

## **Tasty Meal or Man's Best Friend?**

*The Yulin Dog Meat Festival highlights a fierce battle between morality and local customs*

By LI Zuchen, Mike

On the main road of Yulin, a quiet Guangxi town, dozens of restaurants are lined up with bright red signs emblazoned with depictions of dog meat. Video host Izzy Yeung reports at the scene. The air is filled with strange smell, like sour sweat. Swarms of people are shuttling between bustling restaurants, while others are sitting happily around the table, eating cooked dog meat and fresh lychees with noise and gusto. There are even some diners who have brought their pet dogs, which are shivering underneath the table...

As I watched the Youtube video *Dining on Dogs in Yulin: VICE Reports*, I felt unsettled. As I continued viewing, the scenes became even more distressing.

The wholesale dog meat markets nearby are our furry friends' genuine hell. Their appalling screams cry out constantly from the slaughterhouses. Trucks loaded with dogs keep appearing, and workers are continuously unloading the cages. It's impossible to count the number of dogs in one cage; these dirty, fluffy balls are packed tightly together, trembling silently. Pairs of vacant eyes look out of the cages, filled with fear and despair knowing they are bound to die.

On the opposite side of the street, dogs are killed, roasted and shaved, then either hung on hooks or put on shelves. A dog's caramel-colored carcass stretches stiffly, with empty eyes, as if asking "Why me?" The butcher at the next shop wields his chopper expertly, quickly dismembering the dogs' bodies and cutting them to suit the customers' preference...

At the same time, there is a clamoring crowd of dog lovers marching along the streets, boycotting what they call a horrifying custom. They hold up signs proclaiming: "Dogs are man's best friend: stop the cruel conduct of eating dog meat!" Some demonstrators even stop passersby to warn them that dog meat is "poisonous"...

This may seem shocking for people who are unaware of dog eating traditions, whereas the phenomenon is fairly common in many Asian cultures, such as China, Korea and Vietnam. These scenes at the Yulin Dog Meat Festival raise the question of whether eating dogs is an immoral act or a respectable custom.

Being Chinese myself, I have been aware of this practice for many years. My attitude towards the dog eating custom was slightly ambiguous before I researched the topic by reading Chinese and international news and blogs, as well as watching several videos and TV programs.

On the one hand, I concur with familiar saying that “Dogs are man’s best friend”. Dogs are lively, happy and compassionate, and also loyal to people. Actually, I come from a family of dog lovers. My uncle and aunt have two lovely teddy dogs. Pipi, posing with my uncle below, is a dark brown male, 2 years old. He is a gentle and quiet dog who shows great affection. Every time we return home, Pipi is standing at the balcony, waiting for us. The female teddy with bright brown curly fur in my aunt's arms is Jiajia, Pipi’s best playmate. She is a sunny and energetic girl. They spend their days playing together, carefree. As my uncle and aunt do not have children, these two lovely teddy dogs give them a lot of companionship and happiness, adding great meaning and satisfaction to their lives.



My uncle and aunt with their lovely teddy dogs

On the other hand, I respect the long-standing local custom of dog eating. The German philosopher Hegel says “What is reasonable is real; that which is real is reasonable.” This implies that every culture is equal, and no one can put their own cultural customs over others. People unfamiliar with this culture may oppose the practice of eating dogs.

However, let's consider an Indian tradition since ancient times in which many don't eat beef. Should Indians oppose Europeans and Americans eating it? Should Indians protest and picket at McDonalds? The main argument against the festival is that dogs are much-loved pets and should not be eaten. If we flip our perspective, are not chickens, cows, sheep and other livestock similar to dogs? Cattle are also sentient, and they help people plow the fields and pull carts. Do people have the right to ignore the lives of cattle?

This has been a quite complicated ideological struggle for me. The views of dog lovers can seem rather oversensitive and selfish at times, as they seem to dictate other people's behavior, forcing other people to love dogs. The dog meat eaters can lack respect and compassion for dogs' lives, and may consume them for superstitious reasons. There is no lack of viable substitutes for dog meat.

My investigation of the Yulin Dog Meat Festival revealed some surprising information. For instance, participants consume about 40,000 dogs and 10,000 cats each year. However, according to an investigative Chinese TV program, animal protection organizations found out that many of them are obtained by stealing people's pets, which is both immoral and illegal. Meanwhile, some transit crew also fail to obtain a quarantine certificate and transport permits, which could lead to the spread of diseases. Hence, customers who eat these dogs can become ill. Even more disturbing, some local dog-eating lovers believe that adrenaline enhances the taste and texture of the meat, so they beat or even electrify the dogs before slaughtering them.

"The practice of women's foot-binding has been eradicated in China as the country develops, so eating dog meat can also be changed over time," one dog lover says in an interview with Izzy Yeung.

After much consideration, I side with the dog lovers. I don't propose that dog eating should be banned per se, rather that the illegal acts of stealing and unlicensed selling should be abrogated. Immoral behaviors must be changed by education. The dignity of the law should be safeguarded, while preserving local customs.

The glory of human nature lies in the recognition of errors and timely self-correction. It also lies in loving things equally. Since numerous flawed customs have been abandoned throughout the history of human development, certainly the Yulin Dog Meat Festival can adapt with the efforts of generations.