

Trans-species Care: Taiwan's Feral Dogs and Dog Mother Activism

Dr. Chia-ju Chang

Department of Modern Languages and Literatures

Brooklyn College

The City College of New York

2900 Bedford Avenue

Brooklyn, NY, 11210-2889

USA

Abstract

Feral dogs living on the streets in densely populated urban centers have been a serious social, environmental and animal rights problem for the local governments in many big cities outside of the Anglo-American world. Taiwan is no exception. The Taiwanese government, one that is indoctrinated in the ideology of modernity, has been campaigning to exterminate stray dogs instead of adopting other means of addressing the stray dog population. This campaign has proven to be ineffective. Stray dogs and cats are a symbol of the excesses of capitalism; they are direct victims of Taiwan's capitalist economic and urban growth and the global pet industry. Several counter-voices along the lines of animal rights advocacy have emerged in response. The most silent animal advocate group is the so-called "dog mothers." Dog mothers are animal caretakers comprised of women from all classes of Taiwanese society; they volunteer to rescue, shelter, and feed stray dogs and cats on the streets. The victimization and marginalization they share with the dogs they defend is worth exploring in the context of common assumptions about social transgression. In this paper, I explore the question why many Taiwanese feel uneasy about dog mothers, by reflecting on what both dog mothers and stray dogs mean to urban society as a whole. I argue that these dog mothers reveal an inconvenient truth about the contemporary urban consumerist social order that is androcentric. Their plight reflects the absence of an ecological-feminist discourse that sees animal issues and women's issues as interlinked.

Keywords: Feral dog, dog mother activism, Taiwan, trans-species care, ecofeminism

I. Introduction

It is like a destiny as if I owe these dogs in my previous life. Now reflecting on why I took this path, I think it has something to do with my childhood living condition. Wherever I go to a place and see a dog scavenging garbage, if I have any food in my hand, I will definitely feed it. My family was very poor...so I am familiar with the misery of no food to eat. Compare to other dog mothers, I am not among the ones who love dogs. Because my family was so poor, I ate everything, rabbits, rats, including dogs.

—from an interview with a dog mother¹

Women caring or nurturing (e.g., feeding, nursing and so on) nonhuman animals is not uncommon throughout the world. However, such a behavior of intimate trans-species care tends to be viewed as a form of feminine sentimentality, abnormality, subversion, abjection, or even monstrous and threatening to the modern, industrial social order.² Such a prevalent stereotype of maternal impulsivity is well captured in American popular imagination, for example, in an episode of *The Simpsons*, Marge Simpson begins to compulsively search for a substitute by holding a sack of potato to replace her baby, Maggie Simpson. As another example, photos are posted on the internet exhibiting women breastfeeding animal infants in the "odddity" section. These reveal an adamant patriarchal logic and institutionalization of motherhood, which mandates that a normal human mother should only raise and care for her legitimate, biological offspring and that a woman's care is nothing but a biological imperative and her duty as guardian of patriarchy (meaning in a traditional society, women bear children for her husband's family line).³

¹ Lin, 40.

² Not surprisingly, images of women breastfeeding nonhuman animals appear in the oddity section on the internet.

³ Gaard, G. *Mothering, Caring, and Animal Liberation*[1]. Retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/ye4gjbm>. Also Rich, A. (1976). *Of Woman Born*.

Taking up Adrienne Rich's critique of the patriarchal institutionalization of motherhood, contemporary ecofeminist theorists have been building women's care theories to serve not only as an alternative model to the masculinist, rights-based animal advocacy theory but also more subversively as "an act of defiance against patriarchy." The strategy for Western educated, middle-class women in dealing with the devaluation of maternal care is to expand the narrow definition of care to encompass other forms of practice such as writing, protesting, boycotting, and so on.⁴

