

## **Good to Pet and Eat: The Keeping and Consuming of Dogs and Cats in South Korea**

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*Over the past few decades, there has been mounting criticism, mainly from Western societies, of the practice of consuming dogs and cats in South Korea. In the current study, I researched historical, cultural, and demographic details on, and South Korean people's attitudes to, this practice. Data were collected in two ways. Firstly, relevant information on the history and current status of dog and cat use, including consumption, was sourced from the academic literature, newspaper reports, websites, and animal welfare organizations. Secondly, in 2004, the polling agency Market & Opinion Research International (MORI) was contracted to survey 1,000 adults (15 years and above) in South Korea on their attitudes to keeping cats and dogs as pets and to the consumption of these species. The consumption of dogs has a long history in South Korea while the consumption of cats is more recent. Pet ownership is a more recent phenomenon and is growing steadily. Banning the eating of dogs was not supported in the survey. Unlike cat consumption, dog consumption is strongly linked to national identity in South Korea, and it seems that calls from the West to ban the practice are viewed by South Koreans as an attack on their culture.*

Research suggests that humans evolved from a vegetarian lifestyle to the one including meat in their diets around 2.5 million years ago (at the dawn of

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the genus *Homo*) (Holzman, 2003), though just how much of the prehistoric diet included animals is difficult to tell from archeological evidence (Wing, 2000). Up until around 12,000 years ago, humans derived food and raw materials from wild animals and plants (Serpell, 1996). Men did most of the hunting and butchering of game and produced tools for these purposes. Women gathered edible fruits, nuts, and other plant materials for their families to eat. The Ice Age, however, brought an end to this “hunting and gathering” lifestyle and led to the domestication of plants and animals to provide ready and accessible sources of food (Serpell, 1996). The dog was the first domesticated species, which appeared around 15,000 years ago in East Asia (Savolainen, Zhang, Luo, Lundeberg, & Leitner, 2002); following behind were the major farm animal species (sheep, goats, cattle, pigs, horses, and chickens; see Clutton-Brock, 1999). The domestic cat derives from the Near East (Driscoll et al., 2007), with archeological evidence for the taming of cats dating back some 9,500 years (Vigne, Guilane, Debue, Haye, & Gerard, 2004).

A number of theories have been put forward as to why the dog was domesticated, including to assist with hunting game, to act as guards (e.g., Clutton-Brock, 1995, 1999), and that the animal might have actively chosen to be with humans and so, in effect, domesticated itself (e.g., Budiansky, 1999). Manwell and Baker (1984) also suggest that domestication was at least in part carried out to provide a supply of food for human consumption. However, there is a lack of convincing evidence for this (Olsen, 2000). Regardless of whether dogs really were domesticated for their meat, dog flesh has been eaten in various countries since ancient times, and this still occurs today (Simoons, 1991, 1994; Vigne & Guilaine, 2004). Places where there are records of dog eating include southeast Asia and Indochina, North and Central America, parts of Africa, and the islands of the Pacific (Burkhardt, 1960; Clutton-Brock & Hammond, 1994; Driver & Massey, 1957; Griffith, Wolch, & Lassiter, 2002; Harris, 1985; Ishige, 1977; Frank, 1965; McHugh, 2004; Olowo Ojoade, 1990; Schwabe, 1979; Serpell, 1995, 1996; Titcomb, 1969). During the Neolithic and Bronze Age, dog eating was apparently also widespread in Europe (Bökönyi, 1974; Vigne & Guilaine, 2004).

Much less has been written or discovered about the eating of domestic cats.<sup>1</sup> It has a briefer history than dog eating—there are records of it from 13th century England (Luff & Moreno García, 1995), 14th century China (Clifton, 2003), 17th century England (Thomas, 1984, p. 116), and 18th century France and Germanic countries (Ferrières, 2006, p. 159, 164)—and the level of consumption of cat meat is comparatively low (Hopkins, 1999).

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<sup>1</sup>However, recent archeological evidence shows that the Near Eastern wildcat (*Felis silvestris lybica*), the most likely ancestor of the domestic cat, was eaten by humans around 8,500 BCE in Cyprus (Vigne & Guilaine, 2004).

