

Two dogs with one stone? Urban markets and the dog meat trade in South Korea during the Covid-19 pandemic

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Activists raising awareness about respect for animals and campaigning for an end to the consumption of dog meat in South Korea. Credit: Miwon Seo.

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Two dogs with one stone?

Urban markets and the dog meat trade in South Korea during the Covid-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

While the Covid-19 pandemic has brought to global light the zoonotic risks in Asian markets where animals are sold alive, ideas about material proximity between humans and animals have taken a specific meaning in South Korea, where the tradition of eating dog meat has been instrumental in the national construction. In this article, we describe how the regulation of urban markets in three municipalities launched in the past decades has been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, pushing to the margins of South Korean cities the slaughter of live animals in cages. On the basis of interviews conducted with dog retailers, we explore the opposite view of dog trading as taking part to a metabolic and symbolic order, both as recyclers of waste and as carriers of virtues of resistance. We finally follow the arguments of animal activists and veterinarians, who develop views on shared feelings and affects between humans and dogs based on kinship relations and narratives of co-evolution. We thus show that taking the Covid-19 pandemic as an opportunity to accelerate the modernisation of urban markets leaves out two alternative views on human-animal relations that also exist in contemporary South Korean society.

KEY WORDS
Animal
commodification,
zoonosis.

RÉSUMÉ

Qui veut noyer son chien l'accuse de la rage: marchés urbains et commerce de viande en Corée du Sud pendant la pandémie de Covid-19.

Alors que la pandémie de Covid-19 a mis en lumière les risques zoonotiques dans les marchés asiatiques où les animaux sont vendus vivants, les idées sur la proximité matérielle entre les humains et les animaux ont pris un sens particulier en Corée du Sud, où la tradition de manger de la viande de chien a joué un rôle important dans la construction nationale. Dans cet article, nous décrivons comment la réglementation des marchés urbains dans trois municipalités, lancée au cours des dernières décennies, a été accélérée par la pandémie de Covid-19, repoussant aux marges des villes sud-coréennes l'abattage d'ani-

MOTS CLÉS
Marchandisation des
animaux,
zoonose.

maux vivants dans des cages. Sur la base d'entretiens menés avec des vendeurs de chiens, nous explorons la vision opposée du commerce de chiens comme participant à un ordre métabolique et symbolique, à la fois comme recycleurs de déchets et comme porteurs de vertu de résistance. Enfin, nous suivons les arguments des défenseurs des animaux et des vétérinaires, qui développent des points de vue sur les sentiments et les affects partagés entre les humains et les chiens sur la base de relations de parenté et de récits de coévolution. Nous montrons ainsi que le fait de considérer la pandémie de Covid-19 comme une opportunité d'accélérer la modernisation des marchés urbains laisse de côté deux visions alternatives des relations humains-animaux qui existent également dans la société sud-coréenne contemporaine.

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has raised conflicting images of Asian societies reacting rapidly to an unknown pathogen by information technologies, and of animal markets where this pathogen might have emerged in unclear conditions. Animal markets in China, called “wet markets” to justify regular cleaning of shops (Fearnley & Lynteris 2020), have been criticised by public health experts as a potential source of transmission of SARS-Cov2 from bats to humans, based on the scenario of the emergence of the SARS-Cov1 virus in 2003. In Shenzhen, as a first reaction to the emergence of Covid-19 in Wuhan, Chinese authorities have banned the selling of dogs and cats as meat in the spring of 2020 (Pettier 2021). The Western media have described animal markets as introducing pathogens at the heart of Asian cities, by contrast with Euro-American cities where they have been replaced by chilled meat in supermarkets and where the killing of animals has been removed outside of urban areas in hygienised slaughterhouses (Vialles 1994).

This article is part of a collective research on the transformations of animal markets in East Asia by the Covid-19 pandemic. As South Korea was one of the first countries to be reopened, it is based on ethnographic data collected in October-November 2020: we made interviews with urbanists, dog meat retailers and animal activists in markets that had been observed by social scientists during the last twenty years. Our data were compared to similar data previously observed in the same sites to prevent any bias in the choice of persons interviewed and to measure the effect of Covid-19 in the change of perception of dog meat. In South Korea, as a result of the enforcement of animal and wildlife protection in the early 2000s, “traditional markets” (*chōn'ong sijang*) have undergone pressure to evacuate all or some live animals on sale. The South Korean law defines traditional markets as “a commercial infrastructure”, or a place that needs maintenance or improvement due to old and worn out facilities, or that needs improvement in the management and modernisation of its business because of weak distribution potential (Ministry of SMEs and Startups 2021). In 2020, a variety of live animals (chickens, ducks, rabbits, cats and dogs) were still seen to be traded in those markets, especially on the opening days of street markets. Out of all species sold at these markets, our study has focused on the

consumption of dogs because it has been the most controversial among South Koreans. Indeed, various groups, mainly animal activists and younger generations though not only, are advocating for the end of this practice not for reasons of zoonotic risks in a modernising narrative but for animal welfare in a narrative of compassion.