Thinking in this vein of women-centered, care-based animal activism, this paper turns to non-Western societies and reconsiders the subversive potential of the traditional maternal care practice for women from more disadvantaged economic and educational backgrounds in capitalist patriarchy. In this paper, I use Taiwanese "dog mothers" (gou mama) as a case study to demonstrate that a traditional mothering practice and maternal warmth, when extended to other sentient beings, may actually wind up being a powerful critique and resistance to an omnipresent capitalist "social norm" that is oblivious to exploitation of others. Just as Josephine Donovan points out that the involvement of women of the late nineteenth century in the antivivisection movement, based on a felt kinship to animals can be read as a manifestation of a counter-hegemonic resistance against the "scientific imposition of the mathematical machine paradigm on all living forms,"⁵ these late twenty-first century Taiwanese dog mothers' activism, I argue, not unlike those of their Western counterparts, is an expression of protest against every particle permeating in every corner of Taiwanese society, that is patriarchal-capitalist devaluing and objectifying of the living other. However, the consequence of such a practice is this: while the very act of caring for stray dogs directly challenges the capitalist ethos of profit-oriented exploitation and subversive patriarchal virtue of motherhood, dog mothers are punished for their transgression of patrilineal maternal matrix beyond its domestic and speciesist bounds. While dog mothers are blamed for the stray problems, their protected "children" become the direct victims of such hostility toward women's spatial, maternal transgression.

In Taiwan, there emerged in the late 1980s a group of women labeled by outsiders as "dog mothers" (gou mama). Initially the term was intended as derogatory, but later was appropriated by the women to express their adamant alliance and identification with dogs. By calling themselves "dog mothers," they challenge the prevalent Confucian anthropocentric hierarchy and cultural bias against nonhuman animals. Dog mothers are those who devote themselves to caring for stray dogs, including TNR (trapping, neutering and releasing), rescuing, sheltering and feeding.⁶ As a new emerging cultural phenomenon, it cut across class, nationality, age, even gender. They consist of women from different marital or maternal statuses, classes, occupations and even nationalities.⁷ Though across a wide range of economic backgrounds, the majority of these women are identified as in their mid-life or (in their 60s) and belong to the working class without higher levels of education.⁸

Their involvement with caring and sheltering for stray dogs (some of them even keep up to 1000 dogs in their private animal shelters!) often brings them to the edge of bankruptcy physically, psychologically, financially and socially. Before I move on, it is crucial to point out that, in the case of these Taiwanese dog mothers, any interpretations such as the essentializing comment about women's maternal impulse to nurse (like Marge Simpson), or symptomatic capitalist pathology of obsessive animal collecting (like an old cat lady), etc.,⁹ by no means do justice to these women who have to endure tremendous social pressure, ridicule and hostility on a daily basis and at the same time suffer from so-called "compassion fatigue."¹⁰

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Donovan, p. 379.

⁶ Women from other places such as Mainland China and other South Asian countries also join the team.

⁷ My data is heavily relied on Lin Yi-shan's fieldwork study on the dog mother, the only systematic study available so far. Lin, YS. (2006). *Craziness? Love? Dog Mothers' Caring Image and Social Situation* [Gou mama de zhaogu tuxiang yu shehui chujing]. Master's thesis, National Tunghua University.

⁸ This presents an interesting contrast with animal rights activists in the US, or the studies of the animal rights movement where most activists tend to hold much higher levels of education. See Emily Gaarder, 4.

⁹ In Lin Yi-shan's study of dog mothers, she points out a societal stereotyping dog mothers as either self-sacrificing, loving, maternal, crazy or attention seeking and argues that all of these interpretations is a social construct imposed from the dominant culture so as to rationalize it as a form of "deviant behavior."

¹⁰ Figley, 15.

In Taiwanese, predominately Buddhist, religious context these women's action of care may arise out of intertwined combinations of religion, class and women's experience including Buddhist beliefs and practices (e.g., reincarnation, the doctrine of *ahimsa*, or "non-violence," and vegetarianism),¹¹ a feminine interrelated sense of self as well as a shared experience of oppression with these animals in misery.