Today, the consumption of dogs and cats still occurs in a number of countries, including Cambodia, China, Thailand, and Vietnam (see Bartlett & Clifton, 2003; Podberscek, 2007), but the eating of dogs was outlawed in the Philippines in 1998 and cat eating was banned in Vietnam in 1998. In 1996, it was reported that dog meat was still being eaten in parts of Eastern Switzerland (De Leo, 1996). It has been calculated that in Asia, about 13–16 million dogs and 4 million cats are eaten each year (Bartlett & Clifton, 2003).

The issue of eating dogs and/or cats is highly emotive, especially in countries (largely Western) where the practice has been extinguished for a long time or has rarely or never occurred (e.g., UK, USA). In these countries, the very idea of consuming a cat or a dog is viewed as abhorrent and morally corrupt. This is perhaps unsurprising, considering dogs and cats are mainly kept as pet animals. But in the countries where cats and dogs are consumed, these animals are also kept as pets (e.g., China and Vietnam; Podberscek 2007).

The concern that people have about dog and/or cat eating manifests itself in the form of international campaigns calling for a ban. One country which has received an enormous amount of negative, international media attention because it allows the consumption of dogs and cats is South Korea. However, little scholarly literature exists on the consumption of dogs and cats in this country (or, indeed, pet ownership) and the attitudes residents hold toward consumption and pet ownership. The present study, funded by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), was designed to fill this gap. Firstly, historical and current information on the roles of cats and dogs as pets and food in South Korea will be provided. Secondly, the results of an opinion poll on what adult South Koreans think about dogs and cats as pets and as food will be reported.

## Methods

Information for this article was sourced in two ways. Firstly, relevant information on the history and current status of dog and cat use (as pets and as food) was sourced from the academic literature, newspaper reports, websites, and animal welfare organizations (IFAW, Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals [RSPCA] International, World Society for the Protection of Animals [WSPA], International Aid for Korean Animals [IAKA], and Korea Animal Protection Society [KAPS]).

Secondly, the polling agency Market and Opinion Research International (MORI) was contracted by the IFAW to conduct a survey in South Korea on attitudes to dogs and cats<sup>2</sup>, with particular reference to the eating of these animals. The questions considered in this article deal with (1) attitudes to the uses of dogs and cats as food and pets and (2) attitudes to banning human consumption of a number of species of animals, including cats and dogs.

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<sup>2</sup>The number of questions asked was limited by the available budget.

### *Survey Design*

The questions used in this study were designed by myself, IFAW, KAPS, and MORI.

*Attitudes to the uses of dogs and cats.* People were asked “To what extent do you approve or disapprove of the use of dogs/cats (a) as pets or companions?, and (b) as food for humans?” The possible responses were strongly approve, tend to approve, neither approve nor disapprove, tend to disapprove, strongly disapprove, and don’t know.

*Attitudes to banning the consumption of certain animal species.* Respondents were asked “How strongly would you support or oppose a ban on eating the following animals?—cat, chicken, cow, dog, fish, monkey, pig, sheep.” The possible responses were *strongly support, tend to support, neither support nor oppose, tend to oppose, strongly oppose, and don’t know.*

### *Survey Procedure and Participants*

One thousand adults (15 years and above<sup>3</sup>) were randomly chosen and interviewed over the telephone in 2004, from April 2 to 16. These interviews took place in the cities of Seoul, Busan, and Kwangju, and involved 500, 300, and 200 residents, respectively. Data from the interviews were input and response frequencies were calculated by MORI. Due to budget constraints and the time scale for the study, a multivariate analysis was not possible.

Of the participants in the survey, 50% were male and 50% were female; 50% were aged between 15 and 34 years, and 36% of households had children. Fifty-eight percent had completed their schooling and had taken a higher degree, while only 1% had no formal education. Twenty-four percent of participants owned pet animals: 21% had dogs, 2% had cats, 1% had a bird, and just over 2% had other pets (e.g., goldfish). The type/breed of dog owned was not explored.

### *Country Specifics*

South Korea makes up the southern half of the Korean Peninsula, an area of 98,480 km<sup>2</sup> (slightly larger than the U.S. state of Indiana), bordering the Sea of Japan and the Yellow Sea. It has a population of 49 million, almost all of whom are ethnically Korean (about 20,000 are Chinese). About 26% are Christian, 26% are Buddhist, 1% are Confucianist, 46% are of no religious affiliation, and 1% are “other” (Central Intelligence Agency, 2007).

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<sup>3</sup>This age limit is one used by MORI in their polls.

