

Exploring Animal Welfare Policy in China from the Efforts of Government and Non-governmental Organisations

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Abstract

The traditional Chinese cultural formation of the relationship between animals and humans has resulted in unique ideas and practices. Some ideas are considered detrimental to animal protection and animal welfare, such as the dietary habits of Guangdong and Guangxi regions. It is a consequence of cultural differences and historical habits. Although the development of animal welfare policies in China is still at a preliminary stage due to political, cultural and religious factors, and legislations have not been completed, the government and non-governmental organizations have been persistently promoting the specification of animal welfare policies for many years. Because of their efforts, more and more Chinese people learn about animal welfare, practice these policies voluntarily, and move from the use of animal resources has shifted to the treatment of animals as sentient beings.

Keywords

Animal welfare policy; Government; Non-governmental organizations; Efforts.

1. Introduction

With the changing times and evolution of human ideology, welfare policies have been extended to ecology, environment, and animals. Many countries and governments in Europe and the USA have legislated for animal welfare since the 19th century and have continued to update and introduce policies related to animal welfare. Animal welfare policy has become more visible to the public due to influences such as avian influenza, international illegal animal trade, and SARS. From an international perspective, in the past only NGOs working on animal and species conservation, such as WWF and IUCN, were concerned more with animal welfare, but they were only able to promote the formation of policies and disseminate them, rather than being directly involved in the formulation of policies and legislation. In recent decades, organisations such as the WTO, OIE and FAO have taken a lot of interest in animal welfare, and have formulated relevant policies and legislation, bringing the development of animal welfare policy to a new stage [1]. The development and exploration of these animal welfare policies has brought a new intellectual impact to China. While European and American countries are already at a more developed stage of animal welfare policy, China is still at a preliminary stage of development. Furthermore, for a long time, there has been no specific animal welfare legislation in China, and similar content regarding animal welfare is contained in other different laws, regulations, and local provisions. However, in the last decade, as animal welfare has become an international issue, it has also caused great repercussions in China, and has shed new light on the development of animal welfare policy in China [2].

2. Animal Welfare Policy

2.1. Concepts and Definitions of Animal Welfare Policy

Animal welfare policy differs from other welfare policies, as generally the subject of welfare policy is the state, government and other authorities, and the object is the target audience, i.e.,

citizens. The target of animal welfare policy is animals. Although animal welfare has only come to the attention of most countries and the public in the world since the 20th century, it was already visible in the *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* [3] as early as 1789. At that time, Bentham introduced the idea of protecting the rights of animals as the object of moral protection [4].

The concept of animal welfare policy is not uniformly explained, as it encompasses two concepts, which are the combination of the animal welfare and welfare policy. It is generally considered to be a policy based on animal welfare, i.e., the avoidance of unnecessary suffering of animals to safeguard their physiological and psychological well-being and natural behaviour. While it also restricts the harmful activities of individuals and organisations towards animals.

The purpose and practice of promoting animal welfare can vary depending on the definition of animal rights by academics and experts. For example, the habits and behaviours of captive and wild animals cannot be measured using the same standards, as the natural behaviour of wild animals is unpredictable, making the identification of their welfare even more difficult. Therefore, animal welfare policy makers in all countries need to work with zoologists to examine the standards of welfare of each species of animal, and to determine what elements need to be included to develop the appropriate policy.

2.2. Comparative Standards for Animal Welfare Policies

Animal welfare policies are complex and controversial. Indeed, these controversies can result in some critical voices, but it is also possible to draw on the diversity of the various analytical critiques of animal welfare policy. The standards for animal welfare policies are necessary and have some advantages, as they can help policy makers to better assess the rationality of the policy, thus balancing the gap in opinion between the government and experts who work on animal welfare, providing references for stakeholders and citizens who are affected by the policy, reducing their blindness and mistrust.

In the past, there is no comprehensive reference standard for animal welfare and policy, with each country having its own standards and elements of its practice. To address this issue properly, the OIE brought experts and animal welfare groups from five continents together in 2002 to discuss international principles and standards for animal welfare. In the same year, a permanent working committee on animal welfare was established [5]. To integrate and balance the input of national communities to establish international standards, OIE gathered useful information from a wide range of professional groups and individual experts from all relevant sectors of the world, to reduce the bias of different cultural backgrounds, economic situations, natural resource situations. As a result of these efforts, the OIE has developed animal welfare standards that are acceptable to most countries around the world, and are highly practical and scientifically sound [6].

These standards are also used in the development of animal welfare policies and related legislation. The key elements include meeting the physical, psychological, and natural behavioural needs of animals, considering the state of animals from their point of view with scientific expertise, ethical judgements about animal behaviour and the legal responsibilities of owners towards their animals. Two of the most important of these standards, which are recognised and used by most countries, are the Five Freedoms and the Three Rs [7].

