
Evolving Practices: Hunting, Wildlife Consumption, and Gender Dynamics in China's Cultural Landscape

by

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Hunting, as a fundamental activity deeply intertwined with human history, has left an indelible mark on cultures worldwide. In China, this practice has evolved over millennia, forming a complex tapestry interwoven with cultural, social, and gender dynamics. Despite the paucity of explicit information regarding the intricate relationships between hunting, wildlife consumption, and gender dynamics in the Chinese context, this study embarks on a comprehensive exploration of these interconnected themes. By analyzing and synthesizing information from four distinct texts, this review aims to shed light on the complex interplay between hunting practices, wildlife consumption, and the nuanced roles that gender plays within these domains in China and South Asia.

The multifaceted history of hunting in China spans from ancient times to the present day, encompassing a diverse array of practices, beliefs, and attitudes that have evolved alongside the ever-changing societal landscape. While hunting has undergone significant transformations over the centuries, its impact on the environment, ecosystems, and human societies has remained profound. Importantly, hunting has often been intertwined with the consumption of wildlife, forming a complex relationship that impacts both the ecological balance and cultural heritage of the region. This interplay between hunting and wildlife consumption necessitates an interdisciplinary approach to unravel the multifarious dimensions of this phenomenon. One intriguing aspect of this exploration is the examination of gender dynamics within the realm of hunting and wildlife consumption. While the gendered aspects of hunting practices in China may not be explicitly documented, an investigation into the subtle roles and dynamics that underlie these practices is essential to comprehending the broader cultural and societal implications. This study acknowledges that gender roles and perceptions are often deeply entangled within traditional hunting practices, potentially influencing resource distribution, power dynamics, and ecological interactions.

In order to illuminate these intricate connections, this review will draw upon insights gleaned from four different texts. Each research offers a unique perspective on the relationship between hunting, wildlife consumption, and potential gender dynamics in China and South Asia more broadly. Through a comparative analysis

of these articles, this study seeks to discern patterns, contradictions, and gaps in our understanding of these phenomena, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive and nuanced comprehension of the subject matter.

In the paper *The Gender Dimensions of the Illegal Trade in Wildlife Local and Global Connections in Vietnam*, by Pamela McElwee¹, the focus is on understanding and regulating the complex dynamics of the wildlife trade, with an emphasis on the role of gender analysis. The author discusses the various stages of the wildlife trade, from production to market to consumption, and explores how gender considerations can contribute to more effective regulation. Furthermore, she highlights that all aspects of wildlife use, from the extraction of animals in forests to their consumption at the table, have gendered dimensions. The text is significant since it sheds light on how cross-border trade between China and Vietnam exerts significant pressure on Vietnamese wildlife. The demand from China has grown due to factors like an affluent middle class and Chinese state law restricting animal harvesting. The trade involves live animals, mainly ending up as bushmeat or traditional medicine. Despite some animals being banned from international trade, an estimated thirty tons of wildlife, pass through the Vietnam-China border daily. Turtles make up the majority, followed by mammals like pangolins and macaques. Notably, Vietnamese wildlife faces demand not only from China but also domestically due to a rising middle class. Wildlife, even endangered insects, are consumed at specialty restaurants in urban areas. A survey in Hanoi revealed that forty-five percent of households admitted to using wild animal products for various purposes. Incorporating a gender analysis can provide valuable insights into how hunting and wild animal trade regulations should be designed to reduce illegal and unsustainable practices. Despite the importance of gender analysis, it has not yet been fully integrated into discussions around regulating the wildlife trade, which has primarily focused on policy and enforcement rather than social factors. Various interventions to address unsustainable wildlife harvesting are discussed, including market regulations, legal restrictions, community rights over lands, consumer awareness campaigns, alternative income projects, and hunting season limitations. However, the author notes that these interventions have both positive and negative social impacts, and gender implications must be considered for each solution. The text provides specific examples, such as the ineffectiveness of blanket hunting bans in Vietnam, where professional hunters often elude enforcement, while local hunters, who may be primarily women, suffer economic losses. The author also points out that hunting bans fail to discriminate between species that are hunted, which can disproportionately affect communities relying on hunting to control crop predators that are not endangered. Solely targeting the initial stages of the wildlife trade (hunting) may lead to social inequities and uneven implementation. Various stakeholders seeking solutions, including NGOs and governments, are sometimes implicated in the expansion of the illicit wildlife trade due to factors like infrastructure development. Gender plays a role in the enforcement and perpetuation of wildlife

¹Pamela McElwee, *The Gender Dimensions of the Illegal Trade in Wildlife: Local and Global Connections in Vietnam*, in *Gender and Sustainability: Lessons from Asia and Latin America*, edited by María Luz Cruz-Torres and Pamela McElwee, University of Arizona Press, Tucson 2012, pp. 71-93.