## Results

### *Dogs as Food*

*Historical notes.* According to Ann (1999, 2003a), the eating of dog meat has a long history in Korea, originating during the era of Samkug (Three Kingdoms, 57 BC to AD 676). It was not common after this period, though, as Buddhism grew in popularity and became the state religion during the Koryo Dynasty (918–1392). However, during the Choson Dynasty (1392–1910), Confucianism became the state ideology, paving the way for the return of dog meat as food. Indeed, Confucians enjoyed the meat so much that it was, according to oral tradition, nicknamed “Confucians’ meat” (Walraven, 2001). To justify this, Confucians pointed to the canonical authorization of the so-called Chinese *Book of Rites*, in which dogs are divided into three classes: hunting dogs, watchdogs, and food (Ash, 1927, p. 59; Walraven, 2001). During this period, dog meat was served in many ways, including *gaejanguk* (original name for dog soup; also spelt *kaejanguk*), *sukyuk* (meat boiled in water), *sundae* (a sausage), *kui* (roasted meat), and *gaesoju* (literally “dog liquor,” also spelt *kae-soju*; Ann, 1999). Kim (1989) found details of 14 different dog meat recipes for the period of 1670–1943.

The consumption of dog meat has mainly been associated with farmers trying to maintain their stamina during the oppressive heat of summer (Simoons, 1994; Walraven, 2001). However, exceptions to this have been found. For example, in 1534, there is a reference during the reign of King Chungjong that dog meat was offered to a high official as a bribe, and in 1777, a reference was made to government officials going out to eat dog meat soup (Walraven, 2001).

It is important to note that dog meat has always been a medicine as well as a food (Simoons, 1994; Walraven, 2001). This is not surprising, as in East Asia there has always been much interest in the medicinal qualities of foods. In “Precious Mirror of Korean Medicine,” written by royal physician Hoh Jun (1546–1615), first published in 1613, the medicinal qualities of different parts of the dog are given (Walraven, 2001). Here it states, for example, that dog penis will help overcome male impotence and that the heart can be eaten to treat depression and rage. Dog meat is “hot” in the hot/cold classification of food (Simoons, 1994, p. 205) and so is good for the *yang*, the male, hot, extroverted component of human nature (as opposed to the female, cool, introverted *yin*; Hopkins, 1999, p. 5).

Although dog meat is most often consumed in the form of a stew or soup (*tang*), it is also commonly taken in liquid form, *gaesoju*. Here, after the dog is killed, it is put into a stainless steel pressure cooker and boiled for up to 6 hours. The resulting liquefied dog is then mixed with herbs and strained into containers. Stores producing and selling *gaesoju* and other health tonics are called *Youngyangso* or *Boshinwon* (nutritional or body health shops) (K. Kumm, International Aid for Korean Animals, personal communication, 2004).

It is thought that the first attack against the eating of dog meat in South Korea was led by the Austrian-born wife of South Korea's first president Syngman Rhee. Her thoughts on banning the eating of dogs were not popular, but they did lead to a cosmetic change: the renaming of dog stew from *gaejangguk* to *boshintang* (also written as *bosintang*, *poshintang*, or *poshint'ang* "invigorating soup") in 1945 (An, 1991 cited in Walraven, 2001). Any outward disapproval of dog meat eating disappeared during the Korean War (1950–1953). During this time, people were faced with severe food shortages and so dogs became a valuable source of protein. However, criticisms about dog meat eating resurfaced in the 1980s in the form of international condemnation. This campaign was led by former actress Brigitte Bardot and resulted in the enactment of the Food Sanitation Law in June 1984 which declared that restaurants could not sell any foods deemed to be "disgusting, repugnant, unhealthy, or unsanitary." Specific examples of such products include soups or seasoned broth which contain meat or other materials obtained from dogs, snakes, lizards, or worms. Violators of the law would receive one warning without penalty and then 7-day suspensions from business for each subsequent offence. However, this was not actively enforced and was not popular among citizens (Walraven, 2001), and in November 1996, a Korean Court of Appeal decided that, in principle, dog meat could be eaten as food after all, despite the legislation.

