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Vegetarianism In Historical and Contemporary China:
Tracking Transitions In Discourse Through Rhetorical
Idioms of Entitlement and Endangerment

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I. Introduction

“Vegetarianism” is an ambiguous, multivalent term. It is often characterized as a personal dietary choice, but some consider it an ideology or social movement. Thus, what is considered “vegetarian” changes based on one’s perspectives. Since food practices are “personally embodied and structurally embedded”, they can be difficult to define.¹

It can also be difficult to define what exactly “vegetarianism” entails. Many different diets, including lacto ovo vegetarian (eggs and dairy products, but no meat), lacto vegetarian (dairy products, but no eggs or meat), ovo vegetarian (eggs, but no dairy products or meat), pescatarian (fish, eggs, and dairy products, but no non-fish meat), and vegan (no animal products of any kind, including eggs, dairy products, and honey) can be considered “vegetarian” under varying definitions.² In addition, while some people who occasionally eat meat but usually abstain from meat may consider themselves vegetarians, stricter vegetarians may resist this definition of vegetarianism, only accepting people who never consume meat as true vegetarians.

Just as the idea of vegetarianism is in flux, China has also experienced a massive amount of change over the past forty years. Following opening-up reforms of the late 1970s and 1980s, China has experienced a period of rapid economic

¹ Donna Maurer and Jeffery Sobal, eds. *Eating agendas: food and nutrition as social problems*. Transaction Publishers, 1995., 144

² Donna Maurer. *Vegetarianism: Movement or moment: Promoting a lifestyle for cultural change*. Temple University Press, 2010., 77, 84

growth that has transformed the lives of the Chinese. As China enters an era of globalized supply chains, Chinese citizens gain access to a greater variety of products from around the world. Along with rising income, this gives them access to many products and services that were unavailable in the past. Additionally, despite censorship efforts by the Chinese government, the Internet provides new forms of communication that allow for the proliferation of ideas, primarily among people within China, but also among Chinese abroad. Therefore, there is not only an increase in economic capital, but also intellectual capital that can be shared in public ways.

However, along with new opportunities and knowledge, this era of increased globalization, economic development, and prosperity also brings new fears and problems. Among these is the increasing threat of an obesity epidemic. With increased access to food products, including not only meat but also imported and domestically produced processed food products, instances of obesity-related chronic diseases in China are on the rise.³ The increased risk of these diseases, along with increased media attention to food impurities and contamination and increased air and water pollution in many major cities means that Chinese today must grapple with a host of new public health concerns. This new social landscape, which includes the positive, negative, and neutral impacts of economic development and increased globalization, generates new discourses through which people can grapple with understanding their new world and the methods they can use to cope with it. In this

³ Y. Wang, Jianchun Mi, X. Y. Shan, Qiong J. Wang, and K. Y. Ge. "Is China facing an obesity epidemic and the consequences? The trends in obesity and chronic disease in China." *International journal of obesity* 31, no. 1 (2007): 177-188.

environment, where people need new ideas with which to conceptualize their lives, vegetarian culture and discourse finds fertile ground in which to take hold.

Vegetarian discourse, like most discourse centered around the correction of perceived social problems, is grounded in rhetorical idioms that structure the discourse. People often use specifically tailored rhetorical idioms- marked as such because they are easily identified through their “symbolically coherent and morally competent” nature- in order to structure discourse in a familiar way for consumers of this discourse.⁴ Ibarra and Kitsuse (1993) identified five main rhetorical idioms used in discourse surrounding social problems- rhetoric of loss, rhetoric of endangerment, rhetoric of entitlement, rhetoric of unreason, and rhetoric of calamity.⁵

According to Donna Maurer, vegetarians have a “vocabulary of motives” that they apply to their experience.⁶ Much of this vocabulary is derived from rhetorical idioms discussed by Ibarra and Kitsuse. According to Maurer, vegetarian rhetorical idioms primarily take on two of Ibarra and Kitsuse’s types: entitlement vegetarianism and endangerment vegetarianism.⁷ This thesis will argue that these two types of vegetarianism reflect two different orientations towards vegetarian

⁴ Peter R. Ibarra, and John I. Kitsuse. "Vernacular constituents of moral discourse: An interactionist proposal for the study of social problems." *Reconsidering social constructionism: Debates in social problems theory* (1993): 25-58., 36

⁵ Peter R. Ibarra., and John I. Kitsuse. "Vernacular constituents of moral discourse: An interactionist proposal for the study of social problems.", 34

⁶ Donna Maurer, and Jeffery Sobal, eds. *Eating agendas: food and nutrition as social problems.*, 144

⁷ Donna Maurer. *Vegetarianism: Movement or moment: Promoting a lifestyle for cult change.* Temple University Press, 2010. 143; Peter R. Ibarra., and John I. Kitsuse. "Vernacular constituents of moral discourse: An interactionist proposal for the study of social problems.",

practice in China. I will argue that entitlement vegetarianism characterizes the dominant motive for the historical practice of vegetarianism in China, while endangerment vegetarianism is the main factor in contemporary vegetarian practice.

Entitlement vegetarianism is focused on animals' entitlement to life.⁸ Additionally, entitlement vegetarianism is oriented with "freedom, choice, and liberation while it condemns attitudes that are discriminatory and unjust"; it frequently employs words such as "lifestyle", "diversity", "tolerance", and "empowerment".⁹ The entitlement rhetorical idiom emphasizes the "virtue of securing for all persons equal institutional access as well as unhampered freedom to exercise choice of self-expression" (and, in the case of vegetarianism, certain arguments extend this definition beyond humans to animals- Ibarra and Kitsuse suggest that this rhetorical idiom is sometimes extended as far as to include cultural objects such as films).¹⁰ Entitlement vegetarianism's logic goes that the more people advocate for these values, the greater benefit there is for society at large.¹¹

Entitlement vegetarianism is often associated with the animal rights movement, because utilitarian philosopher Peter Singer's seminal work, *Animal Liberation* and many other animal rights works are based heavily on entitlement-

⁸ Donna Maurer, *Vegetarianism: Movement or moment*

⁹ Jeffery Sobal, and Donna Maurer, eds. *Eating agendas: Food and nutrition as Social Problems.*, 152; Peter R. Ibarra, and John I. Kitsuse. "Vernacular constituents of moral discourse: An interactionist proposal for the study of social problems.", 38

¹⁰ Peter R. Ibarra, and John I. Kitsuse. "Vernacular constituents of moral discourse: An interactionist proposal for the study of social problems."

¹¹ Peter R. Ibarra, and John I. Kitsuse. "Vernacular constituents of moral discourse: An interactionist proposal for the study of social problems."

based rhetorical idioms.¹² Although animal rights-based arguments for vegetarianism clearly fall within the realm of entitlement-based arguments, entitlement vegetarianism also includes vegetarian arguments that “emphasize the wider enhancement of human life”.¹³

Endangerment vegetarianism is focused primarily on the threat that meat-eating poses to an individual’s health and well-being, and sometimes the threat posed to society and the environment.¹⁴ It is focused largely on the idea that meat poses threats to consumers, though the exact type of threat can vary- of course health concerns are one possible endangerment-based argument, but arguments that emphasize animal agriculture’s impact on the environment and arguments that the use of grain to raise livestock endangers starving people also fit into this framework.¹⁵ Although one could see the rhetorical idiom of endangerment as fitting into the framework of entitlement, as the argument sometimes goes that everyone has a *right* to physical health and safety, endangerment appeals are less focused on health care and bodily function than they are on liberation.¹⁶ Furthermore, while entitlement vegetarianism is rooted in philosophical arguments, endangerment vegetarianism tends to draw its arguments from science.¹⁷ In fact, many endangerment appeals rest on the ability of medical and other scientific

¹² Peter Singer. *Animal liberation. Towards an end to man's inhumanity to animals.* Granada Publishing Ltd., 1977. This book is often credited with starting the modern animal rights movement in the Western world.