In Taiwan, people tend to take it for granted that it is mother's (or woman's) job to clean up the mess within the family (e.g., doing dishes, laundry and taking care of the pets her child leaves behind, and so on). How then do we come to terms with women who volunteer to shoulder the responsibility to take care of the mess of stray animals—literally a class of "living garbage"—created, dumped and denied by the whole society? What do we make of the collective hostility and threat they have dealt with for their thankless sacrifices? And lastly, can we perceive the very act of maternal work of dog mothers as a "function of social practice" (to borrow Sarah Ruddicks' term) that challenges patriarchal-urban order, rather than as a gesture of a woman's patriarchal desire to fulfill the traditional role of a mother or as a source of social disturbances as perceived not only by their neighbors as well as the civil servants such as government animal catchers and policemen?

What seems to be common to these dog mothers is a sense of moral obligation, or a Bodhisattva's compassionate impulse, to care for these free-roaming street dogs. Yet it is true that this ethical imperative among these women may seem to partially derive from their familial and gendered role and experience as housekeepers who clean up the mess and care for the whole family. There was once a popular anecdote in Taiwan about a child who announces that his mother's favorite food is fish heads, only to learn through his mother's protest that the reason his mother always eats fish heads is because no one else in the family will help clean up the leftovers! By the same token, the dog mothers who clean up the "leftovers" are similar to the mother in the anecdote. What dog mothers do can be construed as extending their domestic care activities to the public sphere. In this light, dog mothers seem to continue what a patriarchal society expects a woman or mother to do, but only doing it outside of the private sphere. Granted dog mothers' extended maternal work to their community continues the traditional expectation of their gendered role as mothers, why are they not met with warm enthusiasm but only with foul mouthed abuse and harassment from the society?

I argue that dog mothers' behavior cuts open a fact too inconvenient for a capitalist and omnivorous society as a whole to face. The fact that women care for urban stray dogs weaves together at least two interrelated issues in contemporary Taiwanese society, which are worthy of an urban ecofeminist attention.¹² First is the perception of animals as objects and animality as abject in Taiwanese consumerist-oriented society. Second is the urban organization of public space such as streets, public squares and areas around public buildings and shopping malls, and so on, as exclusively androcentric. While the public sphere is conventionally conceived as men's turf, the presence of stray dogs becomes the utmost expression of urban otherness and symbol of barbarity that has to be systematically eliminated by the state. Any defiance against this golden rule of urban androcentrism will be carefully put under surveillance and punished. I contend that men's harassment and the government's accusation of dog mothers as the ringleader for the stray dog problem is a collective scapegoating of women for transgressing urban, androcentric values and boundaries, whereby animals become the indirect victims of such antagonism.

II. Dogs, Pets and Strays in Taiwan: A Non-anthropocentric Cultural History

Stray dogs and cats living on the streets in densely populated urban centers have been a serious social, environmental and animal rights problem for the local governments in many big cities outside of Anglo-US societies. Taiwan is no exception.

¹¹ It is not surprised to learn that Buddhism bears the brunt in the animal protection movement and the first animal protection law was lobbied by a Buddhist nuns and monks.

¹² Here ecofeminism pertains to a holistic and contextual-based critical apparatus examining complicated, social phenomena with an accentuation on the way the issues of nonhuman animals/nature and women are interlinked in different cultural contingencies. In particularly, I focus on the branch of ecofeminist analysis that centers on the underlying logic of objectification and exploitation of patriarchy and capitalism, as well as women's alliance with animals based a shared experience in capitalist society. Gaard, G. (2001). Tools for a cross-cultural feminist ethics: Exploring ethical contexts and contents in the Makah whale hunt. *Hypatia*, 16,1, pp. 1-26. Indiana University Press; Adams, C. J. (2010). *The Sexual Politics of Meat*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.

Anyone who has ever visited or lived in Taipei, particularly in the 1980s, cannot help but notice the ubiquity of these nonhuman urban animals lying about and sauntering around on the street. Without any human provision for food or care, they manage to just barely survive by scavenging human refuse, and to breed and live in parallel with their urban human counterparts.

