



Offering a kind hand, veterinarian Deedee Wang ties a tag around the leg of one of thousands of dogs rescued in August from trucks carrying them to meat markets. Activists, many supported by HSI, took to the highways around Beijing to save them.

A photograph of a person's hands petting a shaggy, brown, scruffy-haired dog. The dog is sitting on a light-colored floor. The person is wearing a white t-shirt with a red heart and a yellow crown logo. The background is dark and out of focus.

Surge of Compassion

CHINESE ANIMAL ACTIVISTS
CONFRONT THE DOG MEAT
TRADE IN A GROWING
MOVEMENT THAT'S CHANGING
MINDS AND SAVING LIVES

BY KAREN E. LANGE

It's early, the sky still gray with dawn, when the Chinese animal activists find the market where dogs are sold for slaughter. Down a dirt road, amidst a tangle of people and motorbikes loaded with cages, doomed animals are barking, yelping and crying a week before the city of Yulin's dog meat festival.

Sensitive to criticism, the government of this city in southern China has been stopping trucks carrying dogs from entering the municipality in advance of the June 21 event. But the dog meat traders have figured out a way around that rule: Squat, rusty cages crammed full of dogs are being ferried by motorbike to this market off a main highway leading into Yulin. Accompanied by a TV journalist carrying a camera, activists from Guangzhou, Beijing, Xi'an and California's Silicon Valley are trying to enter the market. They want to draw national attention to the situation. The manager blocks their way, planting herself in the middle of the narrow road.

"We don't sell dogs to eat, only as pets," she says.

Behind her, caged animals—some skinny and missing fur, some who appear healthy but are afflicted with a look of empty resignation—are being treated like edible flesh. Men who mill around the market carry big sticks and long-handled tongs, sort of like giant pliers, with which they can grab dogs by the neck and pull them, helpless, upward and out of the cages for buyers. When the men need to move dogs from one cage to another, they prod them again and again with the sticks and the tongs, indifferent to their cries of pain. The activists ask again to be allowed into the market.

Frustrated, the manager starts yelling. "Enough!" she says, attempt-

ing to wave them off. "Enough!" But they don't budge. Traffic whizzes by on the highway. A few more motorbikes buzz up and then coast down the road toward the market with their cargos of dogs. The manager continues shouting, wearily pouring her energy into the performance. "If you guys are here, I cannot guarantee your safety! People could get mad! They could get physical!" Unswayed, the activists offer her money for two dogs.

The manager goes away and comes back with a bag holding two puppies. The dogs are crying as though they've been hurt and expect to be hurt again. She asks \$100 for the pair—more than twice the going rate. Silicon Valley activist Andrea Gung of the Duo Duo Animal Welfare Project pays, and the activists gain instant credibility. They are allowed to enter the bustle of the market.

Traders smile and swagger, indifferent to the fear that rolls off the animals. The dogs look through cage bars with pleading eyes, until a person approaches too close. Then they growl—not as though they believe they can fight their way free, merely as a last declaration that they are still alive. Earlier that morning, Peter Li, a consultant with Humane Society International, had slipped into the market with an undercover newspaper reporter and rescued another pair of puppies: four dogs saved. Scores remain. In the market, Beijing activist Xu Yufeng makes a sound of helpless disgust, as a motorbike loaded with dogs pulls away, carrying them to the dinner table.

But the images collected by the activists and journalists will go out across China, drawing attention to the upcoming festival and the effort to stop it. Before the summer is over, there will be a heightened awareness of the long-distance commercial dog meat trade that feeds festivals like Yulin's and certain restaurants in China's south and

Animals arrive for Yulin's dog meat festival squeezed into tiny cages from long-distance transports (below, left). Dogs were delivered to restaurants on motorbikes (right). Activists bought as many as they could and drove them to safety (opposite).



PREVIOUS SPREAD AND THIS SPREAD: AP IMAGES FOR HSI



northeast. And, because of that, there will be an unprecedented surge to halt the grim transport trucks carrying stacks of cages filled with dogs. Thousands of dogs will be rescued by China's grassroots animal welfare movement, as middle-class pet owners in and around Beijing take to the highways.

