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Clear and Present Dangers: The State of Animal Welfare in China and Possible Solutions

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ABSTRACT

With the increasing connection between humans and companion animals, conflicts between humans and animals necessitate the establishment of animal welfare and animal protection laws. In mainland China, the overpopulation of stray animals, along with the absence of animal protection policies with strong enforcement by the government, has caused multiple adverse phenomena: dog and cat meat trade, animal abuse cases, and stray shelter overload happen constantly and on a significant scale. The lack of animal protection laws also creates divides between humans and concerns regarding public health, such as the spread of rabies. Currently, the most common governmental strategy for preventing cat-and-dog-related threats toward humans is culling, which does not align with the morals of the majority of mainland China, especially with a growing pet industry. This paper is dedicated to exploring the deep-rooted reasons behind the poor state of animal welfare in China. With reference to the Animal Protection Index, I selected two similarly situated countries—Mexico and Thailand—for case studies to examine whether it would be feasible to implement a version of their morally acceptable and successful animal policies in mainland China. After reviewing social, psychological, cultural, legal, and logistical factors, this paper proposes feasible and ethical ways to minimize the conflict between humans and animals in mainland China, through strategies such as microchipping; CNVR, which stands for Capture, Neuter, Vaccinate, and Return; and mobile vets.

INTRODUCTION

With the increasing trend of building family-like attachments to companion animals such as dogs and cats, there has been a rapid expansion of the pet industry in China, substantially enhancing the living standards and the number of pet owners, as well as the number of species that count as companion animals (Xinhua News Agency, 2025). Still, there are approximately 51.8 million stray dogs and 69.8 million stray cats, representing 10-20% in mainland China (Su et al., 2025). With this astoundingly large stray population, China hosts 20% of the stray animals globally (Yang & Shaw, 2024).

There is a lack of nationwide laws or regulations that specifically protect animal welfare for companion animals, leading to animal abuse and theft cases across China (Liu et al., 2026). Interestingly, the mainstream religious and philosophical beliefs in China, such as Buddhism, emphasize “non-harming” and “loving-kindness” (Lankara, 2024). Within the confines of a purely culturally-centered narrative, human indifference towards animals is a perversion of the human-animal relationship. Perhaps such

indifference originated from the common utilization of wild animals in Chinese medicine practices, a tradition that conceivably changed the killing of animals from a morally fraught proposition into an emotionally bereft decision for which pragmatism offers a shield.

From a historical and political perspective, indifference to the well-being of animals could also be due to anti-animal welfare actions taken by influential figures such as Mao Zedong, who initiated the mass killing of Eurasian tree sparrows after farmers complained and blamed the sparrows for eating their grains (Wang, 2025). In terms of historical memory, the experiences of serious and recurring famines, and the concomitant shortage of resources during the early eras of mainland China, forced people to consume animals, further cementing the public's indifference towards them (Zhou, 2023). This intricacy of historical, religious, philosophical, and cultural influences on mainland China's attitude towards animal welfare creates polarizing opinions and conflicts nowadays. Stray animals, namely free-ranging animals, are thus the most vulnerable category that is influenced by this societal complexity, as they are surviving in a heavily human-dominated environment while they are not protected under any law or collective consensus that animals should be treated as sentient beings.

The abundance in stray animal populations raises public health and regulatory concerns such as pedestrian attacks and disease spread. Specifically, China reports twelve million dog bite incidents annually (Yang & Shaw, 2024). Consequently, approximately 719.07 rabies deaths are reported annually in China, ranking fifth among 204 countries that the study included in terms of rabies death rate (Gan et al., 2022). However, there is no policy or system in China that helps to maintain the balance between humans and animals.

Culling is the most common and longest-standing strategy in the Chinese government's toolbox when it comes to guarding humans from potential threats posed by stray animals (Barber & Hathaway, 2022). However, culling is inhumane. As an inhumane practice, it is ill-suited to change the larger societal attitude towards animals. Without changes in attitude about the importance of animal welfare, people will continue to engage in behaviors that lead to stray animals in the first place, using culling as a cruel bandage rather than treating the societal wound itself. There are humane strategies that, though imperfect, are significantly more efficient and effective than the large-scale killing of sentient beings—beings who only exist in their current form and place because they were bred and domesticated by humans. In light of the need for deep social and political change in human-animal relations, this study addresses in detail the problem of animal welfare in China, the inadequacy of culling practices, and the feasibility of current solutions, such as microchipping, CNVR, and mobile vets.