Dogs (and cats) have lived long before urbanization took place and they have been part of Taiwanese pre-colonial indigenous and colonial history. The indigenous tribal inhabitants have long kept dogs and cats for hunting purposes and this practice can be traced back as early as the seventeenth century before the Han emigrated from Mainland China to Taiwan. Different from the native aboriginals, the agrarian Han settlers raised dogs as watchdogs.¹³ Beginning in the 1950s, trading of dogs, particularly German wolfdogs came into vogue.¹⁴ It is not until the 1980s, with the arrival of global market capitalism, that the concept of “pet” was introduced. The most commonly found dogs and cats went through a radical, conceptual transformation from cohabitants and helpers to commodity and they were packaged as pets, or more accurately, living commodities.

In shaping a new form of relationship with dogs/cats as pets in the new era of consumer-oriented globalization, the very idea of these animals as playthings and accessories for social status stands at odds with the preceding utilitarian, symbiotic relationship found in hunting and agrarian roots of the island. It, at the same time, forged a new, restrained perception of love, which is discriminatory, disposable and contingent upon the price of the animal. Here the ethics of care and responsibility neither accompany the animal upon transaction, nor is there an educational campaign to consumers and vendors on ethical treatment of animals and guidelines. On the contrary, due to the lack of governmental supervision and animal protection law regulation and enforcement, the whole network of pet markets and operations, all the way from advertisement, animal farming, trading, maintenance and customer service, and so on, collectively work to eradicate a sense of nonhuman animals as living *beings*, but merely as commodities and semiotic objects that happen to be living. They can be returned if the customers are not satisfied with the “products.” If the product have any “defects” (e.g., turn out to be not a purebred, sick, etc.)—a replacement will be guaranteed by the seller. The returned ones will be destroyed, just as they destroy the grown-up yet unsold puppies and their mothers. In the 1990s and onward, there began a notable shift of conceptualization of animal commodification to that of “companion animals” as a new commercial strategy to target a growing demand for urbanites’ need for emotional support began to emerge.

III. Objectification of Animals and Women

Linguistically, the word “pet” in Chinese evokes the notion of concubine in imperial China. In the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “pet” is defined as “any animal that is domesticated or tamed and kept as a favorite, or treated with indulgence and fondness.”¹⁵ This definition aptly dovetails the prevalent mentality toward pet animals. The Chinese equivalent for the English word “pet” is “chongwu,” literally means “*favored thing/being*.” *Etymologically, the word “wu” (thing or being) is not necessarily a discriminatory or objectifying term reserved only for nonhuman animals, as it also includes humans. Xu Shen, the first lexiconographer, wrote, “[Wu] means the ten thousand beings.”*¹⁶ Yet, current dominant global consumerist attitudes and treatments of pet dogs and cats as disposable objects evoke more poignantly an association with another one—“chongfei”—meaning “*favorite concubine*.” The term denotes a changing taste of its unpredictable emperor or master whose concubine might be pampered by the emperor one day and loses his favor the next day, thereby being forced to retreat a “*cold palace*” or “*palace of neglect*” (Ch. *lenggong*)—a place where abandoned favorites are banished or “*rounded up*” to spend the rest of their lives. In other words, today’s “*favored thing*” can be tomorrow’s stray, and it is completely at the mercy of their human “*masters*” or “*owners*.” In this light, Tuan Yifu’s analytical base for the domination in the human-pet relationship may have a conceptual root in ancient China. In the era of global capitalist marketing, pets are likened to those disposable concubines in imperial times. Once they lose the favor of the emperor, they will be banished onto the street and eventually be sent to the scaffold, so to speak.

¹³ Compared to dogs, cats were more independent and they were raised mainly to catch mice.

¹⁴ Chien, pp. 4-5.

¹⁵ Serpell, p. 10; Grier, pp.6-8.

¹⁶ Sterckx, p. 17.