The dog meat debate has been inflamed by the ambivalent and blurry status of dogs in the South Korean legislation between the categories of livestock and companion animals (Dugnoille 2022). Today, in the Korean language, the term 가축 *kach'uk* (家畜) usually designates livestock, but it was traditionally used to refer to animals kept within the domestic sphere for their economic, mental, spiritual, religious, and ecological values. In recent decades, the inflow of foreign culture added to the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation of South Korea have called for a new terminology to represent new sensitivities to animals. For instance, the term “companion animals” (*pallyō tongmul*) now refers to “animals with whom humans live together in their daily life as companions” (Anonymous 2026) in apartments as well as in offices and is widely used in the political sphere. On the other hand, animals raised for meat, dairy or other products (such as cows, pigs, chickens, ducks, goats, etc.) are now classified as “economic animals” (*kyōngje tongmul*). Among these newly defined, yet ambivalent animal taxa, the categorisation of dogs, especially those raised in farms in suburban areas or in the countryside, is a particular site of social, cultural, economic and political contention (Dugnoille 2018).

The Covid-19 pandemic, following other zoonotic crises, has thus provided a window for those opposed to dog meat consumption to precipitate its banishment and frame the practice as one of South Korea's problematic cultural aspects, while focusing this problematisation on dogs and not on bats as in South China. Indeed, zoonoses have played a major role in South Korean politics in the last twenty years. While the government issued a ban on beef exported from the European Union in 2001 and from the United States of America in 2003 for fear of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, huge demonstrations occurred when this ban was lifted in 2008 (Lee & Kim 2022). Outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1, H5N8) have regularly struck South Korea after 2005, leading the government to forbid sales of live ducks in the marketplaces and to

monitor the flight of wild birds from North Korea ((Kang 2021; Nam & Chon 2021). The outbreak of MERS-Cov (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus) in 2015, linked to a single traveller coming back from an infected country but treated with a low biosecurity environment, killing 38 persons, spread the concern for a respiratory disease coming from camels but transmitted between humans (Gitzen 2023). The five veterinarians, including two civil servants, and one professor in public health and human-animal transmission we interviewed agreed that zoonotic transmission during the consumption of dog meat is an unlikely occurrence because, in general, dog-based dishes are cooked for a very long time and always served boiling hot. However, some activists argue that there is a risk of being infected with rabies (Anonymous 2026), potentially before preparing meat, or influenza (Choe 2017), as an influenza virus has been transmitted between a dog saved from a dog farm by an animal protection group and those who adopted this dog in Chicago (Song *et al.* 2008).

Hence, the Covid-19 pandemic can be described as offering an opportunity to “kill two dogs with one stone”: getting rid of live animals in urban markets, as a hazardous presence in times of zoonotic concerns, and of dog meat as a symbol of a pre-modern (*chŏnkūndae*) Korea, incompatible with contemporary values. However, this article contests such a simple modernising narrative, which relies on a dichotomy between traditional culture and modern economy used by the government to justify the hygienic removal of dog meat markets from urban centres. We want to show that the dog meat controversy in South Korea and its acceleration by Covid-19 do not oppose two groups with conflicting interests (modernisers and traditionalists) but three ontologies of human-animal relations, in which various stakeholders find unexpected intersections and where forms of mediation are possible through the ambivalence of human-animal relations. Our ethnographic study has led us to gather our observations around three modes of relations between humans and dogs. If the construction of animal markets as a threat reveals the separation between animals as domestic companions sharing human habits and animals as livestock whose circulation should be controlled, our article analyses, following recent trends in the social anthropology of zoonoses (Dugnoille 2018), the ontological conflicts and contrasts that emerge between these two poles. We do not consider ontologies as categorical grids that determine the behaviour of humans in relation with dogs, but rather as analytical tools allowing us to modulate the views of animals engaged in a contemporary controversy.

We will first explore how the hygiene policies pushed forward by South Korean municipalities in the past decades for traditional markets have stigmatised dog meat production, animal slaughter and the holding of live animals in cages as unsightly and unsanitary activities. We will then see how this separation is contested by what we will call a symbolic or metabolic view of the role of dog markets developed by retailers. We will finally examine how other actors in dog markets talk about shared affects between dogs and humans.

