



An Animals Asia investigation, Report No.4,  
**Survey of public attitudes to  
dog and cat eating in China**

June 2015

# Survey of public attitudes to dog and cat eating in China

**The health risk associated with consuming cat and dog meat is the biggest concern for respondents – and nearly half believe that killing cats and dogs for their meat should be illegal.**

## Introducing the survey

In 2012, Animals Asia commissioned Horizon Research Consultancy Group (Guangzhou) to undertake a survey to gauge attitudes to dog and cat eating among the Chinese public.

This report is the fourth of a series of four Animals Asia reports into the dog and cat meat industry in China. Our groundbreaking research over four years has exposed the horrifying reality of a trade riddled with crime and extreme cruelty.

Sadly the cat/dog meat issue is not a big priority in China, and little research or investigation has previously been conducted into the industry. In 2011, we launched a full-scale, four-year study into all aspects of the cat and dog meat trade. Our research included multiple secret investigations, market surveys and interviews with local NGOs, community groups, the authorities and people in the trade. Compiling and analysing this information has taken much time and many resources, and we are now in a position to release the reports.

We wanted to understand:

- The motives and behaviour behind the consumption of dog and cat meat;
- The characteristics of consumers, including gender, age and location;
- The difference between those who do and those who don't eat cat and dog meat;
- How the public views the consumption of dogs and cats.

## Nineteen cities

The survey covered 19 Chinese cities, which were categorised as either A-class or B-class.

### A-class cities

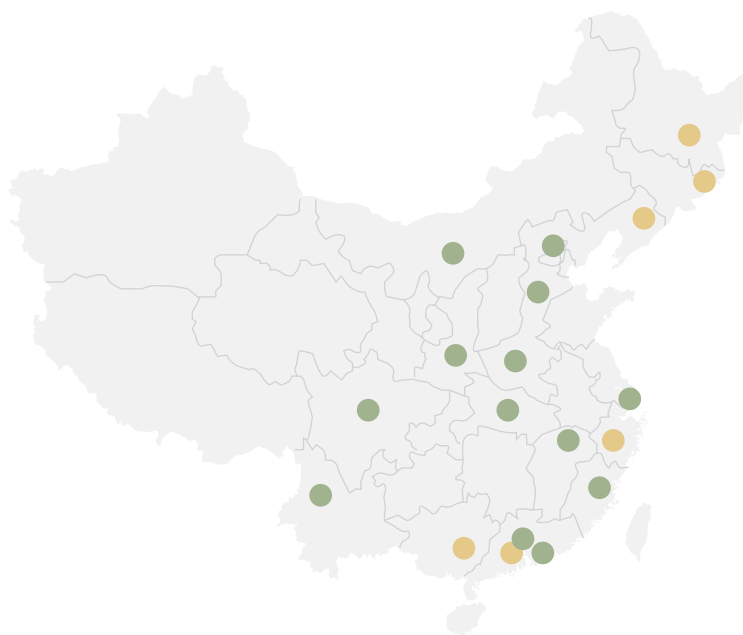
**(where dog meat consumption is more common)**

Yulin (Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region), Kaiping (Guangdong Province), Jinhua (Zhejiang Province), Yanji (Jilin Province), Harbin (Heilongjiang Province), Fushun (Liaoning Province)

### B-class cities

**(where dog meat consumption is rare):**

Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou (Guangdong Province), Shenzhen (Guangdong Province), Fuzhou (Fujian Province), Wuhan (Hubei Province), Chengdu (Sichuan Province), Zhengzhou (Henan Province), Xi'an (Shanxi Province), Baoding (Hebei Province), Jiujiang (Jiangxi Province), Dali (Yunnan Province), Baotou (Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region)



We included more B-class cities than A-class cities in the survey because there are more B-class cities than A-class cities in China and our aim was to gain a more representative picture of the true situation for dogs throughout the country.

Respondents were local residents aged 18-65 who had lived in their city for at least two years. The male/female ratio was close to 1:1.

Respondents were interviewed face to face and the interviewer recorded their answers in a formal questionnaire. A total of 3,221 valid questionnaires were collected – 1,161 from A-class cities and 2,060 from B-class cities.

**Notes on content**

- Groups that eat cat and dog meat are defined as those that have eaten cat or dog meat in the past two years (January 1, 2010 to January 3, 2012);
- Groups that don't eat cat and dog meat are defined as those that haven't eaten it in the past two years (January 1, 2010 to January 3, 2012).

**Who eats dog meat? (By gender)**

Survey results show that far fewer women than men eat dog meat in both A and B-class cities. (Fig. 1)

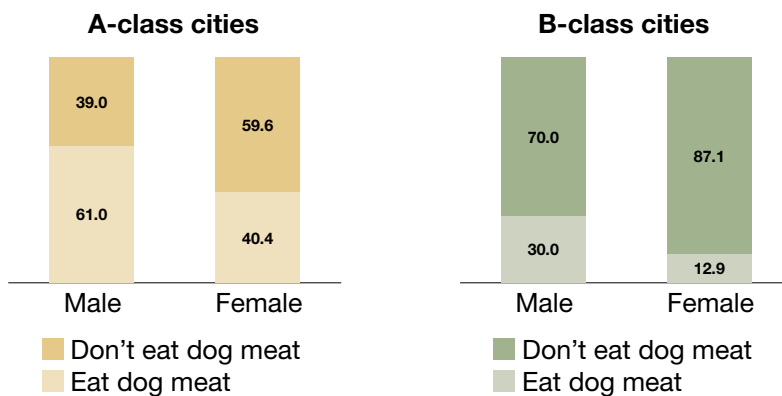


Fig.1 Sex-specific comparison (%)

**Is it normal to eat dog and cat meat in China?**

The survey shows that the consumption of cat and dog meat is not mainstream behaviour in China.