For decades, China's ancient culture of compassion toward animals was eclipsed by ideologies that ignored animal welfare. There were the years under Mao, when sparrows were exterminated as pests and pet dogs branded bourgeois vices. Then there was the rush to get rich, when profit-driven dog meat dealers started stealing pets and poisoning strays. Now, guided by Buddhism and their own hearts, activists are changing the way Chinese regard animals.

Qin Xiaona, 68, president and founder of the Capital Animal Welfare Association, says the country is finally emerging from the effects of the Cultural Revolution, which forced people to turn on each other: "There has been a way of admiring violence. ... The idea of harmony—of being kind to others—[has just] started to spread. ... It's a fight between kindness and violence."

A week before the Yulin festival, Li reminds activists who came to town hoping to cancel the event of this bigger picture. So many dogs are on the verge of slaughter, and the city government says that it lacks the authority to ban the festival. "I am telling them, don't be discouraged, even though dog eating might not be outlawed. But we have achieved success," says Li, HSI's China policy specialist.

The local government, which helped start the Yulin festival to

promote tourism and economic development, seems to be doing everything it can to hide the fact that it's still going on. Responding to calls by Chinese celebrities, plus web and social media campaigns and petitions, including an HSI letter signed by more than 100,000 people worldwide, authorities banned dog trucks from entering the city, told municipal employees not to eat in dog meat restaurants and prohibited the public slaughter of dogs. Gone are banners that advertise the event and the tourism bureau's official sponsorship. The government has even forbidden restaurants from displaying the word "dog" to advertise what they offer.

"Crispy XXX Meat Restaurant" reads a sign in Yulin's center, where the municipal order has been carried out with fidelity. Paper, tape or paint, usually red to match the color of signs, have obliterated the word "dog" from sight, though pictures of dogs and kittens still illustrate what's being offered by butchers in the city's Dong Kou market.

Dog meat vendors still preside over tables covered in rows of hairless animals—some browned with blowtorches, others white after being soaked in water to plump up, the occasional body cut open to reveal the pink flesh inside. The sellers taunt activists: "I can cook you a pot of dog meat—it's good for you! Better than pork or beef! It's organic!" Their stands aren't busy, though. Neither are the dog meat restaurants. Cleavers stand idle, driven into wooden chopping blocks. There is no bloody spectacle of dogs killed in front of customers.

Instead, the activists who've come to Yulin to stop the festival must search for the slaughterhouses concealed off the city's main streets. Acting on a tip from neighbors who complain about the

noise and stench, Wang Yuan, an activist from the north, leads police between houses to a building where dogs are waiting to be killed. The animals stare through rusty bars at pools of blood, a plastic basin in which dead dogs soak and a machine for removing fur, its teeth choked with hair. At the head of a small crowd of residents, Wang walks triumphant. But later, looking back at the pictures on her cell-phone, she will cry: "They only had water to drink after the long journey. And they were so skinny. ... They were trembling." Citing health code violations, police close the slaughterhouse. Activists bring food and water to dogs still locked in the building and continue to search for what their work has driven underground.

The animal advocates operate in a gray area, permitted to go only so far by the local government—how far, they're not exactly sure. If the dog butchers are in hiding, so, to a degree, are dozens of activists who've traveled hundreds of miles to this city that many Chinese in the booming coastal centers see as a backwater, out of touch with the great changes sweeping through the country. The Yulin government wants tourist dollars (yuan), but it doesn't want outsiders coming in to protest, sending out reports that hurt the city's image. As activists arrive, police show up at a local sympathizer's home and question him. The young man gives them the name of the activist who organized a 2013 protest—it's Hao Xijing, the Xi'an activist who helped rescue the puppies. Li hears that authorities, frustrated their restrictions on the festival have not quieted protests, are blaming foreigners for the campaign. This puts Li, who grew up in China but now lives in the United States, in a delicate

situation—HSI has provided support to groups involved.