Anthropocentric supremacy and dominance often gives an indubitable license to violate nonhuman animals. News about civilians' mistreatment of stray animals often hit the headlines, whereas the reverse scenario of stray dogs attacking humans has seldom been reported. An online blogger who lives in Tamsui observed that stray dogs in Taiwan are extremely well behaved and posits that the dogs' good-manners and avoidance of humans might derive from the learned lesson about human cruelty.¹⁷ A dog mother from one of the south Asian countries comments: "When I began to initiate some contact with stray dogs and cats, I see the dogs shunning away from humans and won't even eat the food prepared for them. Only after I walk away do they start to eat the food. There is a dog who starts to trust me and lets me touch it after three years of feeding it. Stray dogs do not behave like this in my country. How strange! What kind of horrible treatment have these dogs experienced to make them so afraid?"¹⁸ Liu Kar-shiang (pinyin: Liu Kexiang), a renowned Taiwanese nature writer and stray animal civil rights advocate, also reaches a similar conclusion that, compared to house/pet dogs, stray dogs tend to exhibit less aggression toward humans, especially the abandoned ones, due to their low self-esteem.

Human aggression, mostly from men, toward nonhuman animals is not an isolated phenomenon but a small fraction of a larger androgenic violence. As has already been articulated by some ecofeminists that all forms of oppressions are interlinked and the root of which is what the "sex-speciesist" system, through which patriarchy is sustained.¹⁹ "[P]atriarchy has been inscribed through species inequality as well as human inequality"²⁰ and this, of course, includes classism and racism. In this light, other prominent sex-related social phenomena in Taiwan, such as the Betel Nut Girls (binglang mei), beef show (niurou chang), prostitution of female children (chu ji), and so on, deserve an ecofeminist analysis in the vein of Carol Adams' critique as an interlinked problem of the way dualistic and hierarchical patriarchy is used to justify male superiority and violence. While each party, feminist and animal advocate, compartmentalizes issues of sexism and speciesism in their analysis of violence, oppression and social injustice, the reality is that one would miss the whole picture if the analysis of women and nature or animals are objectified and conceptualized as food and sexual objects. Li Ang's feminist novella, *The Butcher's Wife* (Sha fu), reveals such an interconnected nature of masculine violence.²¹

IV. Taiwanese Animal Protection Movements and Dog Mothers

While the Taiwanese government continues to control the population growth of these dogs by way of systematic extermination, instead of adopting other means of control such as neutering or more innovative means such as building "dog condos" as in Thailand, their effort has not been effective.²² Together with other factors, stray dogs persist. As of 1999, there are approximately 670,000 stray dogs in Taiwan.²³ And the government campaigned to reduce the number to 100,000 over the next decade.²⁴ To protest the government's pragmatic and genocidal attitude towards stray animals, several counter-voices including local residents, writers and animal protection groups have begun to intervene. Animal protection organizations such as the R.O.C. Animal Protection Association (Taiwan dongwu baohu xiehui), Life Conservationist Association (Shengming guanhuai xiehui), and the like, have been campaigning to reform inhuman animal control practice, to improve animal shelters, to promote responsible pet ownership, and to draw and implement animal protection law legislation, and so on.²⁵ Writers like Liu Kar-shiang and Chu Tian-hsin (Pinyin: Zhu Tianxin) also turn their gaze to this group of animals. Not only do they write about stray dogs and cats but they also organize press conferences to help raise consciousness.

¹⁷ Katz, A. (2008). *The Strays of Tamsui*. *Hubpages*. Retrieved from <http://hubpages.com/hub/The-Strays-of-Tamsui>. Discussion Strays in Taiwan.

¹⁸ Lin, p. 42.

¹⁹ Adams, p.174.

²⁰ Adams and Donovan, p.202.

²¹ Chang, CJ. (2009). "Putting Back the Animals: Woman-Animal Meme in Contemporary Taiwanese Ecofeminist Imagination."

²² Prystay, C. (2004, March 24). In Buddhist Bangkok, Even Stray Dogs Have Their Day. *MONGABAY.COM*, A1. Retrieved from http://www.mongabay.com/external/stray_dogs_thailand.htm

²³ Chien, p.124.

²⁴ Jenning, R. (2007, July 19). Taiwan hopes to muzzle stray dog problem in 10 years. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/idU5TP1836220070719>

²⁵ See Chronology of HSUS/HSI Animal Protection Activities in Taiwan http://www.hsus.org/hsi/dogs_and_cats/street_animal_welfare/taiwan_animal_control/chronology_of_hsushsi_animal_protection_activities_in_taiwan.html. Also Shih, p.443.