DOG AND CAT MEAT MARKET

China is famous for its dog and cat meat markets. Meat markets in mainland China are mainly located in South China, Central China, and Northeast China (Humane World for Animals, 2025). So where does dog meat come from? Professor Guo Peng from Shandong University led a team to discover the trade routes: the one in the northeast is mostly active in rural areas, capturing free-ranging animals, and the other route

is in the southern part of China, targeting companion animals (Xiang & Suwen, 2016). As a result, even though the exact number is hard to estimate, animal activist groups have claimed that the entire dog meat market kills around ten million dogs and four million cats per year in total for the meat trade solely, aside from those that are killed from animal abuse (Humane World for Animals, 2023). Meat markets in some regions contribute to low-income employment (Li, 2021), but they pose a greater threat to humanity and public health.

Take Yulin as an example: it houses one of the large-scale meat markets in mainland China in Guangxi province. This city hosts a meat festival annually called the Yulin Lychee and Dog Meat Festival, which involves killing thousands of cats and dogs each year within a ten-day period. Even though many believe that this event is a historical heritage, it is actually a commercial event that the local dog meat traders created in 2009, disguised as cultural heritage (BBC News, 2015).

Henan is another province that has a large dog meat market and is "a source of stolen dogs for the country's dog meat market," said Peter J. Li, Associate Professor of East Asian Politics and Animal Policy and Law at the University of Houston. He greeted two officials from Central China's Henan Province in June 2014 to investigate the issues of banning the dog meat trade ~~(Li, 2021)~~. The two officials agreed that the dog meat market is cruel; nevertheless, foremost in their minds was the idea that "meeting people's livelihood needs, particularly the need to create more jobs, is a top priority. Without employment, there would be no GDP growth and no social stability" (Li, 2021).

Around 500 people are directly involved in the dog meat market in Yulin. "Although the trade is not a major contributor to employment," said Li, "it employs some of the least skilled and most disadvantaged workers. To the local government, however, this means 500 people who are no longer a burden on the authorities" (Li, 2021). As the local government described those labor forces who are involved in the dog meat industry as the "most vulnerable in the workforce," the existence of the dog meat market is a remedy for labourers who are not able to complete education and compete in the modern occupation market (Li, 2021).

Even so, there are two major reasons that the dog and cat meat industry should still be banned. The first reason is that the market's negative impact substantially outweighs the trivial benefits of employment, which could be resolved in other means. The meat industry brings severe public health concerns. Canine and feline animals, especially those that are stray, have a high chance of carrying zoonotic diseases which can be easily transferred to humans due to their harsh and unhygienic survival environment (Chen et al., 2012). The threat of rabies exists not only at the market, but in almost every single step between stealing and ingesting. Before they enter the slaughterhouse, they have to endure hours of trips on a truck. These trucks are congested with cages of dogs and cats squeezed in tiny spaces where they can barely move. Disease and injuries are inevitable, and rescuers often find dog and cat corpses on these rucks (Humane World for Animals, 2022). For instance, on a highway in Beijing in 2014, 60 out of 160 dogs rescued were found dead on the truck (Huang, 2014). These dead bodies cannot simply remain abandoned in that state, so rescuers are tasked with bringing them out and burying them. Guizhou, Guangxi, Hunan, and

Guangdong contribute 64% of rabies cases in China. This high rate of rabies cases correlates with the prevalence of many meat markets in these areas. Specifically, as meat markets are usually located in rural areas, where 97% of human rabies infections happen, meat markets' contribution to threatening public health is implied (Yue et al., 2022; Li, 2021).