In B-class cities, where it is not common, less than a quarter (21.55%) of respondents had eaten dog meat in the previous two years, and just 1.7% had eaten cat meat. Even in the A-class cities where the practice is common, nearly half of respondents had not consumed cat or dog meat in the two-year period. (Fig. 2)

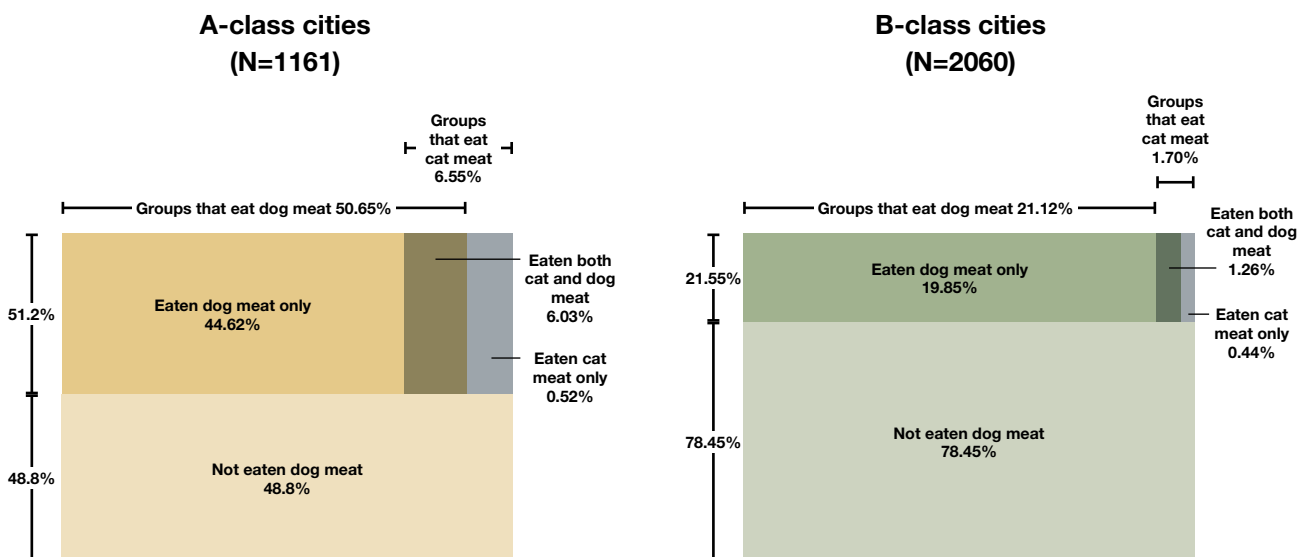


Fig. 2 Proportion of the public that have eaten cat meat or dog meat in the past two years

### Why do people eat dog meat? (Fig. 3, 4)

The taste and a belief in its nutritional value are the primary reasons respondents gave for eating dog meat.

In A-class Cities, the Top 3 motivations are: Delicious taste, local tradition and food culture, and because colleagues eat it.

In B-class Cities, the Top 3 are: Delicious taste, nutrition and nourishment, and because colleagues eat it.

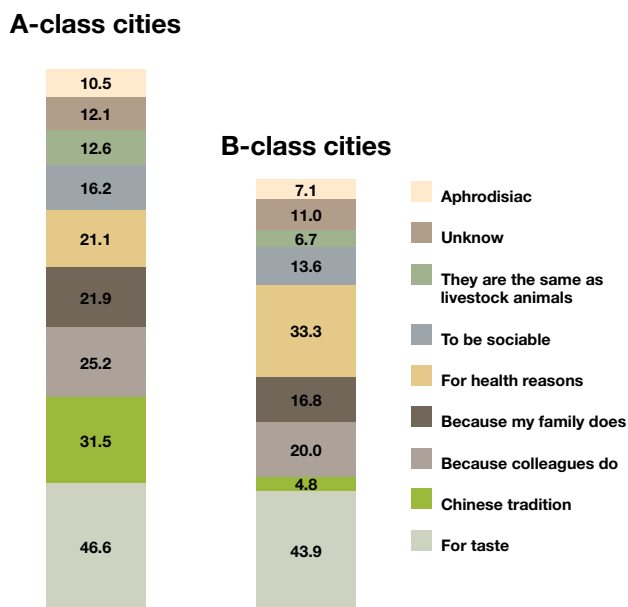


Fig. 3 Motivation for eating dog meat (%) N=1023

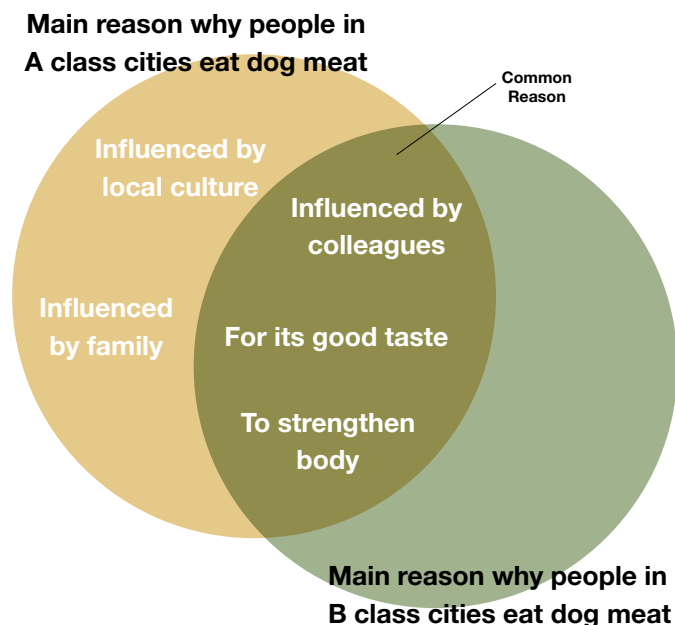


Fig. 4 Common reasons for eating dog meat

### How often is dog meat eaten?

In general, the Chinese public do not eat dog meat frequently. In B-class cities, over 70% respondents ate it only once or twice a year, while in in A-class cities, the frequency was higher. (Fig 5)