trade. The text highlights instances where government officials and law practitioners are consumers of wild animals or are bribed to turn a blind eye to the trade. The gender diversity within these forces could impact their involvement in the illegal wildlife trade. The author also discusses gender considerations in campaigns aimed at reducing wildlife consumption. While some strategies, such as using female celebrities in public service announcements, have been relatively successful, others like urging young people to resist pressure from bosses to consume wild animals may face challenges due to social norms and hierarchies. In conclusion, the text emphasizes that a comprehensive approach is needed to address the global illegal wildlife trade. This approach should incorporate gender analysis at all stages of the trade, considering the impacts of regulations and interventions on different genders, as well as the social dynamics influencing wildlife consumption and trade. Sustainable solutions, informed by gender-aware insights, are crucial for effectively managing and reducing the illegal wildlife trade over the long term.

In the second text *Rethinking game consumption in tourism: a case of the 2019 novel coronavirus pneumonia outbreak in China*, Tianyu Ying, Kaiyun Wang, Xinyi Liu, Jun Wen and Edmund Goh² highlight a significant and potentially lethal connection between novel coronavirus pneumonia (NCP) and the consumption of wildlife in the context of tourism. Despite the extensive media coverage of NCP, there has been limited academic research exploring the illness, particularly from the perspective of food neophilic tourism. This research area warrants attention due to the pivotal role that food plays in motivating tourists' travel choices. In food neophilic tourism, travelers engage in the direct consumption of exotic wildlife and cuisine. However, this adventurous eating behavior comes with inherent health risks, as wild and exotic animals can carry dangerous viruses capable of triggering global health epidemics like SARS, H1N1, bird flu, and NCP. Although international government agencies have made legislative efforts to regulate the consumption of wild and exotic animals, the demand from food neophilic tourists continues to rise. The authors of the paper advocate for a dialogue within the field of tourism studies to delve into food tourism and offer both practical and theoretical insights into this persistent and relevant phenomenon. The NCP outbreak has posed new challenges for both academia and the tourism industry. Wildlife consumption remains intertwined with travel and tourism, an industry heavily reliant on the food supply. The consumption of related foods has the potential to yield adverse effects on tourists, destinations, and the general public. The authors also suggest that tourism scholars should explore various research avenues, such as consumer behavior (including risk perceptions), marketing strategies, and crisis management. By delving into these areas, researchers can provide a comprehensive context for understanding NCP and other public health concerns. Additionally, interdisciplinary studies that incorporate ethics and disease-related aspects could enhance public knowledge in this domain. Ultimately, this collective research effort could yield

² Tianyu Ying, Kaiyun Wang, Xinyi Liu, Jun Wen and Edmund Goh, *Rethinking Game Consumption in Tourism: A Case of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia Outbreak in China*, in "Tourism Recreation Research", 46, 2, 2021, pp. 304-309.

effective measures for risk mitigation and public education. These measures could promote safety and awareness during times of crisis, safeguarding the well-being of tourists, residents, and destinations.

Wild meat consumption (WMC) in the context of Nanxiong, South China, is the focus of Junfan Lin and Paul Waley's article titled *Researching wild meat consumption in contemporary Nanxiong, South China: a social practice approach*.³ The study utilizes a social practice approach to understand the motivations, behaviors, and dynamics behind the consumption of wild meat, particularly in relation to its historical and cultural significance. The research was conducted through in-depth interviews, group interviews, and participant observation, carried out in the years 2015-2016 and 2020. The authors emphasize the timeliness of their research in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has drawn attention to the importance of reducing wild meat consumption due to its potential role in zoonotic disease transmission. The study aims to shed light on why specific individuals continue to prefer wild meat and how their practices and attitudes toward consumption have evolved over time. The paper introduces the concept of social practice theory as an innovative framework for understanding the underlying motivations and societal factors that drive wild meat consumption. This theory provides a comprehensive tool to analyze the multifaceted nature of this consumption behavior within the broader context of everyday life. The study identifies the practices associated with preparing, cooking, and tasting wild meat and examines how these practices have changed over time. It also delves into the materiality of taste and texture, as well as the cultural and social aspects that shape the consumption of wild meat. The authors propose the concept of "practice memory" to explore the development and persistence of the practice of wild meat consumption across generations. They discuss the role of individual memories and peer communication in sustaining this tradition. The research also addresses the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on wild meat consumption. While not all participants agreed on changes in the taste of wild meat since the pandemic, the study suggests that the foundational aspects of taste and enjoyment have been questioned. The authors argue that social pressure, stigmatization, and educational campaigns can play a significant role in reducing the demand for and consumption of wild meat. The study highlights the advantages of framing wild meat consumption as a practice for policymaking purposes. Rather than focusing solely on individuals' food choices, the authors advocate for targeting the practice itself and its associated memories. They suggest interventions that disrupt the transfer of practice memory between generations and emphasize the need for long-term efforts to combat established consumption patterns. Additionally, the authors recommend launching campaigns and social marketing aimed at influencing younger consumers' preferences and encouraging more sustainable food practices.

