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Vegetarians in modern Beijing:  
Food, identity and body techniques in everyday  
experience

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

This study investigates how self-defined vegetarians in modern Beijing construct their identity through everyday experience in the hope that it may contribute to a better understanding of the development of individuality and self-identity in Chinese society in a post-traditional order, and also contribute to understanding the development of the vegetarian movement in a non-‘Western’ context. It is perhaps the first scholarly attempt to study the vegetarian community in China that does not treat it as an Oriental phenomenon isolated from any outside influence. Using qualitative data collected from interviews with vegetarians and non-vegetarians, observation and text from social media, this study finds that the motivations behind vegetarians in modern Beijing are highly similar to the motivations revealed in studies of vegetarians in other societies. The religious influence may be especially noticeable in the local context and is often combined with other arguments for vegetarianism, such as ethics. Vegetarians in Beijing have developed different strategies to maintain their vegetarian identity in a mostly non-vegetarian society, including taking more control of their own diet, using rhetoric to avoid direct confrontation and making certain compromises. Vegetarianism-related organizations are important in forming the vegetarian community, yet a general depoliticisation of vegetarianism in China makes it difficult to strive for more rights for vegetarians. The thesis suggests areas for future research about the vegetarian community in China, the global vegetarian movement and how it may contribute to future policy-making.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
List of Tables, Figures and Photos .....	5
Key to Transcription Conventions Used .....	7
Acknowledgment.....	8
Author's Declaration.....	9
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	10
1.1 Historical Background .....	11
1.2 Key Concepts of the Thesis .....	18
1.3 Research Setting .....	22
1.4 Research Questions .....	23
1.5 Thesis Outline .....	24
Chapter 2 Literature Review .....	28
2.1 Introduction .....	28
2.2 Food and Identity .....	29
2.3 Constructing a Vegetarian Identity .....	34
2.3.1 Defining Vegetarianism .....	34
2.3.2 Motivations for becoming and Remaining Vegetarian .....	37
2.3.3 Processes of becoming Vegetarian .....	44
2.3.4 Social Relations of Vegetarians and Non-vegetarians .....	46
2.3.5 Perception of Vegetarians and Non-vegetarians.....	48
2.3.6 Cognitive Comparison between Vegetarians and Non-vegetarians .....	50
2.4 Conclusions .....	53
Chapter 3 Methodology.....	55
3.1 Introduction .....	55
3.2 Research Methods and Rationale.....	55
3.3 Data Collection.....	57
3.3.1 Fieldwork Setting .....	57
3.3.2. Sampling Procedure .....	62
3.3.3 Interview Procedure .....	65
3.3.4 Overview of the Sample.....	72
3.3.5 Observation .....	85
3.3.6 The Issue of Auto-ethnography .....	87
3.4 Data Analysis .....	87
3.5 Ethics .....	88
3.6 Conclusion .....	88
Chapter 4 Understanding vegetarianism in modern Beijing .....	89
4.1 Introduction .....	89
4.2 (Re)interpreting Vegetarianism: Vegetarianism in the Local Context .....	89
4.2.1 How Vegetarians Understand Vegetarianism.....	89
4.2.2 How Non-vegetarians Understand Vegetarianism .....	98
4.3 What does a Vegetarian Body Look and Feel Like? The Image of Vegetarianism .....	103
4.4 Conclusions .....	110