THE “MODERNISATION” OF DOG MARKETS IN SOUTH KOREA

While bringing food to cities in an industrial manner has been one the defining gestures of Euro-American modernity (Cronon 1991), removing wholesale marketplaces from the centre of cities has been its hygienic counterpart in the last two centuries (Plattner 1989; Bestor 2001). In Asia, this modernising path has been taken more lately, in the context of neo-liberal reforms which strengthened regulation of market places after a series of food safety crises in the last twenty years (Bestor 2001; Endres 2014; Spector 2017; Fearnley 2020). In South Korea, since the Chosŏn Dynasty, policymakers have regularly criticised traditional markets for having “poor and unsanitary facilities”, arguing that a modern market should be a constructed building, not merely a physical space (Kim 2006). Consequently, urban authorities have targeted the abolition of these markets, despite their limited control over marketplace creation. Until recently, the image of traditional markets as “worn out”, “dated”, or “in need of renovation” in political and media circles has persisted, even though many of them have transitioned into built marketplaces. While the selling of dog meat was a peripheral activity at these markets, they became the targets of urbanisation and “modernisation” (*hyŏndae*) campaigns by city planners and controllers, who endeavoured to modify market infrastructures and commodities to “improve the hygiene condition and image of markets” (Interview with a government official in Seoul, 7 December 2020) but also to “develop more attractive contents and reduce things that many people see as abominations” (Interview with a government official in Sŏngnam, 3 November 2020). In this paper, we use “modernisation” as *hyŏndae*, as it was used by our participants in the field. In the context explored here, *hyŏndae* refers to an upgrading, in the sense of an improvement through the renewal of the market’s infrastructure. We make a difference between “modernisation” as upgrading (*hyŏndae*) and as *kūndae*, mainly referring to the historical modernisation of Korea since the Koguryŏ period. We do not refer to “modernisation” as *kūndae* in this paper.

These changes have particularly impacted Kyŏngdong, Moran and Kup’o markets, where dog meat was provided and where our ethnographic study was conducted in 2020, following previous studies of some of the same markets (Dugnoille 2018). Kim *et al.* (2011) argue that enabling the exchange of national commodities with international stakeholders in 1996, accelerated the current crisis of the traditional market. Kup’o, Kyŏngdong, and Moran markets have all benefited from the development of transport and increasing proximity with urban populations since the 1960s. However, the state and municipalities established a legal basis to regulate trade in these marketplaces, and encouraged some retailers, especially dog meat traders, to switch to a business that would better fit the image of South Korea as a modern nation (Pak & No 2007; Kim *et al.* 2011). Important changes included the integration of street-based retailers into the renovated urban landscape as more permanent shopkeepers in Kup’o and Moran, and the

commodification of traditional medicine for global and local urban populations in market zones specialised in the selling of these goods, as was the case at the Kyöngdong market.

Located one kilometre away from Ch'öngnyangni Train Station, Kyöngdong (京東), which means “east of the capital city”, is now seen as a modernised centre for traditional Korean medicine, and is increasingly visited by international tourists and local urbanites looking for medical and zootherapeutic products (Chee 2021). The opening of the Kyöngdong market is believed to have emerged from the development of railroad transportation in the 1900s when local rural farmers started selling their crops and animals to urban populations (Kim 2013). The main marketplace is divided in two commercial zones by a large avenue. The eastern section, which is confusingly referred to as *Kyöngdong*, is reminiscent of the image of the traditional market that dominated up until the 1980s. The current architectural configuration of this part of the market also reveals previous modernisation efforts (Kim 2020): “New mall” (*Sin'gwan*), a building at the centre of the market, was provided by the city to street-based retailers (including dog meat traders) for them to start a more permanent business in the mid-1980s. However, a large number of these retailers refused to go inside for fear of losing their customers to those who decided to remain outside the building. In 2019, the association of retailers of the market built a new business partnership with external businesses and the district office. As a result, they opened, in this part of the market, a mall “by and for young adults” (*Ch'öngnyönmol*), in order to promote both youth entrepreneurship and inter-generational exchanges inside the market.

In the western section, “Seoul Yangnyöngsi” (藥令市), one can find plant- and animal-based products destined to zootherapeutic practices. Here, Korean traditional medicine is heavily commodified for tourists and urbanites who come to buy ginseng, honey, and other traditional medicinal ingredients as well as rural-grown health foods. Interestingly, beyond the refurbishing of shops and buildings, the renovation of the “market infrastructure” (*sisöl hyöndaehwa*) was accompanied by a re-evaluation of what counts as part of traditional Korean medicine. In fact, the reconfiguration of the marketplace could have easily integrated dog meat activities into the western “upgraded” section of the market because of its prevalent association with traditional medicine, referring frequently to the *Tongüi Pogam*, a seventeenth-century traditional book by Hō, Chun. However, in 2020, dog meat was sold in an adjacent street at the outskirts of the market, indicating that it was deemed out of place in the modernisation of South Korean markets as well as in the commodification of traditional medicine at the marketplace.