¹³ Bob Ashley. *Food and cultural studies.* Psychology Press, 2004., 192

¹⁴ Donna Maurer. *Vegetarianism: Movement or moment,* 143

¹⁵ Donna Maurer, and Jeffery Sobal, eds. *Eating agendas: food and nutrition as social problems.* 147

¹⁶ Peter R. Ibarra, and John I. Kitsuse. "Vernacular constituents of moral discourse: An interactionist proposal for the study of social problems.", 39-40

¹⁷ Bob Ashley *Food and cultural studies.*, 193

studies to supersede value judgments.¹⁸ Therefore, endangerment is most idiomatic when it uses a scientific writing style.¹⁹ These scientific arguments can involve, among others, arguments that a vegetarian diet is healthier than one that contains meat and arguments about the size of Earth's population that can be sustained through animal agriculture. These concerns, as well as endangerment vegetarianism itself are often associated with growing anxieties around food production and consumption in today's world.²⁰ Whether these anxieties are based in accurate science or not, they tend to center around the endangerment of the physical body by outside contaminators. Endangerment arguments take issue with entitlement ones when the perceived risks of entitlement outweigh the perceived benefits.²¹ They usually use words such as "hygiene", "prevention", "disease", and "epidemic".²² Endangerment arguments also emphasize the potential for increased quality of life upon adopting a vegetarian diet.²³

While endangerment-based appeals are often strong ones in the contemporary world, they are not infallible. The counterargument to endangerment is anecdote- personal experiences and the personal valuation that

¹⁸ Peter R. Ibarra. and John I. Kitsuse. "Vernacular constituents of moral discourse: An interactionist proposal for the study of social problems.", 39

¹⁹ Peter R. Ibarra, and John I. Kitsuse. "Vernacular constituents of moral discourse: An interactionist proposal for the study of social problems.", 39

²⁰ Bob Ashley. *Food and cultural studies.*, 188

²¹ Peter R. Ibarra, and John I. Kitsuse. "Vernacular constituents of moral discourse: An interactionist proposal for the study of social problems.", 43

²² Peter R. Ibarra, and John I. Kitsuse. "Vernacular constituents of moral discourse: An interactionist proposal for the study of social problems.", 39

²³ Donna Maurer, and Jeffery Sobal, eds. *Eating agendas: food and nutrition as social problems.*, 150

arises from them stands in stark contrast to endangerment's sterile style.²⁴

However, it is possible that one's personal experience may validate one's endangerment concerns; therefore, not all anecdotes are anti-endangerment.

Contemporary vegetarian authors who use primarily entitlement-based arguments often find it necessary to first establish appeals to endangerment.²⁵ Many people are only convinced to adopt vegetarianism if they are first convinced that being vegetarian will benefit (or at least not harm) their own health and safety. This is tied into the fact that endangerment arguments are often more likely to be accepted than entitlement ones are because they have a more concrete outcome in the form of an extended life.²⁶

Regardless of their reason for choosing vegetarianism, vegetarians and others who espouse the values of vegetarianism employ these two ways of understanding vegetarianism to characterize their own motivations for becoming vegetarian, as well as attempt to convince others to adopt vegetarianism. Many arguments combine entitlement and endangerment arguments.²⁷ However, although one person or group of people may advocate vegetarianism using arguments that draw on both entitlement and endangerment vegetarianism, this thesis hopes to track the shift from one to the other, and therefore will characterize arguments based on their primary focus.

²⁴ Peter R. Ibarra, and John I. Kitsuse. "Vernacular constituents of moral discourse: An interactionist proposal for the study of social problems.", 39

²⁵ Donna Maurer, and Jeffery Sobal, eds. *Eating agendas: food and nutrition as social problems.*, 158

²⁶ Donna Maurer, and Jeffery Sobal, eds. *Eating agendas: food and nutrition as social problems.*, 157

²⁷ Donna Maurer, and Jeffery Sobal, eds. *Eating agendas: food and nutrition as social problems.*, 147

Although there is a growing amount of scholarship on vegetarianism in China, very little of it centers on the social dimensions of vegetarianism.²⁸ Instead, many studies take a medical or scientific approach to vegetarianism.²⁹ A few others take a more theoretical approach, using traditional Chinese thought as an entry point of analysis.³⁰ While there are some works that focus on vegetarian history in China, these works do not take an in-depth look at the contrast between historical and contemporary vegetarianism, and do not use endangerment vs. entitlement vegetarianism as their lens of analysis. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by addressing changes in the landscape of vegetarianism within China.

Since vegetarianism is affected by and affects so many different issues- social relations, human-animal relations, the natural environment, the economy- this thesis is relevant to a wide variety of stakeholders. For example, those in the food

²⁸ For a more in-depth discussion of specific works, see chapters Two (for historical work) and Three (for other Chinese academic work).

²⁹For example: Shi Yanqin(石琰琴), and Ma Hongbo (马洪波). "Sushi yinshi fangshi yu jiankang yanjiu jinzhan 素食饮食方式与健康研究进展. (Making Progress On Vegetarian Eating and Drinking Habits and Health Research) 吉林医药学院学报 35, no. 3 (2014): 219-222.; Mao Xuanxia (毛绚霞) et. al "Shanghai sushi requn goucheng ji sushizhe jiankang he yinshi xingwei diaocha" 上海素食人群构成及素食者健康和饮食行为调查. (A Survey On the Composition of Shanghai's Vegetarian's Health and Eating and Drinking Behavior) 卫生研究 44, no. 02 (2015): 237-241.

³⁰ For example: Feng Yanhong (冯延红). "jiyu tianrenheyi linian xia sushi wenhua de xianshi yiyi yanjiu" 基于天人合一理念下素食文化的现实意义研究. (Research On the Theory of "Tianrenheyi" and Vegetarian Culture's Contemporary Meaning) 楚雄师范学院学报 11 (2014): 8-12.

industry can better understand how to market their food to both (Chinese) vegetarians and non-vegetarians if they understand the meanings that vegetarianism holds in the contemporary context and the reasons that it has taken on these meanings. Furthermore, it is important for foreigners traveling in China to understand the dynamics of Chinese vegetarianism in order to better navigate China's cultural landscape, and therefore gain increased inter-cultural competency. These are just a few of the many possible stakeholders that stand to benefit from an increased understanding of the social aspect of Chinese vegetarianism- a complete list would go far beyond the scope of this thesis.

This thesis argues that, although vegetarianism in China has historically been centered on entitlement vegetarian rhetoric associated with Buddhism, since the opening-up reforms of the late 1970s, a new form of Chinese vegetarianism focused on the endangerment rhetorical idiom is emerging. This new Chinese vegetarianism is not one that a certain religion or ideology imposes, and, unlike Western vegetarianism, it is not a social movement, but is rather a tool that Chinese people use to grapple with contemporary problems such as environmental degradation, obesity, and food safety concerns.

Chapter One, Entitlement Vegetarianism: the Influence of Buddhist Thought and Practice in China, will address the status of vegetarianism in China throughout history, including Buddhist and other influences. It will draw on academic and historical work to situate vegetarianism within the context of Chinese history, as well as draw a connection between historical vegetarianism and entitlement-based arguments.

Chapter Two, Endangerment Vegetarianism: Contemporary Concerns, will take the state of vegetarianism in contemporary China as its subject. It draws not only on academic work, primarily by Chinese scholars, but also on interviews with Chinese international students at Oberlin College in the United States and information gleaned from vegetarian blogs on the popular messaging and social media app WeChat.³¹ It will discuss the ways that people in contemporary China use vegetarianism to address contemporary problems such as obesity, food contamination, environmental crisis, and gender concerns, as well as draw connections between contemporary vegetarianism and endangerment-based arguments.

The concluding chapter will provide concluding comments. It will also offer implications and recommendations for further study within this field.

Chapter Two- Entitlement Vegetarianism: the Influence of Buddhist Thought and Practice in China

³¹ These interviews and blogs are primarily used as sources of anecdotal evidence, and should not be taken as representative of all Chinese people as a whole. The sample of interviews is very limited both in scope and diversity, so they can not stand as a statistically significant sample. The interviews were undertaken with approval from the Institutional Review Board. For more information on the interviews, see the Appendix.

Although vegetarianism in China is in many ways associated with Buddhism, Chinese vegetarianism's origins predate Buddhism's entry into the country.³² In fact, vegetarianism first entered China during the Shang dynasty (1766-1122 BC).³³

However, vegetarianism did not truly flourish in China until the Song dynasty (960 CE-1279 CE).³⁴ During this period, the first vegetarian restaurant opened and the first vegetarian cookbook was written.³⁵ Practices similar to modern agricultural production in China began during the Song dynasty, and did not go through any major changes until the 20th century.³⁶ Therefore, the origins of vegetarianism were present in China before Buddhist vegetarianism became popular. Of course, Buddhist vegetarianism radically change the scene of Chinese vegetarianism upon making its appearance.

By the Ming (1368-1644 CE) and Qing (1644-1912 CE) dynasties, Buddhist-influenced vegetarianism had become prominent in China.³⁷ Buddhist philosophy

³²Xu Xian 许先, "Lüse zhi jingling—Zhongguo sushi wenhua shi jianshu" **绿色之精灵—中国素食文化史简述** (The Spirit of Green- A Historical Summary of Chinese Vegetarian Culture) Shipin yu jiankang **食品与健康** 4 (2008): 4-6.