The second reason that the meat trade should be banned is that the trade is not only harming stray animals, but also pets that are highly treated and valued as companion animals. With the increasing number of dog farms that breed pet dogs instead of selling dogs for meat in recent years, dog meat traders have turned their focus from dogs in the farms to free-ranging dogs and owned pets (Li, 2021). This increase in the capture of domesticated dogs worsens the situation in two ways. First, it increases public attention since pet owners are likely to share their case online, which increases public awareness but also public conflict between people who deem animals as sentient beings and those who deem them as utility. Second, rabies control is based on herd immunity. Maintaining around 70% of the dog population vaccinated can greatly reduce the chance of a rabies outbreak and maintain it for a 12-month period (Conan et al., 2015). Therefore, pets are more likely to be vaccinated than strays, the removal of pet dogs decreases vaccination coverage and thus might increase the risk of a rabies outbreak (Taylor et al., 2017). Even though there is no specific data on how many dogs and cats in the slaughterhouses are pets that are stolen from their owners, Animal Equality, an activist group that revealed and closed down multiple slaughterhouses in China, stated that "many dogs in the kennel still had their collars on, proof that until recently they were loved by their families and showing how common the practice of stealing them was" (Animal Equality, 2023). For example, in 2021, at a rescue just outside of Yulin, rescuers found that "the otherwise lethargic dogs began to show signs of typical household pets, such as reaching out their paws to shake hands. Most of them looked like dogs who were stolen from their families" (Block, 2021).

Additionally, by analyzing the origin of the Yulin Dog Meat Festival, it is clear that it carries no cultural or religious values. Yulin specifically had little to no history of dog meat consumption before 2010, when an increase in back-alley slaughterhouses sprung up in the city. Businesses and dog meat diners filled the industry, promoting this behavior while projecting it as a cultural practice (BBC News, 2015; Li, 2021). Therefore, this festival is a commercial event disguised under the pretext of tradition. The last possible reason for this meat consumption behavior was starvation during the Great Famine in China, which happened in the 20th century. During that period, extreme scarcity of food sources made any kind of meat, including dog and cat meat, an "extravagant food item," as described by Xiao, whose mother lived through the Great Famine (Xiao, 2018). Compared to seventy years ago, China is now a stronger country with a relatively steady economy: China has consistently kept undernourishment below 2.5%, while the average prevalence of undernourishment globally is at 7.8% as recorded in 2025 (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2026). Starvation is not a widespread issue in China anymore, yet the meat industry, which uses China's historical period of starvation as a marketing ploy, introduces both severe public health concerns and conflicts with the general public. As it fundamentally stands opposed to property protection law, disease control, food safety, controlled substance use, and protection of minors (Levy et al., 2003), the dog meat market industry should be banned nationwide.

Besides the concern for public health, there are also many other issues: "predation, road traffic accident, defecation, urine spraying, nuisance, running and fighting during breeding, scavenging on open garbage and scattering all sealed refuse, attacking people as in case of a rabid dog, soiling and threatening pet animals by attacking and biting" (Abdulkarim, 2021, p.321). Throughout the capturing, transferring, rescuing, and even ingesting processes, every step involves a threat to community health and social conflict. The dog meat trade might provide an economic buffer for low-income laborers, but the cost and risks imposed on society are irreparable.

Ultimately, the conflict lies between traditional cultures that see animals primarily as objects of use to humans, whether as food or labor, and more modern developing cultures that see animals as individual, sentient beings. Currently, companion animals are deemed special sentient beings with worth by the majority of Chinese society: In a survey conducted in 2023, out of all pet owners in China, 44% considered them family, 32% considered them children, 13% considered them pets, 10% considered them friends, and only 1% considered them none of the above (Admin, 2025). Even if companion animals are not afforded the same status as humans, evolving societal values increasingly recognize their intrinsic emotional worth, making their consumption socially divisive and ethically contentious. This increase in compassion and care towards animals was reflected by data shown in the 2026 pet-industry white paper: spending on dogs increased by 1.5%, spending on cats increased by 3.2%, and the total number of urban pets increased by 1.8% (China International Pet Show, 2026). Hence, Chinese society is increasingly looking to produce an environment that is welcoming and safe for animals.

LAW AND POLICY

As of September 2026, there is a lack of national law or policy in China that directly addresses the protection and regulation of companion animals, whether they are stray or domesticated (Liu et al., 2026). This absence of legal animal welfare measures weakens not only the safety of companion animals, but also the ability of pet owners to protect their pets against stealing, abusing, and killing in legal cases. Even without the all-too-common cases of dogs missing due to theft, after which they will eventually be sold for profit in the dog meat market, animal maltreatment is prevalent. For example, one man microwaved a puppy after an argument with his girlfriend, another purposefully dragged a dog behind his car for miles until it died, and an 8,000 man kill-dog squadron was formed via social media (Li, 2021). Local governments also carry blame. They have conducted both massive culls of dogs after some random dog attack incidents (Li, 2021) and periodic culls to clear out stray animals on the street (Barber & Hathaway, 2022).