This impetus to modernise and commodify the image of the traditional South Korean market has similarly shaped the current form of the Moran (牡丹) market. Located in the central, downtown part of Söngnam, about twenty minutes away from the city hall, Moran market is the most sectorised and organised of the three markets we studied. It consists in a series of stores (three permanent and one itinerant) divided by an imposing 30-metre large avenue. On the other side of the avenue, is the livestock market, surrounded by several

one-dish restaurants and a row of dog meat retailers. The livestock market (*kach'uk sijang*) was the place where all livestock animals were sold. Since the regulations related to hygiene and the killing of cattle for meat (especially cows and pigs) were put into effect in 1962, the livestock market has been reinvested as the place where dog meat or local live fowls are sold. This place is different from what is now called *ch'uksan sijang*, which means “the market for the livestock industry”. The installation of canopies, a pedestrian road and crosswalks linking the itinerant market to the livestock/dog meat rows on the two opposite sides of the avenue materialised the effort to merge both sides of the market (as was the case until 2014), and to make up for the decline of visitors to the livestock market since the demolition of all dog cages and slaughter facilities in 2017. Dog meat can be found there only in the form of a dish or as mere substance. In this transition, the city of Söngnam has mobilised financial means to help dog meat retailers transform their businesses in such a way that they didn't hold live animals in cages.

Kup'o (龜浦) is located in Dökch'ön, a strategic location to access nearby cities such as Kimhae and Yangsan and the areas of the new residential apartment complexes in Hwamyöng. Kup'o market in Pusan is known to have emerged in the mid-eighteenth century, thanks to the inauguration of a port on Nakdong river between 1876 and 1910 (Chöng 2013). Like other marketplaces in South Korean cities, first created as regularly organised (street) markets based on individuals' needs for trading surplus of agricultural produce, this market was integrated into the urban space in the 1960s (Pak & No 2007; Kim *et al.* 2011). Kup'o Market, as the historical and geographic centre of the Northern District of Pusan, was created in the middle of the eighteenth century, as the Nakdong River allowed the transportation of agricultural products from the region upstream of the river. Until now, the Kup'o Market is still considered one of the largest regularly organised street markets in the country: more than 500 street-based retailers occupy the market alleys every five days. The “cattle market”, where cows and pigs were held in cages before slaughter, was initially located at the southeast of the market. What remains of it can now be found in a street located at the periphery of the itinerant market.

As prominent voices inside and outside of South Korea have criticised killing animals in South Korean “traditional markets” (Hancocks 2019), politician leaders, who had remained silent to preserve the statu quo, came to a consensus that it should be banned. Some of the amendments and bills proposed between 2016 and 2020 reveal the consensus found by a growing number of politicians who agreed to establish a legal framework to protect dogs and cats from being eaten. Most of these propositions have not yet passed. In the case of the dog meat trade, the city of Pusan has agreed to compensate all dog meat retailers for the closure of the shops where they held and killed live dogs in 2019. As a way to continue selling dog meat without having to hold live dogs on site, a majority of retailers (though not in Kyöngdong) have equipped their shops with fridges and now sell refrigerated dog meat, which is also offered in restaurants.

From the perspective of urbanists and controllers, the act of slaughtering animals is problematic not only because it enables unregulated slaughter methods to take place without supervision, but also because it contrasts with a contemporary conception of urban commercial zones. Urbanists stress the discomfort which emerges from the noise, bad smell, visible uncleanness around the dog market and, increasingly, from the aversion to the exercise of violence in public places. Since 2007, the city of Söngnam has planned to build a large number of public spaces adjacent to Moran market in order to “provide an urban park for leisure and rest for citizens, [...] which will also contribute to restore damaged parts of the greenbelt zone” (Söngnam City Council 2021: 31). Complaints from local residents and animal activists about the violence of dog treatment and the poor hygiene conditions at the marketplace led city officials to try and improve the sanitisation of the commercial area. From 2016, with the help of a new deputy mayor, the city officials negotiated the demolition of all slaughtering facilities in Moran cattle market with the retailers, but this did not happen without resistance from the latter (Dugnoille 2022).

METABOLIC AND SYMBOLIC VIEWS OF THE DOG MEAT TRADE

When the ethnographer moved from interviews with urban planners and controllers to enter the market, she was struck not by the abundance of colours, smell and tastes often described in Asian wet markets (Bestor 2001; Keck 2011) but by the dull and hygienised atmosphere of a declining activity. There was a strong contrast between the denouncing narratives of violence collected from city controllers and the nostalgic narratives of a traditional order collected from retailers and consumers of dog meat. This contrast has been a starting point in our enquiry to understand what is dog meat for humans interacting in this urban space, leading us to oppose different ontologies of human-animal relations rather than traditional culture and modern economy.

In the past decades, the three marketplaces mentioned above have been severely criticised in the South Korean media for facilitating violence against dogs. In particular, Kup’o was at the centre of two recent controversial cases. In 2017, it was reported that an employee of one of the dog meat shops in Kup’o chased a dog who had escaped from his cage to the main avenue of the neighbourhood. The dog meat retailer lassoed the runaway-dog with a metal handle and dragged him violently to the ground, and all the way to the slaughterhouse. In April 2018, the employee of the shop was fined \$890 (one million Korean won) for violating the *Animal Protection Act*, and the employee’s boss was sentenced to a six-month suspended prison term (two years) for violating the *Law on the Hygiene of Food of Animal Origin* (*ch’uksanmul wisaenggwalliböp*). Three weeks later, as a dog accidentally disappeared from his house, CCTV cameras recorded a scene where the dog was caught by a human and immediately brought to a *kön’gangwön* in Kup’o to make *kaesoju* for his personal consumption (Anonymous

2018; Pak 2018). These kinds of incidents have caught the attention of the media, raising the status of roaming dogs as potential victims of retailers.