During preparations for the Seoul Olympic Games in 1988, protests were made to the South Korean government by individuals, animal welfare charities (local and international), foreign governments, and the world mass media about the slaughter and consumption of cats and dogs. The government reacted by banning the sale of dog meat at markets, moving restaurants serving dog meat to places where foreigners would be less likely to see them, and by changing the name of dog meat soup (*boshintang*) to a variety of "more appealing" ones: *youngyangtang* ("nourishing soup"), *kyejoltang* ("seasonal soup"), and *sagyatang* ("soup for all seasons"; Walraven, 2001).

In May 1991, the Korean National Assembly passed the Animal Protection Law 1991, which under Article 6 "Prohibition of Mistreatment of Animals" states that

1. No one shall kill animals in a way which is cruel or which provokes disgust without proper, rational reason.
2. Animals shall not be subject to the infliction of unnecessary pain or injury without proper, rational reason.

This Article does not apply to farmed (livestock, fur) and hunted animals, but it does apply to cats and dogs, as they are not classified as livestock. Effectively, it outlawed any cruel slaughter practices involving cats and dogs that existed. For example, traditionally, dogs used for their meat were hanged and beaten until dead. However, the Animal Protection Law 1991 was rarely enforced in terms of

the slaughter of dogs and cats, and this led to national and international animal protection agencies putting increased pressure on the government to ban the killing of dogs and cats for food or medicine. In response to this, in 1999 a group of lawyers suggested that the law distinguish between pet dogs and food dogs, and a poll of 4,158 people showed that 56% were in favor of this (Walraven, 2001). However, amendments to the Animal Protection Law 1991 did not materialize, as critics believed that it would damage the country's international image (Saletan, 2002).

In the lead-up to the 2002 World Cup (football/soccer) which South Korea was cohosting with Japan, international and national pressure again was put on the South Korean government to ban the consumption of dogs and cats. In spite of this, a member of the ruling Millennium Democratic Party launched a campaign to have dogs put on the list of livestock stipulated in the Livestock Processing Act. This amendment bill called for strict standards of slaughter and hygiene, as well as the separation of dogs into those that could be eaten (edible livestock) and those that were pets. (This bill was not passed.) In addition, a member of the main opposition political party Grand National Party proposed a declaration demanding that foreign countries not meddle in Korea's dog-eating tradition, saying that it was a unique feature of the Korean culture (Jin, 2001). Further support for the consumption of dog meat came in the form of the National Dog Meat Restaurant Association, which was set up in February 2002, and is made up of about 150 restaurants which serve dog meat. Just before the World Cup, they unveiled a plan to give free samples of *boshintang* and other dog meat products to football fans outside the various stadiums used during the tournament (Chaudhary, 2002). And some students from Seoul University set up a website to promote the virtues of dog meat. The plan to provide samples of dog soup, however, was abandoned after the government and others put pressure on these groups not to.

Certainly, if dog meat eating had remained a purely rural phenomenon, it would have disappeared in modern times, as about 82% of South Koreans now live in cities (as opposed to 25% during the Korean War). Instead, dog meat eating seems to be increasing. For example, in April 1997, a chain of dog meat restaurants was launched by an entrepreneur Yong-sup Cho (Anon, 1997), and *Seoul Searching Magazine* reported on a dog meat festival held on October 3, 2003, in Seocheon on the west coast of South Korea. Here dog meat was promoted and sold, as were a variety of products derived from dog parts, for example, dog wine and dog oil ([www.SeoulSearching.com/Oct3.html](http://www.SeoulSearching.com/Oct3.html)). Indeed, in 2002, in cooperation with a cosmetics company, Dr. Yong-Geun Ann (Department of Food Nutrition, Chungcheong College, South Korea) released a range of cosmetics based on dog meat, for example, dog oil cream, dog oil essence, and dog oil emulsion. In addition, he also produced a range of foods, including dog meat soy sauce, dog meat *kimchi* (*kimchi* is a traditional Korean food made of fermented vegetables), dog meat mayonnaise, canned dog meat, and dog meat candy (see photograph at <http://wolf.ok.ac.kr/~anny/english/picture2.gif>). Also, based on the Ministry of

Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) statistics, Ann (1999, 2003b) reported an increase in the number of dogs reared for food, from 1,027,299 in 1998 to 1,420,046 dogs in 2001.