Pet owners who have been through animal abuse and murder cases try to protect their rights and their pet's rights by suing the abuser or murderer. However, despite their devoted efforts, no significant penalties have resulted due to the lack of a protective law specifically addressing companion animals. In September 2022, Li's dog, Papi, a 13-year-old West Highland White Terrier, was poisoned along with ten other dogs on the same day; out of the eleven pets who were poisoned, nine died ~~(Global Times, 2026)~~. Prosecutors filed suit in October 2023, charging the criminal with endangering public safety (Global

Times, 2026). Despite nine postponements, the court eventually delivered a landmark verdict in December 2025, finding that Zhang, a 65-year-old neighbor of Li who put acid-soaked chicken bones near a children's playground in the compound, was guilty of the Crime of Spreading (or Releasing) Hazardous Substances and sentenced to four years of imprisonment ~~(Feline Guardians, 2026)~~. The case did not end until 2026 because Li, who quit her job and studied law herself after the incident, originally proposed a minimum of 20,000 RMB for their dog's market value, with an additional 250,000 RMB for the mental distress that the pet owners went through (Global Times, 2026). However, the court did not support this charge for civil compensation, even with clear medical evidence that Li underwent severe depression after Papi's death. According to the Chinese Criminal Law Article 114, "Whoever commits arson, breaches a dike, causes an explosion, releases poisonous or radioactive substances [...] if no serious consequence is caused, shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not less than 3 years but not more than 10 years" (The Supreme People's Procuratorate, 2020). Yet, because the death of eleven dogs only counts as property harm under the current Chinese law, Zhang only received four years of imprisonment. Moreover, during the three years of pushing the lawsuit, Li faced relentless harassment. She was bullied, doxxed, and targeted by rumours (Lu, 2026). The fact that pursuing justice for eleven dogs required consistent effort over three years through nine trial postponements, while the person standing up confronted multiple dangerous personal threats, demonstrates the importance of establishing a clear legal direction and set of regulations dealing with pet poisoning and murder cases in mainland China.

Animal poisoning is not rare in China: in November 2025, fifty dogs were reported being poisoned in Guangdong, while in Fengtai district, Beijing, 20 dogs were poisoned to death within a month in 2024 (CNA, 2025). With the rising awareness of animal welfare and increasing bonds between companion animals and humans, one can reasonably expect more pet owners to bring their cases to court, pursuing justice for their pet, peace for themselves, and adequate punishment for the abuser.

As the case has shown, Chinese law and some parts of Chinese society still deem companion animals as property rather than acknowledging their sentience and emotional capacity. This is where the conflict stalls. Even though the Chinese government declared the removal of dogs from the category of livestock in April 2020 (*China Updates Guiding Catalog for Agricultural Law Enforcement*, 2025), and livestock, as a contributor to the Chinese economy, is protected under the Animal Husbandry Law (Animal Husbandry Law of the People's Republic of China, Chapter IV, 2016), companion animals,, who are increasingly reported by younger generations as a vital source of emotional and psychological well-being (with reports showing increase in Chinese pet supplies market is correlated to owners' strong emotional attachment to pets; Xinhua News Agency, 2025) have limited nationwide regulations to protect them beyond China's criminal property theft law. Additionally,. Criminal property theft law is not valid if the dog's market value is below 2000 RMB, but it is valid under administrative property theft law (*Public Security Administration Punishment Law of the People's Republic of China*, 2014). Given that at least one study has shown "mothers reported similar emotional ratings for their child and dog" (Stoeckel, 2014), companion animals' value to their owners in modern society should be reassessed in terms of both their

practical and emotional worth, rather than reflecting the social priorities of a long-gone period when people treated cats and dogs as no more than farm utilities.

The deepening of pet owners' attachments, attachments that are made evident through increasing social media exposure and court cases, proves the impracticability of culling stray animals, which will likely garner less and less public support as the value of companion pets is more widely recognized. From a cultural perspective, a culling mandate can go no further than its narrative backing allows. As previously discussed, the needless killing of animals, such as in dog meat markets, is strongly disfavored and even rejected by much of modern society in mainland China, decreasing the appeal of culling as a mode of establishing safe boundaries between the public and stray animals. From a moral perspective, the reason that stray animals are clashing with human society in the first place is because of the conscious choices made by humans to encroach upon animal territories without regard for the welfare of the animals themselves. Any policy that denies respect to animals and their need to thrive will have a high potential to be perceived by a vast swath of the public as falling short, with culling at the back of the pack.