While the instauration of the *Animal Protection Law* since 1991 has made it technically possible to attribute sanctions for a legally defined notion of violence against animals (Pak 2018), the concept of “animal welfare” was not introduced to the South Korean legislation until the beginning of 2010, and the system of welfare certification for food produced in South Korea only gradually came into effect since 2012 (Park 2018). Moreover, it was only in 2021 that the Ministry of Justice announced an amendment to the Civil Law excluding animals from the category of “material things” (*yuch’emul*) (Pömmubu pömmu simüigwansil 2021). This late adoption of a Euro-American separation between animals and things may be linked to the discourses of dog retailers, who claimed that they could catch any roaming dog as an urban waste that could be integrated into what could be referred to as a recycling outlook on the trade. This metabolic vision of the dog trade, arguably a reconstruction to defend a declining activity, was one of our most fascinating ethnographic findings in 2020. We have thus analysed this metabolic vision as a transformation of the symbolic order used to justify the traditional consumption of dog meat in a modern economy such as South Korea.

Some of the retailers we interviewed said that animal rights activists influenced the public opinion by showing “false images” of dog farming and the dog meat trade. They shared what the association of the dog meat trade has claimed publicly (e.g., Anonymous 2021). According to the association, since the late 2010, the livelihood of around 150 000 workers in the dog meat trade has been jeopardised by new animal welfare regulations. Retailers tend to see these regulations as saving dogs to the detriment of the livelihood of human workers. The association participated to a round-table discussion with president Moon, Jae-in in December 2021, the aim of which was to reach a consensus to put an end to the dog meat trade. However, as a result of internal dissensions in the association in June 2022, no consensus has been reached as of yet (Hwang 2022; Mun 2022).

According to retailers, dog farming should be defended as a viable economic activity in rural areas because it played an important role in organic waste management. For the last decade or so, as the massive amount of food waste produced in the country’s urban areas became a major environmental concern, some claim that dog farming was used as a way to treat waste (Han 2018). In 2011, the Association of Dog Meat Trade (*Taeahan Yukkyon Hyophoe*) lobbied for the “recycling of food waste into dog feeds” (*ümsingmul ssüregi-üi saryohwa mit pyegimul ch’öri kwalli*) to be recognised as one of the objectives of the trade (Yi 2017), a claim that was never approved by the Ministry of Agriculture. In his essay on waste management in two dog farms, Söngt’ae Han (2018), showed that dog farmers use waste from food processing plants, restaurants, drinking houses (selling food and alcohols), department stores, hotels, wedding halls, and schools from the capital city, to feed their dogs. However, to our knowledge, no sound study (academic, peer-reviewed, and unbiased by personal interests) has been able to rigorously demonstrate the ecological advantages of maintaining the dog meat trade.

Indeed, the notion of waste has been central in the South Korean debate on dog meat consumption. Some pro-dog meat personalities and groups have argued that the magnitude of the food waste produced in South Korea was such that its recycling as food for dogs appeared as a good economic and ecological solution. Even if no retailer or consumer would claim that they eat waste, their discourse about roaming dogs who eat waste presupposed a view of the market as a metabolic site of recycling. The framing of dogs as waste was conspicuous in some of the language used to designate dogs in the trade. *Ttonggae*, i.e. literally “shit dog”, is a term commonly used to designate large, yellow dogs, often said to be the only kind of dogs South Koreans eat, although, in practice, research has shown that this is not the case (Dugnoille 2018). Not only does the term *ttonggae* convey the idea that dogs ought to be perceived as literal waste, and even as the lowest form of commodity conceivable, but the term also refers to a process of recycling and economic efficiency, as “shit dogs” are said to be able to survive on their own waste. In reality, these “shit dogs” are not expected to survive on their own dejections but on the waste humans produce, not only leftovers but also offal and rotten food.