Chapter 5 Life Trajectory: Motivations and Process(es) of Becoming and Remaining Vegetarian.....	112
5.1 Introduction .....	112
5.2 Motivations of Becoming and Remaining Vegetarian.....	112
5.2.1 Ethics .....	115
5.2.2 Religious Influence.....	119
5.2.3 Health .....	122
5.2.4 Environment.....	126
5.2.5 Gustatory preference .....	128
5.2.6 Peer Influence.....	132
5.2.7 Weight Control .....	132
5.2.8 Other Motivations.....	133
5.2.9 Development of Motivations.....	133
5.3 The Process of Becoming Vegetarian .....	135
5.4 Conclusions .....	141
Chapter 6 Social Relations of Vegetarians in Modern Beijing .....	144
6.1 Introduction .....	144
6.2 Inner-group Social Relations: How Vegetarians Interact with Each Other ....	145
6.2.1 How Vegetarians Meet Each Other.....	145
6.2.2 How Vegetarians Communicate with Each Other .....	149
6.3 Inter-group Social Relation: How Vegetarians Interact with Non-vegetarians in Close Social Relationships .....	152
6.3.1 Stories Told by Vegetarians .....	152
6.3.2 Stories Told from the Other Side: Non-vegetarians' Narratives.....	162
6.4 Conclusions .....	166
Chapter 7 Doing Vegetarian: Maintaining a Vegetarian Lifestyle in Modern Beijing .....	168
7.1 Introduction .....	168
7.2 Individual Endeavour .....	168
7.3 Striving for the Needs of Vegetarians as a Social Group .....	190
7.3.1 Vegetarian Restaurants: The Unofficial Centre for Promoting Vegetarianism.....	190
7.3.1.1 Vegetarian Cuisine in China: An Overview .....	190
7.3.1.2 Vegetarian Restaurants in Modern Beijing.....	192
7.3.2 Availability of Vegetarian Options in Other Social Situations.....	201
7.4 Conclusions .....	206
Chapter 8 Conclusions and Discussion .....	208
8.1 Research Questions and Main Findings of the Study .....	208
8.1.1 Body and Identity through the Everyday Practice of Vegetarians .....	208
8.1.2 A New Type of Vegetarianism, or Simply Vegetarianism? .....	211
8.1.3 Vegetarianism and Gender in a Chinese Context .....	212
8.1.4 The Politicised Diet .....	214
8.2 Implications of the Findings and Recommendations for Future Study .....	215
8.3 Limitations of the Study.....	217
Appendix A: Information sheet for one-on-one interviews.....	220
Appendix B: Information sheet for focus groups .....	222

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Appendix C: Consent form for one-on-one interviews.....	224
Appendix D: Consent form for focus groups .....	225
References .....	226

## List of Tables, Figures and Photos

### List of tables

Table 3-1 Guidance for Districts and Counties of Beijing by the Government of Beijing.....	60-61
Table 3-2 List of Current and Former Vegetarian Interviewees from the First Leg of Fieldwork.....	74-75
Table 3-3 Non-Chinese Vegetarian Expert Witnesses from the First Leg of Fieldwork.....	76
Table 3-4 List of Non-vegetarian Interviewees from the First Leg of Fieldwork.....	77
Table 3-5 List of Current and Former Vegetarians Interviewees from the Second Leg of Fieldwork.....	79
Table 3-6 List of Non-vegetarian Interviewees from the Second Leg of Fieldwork.....	80-81
Table 3-7 Members of Focus Group 1.....	83
Table 3-8 Members of Focus Group 2.....	84
Table 4-1 Sources of Knowledge on Vegetarianism Reported by Vegetarians.....	96
Table 4-2 Sources of Knowledge on Vegetarianism Reported by Non-vegetarians.....	99
Table 5-1 Reported Motivations of Becoming and Remaining Vegetarian.....	114
Table 7-1 Food Consumption of Vegetarian Participants for a Period of 24 Hours...	170-174
Table 7-2 Food Consumption of Non-vegetarian Participants for a Period of 24 Hours.....	175-179

### List of figures

Figure 3-1 Map of Districts in Beijing.....	58
Figure 5-1 The Logo of ‘Don’t Eat Friends’.....	117
Figure 6-1 Annual Meat Consumption Per Capita of Beijing Citizens between 1956-1965.....	155
Figure 6-2 Annual Meat Consumption Per Capita of Beijing Citizens between 1978-1998.....	156
Figure 7-1 Annual Meat Consumption Per Capita of Chinese Urban Citizens.....	183

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Figure 7-2 Annual Meat Consumption Per Capita of Chinese Rural Inhabitants.....	184
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## List of photos