*Where and when eaten, and by whom.* Dog meat is eaten nationwide and all year round, although it is most commonly eaten during summer, especially on the (supposedly) three hottest days (known as *boknal* [also spelled *poknal*], “dog days”; Walraven, 2001). These 3 days—known as *chobok*, *jungbok*, and *malbok*, and which come at 10-day intervals—constitute a period called Sambok (Jang, 2004). Eating dog (a “hot” *yang* food) during summer is meant to help fight against the debilitating effects of the heat and humidity; Koreans believe that you “fight fire with fire” (Jang, 2004).

While men and women equally consume dog meat as a medicine, eating dog as a food is largely a male activity (Scott, 2004; Walraven, 2001). This gender bias in consuming dog meat as food is not peculiar to South Korea and has also been noted in the Philippines (Griffith et al., 2002) and Vietnam (Goodyear, 2005).

*Sources of dogs and breeds/types eaten.* Dogs are bred and raised in rural parts of the country nationwide. Some dogs at markets might also have been stolen (people’s pets, guard dogs) or collected from the streets (strays). Figures from the MAF in South Korea show that in 2002, there were 765,006 dog farms, but no figure is provided as to how many of these bred dogs for food.

The type of dog most commonly farmed for food is known as *nureongi* (yellow dog), which is mid-sized, short haired, and yellow furred (Corrall, 2002). However, other types of dog may appear at markets, for example, pointers, mastiffs, and terriers, but these are less common (Wheeler & Butcher, 1998). *Nureongi* are not normally kept as pets.

*Number of dogs used and amount of dog meat produced/eaten.* It was reported by the MAF in 1997 that approximately 2,250,000 dogs were bred on farms and that 958,000 (43%) were used for human consumption (Anon, 1998); 702,000 were used at 6,484 *boshintang* restaurants and 256,000 were turned into *gaesoju* which was sold at 10,689 *Youngyangso* or *Boshinwon* (nutritional or body health) stores. This approximated to 11,500 tons of dog meat being consumed (either directly as meat or in the form of *gaesoju*) which, with a then population of 45 million, equated to 256 grams per person. This is most likely an underestimate, as not all dog meat is sold through restaurants; some is sold directly to consumers at markets and, undoubtedly, some breeders/farmers would eat their own produce. Whatever the true figure, it is unlikely that dog meat consumption was more than the amounts of pork (700,000 tons), beef (370,000 tons), chicken (280,000 tons), and duck (40,000 tons) eaten that year (Anon, 1998).



A survey of 1,502 South Korean adults showed that 83% (92% of men, 68% of women) had eaten dog meat at some stage in their lives (Ann, 2000a). Most commonly, people ate dog meat only two to three times per year and believed that it was good for their health (40%) and that it gave them energy (24%; Ann, 2000b). A recent survey conducted for the WSPA of 1,000 people in South Korea showed that 40% ate dog meat at least occasionally. Reasons given for eating dog meat included the following: to be sociable (25%), for the taste of it (30%), and for health reasons (32%; Scott, 2004).

Overall, it can be seen that dog meat is not a major component of the South Korean diet.

*Sale and slaughter.* At approximately 1 year of age, dogs are ready to be sold in city markets and to restaurants (Corrall, 2002). Other animals are also sold for meat at these markets, for example, rabbits, chickens, ducks, and goats. Pet dogs are sometimes sold by the same people selling meat dogs. To help distinguish pets from meat dogs, pets (most often puppies and kittens) are displayed in pink cages (P. Littlefair, RSPCA, personal communication, 2003; Figure 1).

In the past, it was common for people to kill meat dogs by hanging them and then beating them with sticks—this was meant to increase the aphrodisiacal



**Fig. 1.** Scene from a market in South Korea. Puppies to the fore are in a pink cage, denoting they are for sale as pets. The same vendor is also selling the meat-dogs (*nureongi*) pictured at the back. Photo by Paul Littlefair, RSPCA (UK). Reprinted with permission.

qualities of the meat and to make it more tender. This method was replaced by electrocution more than 10 years ago (Corrall, 2002), but video footage taken by a visitor to Seoul in 2000 (and given to KAPS) shows that this method is still used from time to time.