³³Xu Xian 许先. "Lüse zhi jingling—Zhongguo sushi wenhua shi jianshu " **绿色之精灵——中国素食文化史简述.**" (The Sprit of Green- A Historical Summary of Chinese Vegetarian Culture), 4

³⁴Xu Xian 许先. "Lüse zhi jingling—Zhongguo sushi wenhua shi jianshu " **绿色之精灵——中国素食文化史简述.**" (The Sprit of Green- A Historical Summary of Chinese Vegetarian Culture), 4

³⁵Xu Xian 许先. "Lüse zhi jingling—Zhongguo sushi wenhua shi jianshu " **绿色之精灵——中国素食文化史简述.**" (The Sprit of Green- A Historical Summary of Chinese Vegetarian Culture), 5

³⁶ Eugene Newton Anderson. *The food of China.*, 57

³⁷ Xu Xian 许先. "Lüse zhi jingling—Zhongguo sushi wenhua shi jianshu " **绿色之精灵——中国素食文化史简述.**" (The Sprit of Green- A Historical Summary of Chinese Vegetarian Culture), 5

entails a desire to preserve life and avoid harm. For example, at one point in history, Buddhist monks stopped traveling during monsoon times to reduce harm caused to newly-sprouted plants.³⁸ Furthermore, the suffering of not only humans, but also of animals, was told to have inspired the Buddha (who is said to have nursed an injured goose back to health) to seek enlightenment.³⁹ While the first Buddhist precept of not harming or injuring living creatures has been enforced to varying degrees throughout history, it has certainly contributed to Buddhist ethics and their influence on vegetarianism both within and outside of China.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Buddhism in China is primarily part of the Mahayana tradition.⁴¹ Mahayana Buddhism, which has the primary value of compassion, is distinctive for its focus on vegetarianism as an important part of Buddhist life- it prohibits eating meat in one of its 48 secondary injunctions.⁴² It is important to note that the Buddha's words on meat eating (which emphasize the motivation behind the killing of the animals) contradict the Mahayana texts (which emphasize the prohibition of meat eating), but the Mahayana texts were the ones adopted in China.⁴³ Therefore, Mahayana Buddhist values strongly relate to the impact that Buddhism had on Chinese culture

³⁸ Christopher Key Chapple. *Nonviolence to animals, earth, and self in Asian traditions*. SUNY Press, 1993.

³⁹ Christopher Key Chapple. "Nonviolence, Buddhism, and Animal Protection." *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*, 22-23

⁴⁰ Christopher Key Chapple. "Nonviolence, Buddhism, and Animal Protection." *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*

⁴¹ D Seyfort Ruegg "Ahimsa and Vegetarianism in the History of Buddhism." *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Walpola Rahula*, edited by Edmund Perry, Sri Lanka, Gordon Fraser Gallery Ltd., 1 June 1980, pp. 234-241.

⁴² D Seyfort Ruegg. "Ahimsa and Vegetarianism in the History of Buddhism."; Christopher Key Chapple. "Nonviolence, Buddhism, and Animal Protection." *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*, 30

⁴³ Kieschnick, John. "Buddhist vegetarianism in China." *Of Tripod and Palate: Food, Politics, and Religion in Traditional China* (2005): 186-212., 193

and vegetarianism. Additionally, the Lankavatara Sutra, one of the fundamental texts of Mahayana Buddhism, includes a 24-verse call to vegetarianism.⁴⁴ Some older texts in the traditional Buddhist canon stated that, while ascetic Buddhist monks should not harm, and therefore should not kill or otherwise harm animals to consume as meat, they may eat “available” meat, which they have not killed themselves or asked others to kill on their behalf.⁴⁵ However, later Mahayana sutras criticized this notion, claiming that monks (and, in some texts, Buddhist followers in general) should not consume meat.⁴⁶ Since Chinese vegetarians primarily use the Mahayanist code, there has historically been a close connection between vegetarianism and Buddhism in China.

The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, among the earliest of the Buddha’s teachings, emphasize the existence of suffering in the world. These Truths include that there is suffering in the world, and that this suffering has a cause and an end (which one can arrive at by adhering to the Eightfold Path).⁴⁷ These Noble Truths lead to the goal of reducing suffering within the world. Since these Truths are some of the fundamental pillars of Buddhism, they have a significant impact on Buddhist ideology. As will be further explored throughout this chapter, the reduction of suffering is fundamental to the formation of Buddhist entitlement vegetarianism.

⁴⁴ Christopher Key Chapple. “Nonviolence, Buddhism, and Animal Protection.” *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*, 27

⁴⁵ D Seyfort Ruegg. “Ahimsa and Vegetarianism in the History of Buddhism.”, 234-235

⁴⁶ D Seyfort Ruegg. “Ahimsa and Vegetarianism in the History of Buddhism.”

⁴⁷ Bodhi Bhikkhu, “The Noble Eightfold Path--The Way to the End of Suffering.” *The Wheel Publication* (1984).

Through vegetarian practice, the thought goes, Buddhists are able to reduce suffering among non-human animals and, therefore, among all sentient beings.

Several parts of Buddhism's Eightfold Path tie into entitlement-based vegetarian arguments. In particular, the ideas of cultivating ethical action and right livelihood are crucial foundations of entitlement vegetarianism.⁴⁸ In fact, one of the main tenants of the idea of "right action" within the Eightfold Path is the idea of abstaining from taking life- an idea that extends to all sentient beings, human and non-human alike.⁴⁹ Therefore, one of the most fundamental teachings of Buddhism emphasizes the importance of not harming sentient life, including through actions such as meat eating. By implying that right action includes reducing the suffering of all sentient beings, the Eightfold Path forms the basis of an argument for entitlement vegetarianism. Since non-human animals are included as sentient beings, they are afforded protection and non-violence.

Additionally, the idea of non-violence towards sentient beings, including non-human animals, is addressed in the precept of right livelihood. Right livelihood discourages Buddhists from taking on a variety of professions, including ones that involving raising and killing animals or ones that involve the butchering or selling of meat.⁵⁰ This provision, therefore, discourages Buddhists from pursuing careers that could bring harm to sentient beings, including non-human animals; this furthers the Buddhist entitlement vegetarian argument by, once again, indicating that all sentient beings are worthy of compassion and nonviolence.

⁴⁸ Bhikkhu.Bodhi, "The Noble Eightfold Path--The Way to the End of Suffering." 45

⁴⁹ Bhikkhu.Bodhi, "The Noble Eightfold Path--The Way to the End of Suffering."

⁵⁰ Bhikkhu.Bodhi, "The Noble Eightfold Path--The Way to the End of Suffering.", 63

Although compassion is not exactly equivalent to entitlement in definition, it is certainly a related idea. Buddhist compassion is not an animal welfare-based argument, but rather one that is based in the ideas of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) and *husheng* (reduction of suffering). Therefore, it is important to note that it is not putting forth the idea that animals deserve life because they are animals, but rather makes the argument that animals should be shown compassion because they are creatures with life that can suffer. However, while the ideas do not exactly map onto each other, they are related, and Buddhist ideas of compassion therefore fit into the framework of the entitlement rhetorical idiom.

Another Buddhist appeal to vegetarianism involves the idea of samsara. Since humans who carry out misdeeds during their lives are subject to become animals in future lives, while animals that act nobly have the chance to become human in future lives, all humans and animals have been related to each other in some life.⁵¹ The connection between humans and non-human animals, therefore, serves as one Buddhist argument for vegetarianism. Since it is impossible to know whether the animals that one eats were previously one's family members, the logic goes, it may be best not to eat any animals at all. While this is not the most significant argument related to vegetarianism in Buddhism, samsara also emphasizes the connection between humans and non-human animals, thereby strengthening the argument for nonviolence towards all sentient beings.

This samsara-based argument fits into an entitlement-based framework. It uses the connection between animals and humans to argue for the rights of animals.

⁵¹ Christopher Key Chapple. "Nonviolence, Buddhism, and Animal Protection." *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*

That is, if humans are entitled to life, and these humans may one day become animals, animals must be extended approximately the same respect as one would extend to other humans. Therefore, the connection between humans and other animals means that it is easy to create a standardized way for humans to treat animals. This means that animals' entitlement to life is easily established, which directly speaks directly to the ethos of entitlement vegetarianism. Essentially, the idea of samsara stands out as a fundamental part of Buddhism's entitlement vegetarian arguments.

Mahayana Buddhist texts also draw on endangerment-based arguments in some instances. For example, the Lankavatara Sutra states that those who eat meat are "ill-smelling, contemptuous, and born deprived of intelligence."⁵² At first, it seems that this statement is meant to make readers avoid meat due to the qualities it, according to this passage, instills on their bodies and personalities. However, it is important to note that the Buddhist definition of ignorance is more about lacking religious insight than being deprived of intelligence. This topic will be further explored when discussing contemporary endangerment-based arguments in Chapter Three (Endangerment Vegetarianism: Contemporary Concerns). It is also relevant to note at this point that the prohibition of garlic and onions in Buddhist cuisine is also tied more to ideas of endangerment- the concern with these foods is that they make those who eat them smell bad.⁵³ Additionally, some Buddhist texts

⁵² Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. "trans. The Lankavatara Sutra: A Mahayana Text." (1932), cited in Christopher Key Chapple. "Nonviolence, Buddhism, and Animal Protection." *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*, 28

⁵³Kieschnick, John. "Buddhist vegetarianism in China." *Of Tripod and Palate: Food, Politics, and Religion in Traditional China* (2005): 186-212.

that entered China emphasize vegetarianism more the purpose of avoiding karmic retribution or other forms of punishment, rather than for cases of animal welfare or the maintenance of life.⁵⁴ However, that meat eating was thought to warrant karmic retribution in and of itself emphasizes the importance of vegetarianism in a way that reinforces entitlement ideals. While the arguments were sometimes reinforced through appeals to endangerment, they were still entitlement-based appeals at their core.