It's not "foreigners," however, but Chinese who have left their homes, families and jobs to confront dog meat traders and risk arrest. During their days in Yulin, the activists mostly keep a low profile. They know their images are caught on surveillance cameras each time they walk through the hotel lobby. They assume their phone calls, emails and social media posts are being monitored. The main protest organizer, who resigned from a management position at Jordan Industrial, Inc. to pursue dog thieves in the Guangdong province, north of Hong Kong, doesn't use her real name. Instead she goes by a nickname: Shan Dai ("Kindness First").

Eight days before the festival, an HSI partner group from Dalian, in northeast China, plans a protest in front of Yulin's city hall, a new building of steel and glass perched on a hill above a plaza flanked by two reflecting pools. Gung, the Silicon Valley activist, joins advocates from the VShine Animal Protection Association, which is engaged in a 36-city campaign against the dog meat trade, starting in the group's own region, home to ethnic Koreans, who, like people in China's south, have a culinary subculture of dog eating. The activists arrive near city hall in twos and threes, so as not to be noticed. They've invited media to meet them shortly

Faces of the dog meat trade (clockwise from top left): Fresh off a truck intercepted by HSI partners VShine, dogs look fearful, innocent, bloodied, uncertain and relieved. Failing a quarantine check in Yulin (bottom left) might save a dog's life.



THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: LEFT, IMAGES 1 AND 2, VSHINE CHINA; IMAGE 4, ZWOO/VSHINE CHINA; ALL OTHERS, AP IMAGES FOR HSI; OPPOSITE PAGE: HSI

before noon. But it seems the authorities already know about the demonstration. Around 11:30, two vans of uniformed police pull up to city hall. Down below, plainclothes officers loiter amongst potted plants that border the reflecting pools. They are looking for the protest but see only a few people on the plaza. Suddenly, Gung and the VShine activists converge at the far edge of the space to unfurl a banner for passing cars to see: "National Rabies Prevention Is Above Dog Trader Profit!" Li and Hao and Xu are there, watching. Police sprint toward the protesters from the plants and the front of city hall. But it's over in a flash: The banner is gathered up. The activists head off, able to walk through the police because the media are there. Li and Hao and Xu get in a car and drive off.

Xu is on Weibo—Chinese Twitter—sharing. Hao is grinning. He's the designated spokesperson and is getting contacted by media. But within hours, he takes another kind of call, from a person claiming to be a journalist. "Who was the organizer?" the unidentified man asks. "What do you plan next?" Hao supplies only vague answers.

Back at the hotel, Hao, Li and others relax, buoyant as they talk, laughing with relief: The danger is over. They have not succeeded in getting this year's festival canceled, but they have clearly shaken the Yulin government. If the event goes on, it will be diminished, because authorities are now ashamed of a practice they once promoted.

"It's like a person who thought they were so handsome, and suddenly they realize there are spots all over their face," Li says. "They have to do something—to cover up their face, or put makeup on, or get plastic surgery."

Soon, though, the activists hear the government is searching for the "foreigners" they consider to be behind this protest. Li worries police will come to the hotel. Other than a quick trip to buy tickets for the train out of Yulin, he hardly leaves his room for the next 20 hours. The next morning, he finally hears police have called off the search and is able to check on the rescued puppies, being cared for by a local supporter who doesn't dare protest herself. Later that day, he leaves the city.

China's dog meat trade is frequently defended as a tradition people should be free to follow or a dietary choice they should be allowed to make. However, these sentiments ignore the reality of the commercial trade in China that feeds dog meat restaurants and festivals such as Yulin's. A significant number of the estimated 10 million dogs slaughtered each year do not come from "farms," as defenders of the trade claim. If they did, the price of dog meat would be much higher because dogs are expensive to raise and require costly veterinary care if they are to survive in large numbers. But dog is one of the cheapest meats sold in the market, costing as little as \$5 a pound—about half as much as beef or lamb.