### *Cats as Food*

No historical information was found that suggested cats have ever been a regular source of food for Koreans; traditionally, cats have been kept to catch rats and mice (Dr. Yong-Geun Ann, Chungcheong College, South Korea, personal communication, 2004). However, in the 1980s, a consumable cat product, *goyangisoju* (literally “cat liquor”) came onto the market (K. Kumm, personal communication, 2004). This is made in the same way that “dog liquor” (*gaesoju*) is made: the cat is boiled in a pressure cooker until it liquefies, and the resulting liquid is then mixed with herbs and strained into containers. It is claimed that this tonic is good for treating rheumatism and arthritis. As with *gaesoju*, *goyangisoju* is sold at *Youngyangso* or *Boshinwon* (nutritional or body health shops). No figures were found on the amount of *goyangisoju* that is produced or sold in South Korea.

Any type of cat can be used to make *goyangisoju*; at markets, domestic shorthairs are commonly found. They are not farmed as such, but are bred by individuals who may just have a few cats to breed from. Stray, feral, and stolen pet cats can also find their way to markets. Wheeler and Butcher (1998) noted that the number of cats at South Korean markets was much lower than of dogs.

### *Pet Ownership*

Historically, not only were dogs kept as sources of food, but they were also used to guard property/houses. These guard dogs were not pets and were housed outdoors. Keeping animals as companions, or pets, did not really take off until the 1990s when the economy rapidly improved, standards of living rose, and people had more disposable income. In addition, the government encouraged pet keeping in a bid to shake off the negative image (because of dog eating) the country acquired before and during the Seoul Olympics in 1988 (Chi-dong, 2003). According to the MAF, at the end of March 2004, there were 2.23 million dogs, cats, and other pets being raised in 758,000 households (Keun-min, 2004). The most popular breeds of dog were, in descending order of popularity, Maltese, Shih Tzu, Yorkshire Terrier, and Poodle (Staines, 2004).

With pet keeping becoming more popular, the related industries of pet food and pet services began to develop, too; more than 300 Internet sites have been established, selling pet products (Tae-gyu, 2004), and, recently, the pet industry was estimated to be worth 1.5 trillion won (USD 1.3 billion) and is rising rapidly (Staines, 2004). This interest in pets is perhaps best personified by the opening

in 2003 of Asia's largest pet department store, *Mega Pet*, in Ilsan, one of Seoul's satellite cities. In this 11-story building, one can purchase pets, pet food, and accessories, and visit pet beauty salons, restaurants, a hotel, and gym (Staines, 2004).

The pet phenomenon has continued in spite of a recent economic recession. However, there have been some casualties: some pet owners have been unable to afford their pets and have either abandoned them to the streets or animal shelters or have sold them to dog meat market traders. In addition, some pet stores and related businesses have either closed or have been selling their dogs cheaply to market traders, and these animals end up being slaughtered for the meat trade. This was recently reported (June 2004) by the South Korean television network SBS. The pet-keeping boom has also raised questions regarding the welfare of the animals in pet shops and people's homes (Chi-dong, 2003; Yoo-jung, 2001).

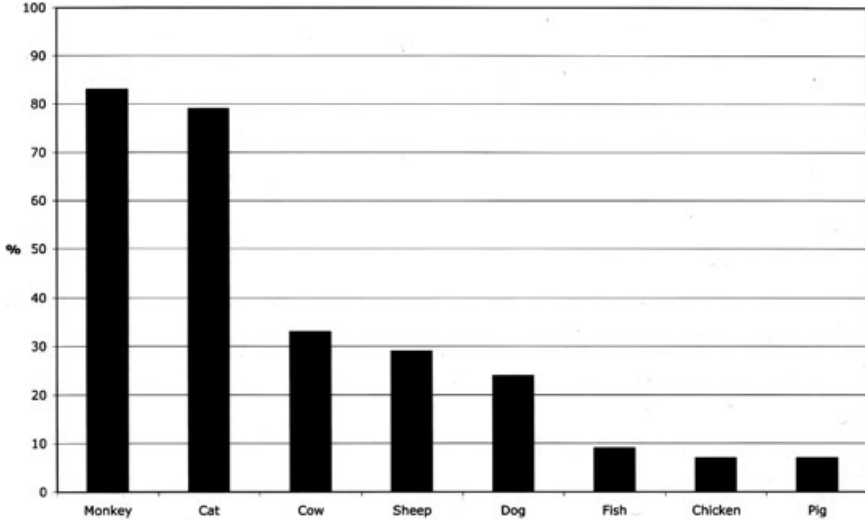
#### *Animal-Assisted Therapy/Activities*

Over the past 10 years, the electronics giant Samsung has moved to develop and promote animal-assisted therapies and activities (AAT/AAA) in South Korea. These services include guide dogs for people with visual impairments, hearing dogs for deaf people, therapeutic horseback-riding programs, and dog handling and training programs in juvenile detention centers. The breeds of dog used are Toy Poodles, Pomeranians, Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, Labradors, and Border Collies. At the time the present study was conducted, there were 51 guide dogs, 15 hearing dogs, and one service dog in South Korea (G. Choi, General Manager, Samsung, personal communication, 2004).