The Lankavatara Sutra also contains multiple appeals to entitlement in its call to vegetarianism. For example, it states that eating meat is forbidden “everywhere and all the time for those who are abiding in compassion”.⁵⁵ The emphasis on compassion in this passage positions vegetarianism as an act of compassion.⁵⁶ Positing vegetarianism as a compassionate act requires that one considers animals capable of being objects of compassion. Since the Lankavatara Sutra does so, it uses entitlement vegetarian rhetoric- the Sutra’s logic goes that abstaining from meat is required for those who are compassionate, because animals are deserving of (entitled to) compassion. This argument is a fundamental basis of most entitlement appeals. It is important to note that this compassion for animals is not extended to them because they are animals- this is not an appeal for animal

⁵⁴ Kieschnick, John. "Buddhist vegetarianism in China."

⁵⁵ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. "trans. The Lankavatara Sutra: A Mahayana Text." cited in Christopher Key Chapple. "Nonviolence, Buddhism, and Animal Protection." *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*, 28

⁵⁶ This position is echoed in later work focusing on the feminist ethic of care, which places compassion and relationships over rights and rules, as applied to vegetarianism. See Gilligan, Carol. *In a different voice*. Harvard University Press, 1982. and Tutu, Archbishop Desmond. *The global guide to animal protection*. Edited by Andrew Linzey. University of Illinois Press, 2013.

welfare- but, rather, as a way of decreasing suffering in the world and a general appeal to compassion.

The Fang Wangjing (or Brahmajala Sutra), a Mahayana Buddhist text that was extremely popular in China, and even speculated to have been written there, contains even more radical entitlement-based appeals to vegetarianism.⁵⁷ In fact, it states that “one should be willing to forsake one’s entire body, one’s flesh, hands, and feet as an offering to starving tigers, wolves, lions, and hungry ghosts.”⁵⁸ This passage, therefore, states that one should move beyond attachment by accepting impermanence and giving up attachments to life for the sake of compassion and nonviolence. This argument is clearly the opposite of endangerment-based. Since it places the needs of others, in this case non-human animals, over even the self, the Fang Wangjing is a clear example of entitlement vegetarianism. These strongly entitlement-based (or anti-endangerment basis) arguments made a lasting impact on the way that Chinese Buddhists conceptualized vegetarianism.

The Fang Wangjing also contains more direct, but perhaps less extreme, appeals to entitlement vegetarianism in terms of a specific code of conduct. For example, it states

Therefore you must always practice liberation of living beings (since to produce and receive life is the eternal law) and cause others to do so; and if

⁵⁷ Christopher Key Chapple. “Nonviolence, Buddhism, and Animal Protection.” *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*

⁵⁸ trans. Dharma Realm Buddhist University. *The Buddha Speaks the Brahma Net Sutra* (Talmage, California: Buddhist Text Translation Society, 1981), p. 150., cited in Christopher Key Chapple. “Nonviolence, Buddhism, and Animal Protection.” *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*, 29

one sees a worldly person kill animals, he must by proper means save and protect them and free them from their misery and danger.⁵⁹

This passage makes a direct call for both human and animal liberation. It also provides specific directions for what to do if one sees others kill animals. In addition to the general sentiment of the passage, several words, such as “save”, “protect”, “free”, and “liberation”⁶⁰ place this passage firmly within the realm of entitlement vegetarianism, as these are, essentially, a summary of the values that entitlement vegetarianism draws on in its arguments.

The Buddhist value of compassion is often enacted through the practice of animal release and other similar types of animal protection. While not strictly an act of animal release, the Sutra of Golden Light describes a man’s journey to save the life of a fish in an evaporating puddle as an act of compassion to be emulated.⁶¹ This story embodies the Buddhist ideal of *ahimsa* (nonviolence), as well as the idea of *husheng* (reduction of suffering).⁶² While animal release is not fundamentally

⁵⁹ trans. Dharma Realm Buddhist University. *The Buddha Speaks the Brahma Net Sutra*, cited in Christopher Key Chapple. “Nonviolence, Buddhism, and Animal Protection.” *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*, 29

⁶⁰ trans. Dharma Realm Buddhist University. *The Buddha Speaks the Brahma Net Sutra*, cited in Christopher Key Chapple. “Nonviolence, Buddhism, and Animal Protection.” *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*, 29

⁶¹ Emmerick, R. E. *The Sutra of Golden Light: Being a Translation of the Suvarnabhasottamasutra*. Luzac, 1970.

⁶² Henry Shiu and Leah Stokes. “Buddhist animal release practices: historic, environmental, public health and economic concerns.” *Contemporary Buddhism* 9, no. 2 (2008): 181-196.

related to the idea of nonviolence, it still ties into the same basis of compassion towards living beings.⁶³

Buddhist influence on Chinese culture has been strong, especially in regards to vegetarianism and compassion for animals and other sentient beings. For example, many Chinese folktales foretell problems befalling those who harm animals.⁶⁴ These folktales became popular in the 5th century CE, which is also when Buddhism had solidified its status within China.⁶⁵ It is therefore likely that Buddhism brought an entitlement vegetarian influence to China, which manifested itself in these folktales. Additionally, a book by Chinese Buddhist monks and followers called the *Hue Shen Hua Chi* attempted to integrate Buddhism vegetarianism with the typically more humanistic Confucianism by saying that vegetarianism shows “love for humanity.”⁶⁶ Buddhist monks’ efforts to fuse the ideals of Buddhism and Confucianism speak to Buddhism’s integration within Chinese culture. Both of these schools of thought are influential in China, but they also interact with each other in order to form a slightly different impact than either of them could have had individually. In the case of vegetarianism, this fused influence manifests itself through entitlement-based vegetarianism that emphasizes humanity’s role.

⁶³ Henry Shiu and Leah Stokes. "Buddhist animal release practices: historic, environmental, public health and economic concerns."

⁶⁴ Christopher Key Chapple. "Nonviolence, Buddhism, and Animal Protection." *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*, 37

⁶⁵ Christopher Key Chapple. "Nonviolence, Buddhism, and Animal Protection." *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*, 37

⁶⁶ Christopher Key Chapple. "Nonviolence, Buddhism, and Animal Protection." *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*, 38

Another impact that Buddhism has had on Chinese vegetarian culture is the institution of vegetarian hall (*zhaitang*). These halls provide a place for unmarried older women without family connections to stay and eat vegetarian food despite their lack of family connections or the funds with which to support themselves.⁶⁷ While not every one of these women is Buddhist, the halls themselves are managed (through a complex system) by Buddhists and endorse Buddhist vegetarianism.⁶⁸ Through their experiences residing in the halls, these women are able to form a community from their mutual experiences (including vegetarianism). In fact, they even develop pseudo-kinship relationships, calling each other by family member names.⁶⁹ These halls are a unique part of Chinese culture that was heavily influenced by Buddhist vegetarianism. The halls themselves also tie into the Buddhist ideas of compassion and reduction of suffering, as they support people in need. In this way, they operate on the ideals of entitlement vegetarianism both through their vegetarian practice and through their care for humans.

Buddhist-based vegetarianism has had a significant impact on Chinese cuisine. Buddhist-vegetarian restaurants have existed in China since the 13th century, and from this time they have been significant in developing vegetarian

⁶⁷ Marjorie Topley. "Chinese women's vegetarian houses in Singapore." *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 27, no. 1 (1954): 51-67., 51

⁶⁸ Marjorie Topley. "Chinese women's vegetarian houses in Singapore."

⁶⁹ Marjorie Topley, and James Hayes. "NOTES ON SOME VEGETARIAN HALLS IN HONG KONG BELONGING TO THE SECT OF HSIEN-T' IEN TAO:(THE WAY OF FORMER HEAVEN)." *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1968): 135-148.

cuisine, including fake meats, in China.⁷⁰ Although Buddhists in other countries were not expected to practice vegetarianism (the Buddha himself is said to have allowed his disciples to eat meat, so long as the person consuming the meat did not know or have reason to suspect that the meat was from an animal killed for the express purpose of being eaten by the consumer), nearly all Buddhist monks and nuns, as well as many Buddhist laypeople in China practiced vegetarianism.⁷¹ In this way, the specific context of the combination between Chinese culture and Mahayana Buddhism lead to the spread of Buddhist vegetarianism in China and its influence on Chinese vegetarian culture as a whole.