This ecological justification of the dog meat trade as recycling waste (humans eating dogs who themselves eat waste) must be understood in the context of a global valorisation of waste or remainder as an extra or a surplus in the margins of modern capitalism, bringing value and taste to what cannot be scaled up to standardised forms of commodification (Tsing 2015; Bize 2020). While urban planners and controllers have tried to push “natural violence” (the necessity to kill animals to eat their flesh) outside of South Korean cities in a civilising process separating society from nature, dog meat promoters have advocated the reintroduction of a “natural balance” within the city space, through the valorisation of the metabolic function of dog farming and dog meat consumption. In our interviews, dog traders described themselves as “waste” to contest the hygienised view of the market, in the same way as Muslim young men used this term to reverse the racist stereotypes of European colonisation on roaming dogs and bring to light the environmental challenges of capitalism (Hage 2017). We can understand this re-evaluation of dog meat through the control of roaming dogs and valorisation of urban waste by contrast with pigs, who have been particularly conceived as waste recyclers in the long history of relations between humans and animals. As the global threat of African Swine Fever has led the pig industry to develop and dramatically reduced small-scale pig farming, the function of waste recyclers has been transferred from backyard pigs to roaming dogs in order to justify the consumption of dog meat.

We must now analyse the “traditional” justification for the dog meat trade by its qualities of freshness and the symbolic values, to understand how far it is consistent with the metabolic view developed by the retailers we interviewed. Slaughtering has long been a common and essential practice in South Korean marketplaces, because consumers looking for fresh meat preferred to choose the animal they wanted to consume alive on the spot (Dugnoille 2018). In the dog

meat trade at the Moran market for instance, it was estimated that about 80 000 dogs were sold annually until 2016, most of which were held alive at the marketplace (Kim 2016; Dugnoille 2018). The consumers we met narrated that in the early stages of the twentieth century and up until the 1950s, dog meat was one of the only kinds of meat available to Koreans, and thus valorised at this time as a rare source of strength. Up until South Korea’s rapid urbanisation starting in the 1960s, the practice remained a local farming activity through which humans lived in close proximity with the dogs they reared and slaughtered. Dogs were commodified by their human guardians either for their own consumption or for that of neighbouring families. Remembering this proximity, some consumers go to the traditional market to meet live animals and sometimes witness their slaughter, as a common way to attest to the freshness of the commodity they came to purchase. For them, the act of slaughter should be kept in plain sight of the consumers because of the practical function it serves to guarantee the freshness of the commodity.

For instance, In’gyo, a restaurant owner in Kyōngdong, did not trust dog farmers to handle the slaughter of the dogs. He believed that the modernisation of the market structures was a way for them to gain control over the dog industry. By managing slaughter, In’gyo argued, dog farmers could fix the price of the meat as they liked, because it depended on the weight of a dog before slaughter. To avoid being fooled by sellers, In’gyo said he examined if the flesh of the meat was white, which meant that water would probably have been injected before slaughter to increase the weight. He also checked the dog for any skin disease and made sure no body part was missing. The need to inspect the meat immediately after slaughter was also referred to by In’gyo as a practice in line with the traditional belief that each body part carries its own therapeutic meaning linked to different troubles in the consumer’s body, expressed in the classical seventeenth-century medicine book *Tongŭi Pogam* by Hō, Chun.

These metabolic justifications of the dog trade by notions of waste recycling and freshness guaranty reformulate in modern terms the traditional justification of dog killing as a symbolic practice for the Korean nation. For some consumers, the disappearance of dog meat consumption was directly connected to the decline of Korea in the twentieth century after its kingly unification in the two previous centuries. In their view, the oppression of some part of Korean culture as a result of successive episodes of imperialism had generated a lot of anger, resistance, but also sorrow and resilience among South Koreans. In many ways, dogs catalysed these feelings, because the stigmatisation of dog eating was the epitome of the criticism of Korean culture during Japanese colonisation and American administration. While most retailers attributed the consumption of dog meat as resulting from the necessities of war economy as a means to avoid starvation, consumers magnified it as a resistance of Korean culture to imperialism. These consumers said they wanted to see dogs struggle before they were killed: witnessing the dogs “resist” allowed them to think of their own resistance to the modernisation of the markets. Dogs have become symbols of the South Korean

nation because their sacrifice in the central place of the market was a way for humans to unify the body of the nation under threat from imperialism and neo-liberalism (Dugnoille 2018).

Sugil, a regular customer at Kup'o market, expressed sadness at the disappearance of what he referred to as the uniqueness of each traditional market and their specialties, including dog meat which he considered as a part of the "Korean spirit" (*chöngsinsegye*). Sugil believed that this Korean spirit was destroyed by South Koreans who did not respect their own traditions, including filial piety, ancestral habits and culinary tradition. Other dog soup consumers associated their childhood memories with the taste, the smell and the visual effect of a dog soup. For instance, Wungju, one of the dog soup consumers we met at Kup'o, said: "When I was a baby, I remember seeing a pot full of boiling dog soup. It was during busy seasons. I didn't even wear a diaper then, but I ate the soup." Minsu, another dog soup consumer we interviewed at Kup'o, had never thought it was problematic to eat dog soup, since his grandfather, to whom he had strong attachment, gave it to him for the first time. What dog soup evoked him was the persistence of the taste, against the tendency to get adjusted to newly developed flavours.