3. Animal Welfare Policies Adopted by the Chinese Government

3.1. Animal Welfare-Related Legislative Initiatives

Under China's one-party political system circumstances, the government is the main subject of animal welfare policy, and there is a direct relationship between government involvement and legislation. The contents and aims of legislation can also give an indication of the government's

attitude towards animal welfare. For example, China's earliest Wildlife Protection Law (1988), as can be gleaned from its articles, was enacted for the primary purpose of protecting, developing, and making rational use of wildlife resources, and thus maintaining ecological balance [8].

It can be found that in the early period, the Wildlife Protection Law was introduced by the government out of special interests such as the use of wildlife resources, remaining only in the idea of animal protection, and not extending to the concept of animal welfare. However, after the 21st century, with the development of the idea of animal welfare, the law on wildlife protection was revised several times to gradually reflect the concept of animal welfare [9].

Furthermore, it was also in 1988 that the Administration of Laboratory Animals Regulations were promulgated. Although the regulations included provisions on the diet and living environment of laboratory animals, the regulations clearly states that these measures are to ensure the quality of animal experiments, and the purpose is for the better development of scientific research. It was not until the 2004 revision that the term 'animal welfare' was included in the regulations [10]. In the case of farm animals, the only relevant law in China is the Animal Husbandry Law (2006), but these provisions are only for epidemic prevention, and did not focus on the welfare of animals.

The policy instruments adopted by the Chinese government is mostly legislative, but it does not specify the concepts of animal protection and animal welfare. Moreover, the anti-cruelty law, which has been the subject of public attention, is still a proposal, and every time it is proposed there is always a lot of opposition, making it difficult to legislate. The General Rules for Animal Welfare Assessment, which are really used to regulate animal welfare related industry, after years of revising and a lot of experimental supporting evidence since it was put forward as a proposal in 2012 is still in the formulation stage [11].

3.2. Animal Welfare Policy Instruments Beyond Legislation

As animal welfare policy has become accepted in various countries, the development of the theory and legislation has also turned out to be a measure of the state of spiritual civilisation in society to some extent. Animal welfare policy involves the construction of public ethics and morality, and cruelty to animals can lead to the degradation of human morality. For example, there are often news reports of animal cruelty, and each time such news appears, it always has a bad social impact. Beyond the law, there are several policies related to animal welfare, namely conventions, development outlines, guidelines, management practices and regulations, all of which are not legally binding, and have a voluntary character.

Both avian flu and SARS are related to animal welfare. From the areas in China where the avian flu epidemic is serious, it seems that most of the avian flu is concentrated in small farms or individual family farms, most of which are due to mixed poultry in captivity, where these animals live in very poor conditions, making epidemic prevention impossible and increasing the chances of spreading the virus [12].

In recent years, the demand for pet ownership in China has also increased, the problems associated with pets as companion animals are also closely linked to animal welfare. These problems have led some local governments, especially in cities with a high level of economic development, to realise that a country without strong animal laws is in danger of a public crisis and the decline of civilisation. As a result, various animal management methods and regulations have been introduced around the state, such as the Beijing Municipal Dog Management Regulations (2019), the Shanghai Animal Epidemic Prevention Regulations (2006), and the Shanghai Experimental Animal Management Regulations (2009), and the public is constantly consulted for amendments.

However, there is not much documentation on the allocation of financial resources for animal welfare policies, such as measures for tax reimbursement and other financial support. Only the

Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development has proposed measures to regulate the management of zoos, requiring municipal governments at all levels to provide zoos with the material conditions in terms of funding. Moreover, they launch of some institutions and policies for the normal operation and sustainable development of animal resources, feed, medical care, and professional and technical personnel such as veterinarians, establishing special funds for zoos, and guiding the society to adopt zoos through donations and adoptions to support the development of zoos to better safeguard the welfare of zoo animals. The government has also worked together with local communities and zoos to regularly carry out educational activities such as animal care, bird care, to foster a sense of animal care among young generations.

4. The Contribution of NGOs to Animal Welfare Policy in China

4.1. The Role of International NGOs in Promoting Animal Welfare

In recent decades, the role of NGOs has expanded to include assisting governments in wildlife management, and developing conservation and animal welfare policies. Many NGOs also support a variety of efforts to reduce illegal wildlife trade, from raising public and government awareness to working directly with a growing number of national regions to develop and implement sustainable development legislation. Therefore, for both developed and developing countries, NGOs have been one of the main forces driving the development of animal welfare. Both international and local NGOs have made many contributions to the promotion of animal welfare policies, trying to bring about a shift in the perception of animal welfare by the Chinese government and the public, from how to make better use of animal resources to prepare for economic development to truly treating and caring for animals as sentient beings.