Buddhist-based entitlement vegetarianism is certainly impacted by sociohistorical context. While vegetarianism did exist in China prior to the introduction of Buddhism, Buddhism left its mark on Chinese vegetarian culture. Although there were hints of endangerment-based arguments, in China, Mahayana Buddhism focused primarily on entitlement vegetarianism, as is evident in the Lankavatara Sutra and the Fang Wangjing. Arguments made in these and other texts primarily focused on the values of compassion and liberation, sometimes using the logic of samsara to support the arguments. These Buddhist appeals to entitlement-based vegetarianism had a lasting impact on the vegetarian landscape in China through folktales as well as the Buddhist vegetarian restaurants and halls still present in China today.

⁷⁰ Kieschnick, John. "Buddhist vegetarianism in China." *Of Tripod and Palate: Food, Politics, and Religion in Traditional China* (2005): 186-212.

⁷¹ Kieschnick, John. "Buddhist vegetarianism in China." *Of Tripod and Palate: Food, Politics, and Religion in Traditional China*

Chapter Three- Endangerment Vegetarianism: Contemporary Concerns

As seen in Chapter Two, social and historical context impacts the ways that vegetarianism is perceived and propagated. China has gone through a period of rapid change at the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century. The next section takes as its subject changes in vegetarianism given this change in sociohistorical context.

There is a substantial body of recent academic work in China focusing on vegetarianism. Many of these studies focus on health issues. Some of these studies focus on negative impacts of vegetarianism, such as possible negative consequences of vegetarianism on bone health in post-menopausal women, or a study of female university students that showed that women who were vegetarian got tired more easily when running in gym class.⁷² Other studies focus on positive health impacts of a vegetarian diet, such as: preventing cancer, preventing cardiovascular problems, reducing toxins, and lightening the weight on your kidney function.⁷³ Additionally, some historical studies of vegetarianism in China exist.⁷⁴ While these works generally do not address the social dimensions of vegetarianism, their existence

⁷²Shi Yanqin (石琰琴) and Ma Hongbo (马洪波). "sushi yinshi fangshi yu jiankang yanjiu jinzhan" "素食饮食方式与健康研究进展." (Making Progress in Vegetarian Eating and Drinking Methods and Health Research)

⁷³Zhang Min (张敏), and Ye Yuwen (叶玉姣). "sushizhuyi yanjiu zongshu" "素食主义研究综述." (Vegetarianism Research Literature Review) *江苏调味副食品* 2 (2013).

⁷⁴Xu Xian (许先). "lüse zhi jingling- zhongguo sushi wenhua shi jianshu" "绿色之精灵——中国素食文化史简述." (The Sprit of Green- A Historical Summary of Chinese Vegetarian Culture) *食品与健康* 4 (2008): 4-6.

makes it clear that vegetarianism is a topic that academics, and therefore presumably others in China, are taking note of.

This academic work, taken together, generally contributes to a trend towards endangerment appeals. As Maurer notes, the endangerment rhetorical idiom tends to rely on a medical or scientific style in order to make appeals, hoping that scientific knowledge will be considered more important than value judgments.⁷⁵ Therefore, the increase in medically based scientific studies allow endangerment appeals to have a stronger point of reference. As Chinese academics establish more concrete ideas of which aspects of a vegetarian diet are and are not healthy, it becomes clearer which aspects of vegetarianism are dangerous and which serve as protection from other potential dangers.

It is also interesting to note that much of this Chinese academic work has a gendered component. Much of the gendered nature of this work is primarily health-based, such as recommendations about reproductive health when vegetarianism or dealing with menopause through a vegetarian diet.⁷⁶ However, other work includes recommendations from Chinese doctors that women do not become vegetarian because it will make them bloated and less beautiful.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Jeffery Sobal, and Donna Maurer, eds. *Eating agendas: Food and nutrition as Social Problems*, 147

⁷⁶Zhang Min (张敏), and Ye Yuwen (叶玉姣). "sushizhuyi yanjiu zongshu" "素食主义研究综述." (Vegetarianism Research Literature Review); Shi Yanqin (石琰琴) and Ma Hongbo (马洪波). "sushi yinshi fangshi yu jiankang yanjiu jinzhan" "素食饮食方式与健康研究进展." (Making Progress in Vegetarian Eating and Drinking Methods and Health Research)

⁷⁷Zhang Min (张敏), and Ye Yuwen (叶玉姣). "sushizhuyi yanjiu zongshu" "素食主义研究综述." (Vegetarianism Research Literature Review)

Most of the academic work reviewed focuses on health concerns as the main motivator and impact of vegetarianism, and interview participants also frequently brought up health concerns as major reasons to adopt vegetarianism. For example, one participant's main impression of vegetarian food and vegetarianism was focused primarily around the idea of health:

I think that in Beijing, the idea of vegetarian food has become very popular. Like my mother- before, my family would eat meat or whatever, but then in recent years my mother has made us use less oil and salt. So now I typically only eat meat once a week or maybe two times a week. Sometimes if we are at a restaurant we will eat meat, but at home we are very healthy, we have vegetarian food that doesn't have much oil or salt. I think this is good because vegetarian food can make you healthier. And then, eating meat, especially at night after you've eaten, can make you feel very feeble and exhausted. Beijing has, in recent years, gotten a lot of vegetarian restaurants, so everyone is especially paying attention to this and health and whatever. So Beijing recently has gotten a lot of vegetarian restaurants where you can eat salads or whatever.⁷⁸

This participant perceives vegetarianism as highly associated with health. Although vegetarianism is really only concerned with the consumption of or abstinence from meat, this participant also perceives vegetarianism as associated with food that does not have much oil or salt. Therefore, the participant extends the definition of vegetarianism to fit her own purpose of creating a healthy body that is

⁷⁸ Anonymous. Interview by author. Personal interview. Oberlin, OH USA, November 2016.

not “feeble and exhausted”. Vegetarianism is used as a tool with which to create a healthy and energetic body.

Other participants also commented on the perceived negative health impacts of meat consumption. For example one commented on cholesterol consumption, saying “I think one reason is thinking that vegetarianism is healthy...because eating lots of meat gives you a lot of cholesterol, right? It’s not healthy to have too much cholesterol.”⁷⁹ Another participant suggested that health reasons were the most common reason for one to go vegetarian in China, saying, “I only know people who are vegetarian for this reason.”⁸⁰ This same participant seemed somewhat skeptical of this motivation, suggesting with a laugh, “maybe some people think that eating meat can cause diseases.”⁸¹ However, another participant seemed to take this exact same concern seriously, saying, “vegetarianism is not something that I think about everyday, but I always make sure to eat some vegetarian food, because if you always eat meat, you can get diseases. It’s not good for your health.”⁸²

This last comment especially brings up the trend that vegetarianism is not necessarily a consistent ideology that one maintains at all times. While many (Western) vegetarians see vegetarianism as moral ideology that may never be broken, the descriptions of vegetarian habits in these interviews point more towards the use of vegetarianism as a temporary tool for a specific purpose. In this

⁷⁹ Anonymous. Interview by author. Personal interview. Oberlin, OH USA, November 2016.

⁸⁰ Anonymous. Interview by author. Personal interview. Oberlin, OH USA, November 2016.

⁸¹ Anonymous. Interview by author. Personal interview. Oberlin, OH USA, November 2016.

⁸² Anonymous. Interview by author. Personal interview. Oberlin, OH USA, November 2016.

case, the participant states that, while he does not consider himself a true vegetarian since he does not think about vegetarianism all the time, he still makes sure to eat vegetarian food and occasionally abstain from meat for the purpose of avoiding disease and maintaining good health. In this way, he combats the endangerment-based fear of meat's corruptive effect on health in order to structure through the use of temporary vegetarianism.

Since environmental concerns are increasingly important in China, and animal agriculture is environmentally destructive, some contemporary Chinese studies of vegetarianism focus on environmentalism instead of solely focusing on health issues. For example, Wu Xin's "Discussing Vegetarian Culture's Impact on Society" lists environmental protection as a major positive impact of vegetarianism.⁸³ Ni Shoumin's "Vegetarianism: An Eating and Drinking Moral Principle to Protect the Ecological Environment" lists a variety of environmental benefits, including: reducing soil degradation and desertification, saving water and energy, reducing pollution, conserving rainforests and ocean resources, and fighting climate change and acid rain.⁸⁴ Additionally, as industrialization of agriculture increases, as has happened in the United States and is happening in China, food becomes delinked from ideas of fertility and nature, and instead is seen as a type of

⁸³ Wu Xin (吴忻). Shilun sushi wenhua de shehui yingxiang) "试论素食文化的社会影响." (Discussing Vegetarian Culture's Impact on Society) *四川烹饪高等专科学校学报* 2 (2009): 18-20., 19

⁸⁴Ni Shoumin (倪守敏). "(sushizhuyi: yi zhong baohu shengtai huanjing de yinshi lunli)" "素食主义: 一种保护生态环境的饮食伦理." (Vegetarianism: An Eating and Drinking Moral Principle to Protect the Ecological Environment) *伦理与文明* (2014): 021.

industrial production, making exploitation of workers and the environment invisible.⁸⁵ In China, many of these issues are growing concerns. Environmental protection is seen as increasingly important as environmental problems become more severe. In this context, some people see vegetarianism as a tool that can be used to combat environmental degradation, playing into concerns of environmental endangerment.