STRAY ANIMAL SHELTERS

The stray animal control system, or shelter system, in China is very different from that in many other countries, as there are currently no laws or regulations that specifically speak to the shelters' existence, leaving them in a legal grey area. After complaints from neighboring community members annoyed by mere barking, shelters are sometimes pressured by local governments to close down and relocate. For example, Liu Yanlin, a fifty-one-year-old shelter owner, has been constantly forced to move since 2016 (He, 2022). The first relocation, to Shunyi district in Beijing, was due to the number of animals the shelter rescued, which has significantly increased since she first started and now requires more space. However, in 2018, the shelter was forced to move within a week after it received notice of a report accusing the shelter of "disturbing the neighbors". Consequently, the shelter moved to Miyun district. But not long after the second relocation, the local government forced them to move again because they stated that the construction of the shelter was "illegal". The shelter moved back to Shunyi, hoping that it wouldn't be reported again, only to be given another ten days to leave by the Shunyi government (He, 2022). The shelter considered applying for NGO status, but the government doesn't allow large-scale animal raising. In an interview, Liu said, "We can never become legal. I still have 100 dogs and 20 cats in my base. How can I move them, and where? I am so disappointed and frustrated at the moment. They are my children. I don't understand why I have been treated like a rat that isn't welcome anywhere" (He, 2022). Sometimes, the relocation of shelters is due not only to legal pressures, but also to hostility from people who dislike animals. For example, in a recent conversation I had with the 80-year-old owners of Zhenjiang Bi Feng Gang shelter, they told me that they moved from Shanghai to Zhengjiang years ago because their neighbors, who were annoyed by the barking in the shelter, smashed their fence. Constant relocation that requires transportation of animals involves a high risk of spread of contagious diseases such as heartworms, which not only take more time for volunteers to take care of them but also require more money for medical treatment, relating back to the severe public concerns discussed in the dog and cat meat trade section (O'Shea, 2010).

The difficulties of the shelters in China are not only about the constant relocation and reporting, but also the incomplete financial cycle. Most shelters are non-governmental organizations (NGOs), meaning that all the expenses, including rent, medical care, food, electricity, water, facilities, labor, and rescues, are funded by the shelter owner without government support, which is unsustainable (Li, 2021). For the shelters that have higher maintenance expenses than their owners have assets, fundraising is the only way to sustain services. However, fundraising is never adequate to meet expenses. Liu, the aforementioned shelter owner, noted that "Even to rescue a healthy dog, the whole process from taking them in until finding a suitable adoptive family costs at least 10,000 yuan a year, to say nothing of the ill ones. Most of the dogs we found on the street were ill to various degrees, and we would need to spend a lot on medical treatment" (He, 2022). Most of the dogs that were rescued were from the meat trucks, meaning the severity of injuries and disease scales up as the number of animals that were stuck together for days increases. In the previously mentioned 2014 Beijing highway rescue, the reporter stated that Capital Animal Welfare Association, the organization that took the 160 dogs, "has raised less than 200,000 renminbi to care for the dogs, and still owes about 30,000 renminbi to pharmacists" (Huang, 2014). The association has also not paid the animal hospitals, some of the veterinarians, or the farmer who lets the volunteers use his yard (Huang, 2014).

Lastly, the adoption cycle is a huge burden on the shelters in mainland China. The problem with adoption comes down to two interrelated factors: insufficient adopters and unwillingness of shelter owners to search for adopters. The first part is easy to understand. When looking for a pet, most potential adopters look for a pet that has a healthy appearance and good personality that enables pleasant interaction with the adopter, which leaves old, aggressive, injured, and handicapped animals in the lurch (Weiss et al., 2012). Hence, with a growing backlog of unadopted cats and dogs, shelters' expenses continue to increase until the operation becomes entirely unsustainable.