Among the most well-known and contributing NGOs working on animal conservation and animal welfare in China is the WWF, which entered China in 1980 as the first international NGO to carry out animal conservation work in mainland China. The results of the research were published in 1985 and attracted worldwide attention. This attention also led the State Forestry Administration to place greater emphasis on research into the giant panda, and to prepare a joint conservation management program with the WWF on the conservation of giant panda habitats, which involved reducing the impact of human activities on the animals, and can be considered the prototype of an animal welfare policy driven by the WWF. Over time, WWF's work in China has expanded beyond the conservation of giant pandas to include sustainable development and combating illegal animal trade. It has also worked with many local Chinese NGOs to guide and support them in their animal protection and environmental conservation work [13].

Animals Asia Foundation (AAF), an NGO based in Hong Kong, with a mission to improve the living conditions of animals, has also worked with the Chinese government on several different animal welfare projects. For example, the 'Protect the Moon Bear' project was set up in response to the live harvesting of bear bile for medicine by Chinese herbal medicine companies, and a bear rescue centre was set up in Sichuan to end bear farming in China, to stop the cruel practice of live bear bile harvesting, and to protect the welfare of bears, which caused a huge reaction. There are also projects such as 'Dog and Cat Welfare' and 'Captive Animal Welfare'.

4.2. The Dilemma and Persistence of Local NGOs

NGOs in China are subject to a 'dual management' system, which means that they need to seek guarantees from government agencies to the civil affairs authorities, who will then allow them to set up [14]. As the animal welfare idea is relatively new to many government agencies, they are generally reluctant to provide guarantees for such NGOs. This makes it difficult for animal welfare-related local NGOs to operate in China.

The ICCAW is an NGO set up in 2013 to promote farm animal welfare, with the idea of creating a China-appropriate animal welfare concept to improve the quality of poultry products, adapted to the Chinese context. In China, the organisation has expanded animal welfare advocacy, conducted exchanges of theoretical and practical achievements, also worked with research institutes to build training institutes to provide training and practice in animal welfare for farming enterprises and farmers, and introduced incentives to motivate enterprises by working with the CIWF.

Snowbound, an NGO working on stray dog projects in Tibetan areas, has been working on a campaign to replace stray dog culling with spaying and neutering since its inception in 2014, and to give citizens in Tibetan areas a long-term sustainable relief in dealing with stray dogs by training local veterinarians to spay and neuter them, eliminating temporary culling where possible. The organisation has been well received by the local government and people, and has brought the idea of neutering instead of culling to the whole of China. Many local governments have been influenced by it and have introduced related policies, such as dog control measures [15].

However, apart from the larger, well-known international NGOs, some local NGOs cannot survive well due to financial constraints. Organising volunteers to carry out animal protection activities is an important mode of operation for NGOs, which can effectively compensate for their lack of funds, and reduce labour costs. One of the most widely known initiative is the organisation of volunteers to participate in anti-wildlife poaching and habitat protection. One example is the volunteer initiative against poaching of Tibetan antelopes in Hoh Xil, which has had very practical results. After years of effort, this conservation initiative has reduced poaching to almost zero [16].

Volunteers organised by NGOs have also been directly involved in anti-wildlife circus performances. By reporting circus performances to the relevant authorities on the grounds of illegal performances and animal cruelty, and by distributing leaflets outside the circus performance venue. They forced the cancellation of animal performances for three consecutive years at the China International Circus Festival held in Zhuhai, Guangdong in 2017 [17]. NGOs, as a third sector beyond the market and the government, contain many staff and volunteers, and their efforts in animal welfare also fully reflect the wishes of some of the public, and through them this awareness will be passed on to more people.

5. Conclusion

Animal welfare policy as one of the special and young forms, differs from other welfare policies in that it protects the well-being of animals. The OIE's unified animal welfare standards are an essential guide to the development of basic animal welfare policies around the world. Developed countries are leaders in the development of animal welfare policies, and they use multiple policy instruments to promote the practice of such policies by all stakeholders, greatly enhancing the policy effectiveness.

The development of animal welfare policy is still at an early stage in developing countries in Asia, and much of the policy development relies on guidance from European and American countries, as well as international organisations such as the OIE. As a developing country with abundant species and the most rapid economic growth, China still has many gaps in the development of animal welfare policies, such as the diversity of policy tools, financial support, and other aspects. In particular, the legislation, as the most basic and crucial of the policy instruments, should not be ignored.

However, with the international community's emphasis on animal welfare, the scope of animal welfare policy is being expanded in China. It can be seen that this has come from the

cooperation and efforts of the many parties involved. Among the forces driving the development of animal welfare, governments and NGOs have made significant contributions.

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