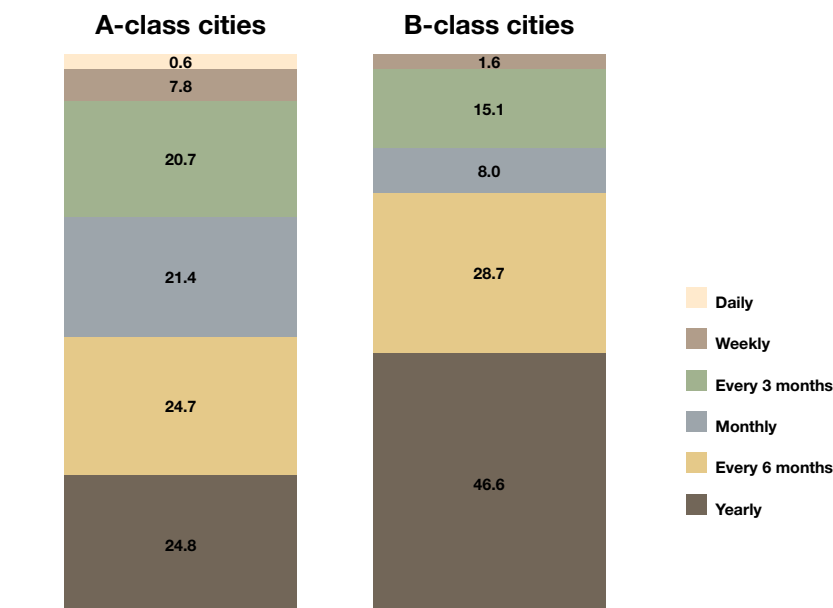


Fig. 5 Frequency of eating dog meat (%)  
A-class cities N=534,  
B-class cities N=490

### On what occasion is dog meat eaten?

In both A-class cities and B-class cities, dog meat is most commonly eaten at dinners with friends (over 60%). The percentage of home-cooked meals is low, which shows that dog meat is not a common family food. (Fig. 6) Respondents could choose more than one option.

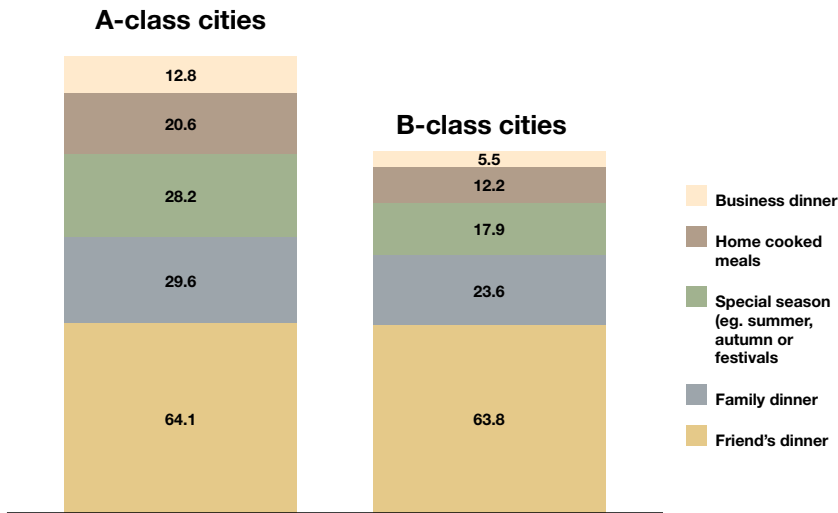


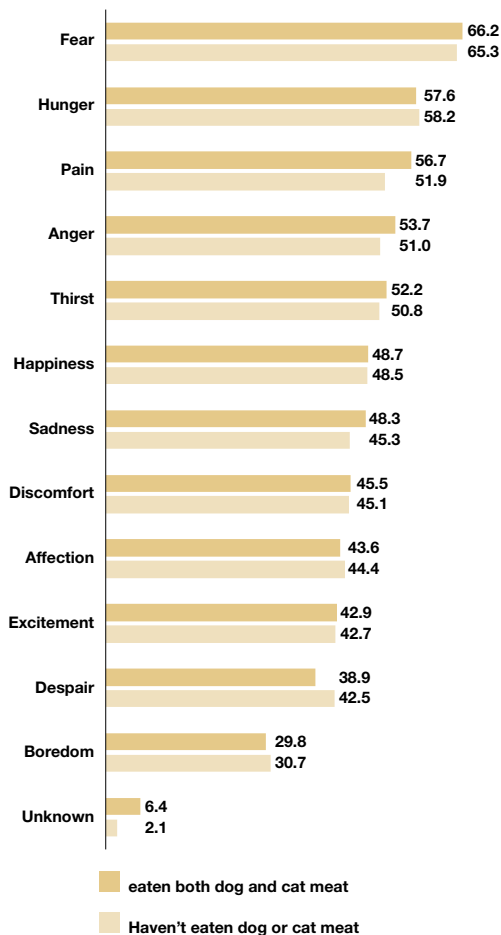
Fig. 6 When is dog meat eaten? (%)  
N=1023

### Understanding of cat and dog emotions

Over half of respondents agreed that cats and dogs had emotions and the capacity for feelings, including “fear”, “hunger”, “pain”, “anger” and “thirst”. Most respondents (more than 60%) thought cats and dogs could feel “fear”. In general, these respondents did not eat cats and dogs, and females were more likely than males to recognise that cats and dogs had feelings. (Fig. 7)