Among these stray animal advocacy groups, the most low-profiled and marginalized is the dog mother group,²⁶ sometimes also called by others as “loving mother” (aixin mama). As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the term “dog mother” pertains to a diverse group of women who devote themselves to caring for stray dogs.²⁷ There are also “dog fathers” but women are the predominant caretakers of these animals and their ways of caring are different from those dog fathers. This gendered disparage confirms many Western ecofeminist observations with regards to women’s participation in the animal advocate movement and caregiving capacity, whether such a capacity is a patriarchal by-product or an innate biologically embedded. As pointed out by Greta Gaard that this women-centered, care-based practice “seems to remain consistent from culture to culture,” women’s experience and capacity of “caring and empathy for others is based in women’s more interconnected self-identity.”

As a new emerging social movement, they start out as individuals who could not bear the sight of starving strays on the street and began to feed them, these women gradually form a small network to support one another. Whether their action of care should count as “activism” is open to debate. These women do not possess any cultural or political capital, like the abovementioned writer Chu Tian-hsin. They are neither interested in participating in political campaigns and protests like the more organized animal protection groups mentioned above, nor do they write books or give public talks to raise awareness of stray animal problems. The nickname “dog mother” captures well the nature of their activist activity, which centers solely on tending wellbeing of individual animal.

It is crucial to draw a line between Taiwanese dog mothers and so-called “animal collectors,” a cultural phenomenon that is prevalent in Europe and North America. According to James Serpell, animal collectors are people “with compulsion to collect stray animals in such numbers that they eventually overwhelm the person’s ability to provide them with adequate care.”²⁸ Animal collecting is often considered as pathology of obsessive-compulsive disorder, attributed to early or sudden loss of a loved one or “emotional bereavement” and problems with letting go.²⁹ Many studies also point out its gendered specificity. Animal collectors tend to be a female, as exemplified in Western popular culture’s stereotype of an old cat lady who lives relatively isolated in urban areas.³⁰ Whether or not women’s collecting animals can be interpreted as a critique in itself of consumer culture goes beyond the scope of this present project. Here the fundamental difference between Taiwanese dog mothers and animal collectors seems to be that many of the members of the former group have reported their apathy and even disgust and fear toward dogs before they became involved. The primary motivation is mostly a humanistic and Buddhist one. It derives from their witnessing the plight of stray animals and the way society treats animals as “living garbage” dumped onto the street.

With regards to the negative reception of dog mothers within Taiwanese society, here it is worthwhile to take an overall look at the feminist-environmental movements after the revocation of martial law in 1987 as a point of contrast. Women, mostly middle-class mothers in their thirties and forties, in late 1980s were encouraged to step out of their private domain, enter into the community, and expand their maternal practice to the public sphere. As a result of this, social networks and directories were established and this served as an organizational foundation for the creation of the “Homemaker’s Union for Environmental Protection” (jiating zhufu huanjing baohu lianmeng).³¹

²⁶ Lin, pp. 122-123.

²⁷ In the West, there are also more women involved in environmental and animal rights movements. As Lyle Munro contends that in the West from the nineteenth century on, “women historically have enjoyed a high standing as protectors of nonhuman animals.” See Munro, L. (2008). “Caring about Blood, Flesh, and Pain: Women’s Standing in the Animal Protection Movement.”

²⁸ Serpell, 32.

²⁹ Lockwood, R. (1994). The psychology of animal collectors. *Trends*, 9, 18-21. Lockwood’s article can also be found in http://www.animalsheltering.org/resource_library/policies_and_guidelines/hoarders_interventions_that_work.html.

³⁰ According to the 1999 study, HARC (the Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium) found that among 2000 cases of hoarding, 76 percent of hoarders are female and more than half live alone. See Simon, C. (2011, September). Cat Bugarler. In *News & Features*. Retrieved from the Phoenix.com:

http://www.bostonphoenix.com/boston/news_features/other_stories/documents/02893062.htm

³¹ Doris Chang, 119.