Chinese dog dealers get most of their supply by capturing strays, often by darting them with poison (an overdose of anesthesia), and stealing pets. They gather the dogs at collection centers, then load them onto transports. A significant number of dogs fall ill, die or suffer serious injury in the tight confines of cages during long journeys without food or water, but because the animals cost virtually nothing



More than 1,000 supporters of the VShine animal protection group (and dozens of their dogs) rallied last year in Dalian, China, to stop the Yulin festival.

to acquire and one truck can move so many, dealers still turn a profit. Along the way, dealers neglect government-required vaccinations and rabies prevention quarantines. When they reach their destinations, the dogs, many of whom have lived trusting lives with humans, are clubbed to death in front of each other.

Researcher Guo Peng, an associate professor at Shandong University in the Jinan province, studied the situation around Yulin and found that people in three villages near there traditionally have raised puppies for guard dogs, not meat. Dogs were eaten only in times of famine, or so as not to waste the meat from old or sick animals about to die anyway. Even then, eating them was considered shameful and sad, not something to celebrate. It was forbidden to offer dog meat to the local gods or ancestors. People would take the dogs out of the village to slaughter them and cook them where neighbors couldn't see. Since 2006, as the commercial dog meat trade grew, guard dogs from these villages began to go missing—presumably stolen. The Yulin festival emerged not from a centuries-old tradition, says Guo, but in the last 14 years as a marketing scheme.

The current ideology of get rich at any cost underlies the dog meat industry. Professor Jiang Jinsong of Tsinghua University in Beijing is a strong proponent of a different set of ethics, one rooted in China's past. A Buddhist, he spent the days of this year's Yulin festival chanting with 300 others near Beijing for the dogs who would be killed and for the people who would slaughter them. The killers would suffer bad karma and might well be reborn as dogs, Jiang believes, perhaps even dogs collected for the meat trade. In his eyes there is no great gulf between people and animals—no separation that could possibly justify treating dogs cruelly.

More ordinary Chinese are starting to agree. Though the dog meat trade persists in Yulin, elsewhere activists and popular taste have shut it down. In Nanning, the largest city in the Guangxi province, where Yulin lies, people with pet dogs greatly outnumber people who would consider slaughtering the animals for meat. In



Zhanjiang—to the south, in Guangdong province, one of the first industrial hubs of post-1978 China—the number of dog meat restaurants has dwindled to near zero. Outside Guangzhou, Guangdong's biggest urban center, Shan Dai's group stopped the dog meat trade in Foshan's Three Birds Market, and it is working to halt dealers in the city itself.

As activists rally against the festival in Yulin, "Lily," a retired government accountant who belongs to Shan Dai's Shoushan of Guangdong group, visits a Guangzhou suburb where dog meat dealers still operate. Beneath a row of canopies, she finds rusty cages, stacked two high on a side street. Inside are all sizes of dogs, including a beagle and a golden retriever with collars, and several cats. They wait silently as rain pours down in the near-empty market. Across the top of one cage is a pair of iron tongs like the kind used to handle meat dogs in the Yulin market. An anticorruption campaign, launched by China's president, Xi Jinping, has urged citizens to call the police when they see wrongdoing, so Lily, who has been on television (face obscured) exposing the dog meat trade, does her duty, complaining that the dogs are a health hazard, likely not vaccinated for rabies. Eventually, two officers arrive, find the

Vets and volunteers treat a dog after he was removed from a transport truck. Activists carried animals (opposite) to makeshift triage centers. Some dogs did not survive.

young man selling the dogs and take him to the station.

Lily follows. But after she has filled out a report in triplicate, signing with her finger dipped in red ink, the young man disappears. Often, Lily says, police are reluctant to arrest dog meat traders. They don't see it as a priority. Or they are receiving money from the dealers.

In Beijing, it's a different world: People walk their carefully coiffed purebreds like proud parents. Pets are companions for urban professionals, totems of identity, warm furry reminders of home and comfort in an enormous city that monthly swallows ever more miles in pavement and steel. Residents who keep dogs in their apartments often flout municipal regulations limiting the size to 14 inches in height and the number to one per household. There are now an estimated 2 million pet dogs in Beijing, up from 1 million in 2006. This in a city where until 1994 the government strongly discouraged dog ownership and the animals could be killed if they were found on the streets.