#### A-class cities

Eat N=594; not eat N = 567



#### B-class cities

Eat N=444; not eat N = 1616

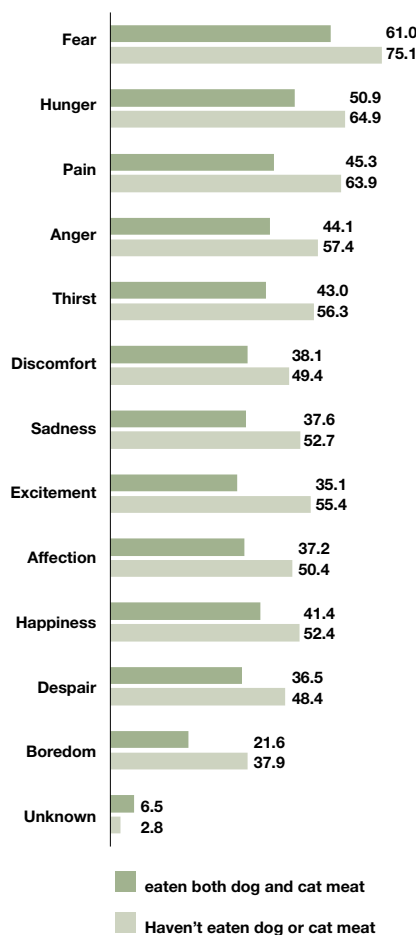


Fig. 7 Public's understanding of cat and dog emotion

## Awareness of how cats and dogs are treated during transportation

Over 50% of respondents were aware that dogs and cats suffered ill-treatment during transportation – cramped conditions, dehydration, malnutrition, injury and even death from being thrown from the trucks and fighting with other dogs. (Fig. 8, 9)

### A-class cities

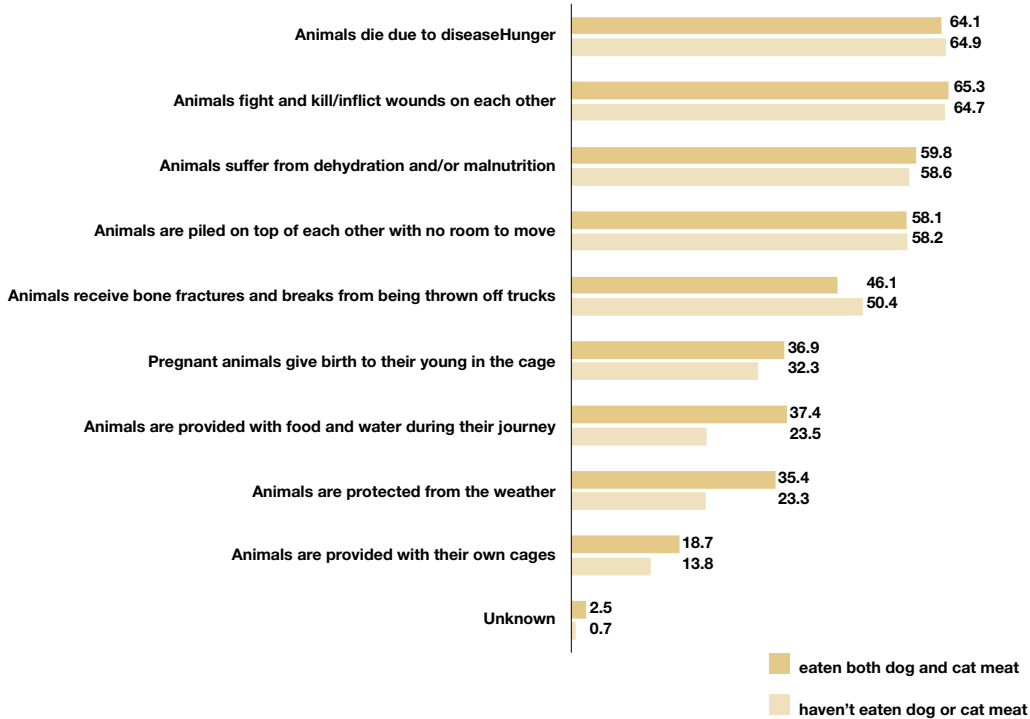


Fig. 8  
Understanding of the treatment received by cats and dogs during transport  
A-class cities  
Eat N=594 Not eat N=567

