

Moral Circle Expansion

Summary

This intervention aims to expand moral concern for non-human animals in China (and potentially other neglected countries) by introducing educational materials in schools and universities about common cultural practices that harm animals. The scale of harm caused to animals in China is huge, and the country has a large global influence, making this a potentially highly impactful intervention. However, extraordinary sensitivity would be necessary to navigate concerns of cultural imperialism. Cultural differences and China's highly authoritarian regime would further complicate advocacy. Furthermore, direct evidence for this type of intervention is weak, and long feedback loops make it difficult to judge progress. If successful, this intervention would likely create positive externalities by expanding the circle of moral concern.

Description of intervention

This intervention involves educating high school or university students in China about common cultural practices (e.g., yin yang fish - a dish where the fish is cooked without being killed and remains alive when served) to increase moral concern. The intervention would most likely be carried out in China, a country with considerable global influence where concern for non-human animals is low and the scale of the problem huge.

Biggest strengths and weaknesses of this intervention

- Strengths: the scale is massive, both in terms of possible direct effects on Chinese meat consumption, as well as indirect effects on long-term attitudes towards animals. This increases yet further if you think there's some non-trivial probability of a value lock-in (e.g., China playing a large role in world government).
- Weaknesses: there are unique cultural challenges to running a non-profit in China, and the feedback loops are a lot less direct than most of the other interventions we are considering. Also, trying to change moral values through schools and

universities in a highly authoritarian country could be quite risky. Additionally, it would be easy for critics to decry this intervention as imperialist. This could not only harm the probability of success of this intervention, but also potentially jeopardize future animal advocacy work in China.

Summary of how the intervention scores on each criterion

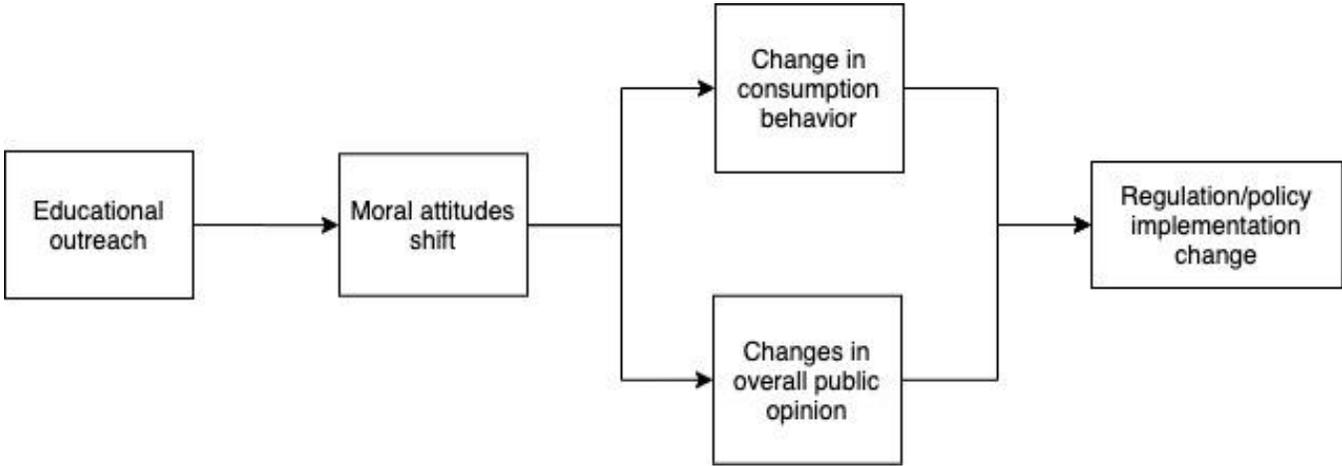
Animal	Problem	Idea	Score	Strength of idea	Limiting factors	Execution difficulty	Externalities
				2	1.5	1	0.5
All animals	Moral circle expansion	Education	27.3	6	6	3	6.5

Brief description of how the intervention performs on each criterion

Criteria	Ranking	Description
Strength of the idea	6/10	The idea broadly speaking has historical precedent, and has examples of success (including US public opinion changes towards environmentalism [1], and the success of British antislavery protests [2]). However, the direct evidence much less robust than other cause areas, and the positive effects go through a fairly long causal chain.
Limiting factor	6/10	Many existing EAs have mentioned China as a priority country for animal advocacy [3], and the size of the problem is huge [4]. Moreover, previous funding has gone into Chinese animal organizations from EA funders [5] [6].

Execution difficulty	3/10	We would probably need to build existing contacts with an animal rights umbrella organization in China [7]. Additionally, founders would need to possess generally high competence, and awareness of China-specific cultural factors. It thus seems quite sensitive to the skills of founding employees. Many large effects of this intervention are on long-term value change, so feedback loops are less direct than for near-term interventions.
Externalities	6.5/10	The intervention offers the chance to shape the animal advocacy movement in China early on, and potentially have huge knock-on effects in the far-future. The downsides are that it could cement the perception of veg*ism/plant-based diets as a form of Western imperialism - this factor is capping the score for this section.

Basic causal chain



Provisional conclusion

I think the intervention is risky but promising, and worthy of in-depth research to see if unique cultural hurdles associated with setting up/partnering with a non-profit in China can be avoided. I mostly think this intervention is promising because of: (1) the enormous (long-term) scale, and robustness relative to other far-future causes, and (2) the high value of information. If indeed it is particularly difficult to partner with an existing Chinese

animal advocacy organization, this is worthwhile information for future animal advocates.

References

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