Building on the growing affection for pets, Beijing's activists—the most passionate number perhaps 2,000—have moved to protect other animals. Chinese animal welfare nonprofits here, such as the Capital

Animal Welfare Association and Nature University, backed by international groups such as HSI, have won an astounding series of victories during the last several years: With the help of HSI, they blocked a performance by a U.S. rodeo, imports of Canadian seal meat and the opening of a British foie gras plant; they persuaded the government to ban shark fin soup at official banquets; more recently, they helped bring about limits on cosmetics testing on animals and a mass destruction of ivory in Hong Kong aimed at discouraging the illegal wildlife trade.

Then they—and others—turned their attention to Yulin.

A week after the city hall protest last summer, Li and Gung are back in Yulin. Lily is there, too. Hundreds of activists and scores of reporters have joined them: The story of the now controversial festival will go out through *The New York Times* and CNN. There's a circus-like atmosphere in the Dong Kou market, with media concentrated there to get a story and anyone with a sign or a loud enough complaint able to quickly draw a crowd with cameras. Some people are there to shop. Many others are there to see the spectacle. On the edges of the chaos, Lily and other activists intercept motorbikes with dogs, buying the animals and loading them onto trucks for transport to safety. By the end of the weekend, Gung estimates activists have rescued more than 1,600 dogs. In the pandemonium, relations with dog meat traders grow ugly: A photo goes out on the wire of a trader taunting activists, lifting an animal up by his neck with tongs, threatening to kill him rather than sell him to rescuers.

If sales are any indicator, the activists have won the confrontation. The Xinhua News Agency reports purchases are down 30 percent. Gung finds out later that marketers had to lower the price of dog meat, which usually goes up during the festival, in order to make sales. Seventeen of 65 restaurants have closed, according to Xinhua, and another four have been shut down for health code violations.

More than that, the whole of China is watching. And six weeks later, the spirit that drove the Yulin rescues reemerges on the highways around Beijing. An activist sees a transport truck headed for China's northeast and follows it. Her social media post attracts hun-



He might've been eaten, but instead Scout was rescued from Yulin, appeared at an HSUS gala in Washington, D.C., then adopted by HSI board member Leslie Barcus.

dreds, among them Xu. After a 110-mile chase, they intercept the truck at a rest stop. CAWA contacts the police, who seize the dogs because the driver lacks the proper paperwork. Animal groups send supplies and veterinary help, organizing a massive rescue that expands, with the halting of four other trucks, to 2,400 dogs. The interceptions continue throughout August and September, growing to 17 trucks and 7,000 dogs. VShine comes to help, as does Shan Dai.

"Yulin is a little spark, and the spark started a fire," says Gung.

Count China's animal activists, and in this nation of 1.3 billion, they are a negligible number. But look at their hearts—at the compassion and determination—and they become significant. For as many who are activists, there are many more who sympathize, silently, and many others who are now being swayed.

When Gung goes back to Yulin following the festival, she eats with some unexpected companions. One day she has lunch with Buddhists who own a dog meat restaurant in the area where festival-goers gather. They say they would rather not serve dog—they would never eat it themselves—but customers ask for it. Another night she shares a meal with a dozen dog meat marketers who say they do not sell butchered dogs out of a conviction that it's right or an appetizing food, but simply to earn an income.

People in China, though, are beginning to look for something more in their lives. And that is where the animal welfare movement draws its energy. It is not about politics. It is not about money. Instead, the movement breaks out and surges forward, powered by smartphone videos, Weibo, WeChat and YouKu posts; by the newly mobile middle class, set free on highways in recently purchased personal cars; by an ever growing multitude of Chinese volunteer advocacy groups; and by individuals, responding spontaneously to animals in need, driven by that most irrational and unreasonable and unquenchable human quality: love.



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