### B-class cities

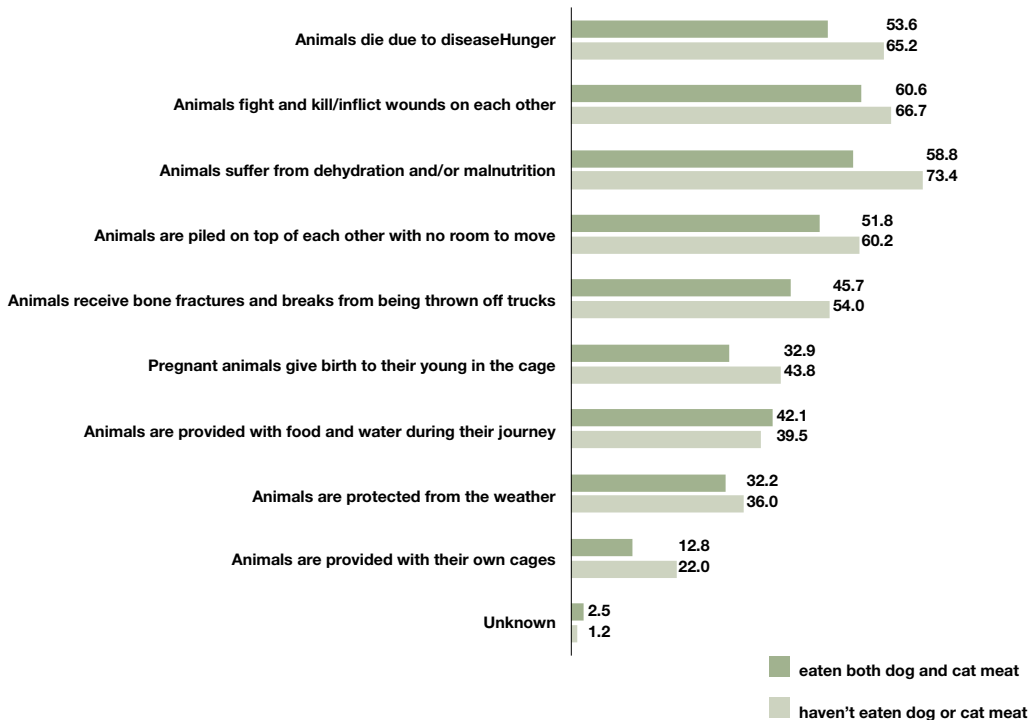


Fig. 9  
Understanding of the treatment received by cats and dogs during transport  
B-class cities  
Eat N=444 Not eat N=1616

## Attitudes to cat and dog eating

Results show that the public in both A-class and B-class cities have similar attitudes to dog and cat eating, however there are some differences between those who eat cat and dog meat and those who don't. (Fig. 10). These questions are deliberately provocative in some cases – for example assessing whether respondents feel that dogs and cats are different from other animals reared for food, and whether “meat” dogs and cats are viewed differently from companion dogs and cats. This allows responses to be assessed in terms of future public education and advertising campaigns.

|                                       | Percentage who agree with statements                                                                    | Do not eat cats and dogs | Eat cats and dogs |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Similar attitude, mostly agree</b> | Both companion dogs and cats and “meat” dogs and cats should be protected by law.                       | Over 90%                 | Around 80%        |
|                                       | It is unacceptable to eat dogs and cats if they are abused or tortured during feeding and slaughtering. | Around 80%               | Over 70%          |
|                                       | Dogs and cats are companion animals and cannot morally be eaten.                                        | Around 90%               | Over 60%          |
|                                       | Chinese people are increasingly opposed to cat and dog eating.                                          | Over 80%                 | Over 60%          |
|                                       | Eating cat and dog meat is different from eating pork, beef and mutton.                                 | Over 70%                 | Over 70%          |
| <b>Some dispute</b>                   | Cats and dogs kept as pets are different from those that are eaten.                                     | Over 50%                 | Over 60%          |
| <b>Big dispute, opposite attitude</b> | There is nothing wrong with eating cat or dog meat.                                                     | Over 20%                 | Over 60%          |
|                                       | Eating cat and dog meat is a part of Chinese food culture.                                              | Over 20%                 | Nearly 60%        |

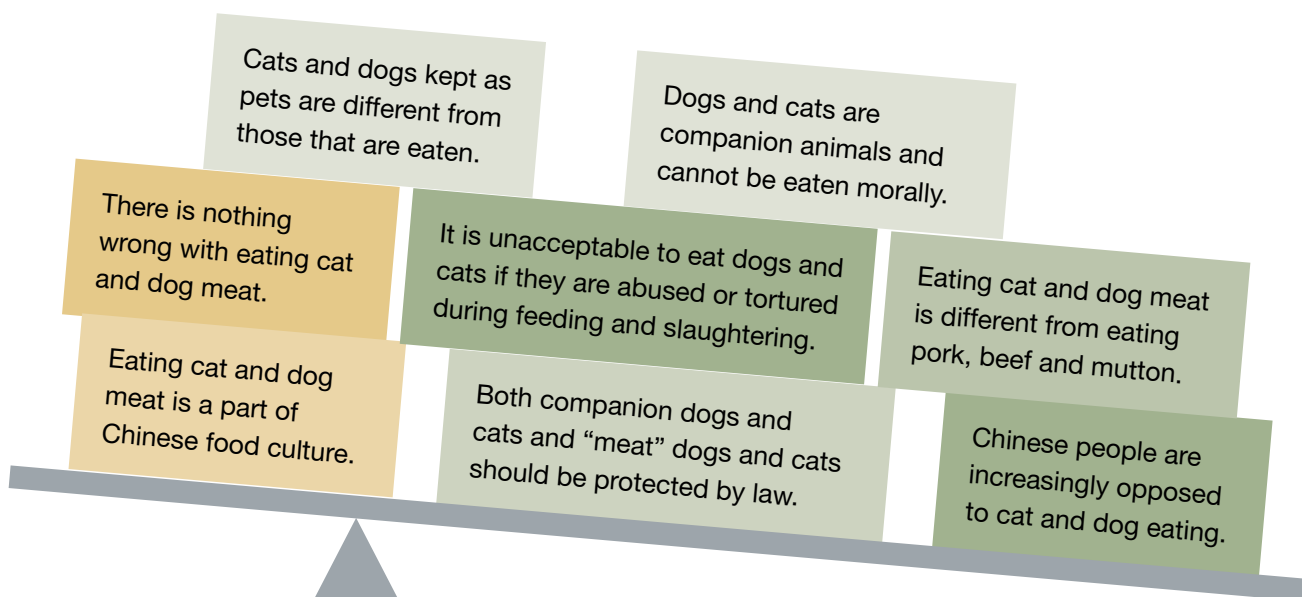


Fig. 10 Public's views on eating cats and dogs

## Reasons for not eating cat and dog meat

Among those who hadn't eaten cat and dog in the past two years, more than 70% had never eaten it; nearly 30% had eaten cat or dog before, but not in the past two years (Fig. 11). The reason respondents in both A and B-class cities changed their minds was similar to those who had never eaten cat and dog. The top three reasons are: it's cruel, they are companion animals not food animals, and it's unsanitary (Fig. 12).