The last study titled *Exploitation Histories of Pangolins and Endemic Pheasants on Hainan Island, China: Baselines and Shifting Social Norms*, authored by

³ Junfan Lin and Paul Waley, *Researching Wild Meat Consumption in Contemporary Nanxiong, South China: A Social Practice Approach*, in "Food, Culture & Society", 20 March 2023, pp.1-18.

Yifu Wang, Nigel Leader-Williams, and Samuel T. Turvey⁴, investigates the historical exploitation of wildlife species on Hainan Island, China, focusing on the Chinese pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*) and the Hainan peacock-pheasant (*Polyplectron katsumatae*). The researchers conducted interviews with 169 villagers residing around seven terrestrial nature reserves on the island, aiming to reconstruct past hunting and consumption patterns of these species from the mid-twentieth century onwards. The study also seeks to understand the influence of historical activities on current consumption behaviors and to explore potential interventions for mitigating wildlife consumption. The findings reveal that while consuming peacock-pheasant meat was a traditional activity on Hainan, eating pangolin meat was not part of local traditions due to cultural taboos. However, attitudes towards hunting both pangolins and peacock-pheasants shifted over time due to pro-hunting policies and a state-run wildlife trade from the 1960s to the 1980s. These changes in social norms persist today and continue to shape local perspectives on wildlife consumption. The study suggests that historical contexts are crucial in influencing current wildlife consumption habits. The research provides insights into the historical dynamics of hunting and consumption of pangolins and other species on Hainan Island. It highlights the impact of governmental policies, societal changes, and economic factors on these behaviors. The study also emphasizes the importance of understanding local historical contexts when designing conservation strategies. The authors suggest that targeted interventions, such as promoting alternative meat choices and livelihoods, could effectively address the consumption of wild meat in the region. Furthermore, the study underscores the ongoing challenges faced by Hainan's biodiversity due to hunting and consumption behaviors. Despite efforts to regulate wildlife hunting and trade, the research indicates that these practices continue, and urgent actions are needed to address illegal hunting and consumption. The study's historical perspective contributes to the understanding of shifts in societal norms and provides valuable insights for the development of effective conservation measures, especially in light of changing policies and public health concerns, such as those brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In conclusion, the historical significance of hunting in China is deeply rooted, and its impact has reverberated through time, influencing both the environment and human societies. The intricate relationship between hunting, wildlife consumption and gender dynamics underscores the need for an interdisciplinary approach to unravel its dimensions. The four different papers reviewed in this study contribute to a more comprehensive comprehension of these interconnected themes. Pamela McElwee's work highlights the gender dimensions of the illegal wildlife trade, revealing the importance of incorporating gender analysis in crafting effective regulations. Tianyu Ying, Kaiyun Wang, Xinyi Liu, Jun Wen, and Edmund Goh's text underscores the potential public health risks associated with wildlife consumption, particularly in the context of food neophilic tourism, and advocates for comprehensive research and interventions. Junfan Lin and Paul Waley delve into wild meat

⁴ Yifu Wang, Nigel Leader-Williams and Samuel T. Turvey, *Exploitation Histories of Pangolins and Endemic Pheasants on Hainan Island, China: Baselines and Shift-ing Social Norms*, in "Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution", 9, Article 608057, 2021, pp.1-12.

consumption, utilizing a social practice approach to understand the motivations and evolution of this behavior, while also acknowledging its influence on zoonotic disease transmission. Yifu Wang, Nigel Leader-Williams, and Samuel T. Turvey's study examines historical exploitation patterns, revealing the impact of shifting social norms on wildlife consumption practices and advocating for context-aware conservation strategies.

Collectively, these texts emphasize the need for comprehensive, interdisciplinary research and interventions that account for historical, cultural, gender-related, and health-related factors. Such an approach is essential for effectively addressing the complex interrelationships between hunting, wildlife consumption, and gender dynamics in the Chinese context, ultimately contributing to more sustainable and balanced ecosystems, societies, and cultural heritage. However, while the historical and ecological dimensions of the matter are evident, the role of gender dynamics is often overlooked, leading to an incomplete understanding of the complex web of interactions. By incorporating a gender perspective into the investigation, we can shed light on the subtle yet influential ways in which traditional hunting practices are shaped by and subsequently shape prevailing gender norms. These dynamics permeate power structures, resource distribution, and even ecological relationships. Failing to recognize and analyze these aspects can result in an incomplete portrayal of the issue, hindering our ability to devise holistic solutions. In essence, adopting a more gender perspective could offer a vital lens through which we can attain a further comprehensive understanding of the interconnected themes of hunting, wildlife consumption, and their implications. It enables us to uncover hidden layers of meaning, challenge conventional assumptions, and foster a holistic approach that embraces the complexities of human-environment interactions.