

# Exploring Cultural Perspectives on Eating Farmed Animals versus Dogs and Cats

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*The article contains details of the cat and dog meat trade that some may find distressing.*

**Researcher Network member, Tani Khara, discusses the key insights from her recent research into the dog and cat meat trade**

In the book 'Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows', Melanie Joy explores various ideologies surrounding the consumption of certain animal species over others (Joy, 2010).

As part of this, she introduced the 'Three Ns of Carnism' - Normal, Natural and Necessary - as explanations commonly used to justify the treatment, slaughter and consumption of certain animals. Piazza et al. (2015) further developed the concept, adding 'Nice' to create the *4N framework*. This framework encompasses Normal, Natural, Necessary and Nice as justifications for meat consumption.

The 4N framework, typically applied to animals like chickens, cows and pigs, considered as meat sources across various cultures, can also be relevant to the consumption of species like dogs and cats in different cultural contexts. According to Four Paws, an international animal welfare group, the dog and cat meat trade involved around 10 million dogs and a few million cats across several Southeast Asian countries (Four Paws Australia, 2023). Similar figures have been noted by other international animal welfare organisations (Animals Asia, 2023; Humane Society International, 2024; Soi Dog, 2023; The Humane Society of the United States, 2023). Additional studies also draw attention to dog and cat meat consumption among certain cultures in China (Li et al., 2017) and South Korea (Podberscek, 2009).

This article highlights insights from various publications, along with findings from a recent study on the dog and cat meat trade in Vietnam (Khara, 2023). It uses the 4N framework to draw parallels in the reasons for consuming non-human animals who many typically consider as pets,

particularly in the West.

## **Consumption of Dog and Cat: Understanding the Perception of 'Normal'**

'Normal' in the 4N framework of meat consumption is about dominant norms and socially constructed food pyramids. This link is primarily rooted in traditional stereotypes and cultural norms that equate the consumption of meat, particularly red meat, with masculine qualities of strength, power and virility.

Previous work highlights that masculine ideals in certain cultures in Vietnam and China tend to be influenced by Confucian principles, which emphasise male dominance (Avieli, 2012; Geng, 2004; Rydström, 2001). When it comes to consumption, dog meat holds a significant place (Ann, 2000, 2003) and is linked with masculinity and Confucian beliefs (Choi, 2013). Apparently, Confucius himself was reportedly fond of dog meat, leading to its nickname 'Confucius meat' (Walraven, 2001).

Dog meat is also viewed as a male aphrodisiac in certain cultures in South Korea (Podberscek, 2009, 2016). Moreover, in a paper titled 'Dog Meat Politics in a Vietnamese Town', it is noted that the consumption of dog - much like the consumption of cows, pigs or chickens in other cultures (Khara et al., 2020, 2021) - represents a marker of class differentiation, modernity and cosmopolitan attitudes (Avieli, 2012).

A recent report by Four Paws and Animal Rescue Cambodia states that dog and cat meat in several regions in South East Asia are frequently consumed at social gatherings (Four Paws & Animal Rescue Cambodia, 2020). Similar to certain animal species eaten for their meat in several Western cultures, dog meat in these cultures is believed to have a taste that complements alcoholic drinks, which contributes to its popularity as a food choice. Another recent report on dog and cat meat consumption in Vietnam revealed the consumption of dog meat was predominantly associated with men over the age of 45, with nearly 80% of this demographic reporting having eaten this type of meat (Four Paws, 2021). For this group, in particular, the consumption of dog also tends to be a communal experience, often accompanied by beer or rice wine, during sporting events (Four Paws, 2020a).

## **Consumption of Dog and Cat: Understanding the Perception of 'Natural'**

The argument of 'Natural' often centres on biological principles, such as natural selection and the inherent nature of consuming meat.

When it comes to dog meat consumption, findings from a study across several South-East Asian countries highlighted that consumers prefer eating this type of meat on weekends (Four Paws, 2020a). Consumption is also reported to increase during colder months, attributed to the belief in

the meat's capacity to provide warmth for the body. In other cultures in South Korea, eating dog meat is considered by some a way to balance the "hot" yang property of the meat with the heat and humidity of summer (Podberscek, 2009).

Another recent report by Four Paws and the Change for Animals Foundation highlights a connection between dog meat consumption and the lunar calendar (Four Paws & Change for Animals Foundation, 2020). This was also found in other work in that the consumption of dog and cat meat in Vietnam has revealed that there are beliefs that eating dog meat on particular days can bring luck and fortune (Khara, 2023).

## **Consumption of Dog and Cat: Understanding the Perception of 'Necessary'**

Studies on the consumption of chickens, cows and pigs have revealed that the perceived necessity for their meat is often connected with notions of survival, strength and health. Similarly, dog meat consumption tends to be driven by its perceived nutritional and energy-boosting benefits (Four Paws, 2020a).

When it comes to cat meat consumption, black cats are also considered by some to contain certain healing characteristics (Four Paws, 2020b). As a result, black cats face a higher risk of theft and command higher market prices. Economic considerations also play a crucial role in shaping consumption patterns. In areas characterised by poverty and limited financial resources, the trade in dog and cat meat may also present a viable business opportunity for several households.

## **Consumption of Dog and Cat: Understanding the Perception of 'Nice'**

In the context of the 4N framework, 'Nice' refers to the palatability, satisfaction or enjoyment derived from eating meat. To this point, the consumption of dog meat, for some, represents a divergence from traditional Buddhist principles, favouring new culinary tastes not bound by historical or religious practices (Avieli, 2012).

Several recent publications highlight that individuals consume dog meat primarily for its taste and appealing flavour. Some common dishes include stew made with dog meat; barbecued dog flavoured with lemongrass and ginger; dog intestines resembling sausages; and dog skewers marinated in chilli and coriander.

## **Conclusion**

The article examines information from multiple sources to explore the prevalent marginalisation of sentient non-human beings. It discusses how certain beings are often classified and treated according to anthropocentric views, primarily being seen either as sources of food or as domestic pets. These assigned roles are largely dependent on human cultural practices, varying

significantly from one region to another. Labels such as 'companion' or 'meat' applied to non-human animals reflect more about human societal norms rather than any inherent qualities or purposes of the animals themselves.

From a vegan perspective, the discourse shifts to emphasise the intrinsic value of each individual animal, taking into account the intricate emotional and social lives of these animals. On the other hand, it challenges the treatment of certain animal species, arguing for the need to understand animals on their terms rather than through the lens of human utility. This re-evaluation of human-animal relationships could potentially lead to more sustainable and humane practices in how we interact with the natural world.

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