
Research Project Grant Proposal

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ENGAGING IN A NEW DIALOGUE ON FARM ANIMAL WELFARE IN CHINA

This is a proposal for a research project focusing on farm animal welfare in China. The proposed study aims to achieve the following main objectives:

- To enhance our understanding of the current Chinese farm animal welfare situation and the regulatory and policy framework regarding farm animal welfare in China;
- To ascertain and analyze the current attitudes towards farm animals and farm animal welfare in the urban population in China for the purpose of increasing the popular awareness of animal welfare issues;
- To engage Chinese animal studies scholars and ordinary citizens in a dialogue for farm animal welfare and a new human-animal relationship regarding farm animals through farm animal welfare research and exchanges; and
- To contribute to policy debates and scholarly research on farm animal welfare in China and to the long-term goal of changing the instrumental conception about farm animals of the Chinese people and culture.

The project will produce both short-term and long-term impact and both tangible and intangible results through a number of initiatives with the purpose of facilitating and enhancing scholarly research on Chinese farm animal welfare and public awareness of farm animal welfare and farm animal suffering in China. The project will contribute to the current Chinese efforts in developing farm animal welfare strategies, to academic research on farm animal welfare in China as an emerging field of study, and to fostering the conception about farm animals as sentient beings and promoting humane treatment of farm animals and ethical eating choices in the urban population in China.

Focus of the Project and Expected Outcomes

The project focuses on farm animal welfare in China. It regards animal welfare as a scientific concept and practice. It covers farm animal welfare theory and practice and issues of animal suffering and animal cruelty regarding farm animals raised for human consumption in China. As a guiding principle, animals including farm animals are regarded as sentient beings who deserve our respect as independent lives and who are entitled to a dignified life free from human inflicted pains whether in life or in death. Further, such sentient beings as farm animals have welfare needs as have been demonstrated in scientific research. For our purpose, animal welfare, according to the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), refers to 'how an animal is coping with the conditions in which it lives' including the treatment that an animal receives.' Without going into details about the animal welfare situation and animal

suffering in general in China, some of the major problem areas in China relevant to this project include: (1) the problems of animal cruelty especially farm animal cruelty in China are enormous and increasing, and cruelty involved is on a large scale; (2) despite the recent progress in the nascent Chinese animal liberation movement, the notions of animal suffering and animal welfare have not yet been popularized in China; it is still a novel or ‘elitist’ idea, and it is even more so for farm animals; in China, the instrumental view of animals dominates, that is, animals especially farm animals are regarded as food or tools without feelings, and certain cooking and eating practices are inherently cruel in Chinese food culture; (3) there is a lack of knowledge and information promoting the ethical and humane treatment of farm animals in the public domain; and (4) the rapid increase of meat consumption in China in the last decade, especially the introduction of intensive factory farming to China from the West, present serious problems for human health and farm animal welfare, not an indicator for the lifting of the Chinese living standards and economic progress.

Specifically, the project will address these issues and produce the following outcomes:

1. Three research papers on farm animal welfare issues in China in English – one of the papers will be a joint paper on vegetarianism and animal ethics in China; and the other two papers will on farm animal related policy analysis and popular attitudes towards farm animals and animal welfare.
2. An educational networking initiative focusing on farm animal welfare in China: (1) to hold a Farm Animal Welfare in China Symposium to be participated by animal science and animal welfare scholars in China, and animal welfare scientists or veterinary medicine specialists from Western countries; (2) using Chinese social media to engage and to disseminate farm animal welfare and cruelty and other related topics interacting with the Chinese general public; and
3. A collection of papers in an edited book from speakers at the symposium in the Chinese language on farm animal welfare science and practices and farm animal cruelty issues, assessing farm animal welfare policy and related developments in China and the research and practices related to farm animal welfare from more progressive societies.

Contributions

The proposed project will make original contributions in the following ways:

First, to alleviate suffering of Chinese farm animals will be a slow and long-term process. There is no one single or most effective or immediate solution. It will require tremendous efforts from all directions, at the government regulatory and policy level, at the basic level of animal husbandry and related food industries, at the level of scholarly research to inform policy makers and the general public, and at the level of the general public in terms of popular consciousness for the Chinese people regarding farm animal welfare. The project will be conducive to all these. In the past couple of years, the Chinese government has shown considerable interest in farm animal welfare for various reasons especially economic reasons, and has been making efforts in learning and introducing humane slaughtering and animal farming practices from the West assisted by international NGOs such as Compassion for World Farming and World Animal Protection Organization. Now China Veterinarian

Association has been preparing a draft national farm animal welfare standard for pigs, chicken, cattle and sheep in China for farming, transport and slaughter. This is a very encouraging development and will provide the basic industry standard framework for farm animals in China. This project, especially the proposed symposium focusing on the scientific study of farm animal welfare in China, will be timely and add more scientific voices and momentum to the overall efforts and provide scholarly input to the policy initiatives and the eventual adoption of the national standard.

Second, given the enormity of animal cruelty and the long held instrumental view of animals especially farm animals, changing the Chinese public attitudes towards farm animals to regard them as sentient beings and increasing public awareness of farm animal needs and their capacity to suffer are vitally important to the alleviation of pains to those billions of animals and improvement of their wellbeing. Regulatory guidelines are not sufficient, especially given the fact that China does not have any anti-cruelty law. Without a fundamental change of attitudes towards animals, especially farm animals, by a large section or a significant number of the Chinese population, farm animal welfare will remain elusive. This project will encourage research and advocacy from animal scientists in China in producing and disseminating knowledge and skills about animal welfare to inform policies and the Chinese academic community and the general public.

Third, the project will bring Chinese and Western animal welfare scientists and other scholars together to exchange views and share latest research findings for the benefit of both, especially the Chinese research community. Future collaborative and interdisciplinary research on farm animal welfare is likely to result from the exchanges to take place during the symposium.

Fourth, related to the increased meat consumption in China, there is also a concern that China will export more meat to Western countries such as the USA. For over the last decade, China has had the long-term plan and ambition to export meat products to Western countries and has been trying hard to achieve that. The Chinese government's recent efforts for introducing farm animal welfare standards are part of that plan due to economic reasons related to meat export. As we know, China currently does not have any humane slaughter requirement for chickens or other animals; and cruelty is a major problem for any animals raised as food in China. Questions need to be asked of Western governments and food authorities in this regard. This project and its findings (to be published in English) will contribute to informing Western policy makers and the general public about the farm animal welfare situations in China.

As for dissemination of the project outcomes and research findings, there will be publications in journals in English, presentations to international conferences and a book in Chinese targeting the academic and general public, and through the symposium of which Chinese media coverage will be anticipated. Social media have provided an unprecedented mass communication platform, and Weibo has been critical to the development of animal protection movement in China in recent years in spreading messages about animal suffering and giving the voiceless (both human and nonhuman) a voice, and in motivating people and mobilizing ordinary people to join the animal cause donating time and money to it. The project will utilize social media and the internet to promote messages about farm animals and farm animal welfare to the Chinese people.

In short, through analytical and practical work in the form of publications, social media interactions and academic forum, the project will contribute to policy debates and formulation and academic research on farm animal welfare in China as an emerging field of study, changing the outdated view about farm animals and promoting humane treatment of farm animals. Its outcomes will benefit both humans and animals in China in the short and long terms.

To sum up, given the large number of animals involved and the seriousness of the animal plight in China, farm animal welfare in China is critically significant in the overall scheme of animal welfare. I believe animal liberation in the world will not be considered complete or successful unless and until animals in China enjoy certain protection from cruelty with their basic welfare needs met. This project will be an important input into the efforts to achieve that end.