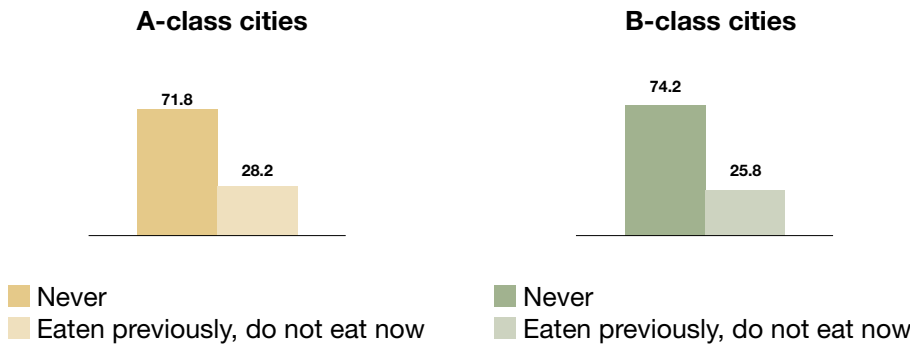


Fig. 11 Previous eating habits of those who do not eat cat and dog meat  
A-class cities N=567;  
B-class cities N=1616

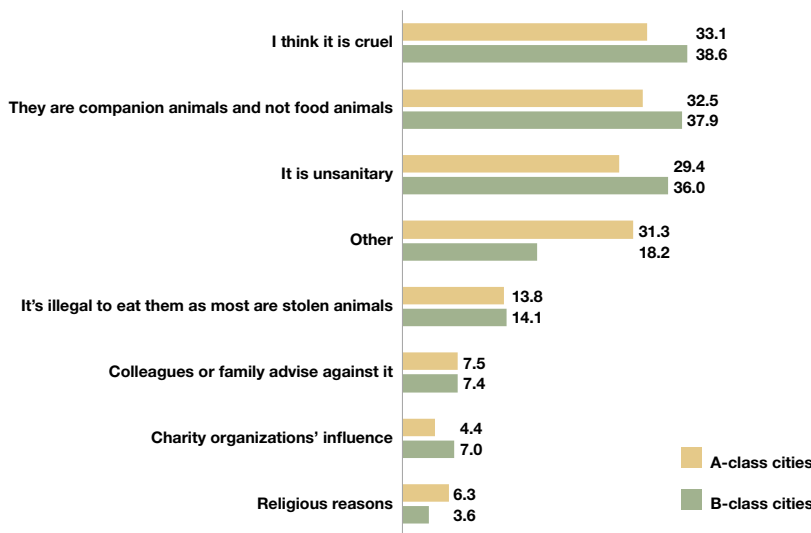


Fig. 12 Reasons for stopping cat and dog eating

## Concerns about cat and dog meat consumption

1. A vast majority of respondents had concerns about eating cat and dog meat. Respondents in B-class cities were more worried than those in A-class cities, and those who ate cat and dog meat were more worried than those who did not. (Fig. 13)

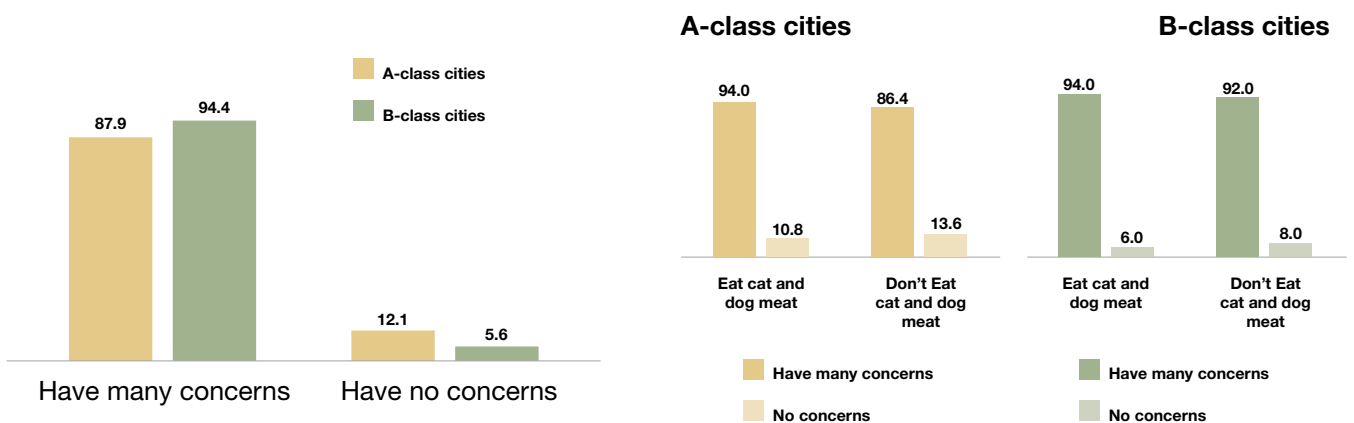


Fig. 13 How concern about cat and dog eating is influencing behavior (%)



2. The top 3 concerns of both A and B-class city respondents related to health and hygiene – the risk of unquarantined meat carrying pathogens, the feeding environment and market not being hygienic, and cats and dogs being poisoned before being put on the dining-table. (Fig. 14)