#### *Survey of People's Attitudes to Keeping and Consuming Dogs and Cats*

*Attitudes to the uses of dogs.* Respondents were in favor of using dogs as pets or companions (60% tended to or strongly approved), but the majority were against the use of dogs as food for humans (55% tended to or strongly disapproved). Pet owners were not significantly more likely to disapprove of using dogs for food than nonpet owners (58% compared with 53%, respectively).

*Attitudes to the uses of cats.* The majority of respondents were against the use of cats as pets or companions (52% tended to or strongly disapproved), and as food for humans (81% tended to or strongly disapproved). Pet ownership did not influence people's attitudes to the use of cats as food: those who had pets in their household were not more likely to disapprove of eating cat meat than those who did not have pets (82% compared with 80%, respectively).



**Fig. 2.** The percentage of respondents in South Korea who tended to or strongly supported the banning of the eating of various animal species. Source: MORI. Base: all respondents in South Korea aged 15 years and older ( $N = 1,000$ ).

*Attitudes to banning the eating of certain animal species.* The majority of respondents would support a ban on the eating of cats (79%) and monkeys (83%) but would not support a ban on the other species listed (Figure 2). Only 24% would support a ban on the eating of dog, which is lower than the support for a ban on sheep (29%) and cattle (33%). Support for a ban on cat eating is not unexpected, as cats are not eaten in South Korea. Pet owners, compared with nonpet owners, were not significantly more likely to support a ban on the eating of cats (80% vs. 78%, respectively) or dogs (26% vs. 24%, respectively).

## Discussion

### *Limitations*

This study had time and budget constraints which limited the degree to which attitudes to cats and dogs in South Korea could be studied and analyzed. In particular, to assess attitudes, only a few single-item questions were used and so it was not possible to measure attitudes in depth. However, as an exploratory study, the results provide some interesting information about how South Koreans feel about cats and dogs as pets and as food. In-depth attitudes need to be assessed in the future—adapting available animal attitude scales (e.g., Animal Attitude Scale; Herzog, Betchart, & Pittman 1991; Attitudes Toward the

Treatment of Animals Scale, Henry 2004) for South Korea is an important next step.

### *Cats in South Korea*

Cats are not eaten in South Korea and are not held in high regard in South Korea—few are kept as pets (and the majority of the people interviewed did not approve of cats as pets), in contrast to their popularity in most other countries around the world (see, for example, Bernstein, 2005). It seems that in South Korea these animals have historically been associated with witchcraft and evil (this association is common to the histories of many countries—see, e.g., Serpell, 2000), which still persists today. This association with witchcraft might have prevented them ever having been seen as a source of food, but might have contributed to their being used in the relatively recent production of the cat “cure” for arthritis and rheumatism—*goyangisoju*. Why suspicion of cats and lack of interest in having them as pets persists is not clear and would repay further investigation.

### *Dogs in South Korea*

Dogs have been used as a medicine and as a source of food since ancient times, and these uses persist today. However, the actual amount of dog that is consumed is low and falls well below that of beef, chicken, pork, and duck: dog meat is not a major component of the South Korean diet. Walraven (2001) argues cogently, however, that dog eating is considered a major part of South Korean culture, just as *kimchi* (fermented vegetables) is, and that many South Koreans will defend their identity most strenuously, regardless of whether or not they themselves eat dog meat (and, as the MORI poll shows, regardless of whether they are pet owners or not). This was indicated in the present study: dog eating was not approved by the majority of people interviewed, but the majority of those polled opposed a ban on the eating of dog. Scott (2004) reported a similar result from the recent WSPA study in South Korea: 84% (of 1,000 respondents) said that they did not believe that Korea’s animal protection law should be amended to forbid the killing of dogs for food. In addition, 70% of respondents said that there was nothing wrong with eating dog. These results, and those showing that dog consumption seems to be increasing, demonstrate that even though the campaigns against dog consumption have been going on for decades, there has not been any effect on the practice. Indeed, they might have had a reverse effect. Brigitte Bardot’s involvement seems to have only led to a new appellation for dog soup: “Bardot soup” (Orange, 1995).