The second part is easier to understand if one has been working with the shelters' owners for a period of time. The last time I went to a shelter in Jiading district, Shanghai, a volunteer and I were trying to bring several good-looking puppies to adoption events in the downtown area. Zhou, the owner of the shelter, stopped us as we stepped into the car. The reason she stopped us from taking the dogs to the adoption event was not that she did not want the dogs to be adopted, but because of the fear that the dogs would get abused or abandoned again, as had happened previously. She stated that if the dogs stay with her, they might not have a high-quality life, but at least they won't be abused or starved, and who knows how their lives would turn out if they were adopted (personal communication, June, 2025). It is disappointing that the only way to reduce the number of animals in a shelter, which is through adoption, faces complicated difficulties that are yet to be solved.

According to Chinese law, cities like Shanghai and Beijing allow one dog per household.~~(Ford, 2013)~~(*How to Be a Responsible Dog Owner Going Forward: Interpreting the Regulations of Shanghai Municipality on Dog Management*, 2011; *Regulations of Beijing Municipality on Dog Management*, 2003). Even though many other cities haven't established a formal law restricting the number of animals

an individual can be responsible for, this law might inhibit shelter owners in Shanghai and Beijing from protecting their animals from government-initiated culling (Borcham, 2019). There is no official count of animal shelters in China. But if culling were to proceed, it would bring immense mental harm to shelter owners, as they have spent all of their assets, supplemented with borrowed money, to continue the lives of these animals in spite of localized societal pressures, diseases, and even mental illnesses. This is an immeasurable loss, even under a regime that still considers animals to be mere property.

SOLUTIONS

It is impossible to perfectly enforce regulations in a country that has a high level of compassion and inclusivity towards animals, yet has just started realizing the importance of animal welfare. Therefore, by referring to the Animal Protection Index (API), which puts different countries into different rankings based on the level of animal welfare they are at (World Animal Protection, 2020c), regulation policies from countries that have a similar ranking will be examined and considered for their feasibility of implementation in mainland China.

In general, the issues of the current mainland China companion animals originate from two aspects: stray animal control and policy establishments. In terms of stray animal control, it indicates overpopulation in the wild and pet abandonment, while policy establishment means the system and legal basis for shelters and lawsuit cases. This complicated issue, however, has no nationwide law to protect either side: people from the threats of disease spreading and attack cases, or animals from maltreatment. Nationwide enforcement is essential, as the lack of equalized policies has led to conflicts: “There are no laws in China forbidding the sale of dog meat, so they can't really say to people that anyone living anywhere else in the country can eat dog meat, but that the residents of Yulin can't" (Radio Free Asia, 2017). Hence, the focus of potential resolutions can be on the relationship between humans and animals, and nationwide policy enforcement.

One of the biggest issues of enforcing related laws is the lack of formality of the pet-owner bond relationship. For example, when a dog is lost, it is very difficult for both the owner and the police to track where the dog is, as insufficient information is provided for the search. “One way to deter dog theft is registration and microchipping,” said Huan Yu, a policewoman in Shanxi district (Li, 2021). However, even though microchipping systems for animals do exist in China, they are not sufficiently utilized and publicized due to the high fees and lack of enforcement effort. By comparison, Mexico established a municipal pet registration system in Mexico City through microchipping (RUAC), as evaluated under the Animal Protection Index (World Animal Protection, 2020a). Currently, 300,000 animals are registered in Mexico, while registration is required for every pet owner in Mexico City as they aim to reduce abandonment cases since 2017 (Dominguez, 2025). This program is not only free, but while it backs up the legal relationship between the owner and the registered pet, it is also linked to public pet health services, meaning that when a pet owner bring their pet to a public vaccination, deworm, or sterilization campaign, their pet can also get registered to the RUAC system (De Protección et al., 2024). Even more, if a citizen in Mexico city did not register their animal, the non-compliance fine will be between 2,279.97

to 3,365.67 Mexican pesos. Additionally, the process of registration is easy to access via online websites, while the only things that the pet owner needs to prepare are medication records and a clear photograph of their pet (De Protección et al., 2024). Even though there has not been a deadline for the registration for citizens in CDMX, 63,000+ registrations were completed right after the program came out, and reached 264,354 by the end of the first half of May 2025 according to the official report released by Agencia de Atención Animal (AGATAN) and the Ministry of the Environment (SEDEMA) (link).