Within the contemporary context of ecological crisis and environmental degradation, even past actions can play into contemporary endangerment rhetoric. The nature of contemporary Buddhist animal release practices demonstrates that Buddhist vegetarian's entitlement basis is increasingly irrelevant in the context of emerging ecological crises and the increased influence of economic markets on the practice. While the practice was originally inspired by compassion for living creatures in need, contemporary practice has created a market for the sale of animals for the explicit purpose of releasing them (for example, in Taiwan, over 40% of pet stores supply Buddhist groups with animals to release).⁸⁶ Since animals are often released in ecosystems that they are unsuited for, not only are they often unable to survive, but they also pose the threat of becoming invasive species, thereby harming the ecosystem they are released in.⁸⁷ Released animals also pose a

⁸⁵ Irene Diamond. *Fertile ground: Women, earth and the limits of control*. Beacon Press, 1997.

⁸⁶ Henry Shiu and Leah Stokes. "Buddhist animal release practices: historic, environmental, public health and economic concerns.", 188

⁸⁷ Henry Shiu and Leah Stokes. "Buddhist animal release practices: historic, environmental, public health and economic concerns.", 190

threat to human health through the spread of disease.⁸⁸ Therefore, while the practice has historically grounded in the idea of compassion for all living beings, in its contemporary form the practice often causes more harm than good, making its appeal to compassion questionable. The process of economic globalization has clearly impacted this practice; only in a world with globalized economic markets may non-local animals be bought and sold for the purpose of release. Although the practice in its original form reflected a call to animals' entitlement to freedom and life through its emphasis on compassion and reduction of suffering for all living beings, changes in the economic and social landscape have made this entitlement-based ideal difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

Furthermore, criticism of contemporary animal release practices draws on endangerment-based arguments. For example, Chinese birdwatchers called for a government ban on the release of birds in this process due to concerns about avian flu.⁸⁹ These concerns about human health show a general concern for the underpinning concerns of endangerment. Additionally, the issue of the introduction of invasive species shows concern for the endangerment of the environment. Although animal release is not directly related to vegetarianism, it is an ideal vehicle through which to see the erosion of entitlement-based arguments and the increasing adoption of endangerment-based arguments. Not only are entitlement-based arguments that originated in Buddhist practice of animal release increasingly

⁸⁸ Henry Shiu and Leah Stokes. "Buddhist animal release practices: historic, environmental, public health and economic concerns.", 189

⁸⁹ Henry Shiu and Leah Stokes. "Buddhist animal release practices: historic, environmental, public health and economic concerns.", 182

irrelevant in contemporary society, but the practice of animal release itself has also given rise to causes of endangerment-based concerns.

While environmental concerns were not the motivation for vegetarianism most commonly mentioned in interviews with Chinese students, several students did address the connection between vegetarianism and the environment. One participant stated that one reason that people might choose to go vegetarian is to promote sustainability, since “meat’s impact on the environment is larger than vegetarian food’s impact”.⁹⁰ When asked further about this topic, he said: “My impression is that the animals we raise also need to eat vegetables, so you need to use a lot of vegetables to raise animals. So if you just eat these vegetables, you’re able to conserve a lot. So you help the environment.”⁹¹ However, other participants had different opinions. For example, when asked if there was a connection between vegetarianism and environmental protection, answered:

This is really hard for me to answer, because I’ve seen some presentations that say that if you are vegetarian, this will help animals, but then some people say that being vegetarian is bad for the environment. It seems like it’s because...how do I explain this...it’s because humans like allocate the land to farming animals, and then you allocate the land to farming like the vegetarian food and if you like you need more resources to make the like land more fertile to get

⁹⁰ Anonymous. Interview by author. Personal interview. Oberlin, OH USA, November 2016.

⁹¹ Anonymous. Interview by author. Personal interview. Oberlin, OH USA, November 2016.

more vegetables so then you like destroy the natural environment to farm what people eat, something like that.⁹²

Another answered with a more passionate argument against vegetarianism for environmental reasons, saying:

Being vegetarian and environmental protection...Actually, I think that there are indeed people who would say that they're vegetarian for the environment, or I think that more of them would say they're doing it to kill less, but I think that there's actually no relationship between those two things. Being vegetarian is more of a personal opinion or a personal belief or a personal way to improve yourself, that's all that it is. Because this meat is all...because all of these animals are specifically made for this, they aren't made to be pets. They are specifically made to be livestock raised for meat. So I think this is exactly like saying that that cow will [negatively impact the environment], but I think that, compared to other things, this is an extremely small thing, so I think that if you say you are going vegetarian for the environment, you...are very out of touch with reality.⁹³

Additionally, most participants expressed that they were unsure if there was a relationship between the environment and vegetarianism, or said that they had never thought about this particular issue. Based on both this observation and the content of the Chinese academic literature reviewed, it seems that health concerns are more significant arguments in contemporary China than

⁹² Anonymous. Interview by author. Personal interview. Oberlin, OH USA, November 2016.

⁹³ Anonymous. Interview by author. Personal interview. Oberlin, OH USA, November 2016.

environmental ones are. While this is important to note, it is also clear from that environmental concerns were raised and contribute to the shift from entitlement focus to endangerment focus.

Comments that focus on environmental reasons as a positive aspect of vegetarianism are particularly focused on endangerment arguments. For example, one interviewee stated that the main impact that vegetarianism had on the environment was that “if fewer people ate meat, if there was less production of pigs, chickens, and cows, the impact on the environment, for example carbon dioxide emissions and I think some other pollutants, would be smaller.”⁹⁴ Implicit in this statement is the idea that carbon dioxide emissions lead to global climate change. The negative impacts that this would have on human life make it clear that this statement rests firmly within the endangerment category. There is a connection between the endangerment of the environment and the endangerment of human life, both of which are concerns that the endangerment rhetorical idiom addresses.

Interestingly, comments about the lack of relationship between vegetarianism and the environment are also focused on endangerment. For example, the participant who thought that vegetarianism had a negative impact on the environment worried that the environment would be “destroyed” by farming for what people eat if people were to go vegetarian.⁹⁵ This fear of impending destruction is a classic example of endangerment-

⁹⁴ Anonymous. Interview by author. Personal interview. Oberlin, OH USA, November 2016.

⁹⁵ Anonymous. Interview by author. Personal interview. Oberlin, OH USA, November 2016.

based concerns. Endangerment vegetarianism has permeated both sides of this discourse about the environment.

Both those statements that assume a connection between environment and vegetarianism and those that assume there is no relationship draw on scientific explanations. In the previously quoted statements, on the one side, there are references to an increase in carbon dioxide negatively impacting the environment, while the other side features the idea that different types of land allocation can be more or less environmentally intensive. Drawing upon the language and style of science and scientific writing brings in the types of ethos appeals commonly found in endangerment based arguments- after all, the rhetorical idiom of endangerment relies on the prioritization of science over other value-based judgments in order to succeed.⁹⁶ This emphasis on science is in clear in discussion of the environment on both sides of the issue. This shift towards an emphasis on science reflects that contemporary society places more of an emphasis on scientific reasoning to make arguments, therefore making endangerment-based arguments more suitable.

Also, some participants stated concerns for the environment related to food safety. For example, one participant stated that she thought there might be a relationship between vegetarianism and the environment because she

⁹⁶ Peter R. Ibarra, and John I. Kitsuse. "Vernacular constituents of moral discourse: An interactionist proposal for the study of social problems.", 50

does not know where the meat she eats in China comes from.⁹⁷ Much concern around food safety is based in an inability to know what ingredients and byproducts are in food products that one consumes; oftentimes food safety-based concerns use consumers' lack of knowledge about a food's origins to construct an argument that that food is dangerous in some way. Another interviewee stated the connection between vegetarianism and food safety concerns more directly, saying "if you're nervous about meat, maybe vegetarian food is better, because it's easier to find organic vegetarian food."⁹⁸ While organic food is hard to come by in many parts of China, organic farming has been a growing industry in China since it was introduced to the country in 1990.⁹⁹ However, as organic farming is limited to 11 of China's 31 provinces, it can often be difficult for some people within China to access organic food, especially because the organic food is often shipped to larger cities to be sold there, where the average income is higher.¹⁰⁰ This particular interviewee was from Beijing and talked about many trends within the Beijing context. Given this contextual information, it is likely that the use of vegetarian organic food as a response to food safety concerns is a highly limited practice, primarily found in large cities among those who can afford organic goods' higher prices.