In *Beyond Nature and Culture*, Descola (2014: 122) shows that the ways humans identify and relate to nonhumans in terms of both *physicality* and *interiority* combine in different ontologies which he calls animism (continuity in interiority between humans and nonhumans, discontinuity in physicality), totemism (continuity in both interiority and physicality between humans and nonhumans), naturalism (continuity in physicality between humans and nonhumans, discontinuity in interiority) and analogism (discontinuity in both interiority and physicality between humans and nonhumans). Descola argues that the removal of slaughterhouses from urban centers is one of the strong drivers of naturalism, since it clearly separates animals raised as commodities and animals raised and pets; he also argues that sacrifice is one of the catalysing practices of analogism, since all the entities that constitute the world are brought together in an act that reconstitutes sovereignty. However, the metabolic and symbolic justifications we have gathered in South Korea also include elements that we can consider as animistic, such as the argument that the consumer must watch the dog being killed and share its anger to appreciate its meat. We are thus moving to a third mode of justification of the dog trade which relies not on hygiene or metabolism but on shared affects.

SHARED AFFECTS BETWEEN DOGS AND HUMANS INSIDE AND AROUND DOG MEAT MARKETS

Surprisingly, the argument of some dog consumers that they want to feel the anger of the dogs bring them close to those who oppose the dog trade because of compassion for animal suffering. Some of the South Korean animal rights advocates we met argued that dogs suffer like us because they share a similar nervous system, but also because they share intimate affects in family and kinship circles. They often lived with dogs

or cats in shelters at home, and described the pleasures but also discomfort of sharing urban flats with animals. Activists revived the trajectory of each rescued dog as a singular story of suffering that could be reflected in human lives.

In the summer of 2013, one of the slogans used to campaign against dog meat consumption, which was strategically placed around the neck of a charismatic puppy rescued from the market, read "Please don't eat my (our) mom" (*uri ömmarül mökchimaseyo*). The imagery that this slogan generated mixed the horror of losing a member of the family with the tearing apart of the physicality of a loved one into mere body parts and flesh. The use of the term "mom" (*ömma*) was deliberate: it revealed a qualitative relation between humans and dogs far beyond species membership. Some activists welcomed the closing of dog meat facilities at Kup'o market in Pusan as a great step towards further development (*sönjinguk*) of South Korean society, "a society where humans and animals live together" (*saram-kwa tongmul-i hamkke kongjonhanün sahoe*), to quote the slogan used by Korean Animal Welfare Association, for their 2020 festival in Pusan (Han *et al.* 2020).

However, some dog retailers also talked about shared feelings with animals, in ways that bypass the modern dichotomy between livestock and domestic companions, and come closer to "animist" (Viveiros de Castro 1992; Descola 2014) perceptions of animals as sharing interiorities with humans who take their perspective before killing them. For Hyönmi, a retailer at Taegu Ch'ölsöng market, caring for animals before they were slaughtered was an ethical matter. Keeping live dogs in cages gave her an opportunity to engage with them, look after them, feed them, clean their living space, ensure that dogs never went hungry and were settled in her absence. However, these human-canine relations were not incompatible, in her views, with selling dog meat as a commodity and a medicine.

Another retailer, Ch'önsik, quoted a common Korean belief that seeing a dog in dreams was a sign of misfortune. This statement relied on the possibility for dogs and humans to share dreams and penetrate each other's selves, based on a long history of shared domestication and a capacity to literally interpret dog dreams as preparing them to encounters with other living beings (Kohn 2007). According to Ch'önsik, dog meat consumption was inscribed in a spiritual competition between dogs and humans to penetrate the dreams of each other, a conception often attributed to hunting societies where shamans regulate the human consumption of animals (Stépanoff 2009). Ch'önsik also compared the cost of visiting a veterinarian for one of his daughter's cats with the profit he could have made if he had sold this cat directly at the market. It was a Chinchilla, he said, so it had a high value for the veterinarian taking care for his daughter's cat, but for him, it had the same economic value as stray cats, and could equally be sold at the market for the equivalent of four euros. "There are too many abandoned animals", Ch'önsik said, "they fight with each other and leave their faeces everywhere; nobody cleans them up." Ch'önsik's arguments thus used the analogistic view of the metabolism of animals and humans in the urban space, but grounded them on animistic conceptions of shared interiorities with animals, probably coming from

rural shamanistic practices (Kendall 2009; Kwon 2009). Rather than comparing the views of animal activists to those of urban controllers as two forms of the modern separation between humans and animals, called *naturalist* by Descola, we are thus led to hypothesise that animal activists shared with dog retailers an animist view of shared feelings between humans and dogs.