This combination of cost-free, non-compliance punishment, and a simple registration process achieved success in terms of the number of registrations since the program started in 2024. By making this registration cost free meaning that the government needs to allocate a portion of the budget to fund the program. The cost also depends on the amount of demand for the program. In CDMX, there are only around 1.2 million pets. However, in a city like Shanghai, the total count of pets easily exceeds 2 million. Therefore, considering the implementation part of this microchipping system, it would be more feasible to test in smaller cities or provinces in terms of pet population that have an inclusive environment for animals, such as Wuxi city in Jiangsu province (CCTV, 2025). The success of the implementation of the model can be measured by the percentage of microchipped pets out of all companion animals in the city, alongside tracking of stray animal population, as the purpose of this model is to strengthen the sense of responsibility of owners towards their pets while reducing pet loss due to lack of information.

In conclusion, the microchipping case study in Mexico can potentially enhance the sense of responsibility, therefore fortifying the formality of pet ownership, mitigating abandonment rate alongside the stray population, bettering public health, and creating a model for means of policy establishment.

The second potential resolution would be targeting stray animal reproduction control methods. Thailand, with an API ranking of ‘D’ (World Animal Protection, 2020b), is known for its Buddhist culture and religious beliefs similar to China. Thailand has successfully balanced animal welfare with public health: not only did it enact the Cruelty Prevention and Welfare of Animal Act in 2014, but Phuket was also declared officially rabies-free, with its stray dog population decreasing by 50% between 2011 and 2016 (World Animal Protection, 2020b). Hence, Thailand can be used as a case study to investigate how mainland China can slowly clear out rabies and public health concerns without doing culls and euthanizations.

Similar to TNR (Trap, Neuter, and Return), which is a common strategy utilized by multiple countries as a means to reduce stray populations, Thailand animal welfare activist group Soi Dog promoted and implemented CNVR, which stands for Capture, Neuter, Vaccinate, and Return (Soi Dog Foundation, 2026). There were TNR programs in Shanghai and many other metropolitan areas in China, but they were not as effective as Soi Dog's. First, Soi Dog actively did CNVR on shelter dogs. Similar to China, the shelters are struggling due to limited government support and attention (Saengthong et al., 2025). In all the shelters that I personally worked with in Shanghai, Zhejiang, and Xian, apart from the expenses on food and rent, their biggest burden is on medical care, including vaccination and sterilization. Meanwhile, I have encountered multiple cases of shelters that did not spay the dogs in time and ended up with dogs

giving birth to more dogs, adding to the already significant stray dog population in the shelter. There were also cases where the owner of some shelters passed away, leaving the dogs in the shelters alone until they either died due to starvation and disease, or they successfully left the shelter and spread the diseases they carry to the public. Soi Dog successfully carried out CNVR with "1,600 animals at the shelter and well over 200 animals treated weekly" (Photographers Without Borders, 2023). This strategy no doubt lessened the stress on the rescuers while increasing capacity at the shelter to rescue more dogs and cats, as sterilization and vaccination enhanced their health, thereby leading to significant savings on the costs of birth control and disease management. As a result of Soi Dog Foundation's work on CNVR, not only have reported rabies cases decreased in Thailand since 2015 when they were expanding their program in Bangkok, stray dog population in the areas that they covered reduced by 20% in Bangkok area (Soi Dog Foundation, 2026). Therefore, the CNVR strategy should not only focus on the existing free-roaming animals, but also the ones in the shelters to efficiently take care of public health concerns while reducing the burdens on stray animal shelters.

When considering the feasibility of a solution, it is important to consider not only the societal factors discussed previously, but also the differences in cost of implementing and facilitating such solutions. In a study conducted by John Dunham, an economist, it has been proven that methods such as TNR are less costly than culling (John Dunham & Associates, 2010). The calculation is based on a quadratic regression of the Neuter/Spay and Return Cost Savings Calculator that gives the estimated number of feral cats, which identifies the number of feral cats in each region in the U.S. Then, pulling information and data from research journals, veterinary journals, national media publications, federal government reports, and animal welfare groups, a national average culling cost is obtained, while a standard price index was used to account for state price differences in costs. The result shows that sixteen billion USD is required to conduct a full cull on the eighty billion cats that the U.S. has, including the cost of trapping, sheltering, food and supplies, laboratory tests, and euthanasia. Meanwhile, if volunteers' help is present, the cost of TNR, which includes trapping and the TNR procedure with volunteers' aid, will be down to around seven billion USD, saving around eight billion dollars relative to culling (John Dunham & Associates, 2010). Therefore, CNVR, which is very similar to TNR in terms of procedure and structure, is a more cost-efficient method than culling.