⁹⁷ Anonymous. Interview by author. Personal interview. Oberlin, OH USA, November 2016.

⁹⁸ Anonymous. Interview by author. Personal interview. Oberlin, OH USA, November 2016.

⁹⁹ Paul Rye Kledal, Qiao Yu Hui, Henrik Egelyng, Xi Yunguan, Niels Halberg, and Li Xianjun. "Organic food and farming in China." In *The world of organic agriculture-statistics and emerging trends 2007*, pp. 114-119. IFOAM & Fibl, 2007., 114

¹⁰⁰ Kledal et al. "Organic food and farming in China.", 114

Chinese vegetarian blogs also contain language that suggests a connection between vegetarianism and food safety. For example, the blog VeggieDorm's introductory message for followers who have just subscribed to the blog's updates states that it is a "natural health consultant"- language that draws attention to the alleged "natural" nature of vegetarian food as compared to the "unnatural" nature of meat, which is presented as a contaminant.¹⁰¹ The introductory message draws together many arguments that primarily employ the endangerment rhetorical idiom. In addition to food safety and ideas of the natural, it draws on ideas of physical health and environmental protection, saying, "we believe, a healthy way of enjoying life can change our bodies and the inherent nature of the global environment"; this statement draws together two of the most common endangerment concerns: the health of the physical body and the state of the natural environment.¹⁰² It also contains direct appeals to the reader, saying that we should "work hard together, love our health, love the world, and love life!"¹⁰³ The message first lays out a variety of endangerment concerns, and then directs readers to read their vegetarian blog, saying that it will help them conquer said concerns. In this way, the blog sets up a classic appeal to endangerment.

Food safety concerns are a growing issue in China today. This concern over food safety takes a variety of forms. These range from the use of gutter

¹⁰¹ 素舍 (Veggie Dorm), text message, September 27 2016

¹⁰² 素舍 (Veggie Dorm), text message, September 27 2016

¹⁰³ 素舍 (Veggie Dorm), text message, September 27 2016

oil (recycled waste oil) to melamine contamination in milk and other dairy products.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, it is unsurprising that those in China would seek out ways to deal with these food safety threats. The rhetorical idiom of endangerment is particularly appealing here. When food is truly a potential contaminating agent, endangerment appeals are at their strongest.

Despite these concerns, meat consumption has actually increased in China in recent years. Typically, as income increases, so does meat consumption.¹⁰⁵ In fact, while 30.8% of calories in the developed world came from animal products in 1986-1988, in the developing world during that time period, animal products only constituted 8.9% of the calories consumed.¹⁰⁶ China is no exception- in fact, Chinese meat consumption rose from 9 kg per person in 1970 to 52 kg per person in 2002, and in 2006, China ate more meat than the entire world did in 1961.¹⁰⁷ This is particularly significant because “the consumption of meats was strikingly low before 1949”.¹⁰⁸

Although a large part of the reason that meat consumption increases as income increases is that consumers are only able to afford meat products at higher income levels, another significant factor in this correlation is the association of meat

¹⁰⁴ Xiaofang Pei, Annuradha Tandon, Anton Alldrick, Liana Giorgi, Wei Huang, and Ruijia Yang. "The China melamine milk scandal and its implications for food safety regulation." *Food Policy* 36, no. 3 (2011): 412-420.; Fangqi Lu, and Xuli Wu. "China food safety hits the "gutter"." *Food Control* 41 (2014): 134-138.

¹⁰⁵ Colin Sage. *Environment and food.*; Donna Maurer. *Vegetarianism: Movement or moment: Promoting a lifestyle for cult change.* Temple University Press, 2010.

¹⁰⁶ Alan Beardsworth, and Teresa Keil. *Sociology on the menu: An invitation to the study of food and society.* Routledge, 2002., 200

¹⁰⁷ Colin Sage. *Environment and food.*, 143; Zhang-Yue Zhou, Hongbo Liu, and Lijuan Cao. *Food consumption in China: The revolution continues.* Edward Elgar Publishing, 2014., 64

¹⁰⁸ Kwang-chih Chang. "Food in Chinese culture.", 1977., 302

with status. Meat is often identified as a product of the rich.¹⁰⁹ In fact, “meat, in its many forms, represents what is probably the most universally valued of foods across the broad spectrum of human cultures”.¹¹⁰ When meat is seen as a status symbol, only people with enough status to be unconcerned with status are willing to consider vegetarianism- “people from lower-income groups rarely become vegetarians before they acquire the capacity to purchase all of the meat (i.e., the status) they want”.¹¹¹

However, even as the consumption of meat increases, the number of vegetarians in China is also increasing- in fact, 4-5% of Chinese are said to be vegetarian.¹¹² This is a typical phenomenon- increased meat consumption in China is tied to an increase in income, which is largely due to China’s opening up reforms and transition to a market-based economy. Although this leads to increased meat consumption, vegetarianism also becomes more accessible as it is absorbed into the capitalist food system, and therefore becomes more commonly understood and available.¹¹³ Additionally, many significant ingredients in Chinese cooking, at least in certain areas of China, are vegetarian. For example, soybeans, fava beans, mung beans, peanuts, and red beans are all important sources of protein.¹¹⁴ A variety of

¹⁰⁹ Kwang-chih Chang. "Food in Chinese culture.", 326

¹¹⁰ Alan Beardsworth,, and Teresa Keil. *Sociology on the menu: An invitation to the study of food and society.*, 193

¹¹¹ Donna Maurer. *Vegetarianism: Movement or moment: Promoting a lifestyle for cultural change.*, 8

¹¹² Tommy Dean. "China’s Vegan Population is Largest in the World." VegNews.com. January 13, 2014. Accessed March 16, 2017.
<http://vegnews.com/articles/page.do?pageId=6392&catId=8>.

¹¹³ Alan Beardsworth,, and Teresa Keil. *Sociology on the menu: An invitation to the study of food and society.*, 240

¹¹⁴ Eugene Newton Anderson. *The food of China.*

vegetables, such as cabbage, spinach, lettuce, parsley, celery, watercress, Chinese wolfthorn, carrot, and bamboo shoot are also important to Chinese cuisine.¹¹⁵

Therefore, vegetarian food is available in some forms in China.

In addition to pressing health, food safety, and environmental concerns, interview participants' comments and blog posts suggest that many Chinese women use vegetarianism as a form of gender performance. Almost all interview participants said that women were more likely to become vegetarian than men were. Many of these participants emphasized women's greater emphasis on health, for example saying, "women like to eat vegetarian food a little more because...women care more about their body and health".¹¹⁶ Additionally, a few interview participants emphasized that "in China right now the idea is 'the thinner the better'" in terms of women's ideal for themselves.¹¹⁷ Although the participants who made these comments emphasized that this type of attitude was unhealthy, they also took it as a fact of life. It seems that, for the women who chose to adopt this type of gender performance through vegetarianism, their ideal body is more important than their physical health. This may suggest that a type of social endangerment supersedes the importance of physical endangerment such as that based in health.

The blog VeggieDorm (素社 (sushe)- a pun; it literally means "vegetarian society", but has the same pronunciation as "dorm") features an interview of one

¹¹⁵ Eugene Newton Anderson. *The food of China*.

¹¹⁶ Anonymous. Interview by author. Personal interview. Oberlin, OH USA, November 2016.

¹¹⁷ Anonymous. Interview by author. Personal interview. Oberlin, OH USA, November 2016.

such woman, He Taohong (和陶虹).¹¹⁸ The blog post continuously draws connections between He's vegetarianism and the traditionally feminine traits she embodies. For example, the interview opens with an anecdote of how He finds herself at a hot pot restaurant that serves its hot pot with a fish broth, but she is too polite to assert herself and reject the fish broth, despite her commitment to vegetarianism. This anecdote provides an entry point into a major theme of the interview- He's desire not to trouble people with her vegetarianism, and her ability to adapt to situations that undermine her practice of vegetarianism. Through the way that she adopts vegetarianism not in the aggressive manner of the activist, nor as the staunch guardian of her personal health, but rather as a passive, delicate, and polite woman, He's vegetarianism emphasizes her feminine traits. Additionally, her desire to be vegetarian in the first place, which stemmed from a sudden realization that fish have life (something that vegetarian theorists characterize as a "shock moment"¹¹⁹) when watching a TV show that portrayed fishing. Her decision to eat a vegetarian diet is portrayed as coming from kindness and compassion, personality traits that are often characterized as feminine. On top of personality traits, the interview attempts to connect He's vegetarianism to her clothing, which is described as both white and pure, two previous meanings of the Chinese word for vegetarian food (素 *su*) which are also often associated with femininity. Through these traits,

¹¹⁸ Veggie Dorm, "xiao taohong: sushi zhongxin sikao rensheng" 小陶虹：食素重新思考人生 (*Xiao Taohong: The Main Part of Eating Vegetarian is Thinking Deeply About Life*), Veggie Dorm (素社), September 29, 2016

<http://www.jiuchisu.com/m/a/314/14630>

¹¹⁹ Alan Beardsworth,, and Teresa Keil. *Sociology on the menu: An invitation to the study of food and society*. Routledge, 2002., 108

both her personality and physical presentation, He constructs a heightened sense of femininity using her vegetarianism.