This feminist group not only managed to succeed in promoting environmental education in elementary schools but also urged municipal governments to “allocate human and financial resources for used paper, plastics, and glass containers.”³² Their environmental campaign covers anti-nuclear movements, golf course, second-hand smoking, the promotion of reusable shopping bags, etc. Such maternal practice developed along the lines of Sara Ruddicks’ idea of mothering as a conscious form of social practice, in which mothers’ work is regarded as “a function of a social practice rather than as a consequence of biological destiny.”³³ The emergence of the dog mother phenomenon certainly has to do with the ambience of the post-martial law feminist and environmental discourses and movements of the time. However, sharply contrasting with the high profiled and well-supported middle-class based Housemakers’ Union group and other feminist organizations, the loosely organized dog mothers “group” does not share the same prestige and support for their work. On the contrary, they are perceived as the source of social problem and the reason is obvious.

Dog mothers’ caring for nonhuman animals does not accord with urban, middle-class family values, which are essentially Confucian, whereas tending to the environment for the sake of future generations is, at least on a rhetorical level. Advocating animal rights, civil responsibility and interspecies care to this group of animals is difficult to defend, especially in places that view these animals as commodities instead of humans’ helpers or best friends. It is even more so for stray dogs as they are often perceived as a public nuisance; they are “vectors of human disease and they provide insight into effects of urbanization on man.”³⁴ From the standpoint of traditional urban ecologists, urban dogs serve as indicators of stress, pollution, and environmental deterioration and as models for behavioral adaptations to urban life. Alan Beck, an often-cited scholar on the subject on free-ranging urban dogs, writes, “[t]he role of the dog is widely recognized in the spread of rabies.”³⁵ The extension of animal rights or ethics of care to stray animals is also a hard piece to sell in urban centers as they have become the symbol of urban excess and embody a rotting process that human civilization is trying turn away from.³⁶ This alone justifies extreme surveillance of pet/companion dogs as examined by Karla Armbruster’s writing about dog leashes in the United States and the ruthless systematic extermination of urban stray dogs in other countries.³⁷

V. Conclusion

In Taiwanese male-dominated consumerist society, dog mothers’ caring for stray dogs uncovers an inconvenient truth. That is, there is a deep-ingrained androcentric supremacy reflected in the current order of Taiwanese urban sphere, which is anti-animals (except leashed pets accompanied by their owners) and hostile towards women. As a woman nature writer, Wang Jui-hsiang (Pinyin: Wang Ruixiang), once talked about her experience of strolling around on a hill adjacent to her neighborhood in search of insects. She was perceived by male passerbys as a social deviant and transgressor, and thereby courted with hostility and harassment. Such a gendered spatial division helps to understand dog mothers’ caring for the unwanted “things/animals” in men’s domain as a form of transgression. Such an interspecies caregiving in an open space defies both the capitalist ethos of exploitation and patriarchal notion of motherhood. If stray dogs are direct victims of Taiwan’s economic development, urbanization and the global pet industry, then their caretakers—dog mothers—become the indirect victims whom society winds up punishing. In the end, they become the scapegoat for the continued stray dog problem, rather than a Bodhisattva (or Guanyin in Chinese, the goddess of mercy) who extends her arms to protect any sentient being who cries out aloud in the ocean of endless suffering.

References

- Adams, C. J. (2010). *The Sexual Politics of Meat*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.
- Adams, C.J., Donovan, J. (Eds). (2007). *The feminist care tradition in animal ethics: a reader* (pp.202). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Armbruster, K. “Dogs, Dirt, and Public Space.” Human Animal Studies Fellowship Peer Scholar Lecture, hosted at Duke University, Durham, NC. July 5, 2009.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ruddicks, 17.

³⁴ Beck, xi.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See Armbruster’s “Dogs, Dirt, and Public Space.”

³⁷ See Karlekar, H. (2008). *Savage Humans and Stray Dogs; a Study in Aggression*.