A similar situation was noted amongst modern-day Oglala (one of a number of Native American tribes, popularly known as Sioux), who keep dogs as both

pets and as sacrificial food (Powers & Powers, 1986). Pet dogs are named and never eaten, but those destined to be sacrificed and eaten will not be named and are eaten when they are puppies. However, the sacrifice and eating of dogs has gained in importance while other distinguishing features of Indian culture have been lost due to pressure from Whites. The Oglala see the act of dog eating as the one which differentiates them from Whites—this is very important to them, and to their cultural identity.

While dogs are consumed in South Korea, recently, certain (mainly small) breeds have become popular as pets and some other breeds are now being used in animal-assisted therapy programs and activities. It is clear that some breeds of dog are seen as pets and assistance animals, while other dogs, especially the yellow-furred dogs (*nureongi*), are viewed as a food and medicine (and never as pets). Apart from the cultural reason discussed earlier, this may be another reason why pet owners and nonowners had similar attitudes to dog eating—pet owners do not associate pet dogs with the dog-eating issue. While this may disturb and confuse some people, particularly those in the West, that dogs (and cats) can be assigned the roles of both a friend and food, the phenomenon of assigning different roles and hence moral status to animals of the same species is common. For example, Arluke (1988) reported, through ethnographic research in biomedical laboratories, that animals in laboratories are not just given one role, one status. Apart from being a subject for experimentation, some laboratory animals can be assigned the role of a “pet.” Arluke also occasionally came across stories about laboratory workers who had eaten laboratory animals after their use (mainly sheep and pigs, but sometimes rabbits and rats). Hence, these animals had been reassigned as “food.” Herzog (1988) similarly showed how the moral (and legal) status of the mouse is affected by the label or role each mouse is given (e.g., subject, pest, food, pet). This process of organizing animals into different roles has been referred to as “compartmentalization” by Fox (1999).

The division in the roles different breeds/types of dog have in South Korea has previously led the government, in an attempt to allay the protests about the way meat dogs were treated before and during slaughter, to put forward a law that made a distinction between pet dogs and meat dogs. This law would have meant meat dogs were treated more humanely, in line with how other meat animals are treated. However, this proposed law evoked a major, negative response from people campaigning against the use of dogs as food and medicine. The reason for this is that concern for the animals’ welfare is not at the heart of campaigns to end the consumption of cats and dogs, rather, at the heart is a belief that it is intrinsically wrong to eat these animals. This is not surprising, as campaigns are largely driven by Westerners, people who do not eat dogs and cats, but who keep them as pets or companions. Indeed, the dog and cat are the two most popular pets worldwide (Bernstein, 2005), with owners stating that companionship is the most valuable benefit derived from them (e.g., Endenburg, Hart, & Bouw, 1994;

Zasloff, 1995). In addition, research over the past few decades has indicated that pets may be good for our health too (see, for example, Wilson & Turner, 1998).

Despite the popularity of cats and dogs and the good reasons for pet ownership, large numbers of cats and dogs (and other pets) in Western countries are also abused, abandoned, and needlessly euthanized each year (e.g., Bartlett, Bartlett, Walshaw, & Halstead, 2005; Gerbasi, 2004; New et al., 2004), and are also used in medical research (e.g., Carbone, 2004; Home Office, 2006). Not surprisingly, this lack of consistency in the behavior of Westerners toward cats and dogs leads to annoyance among South Koreans (and the people of other countries where dogs and cats are eaten) when they are criticized for consuming these animals (see, for example, Feffer, 2002; Walraven, 2001; Wu, 2002). It also raises the question about which animals are okay to eat and which are not. Why are cats and dogs exempt from the food table when the majority of people eat other animal species? It is beyond the scope of the current study to do more than raise this ethical issue here, but is worthy of much more research, reflection, and discussion.

In summary, cats do not feature strongly in South Korean culture either as something to be consumed or to be kept as a pet. Dogs, however, do feature strongly in a number of ways: food, medicine, and pet. Indeed, the consuming of dogs appears to be strongly linked with South Korean national identity and so residents do not support calls for a ban of this practice, regardless of whether they are pet owners or not.

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