Anecdotes from interviews suggest that this type of attitude is one that can be put on and taken off at will. For example, one participant told a story about one of his high school classmates, saying, “At my high school, I had a classmate who only ate vegetarian food for all three years of high school. And then since the classmate has lost weight now, she’s started eating meat again.”¹²⁰ In this example, the classmate uses vegetarianism as a way to construct a physically attractive form for herself. In a society in which “thinner is better”¹²¹ for women, she uses vegetarianism only in order to achieve the thinner body that allows her to gain higher social status. Once she has achieved this goal, she abandons vegetarianism, leaving her with only the results of her time as a vegetarian- her “improved” body, and therefore solved “problem”. Therefore, it is obvious that she does not cling to vegetarianism as an ideology, and is not drawn in to her vegetarianism by her connection to other members of a vegetarian social movement, but rather is motivated by a pragmatism that requires her to achieve a socially desirable body by any means possible, including the renunciation of meat.

In all of these examples, people describe vegetarianism as a tool with which to address a particular problem. This is most obvious in the examples of those trying to lose weight. The classmate who is described as being vegetarian for three years until she lost weight, at which point she resumed eating meat is a prime example.

¹²⁰ Anonymous. Interview by author. Personal interview. Oberlin, OH USA, November 2016.

¹²¹ Anonymous. Interview by author. Personal interview. Oberlin, OH USA, November 2016.

She had an end goal- to lose weight- and used vegetarianism as a tool with which to meet her goal. By being temporarily vegetarian, she was able to craft her ideal body with which she could navigate a potentially dangerous social and dietary landscape. Endangerment-based appeals to vegetarianism are often more effective because of their connection to actual results in the form of extended years of life or, in this case, lost weight and the associations of healthiness that often accompany the process.¹²² The idea of using vegetarianism as a tool with which to create a healthy body is also supported by Chinese scholars' scientific and medical work- a genre that is closely associated with the endangerment rhetorical idiom.¹²³

Overall, new concerns brought about by globalization and other contemporary factors create an environment where endangerment concerns are prominent. In response to this, people use vegetarianism as a way to address these concerns and bring about a feeling of safety from the sources of endangerment.

Chapter Four- Conclusion

Examination of historical and Buddhist work showed that historical Buddhist vegetarianism focused on ideas of compassion and justice. It focused strongly on ideas of animal rights, especially as connected to ideas of samsara and ahimsa.

¹²² Donna Maurer, and Jeffery Sobal, eds. *Eating agendas: food and nutrition as social problems.*, 157

¹²³ See Shi Yanqin (石琰琴), and Ma Hongbo (马洪波) "sushi yinshi yu jiankang yanjiu jinzhan" "素食饮食方式与健康研究进展." (Making Progress in Vegetarian Eating and Drinking Methods and Health Research) and other articles cited throughout this thesis- see "Notes" for more information.

Although compassion is not exactly the same as entitlement, entitlement arguments tend to include appeals to compassion. Animal release practices and Buddhist vegetarian halls also contributed to a focus on arguments based in the entitlement rhetorical idiom.

There is a clear turn from historical entitlement-based appeals to endangerment-based ones in contemporary China. This change reflects the shift from traditional Buddhist values to contemporary values not necessarily centered around Buddhism. This shift is especially prominent with the growth of globalization and increased concerns about a variety of issues.

Economic development in China has had significant impacts on the vegetarian landscape. While it has created more access to meat, it has also increased connections that allows for the quick spread of information about vegetarianism. Economic development and other contemporary factors have also led to an increased concern about health and body image. Concerns about obesity and weight in general have led people to see certain foods as unhealthy. Food safety concerns have pushed this concern even further. Maurer notes that endangerment appeals are particularly potent in today's society because of ideas about health and wellness, but unique conditions in China make endangerment-based rhetorical idioms even more significant there.¹²⁴

Today's vegetarianism, as revealed by contemporary accounts by Chinese scholars, oral interviews, and an analysis of Chinese vegetarian blogs, is more focused on the endangerment rhetorical idiom. When discussing vegetarianism,

¹²⁴ Donna Maurer, and Jeffery Sobal, eds. *Eating agendas: food and nutrition as social problems*.

people in contemporary China focus on the ways that it is related to pressing problems such as obesity, food safety, and environmental crisis.

Therefore, the automatic connection between vegetarianism and these issues suggests that people consider vegetarianism a way to protect against these threats on an individual level. Food, due to its potential contamination, impacts on one's health, and environmental impact, is seen as dangerous. The restriction of food consumption to avoid meat- a food product that is characterized as especially dangerous- is one way that people see as an option to address their concerns about these growing problems.

This study establishes changes in vegetarian rhetorical idioms used in China. It does this by creating two distinct categories of vegetarianism- one is defined as historical Buddhist-based vegetarianism, while the other is contemporary vegetarianism, which is characterized by concerns brought about by globalization and other emerging concerns in the contemporary era.

While this study looks at vegetarianism in contemporary China from a social science perspective, there is still more work that could be done on this front. For example, a quantitatively rigorous study would be useful in order to have a more concrete idea about the state of vegetarianism in China today. The participants interviewed for this project were not a random sample, and there were not enough of them to give any kind of statistically significant results- therefore, more extensive research with a wider group of people would be very useful on this front. Additionally, some use of statistical methods may be helpful in better characterizing the exact dynamics of vegetarianism in China today. Additionally, while Maurer only

identified two of Ibarra and Kitsuse's five rhetorical idioms as applying to vegetarianism, Maurer's study was based in the West. Further research is necessary to know how rhetorical idioms of calamity, loss, and unreason fit into the Chinese vegetarian landscape, if at all.

China's vegetarian landscape is continually changing. This study has explored the changes from entitlement-based Buddhist vegetarianism to the emerging contemporary endangerment-based vegetarianism. It is likely that people will continue to adapt to the sociopolitical situation- and shape vegetarianism along with them.

V. Appendix

Interview Methods:

This study involved oral interviews of Oberlin College international students from China. The author used a flyer advertising the project in order to get participants for the interviews. This flyer was distributed in a few different ways, including a physical flyer, and emails to residents of Oberlin's Asia House, the Chinese Student Association, and classes related to China. Participants themselves also helped find more participants for the interviews through personal connections. In total there were 10 participants. They were all Oberlin College international students, who were of college age (18-22 years old). They came from a variety of locations in China (which will be elaborated on when relevant), and study a wide variety of subjects at Oberlin. All of them spoke Mandarin Chinese, which was the

language used for the interviews (though some participants chose to switch into English for brief periods). Although some could also speak regional dialects such as Cantonese, these were not used in the interviews, except in very specific cases (such as describing a regional dish that does not have a widely-used Mandarin name).

The interviews consisted of approximately seven questions. The questions were relatively open-ended, and participants were encouraged to share their related thoughts even outside of the specific questions. The questions focused on participants' thoughts about food and vegetarianism, particularly related to gender, environmental protection, and religion. Participants were asked about reasons that people would choose to be vegetarian, as well as which types of people would be most likely to be vegetarian. Participants were told (via consent form and personal communication) that they could address other topics at their own discretion. The interviews varied in time length based on the amount of interest and the length of responses of each individual participant.

These students are all Chinese students studying in the United States, particularly at Oberlin College, so they do not represent the general population of China. However, their viewpoints are still a valuable source of information for analysis. As Chinese students studying in the United States, they have a keen awareness of both Chinese and Western cultures. In some ways, their separation from China provides them with a clearer view on what exactly makes Chinese culture unique compared to other cultures. Additionally, as we will see in the next section, their thoughts and feelings about food are closely linked to their own culture- they have seen the difference between food cultures in China and the

United States, and have drawn conclusions about Chinese food culture based on these contrasts. Furthermore, Oberlin College is considered a hotspot of vegetarianism in the United States. For example, in 2015, Oberlin College was voted the most vegan-friendly small college in the United States, according to peta2.¹²⁵ Therefore, these students are sure to have interacted with vegetarian culture in the United States. While one may expect this to “corrupt” their opinions of vegetarianism, it also gives them an awareness of multiple cultures at once, as well as an emotional investment in their home culture. This awareness of the status of vegetarianism in their own culture, as well as the prevalence of and attitudes towards vegetarianism at Oberlin College in the United States, makes them valuable cultural informants who are well positioned to give a unique perspective on Chinese vegetarian culture.

¹²⁵ Peta 2. "Favorite Vegan-Friendly College' Contest." Peta2. 2015. Accessed April 18, 2017. <http://features.peta2.com/vegan-colleges-2015/>.

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