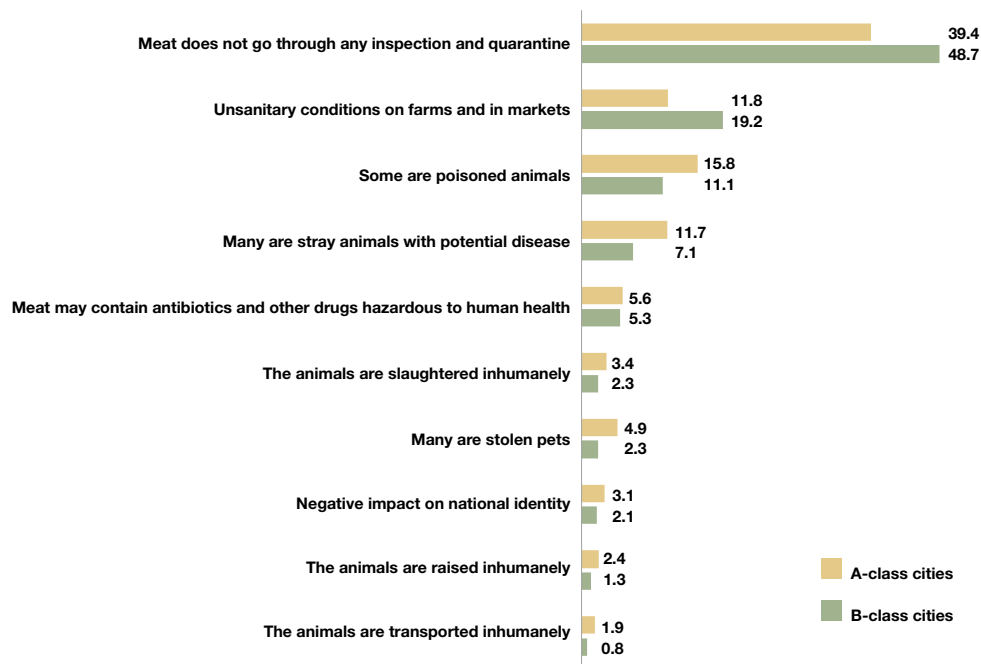


Fig. 14 Common concerns about consumption (%)

3. These concerns impact the attitude and behaviour of around 80% of respondents, and they have a great impact on 50%. (Fig. 15)

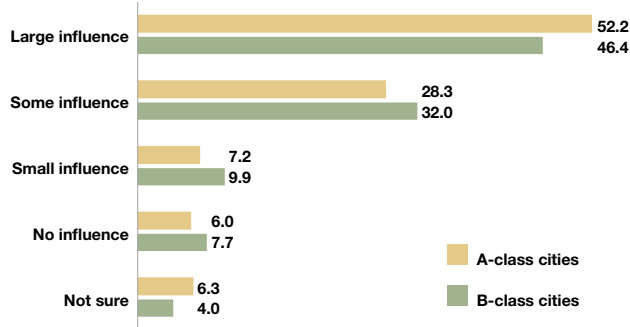
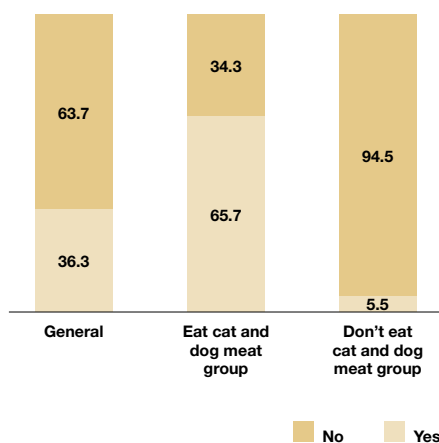


Fig. 15 Affect of concerns on cat and dog consumption (%)

### Looking ahead

Respondents in B-class cities were 20% more likely not to eat cat and dog meat in the future than respondents in A-class cities. More than 30% of respondents in A-class cities and more than 40% of respondents in B-class cities, who had eaten cat and dog meat, were unwilling to eat it again. Very few respondents who did not eat cat and dog meat intended to eat it in the future. (Fig. 16)

#### A-class cities



#### B-class cities

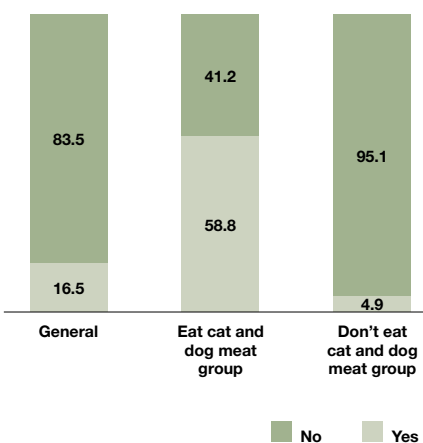


Fig. 16 Future consumption patterns (%)

## How consumers are viewed

Respondents in both A & B-class cities who did not eat cat and dog meat generally shared the same attitudes towards others eating cat and dog meat. More than 50% disagreed with the practice, and more than 30% thought it was none of their business. Only around 1% thought it was fine for others to eat dog and cat meat. (Fig. 17)

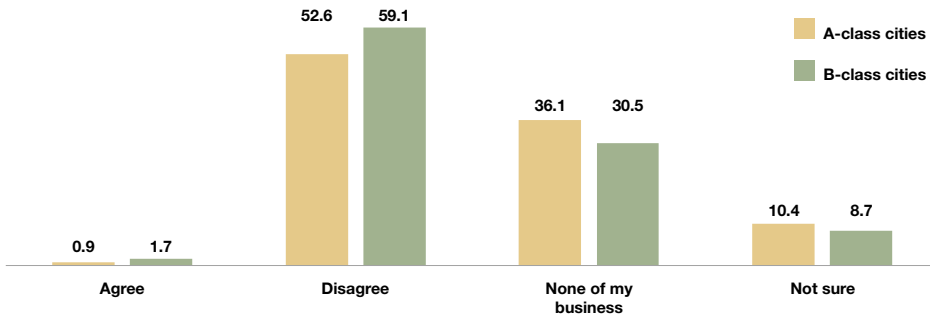
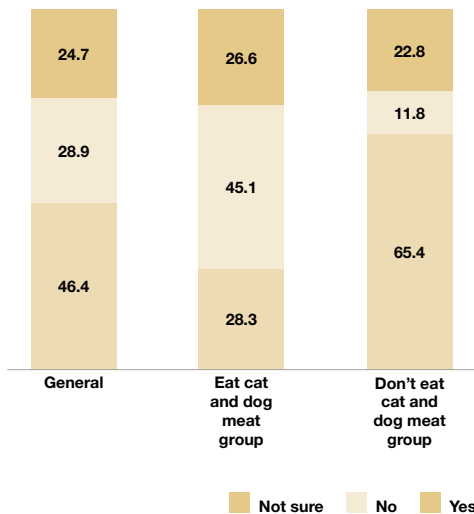