Another surprising finding of our ethnography was that veterinarians, although trained in Euro-American biomedicine and anatomy, were induced by their caring practices to consider animals as sensitive beings, and could thus play an intermediary role on the tensions of animal killing revealed by public discussions on dog meat (Dugnoille 2022). The veterinarians we spoke to in South Korea perceived dogs through the general possibility of disease affecting all living beings, and developed a worldview where all living beings could be cured by a situated use of medical knowledge. Much like queer activists in South Korea have used MERS-Cov in 2015 to spread alternative views to the biosecurity separations between humans and viruses (Gitzen 2023). In 2020, at a symposium organised at the National Assembly in the midst of Covid emergency, veterinarians emphasized the interconnectedness of human and animal health, especially through the zones of contact between wild animals, domestic animals and humans including dog farms (Han *et al.* 2020). They leveraged COVID-19 as a teaching moment to highlight shared vulnerabilities to emerging pathogens between humans and animals in farming environments. This framing allowed them to position dog farm biosecurity concerns within the broader context of pandemic preparedness and zoonotic disease prevention.

Sangjin, a vet and civil servant in Pusan, considered that empathy (*kyogam*) was a fundamental relation between humans and other living beings that should be taught at an early age, because different life forms share a similar physical vulnerability with various species-specific perspectives. Sangjin took the example of primatologists who learn to perceive the worldview of primates to understand how to best protect them (Salazar Parreñas 2018; Langlitz 2020). For him, culture and society were not only found in humans but also in other animals, because both humans and nonhumans constituted societies and cultures together. According to Sangjin, dogs' ability to feel physical pain and to develop specific perspectives in relation with humans carried more weight than the perpetuation of a tradition that promoted violence and cruelty as symbols of national/cultural uniqueness. He concluded that if dog meat activities were maintained, they should minimise the pain inflicted upon dogs.

This approach of animal suffering translated in the way that the South Korean veterinarians we met incorporated the concept of "One Health" into their medical practice (Braverman 2023). Yumin, for instance, said that while techniques for educating dogs used to strike them on the nose, positive reinforcement had, in the past decades, progressively been advocated by South Korean veterinarians as a better way to train dogs. However, the "One Health" concept has been applied well beyond dogs by South Korean veterinarians and

public health scholars, who promoted it to the Ministries of Health, Agriculture and Environment as a way to monitor diseases at the interface between humans, animals and their environment. "One Health means we live well, animals live well and the environment lives well", Sangjin told us. This meant that it was not only the responsibility of veterinarians to look after animals, but that of the entire nation. "By caring for animals, Sangjin said, we are looking after ourselves." Dogs were considered by vets not as symbols of Korean resistance against imperialism but rather as sentinels of global environmental challenges (Keckr 2020).

We are thus led to explain how activists and vets could work as mediators between the competing ontologies of dog meat that have developed in South Korea over the last twenty years. While the dog meat trade has opposed views of animals we can characterize as *naturalist* and *analogist*, when they are developed by modern urban planners and traditional market retailers, animal activists and veterinarians are combining a *naturalist* view of animals as sharing substances with humans and an *animist* view of animals as sharing affects with them.

CONCLUSION

This article has analysed the reorganisation of the dog meat trade in South Korea after Covid-19 and a series of other zoonotic crises in sites of material proximity between humans and animals. It has contested the narrative that urbanisation policies promoting a hygienic reform of South Korean markets have "killed two dogs with one stone." By banishing the holding and slaughter of other animals from the "upgraded market" for hygienic reasons, city planners have also jeopardised the symbolic value given to the dog trade as a Korean tradition, leaving only a marginal space for dog meat restaurants to remain open in allocated areas, where no live dogs are held in cages.

However, our ethnographic approach has displaced this dominating narrative in South Korea by listening to those who live at the margins of Korean society and who share affects and substances with dogs. The retailers we spoke to argued that dogs could play a metabolic role in urban ecology as human waste recyclers, and the consumers of dog meat gave it a symbolic value as carrying qualities of freshness and resistance. Retailers and consumers thus put the slaughter of dogs at the centre of the social space of the urban market, in a symbolic view of the world that offered an ontological alternative to the urbanists' view of the modernised market. This symbolic view of human-dog relationships was not incompatible with the idea that dogs and humans share affects and microbes, which was articulated differently by animal activists, dog retailers as well as veterinarians, who endorsed it on feelings of kinship for the first, on narratives of shared dreams for the second, on histories of co-evolution for the third.

Rather than oppose the modernist view of urban planners and the traditional view of dog retailers, around symbolic conceptions of the collective body that clean it from zoonoses, we have showed that all these groups could use different

ontologies of human-animal relations which are available in South Korea, as a territory where shamanistic practices are mixed with nationalistic discourses and modernising tropes. We have thus suggested that activists and veterinarians could play a role as mediators between the opposite views of urbanists and retailers on the dog meat trade, when they use a “One Health” discourse promoting shared vulnerabilities between humans and other animals, in the wake of global environmental challenges such as the zoonotic emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Credits

- Conceptualization, formal analysis, investigation, methodology: Dugnoille, Keck & Seo-Plu;
- Writing – original draft, review & editing: Dugnoille, Keck & Seo-Plu;
- Funding acquisition: Keck.

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