Another Thai strategy that is applicable to China is the mobile vet team. This is organized by the Soi Dog team and their community outreach program, and the mobile vet team is a group of volunteers responding to calls from local community members who found a stray and have concerns on their health and their safety (Soi Dog Foundation, 2026). Currently in China, many citizens who participate in feeding stray animals do so irresponsibly and face public criticism for their behavior (Xu & Jiang, 2023). Hence, the mobile vet program can potentially help with standardizing processes of stray feeding and lessening social conflict.

Behind any social work and volunteering programs, the problem is funding. Soi Dog, despite contributing so much to Thai communities' public health, does not receive government funding. Instead, they receive

donations from the public and feeders scattered around the community (Soi Dog Foundation, 2026). Further research should be done on funding structures and methods of delivering mobile vet services.

Thailand's Soi Dog program exemplifies what a successful stray dog population and reasonable animal birth control regime looks like, even reducing the financial stress under which shelters and public health agencies struggle to thrive.

While enhancing animal welfare through microchipping, CNVR, and mobile vet teams, China should also return to the issue of cat and dog meat markets. South Korea, with an API index of D, recently established a formal ban on all sorts of dog meat markets. Therefore, South Korea's meat industry history and banning process should be studied in future research to analyze the feasibility of mainland China adopting the same approach.

There were some countries that tried mass culling. For example, in Europe, 16% of the countries (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan Republic, Moldova and Ukraine) conduct culls by municipal hired contractors as a method of stray control (World Society for the Protection of Animals, & Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 2007). However, in China and Thailand, which are countries with deeply ingrained Buddhist culture, culling is not feasible. Buddhist ideas and philosophies, along with Confucian and Legalist traditions, have heavily influenced Chinese legal thought (Lee et al., 1978). Out of the 500 million Buddhist population around the world, 254 million of them are from China, followed by 66 million from Thailand as the second largest Buddhist population (Khoo, 2023). As mentioned before, Buddhism emphasizes "non-harming" and "loving-kindness," which goes against culling (Lankara, 2024). The lack of public support for culling, and the increasing number of pet lovers and animal welfare activists, will eventually represent a serious impediment to governmental campaigns that set out to kill innumerable animals. Chinese authorities who tried to resort to animal culls in the past have already provoked strong rejections from the public (Li, 2021, p. 135). Culling, especially if done simultaneously nationwide, is at most a pyrrhic victory, at worst a colossal waste of time and money that actually worsens the problem. Moreover, the vacuum theory, also known as the vacuum effect, indicates that culling strays in one area but not in other regions of the country will boost the population of the strays, as the vacant land and unused resources in one area may simply attract more strays to migrate and reproduce at a faster rate without the pressure of competition (Pathak et al., 2026). The theory supports studies and research that have shown that culls are ineffective at controlling rabies, as culling is not an effective way to reduce stray population (Hiby, 2024). There are also studies that have shown that lethal methods of stray population control might increase conflict with humans (Yoak et al., 2016). Hence, culling might not be the optimal feasible solution for mainland China to ameliorate the conflict between animals and humans.

CONCLUSION

It is undeniable that mainland China needs a nationwide animal welfare regime due to animals' presence in human civilization nowadays and human recognition of them as sentient beings. Culling is not feasible

as a way to ameliorate the tension between humans and non-human animals. However, the other more humane resolutions suggested above require prerequisites to be met before implementation. First, the public needs to receive narrative confirmation from the government and social institutions that animals are companions and are sentient beings, in the form of rigorous restrictions on any industries benefiting from or related to the cat and dog meat trade in China. The second prerequisite is financial support: the government must subsidize legal, transparent non-profit organizations so that they can not only continue the sentimental and practical work they do to care for animals, but also raise, organize, and apply funds to campaigns and legal battles seeking consequences for those who do not respect the rules. Crafting an effective legal animal welfare and animal protection scheme in China will take time and effort from individuals as well as institutions, but the time and effort spent repairing the relationship between humans and animals is barely the blink of an eye when compared to the millions of years we spent evolving and thriving in community with our four-legged neighbors.

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