- Beck, A. (2001). *The Ecology of Stray Dogs: a Study of Free Ranging Urban Animals*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.
- Chang, C.J. (2009). "Putting Back the Animals: Woman-Animal Meme in Contemporary Taiwanese Ecofeminist Imagination." In Lu, SH., Mi, JY.(Eds), *Chinese Ecocinema in the Age of Environmental Challenge*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Chang, D. (2009). *Women's Movements in Twentieth-Century Taiwan*. Champaign-Urbana, IL: University of Illinois.
- Chien, YJ. (2002). *The Commodification of Pets in Taiwan*. Master's Thesis, Taiwan University. (in Chinese)
- Chronology of HSUS/HSI Animal Protection Activities in Taiwan
http://www.hsus.org/hsi/dogs_and_cats/street_animal_welfare/taiwan_animal_control/chronology_of_hsushsi_animal_protection_activities_in_taiwan.html.
- Donovan, J. (2008). "Animal Rights and Feminist Theory." In Flynn, Clinton, P. (Ed.), *Social Creatures: A Human and Animal Studies*. Brooklyn: Latern Book.
- Figley, C. R. , Roop, R.G. (2006). *Compassion Fatigue in the Animal-Care Community*. Human Society University. Washington, D.C : Humane Society Press.
- Gaard, G. *Mothering, Caring, and Animal Liberation*[1]. Retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/ye4gjb>.----- (2001). "Tools for a cross-cultural feminist ethics: Exploring ethical contexts and contents in the Makah whale hunt." *Hypatia*, 16,1, 1-26. Indiana University Press.
- Gaarder, E. (2011). *Women and Animal Rights Movement*, Rutgers University Press.
- Grier, K.C. (2006). *Pets in America: A History*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press.
- Jenning, R. (2007, July 19). Taiwan hopes to muzzle stray dog problem in 10 years. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTP1836220070719>
- Karlekar, H. (2008). *Savage Humans and Stray Dogs; a Study in Aggression*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Katz, A. (2008). The Strays of Tamsui. *Hubpages*. Retrieved from <http://hubpages.com/hub/The-Strays-of-Tamsui>. Discussion Strays in Taiwan.
- Lin, YS. (2006). *Craziness? Love? Dog Mothers' Caring Image and Social Situation* [Gou mama de zhaogu tuxiang yu shehui chujing]. Master's thesis, National Tunghua University. (In Chinese)
- Lockwood, R. (1994). The psychology of animal collectors. *Trends*, 9, 18-21. *Lockwood's article can also be found in* http://www.animalsheltering.org/resource_library/policies_and_guidelines/hoarders_interventions_that_work.html .
- Munro, L. (2008) "Caring about Blood, Flesh, and Pain: Women's Standing in the Animal Protection Movement." In Flynn, C.P. (Ed). *Social Creatures: A Human and Animal Studies Reader*. Brooklyn: Latern Book.
- Prystay, C. (2004, March 24). In Buddhist Bangkok, Even Stray Dogs Have Their Day. *MONGABAY.COM*, A1. Retrieved from http://www.mongabay.com/external/stray_dogs_thailand.htm
- Rich, A. (1976). *Of Woman Born*. W.W. Norton & Company.
- Ruddicks, S. (1995). *Maternal Thinking: Toward A Politics of Peace*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Serpell, J. (1996). *In the Company of Animals: A Study of Human-animal Relationships*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Serpell, J.A. (1990). "Pet-keeping and animal domestication: A reappraisal." In Clutton-Brock, J. (Ed.) *The Walking Larder: Patterns of Domestication, Pastoralism and Predation* (pp.10). London: Taylor & Francis Inc.
- Simon, C. (2011, September). "Cat Bugarler." In *News & Features*. Retrieved from the Pheonix.com:http://www.bostonphoenix.com/boston/news_features/other_stories/documents/02893062.htm
- Sterckx, R. (2002). *The Animal and the Daemon in Early China*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Shih, CH. (2008). *Buddhist Meta-Ethics* (pp.443).Taipei: Fajie Publishing House.