Fig. 17 Attitudes of non-consumers towards those who eat cat and dog meat (%)

## Should killing cats and dogs for food be illegal?

As a whole, more than 46% of respondents agreed that killing cats and dogs for meat should be illegal. A quarter were neutral, while nearly 30% thought it should be legal. In the groups that ate cats and dogs, over 40% thought it should remain legal, over 20% thought it should be illegal and more than 20% were neutral. But of the groups that didn't eat cats and dogs, nearly 60% thought it should be illegal, just over 10% disagreed, while more than 20% were neutral. (Fig 18)

### A-class cities



### B-class cities

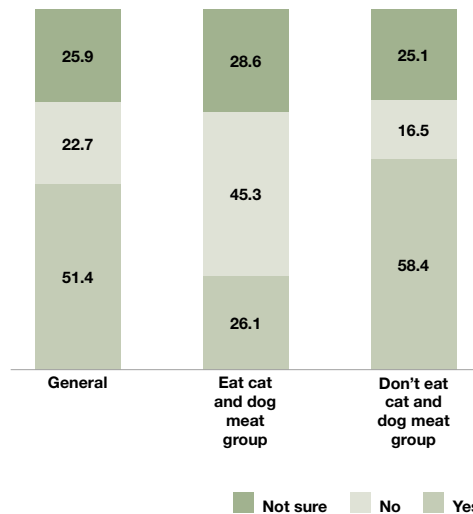


Fig. 18 Should killing cats and dogs for food be illegal? (%)

## Main conclusions of the research

- Eating cat and dog meat is not a regular nationwide practice – and both the amount consumed and frequency of these meals are low considering the population at large.**

Eating cat and dog meat is not a universal behaviour nationwide. In general cities, only 20% of respondents had eaten dog meat in the past two years, while just 1.7% had eaten cat meat; within this non-mainstream minority, more than 70% had eaten cat or dog meat just once or twice a year. Even in cities with the habit of eating cats and dogs, almost half of respondents had not eaten cats or dogs in the past two years, and of those who had, half had eaten it only once or twice a year.
- The taste and perceived nutritive value are the primary reasons for eating dog meat.**

The taste of food and the generally believed nutritive value are the most primary reasons that attract the general public to eat dog meat.

3. **Dog and cat meat is not a common family food.**

Over 60% of respondents ate cat or dog meat at gatherings with friends; respondents rarely ate a home-cooked meal of dog or cat meat with their families and dog meat cannot be considered a staple diet or common family meal.

4. **Women are far less likely to eat dog and cat meat than men.**

5. **90% of all respondents have concerns about eating dogs and cats.**

The most common concerns were hygiene and health (meat without quarantine could carry pathogens, markets were not hygienic, and the cats and dogs could have been poisoned). A total of 80% of the public believed that these concerns influenced the public's attitudes towards cat or dog consumption and 50% thought they had a great impact on attitudes. Among respondents who ate cats and dogs, more than 30% said they no longer would.

Of respondents who did not eat cat and dog meat, more than 70% had never eaten it, while nearly 30% had eaten it in the past. Both gave similar responses, saying it was too cruel, it was unsanitary, and dogs and cats were friends, not food.

6. **Over 50% agree that cats and dogs have emotions and feelings, and that they suffer during transportation.**

Most respondents agreed that cats and dogs had emotions and feelings, including fear, hunger, pain, anger and thirst. More than 60% thought cats and dogs could feel fear. Females and those who don't eat cats and dogs were more likely to know that cats and dogs had emotions and feelings. Over 50% were aware that dogs and cats suffered ill-treatment during transportation (dehydration and malnutrition; illness; injury or death through fighting; being crowded together without space; being dropped from the truck and injured, including suffering fractures).

7. **"Pet" dogs and cats and "meat" dogs and cats should be treated the same.**

Most respondents agreed that all cats and dogs should be treated equally and protected by animal welfare legislation; if cats and dogs are ill-treated during captivity, transportation or slaughter, consumption is unacceptable; dogs and cats are companion animals, eating them is morally unacceptable;

Those who ate cats and dogs and those who didn't, disagreed over the points "there is nothing wrong with eating cats and dogs" and "eating cats and dogs is part of Chinese food culture".

8. **Nearly half of all respondents believe that killing dogs or cats for consumption should be illegal.**

Nearly 30% thought that killing cats and dogs for their meat should remain legal and the rest were neutral.

On this point, those who eat cats or dogs and those who don't have the opposite attitude, over 40% of those who ate cat and dog meat said it should be legal, while over 20% thought it should be illegal, and more than 20% were neutral. Nearly 60% of those who didn't eat dog and cat meat thought the practice should be illegal, over 10% disagreed, and over 20% were neutral.

9. **Among those who do not eat cat or dog meat, over half are against others eating it.**

Over 30% of those who don't consumed cat/dog meat thought it was none of their business if others ate it, and just 1% said it was people's right to eat cat and dog meat if they wished.