Photo 4-1 The Entrance to the Vegan Hut.....	107
Photo 7-1 The Statement of Quality Guarantee of the Food in Boruo Vegetarian Restaurant, Beijing.....	199
Photo 7-2 The Exterior of Zhaixiangyuan Vegetarian Restaurant, Beijing.....	200
Photo 7-3 The Stall of Taipinglaonong at a Spring Festival Fair, Beijing Kerry Centre...	204



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## Key to Transcription Conventions Used

All interviews were transcribed verbatim using the following conventions. The interviews in Mandarin were transcribed in Mandarin, and data were translated into English for inclusion in the thesis.

The conventions used are presented here to assist the reader in their interpretation:

[...]	Material that has been edited.
(...)	Incomplete sentences without editing.
...	Pause in speech.
(name)	Name of the narrator of the quoted material.
[omitted]	Omitted information which should have been in the conversation based on context.
( <i>explanation</i> )	Explanation offered by the researcher for the purpose of clarification.

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## Acknowledgment

This thesis is the result of a long and difficult journey. I started my PhD course in January 2014. Over the years, I have received help from so many people, and now, I have finally reached the end of the journey because of them.

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## **Author's declaration**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Printed Name: YAHONG WANG

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

The relationship between humans and the Planet Earth we all live on has never been so fragile. It is widely agreed among scientists around the world that human activity, particularly since the industrial revolution, has caused considerable negative impact on the environment and on human society. In the case of climate change, for example, a certain degree of fluctuation in global temperature was common over the past 1,000 years, yet the sudden escalation of global warming starting in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is closely linked to the emission of greenhouse gases caused by human activity (Crowley, 2000). It is a serious global issue that threatens the global ecosystem (Schwartz *et al.*, 2006) and food security (Wheeler & Braun, 2013). Since animal husbandry has greatly contributed to the emission of non-CO<sub>2</sub> greenhouse gases (Monteny *et al.*, 2006), it seems that reducing meat consumption world-wide would be beneficial to the survival of humans as a species (Willett *et al.*, 2019). This proposal has drawn close attention from policy-makers, as well. For example, to create a more sustainable food future and better environment, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) (2016) proposed three possible world-wide dietary changes, one of which was to reduce the consumption of animal-based foods. In an attempt to reduce carbon emissions and improve citizens' health, the Chinese government planned to reduce meat consumption by half by introducing new dietary guidelines that suggested a lower intake of meat than the previous editions (Milman & Leavenworth, 2016). This should be an opportune time for promoting vegetarianism because fighting climate change is a strong argument in the contemporary vegetarian movement.<sup>1</sup>

As is shown later in the chapter and in the next chapter, vegetarianism has gained extensive recognition in 'Western' society both in academia and among the public. In contrast, there is little empirical research about vegetarianism in China although the nation boasts a long vegetarian tradition. However, any research regarding the food system or food security in China is of great importance to the whole world, if only because of the sheer size of its population (McBeath & McBeath, 2010). According to the National Bureau of Statistics of

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter 2.

China,<sup>1</sup> the population of China at the end of 2015 was approximately 1,374,620,000.<sup>2</sup> A report from IFPRI (2016) claims that the per capita annual meat consumption in China in 2016 reached 59 kg, which was twice the world average. Although the per capita annual meat consumption in China is not the highest in the world,<sup>3</sup> because of its large population, China has been the world's largest meat consumer since 1992 (Larsen, 2012). In these circumstances, even minor dietary change in a nation inhabited by almost one-fifth of the world's population can have a significant impact on a global scale.

My thesis aims to fill the gap by investigating the non-exclusively religious vegetarian community in China, perhaps for the first time. I want to explore the unique life experience of the members of this community and the ideas they hold in constructing their self-identity, but I do not intend to treat them as the isolated experience of an exotic Other in contrast to 'Western' vegetarianism because the practice and ideas of vegetarians in China are the results of a dynamic society that has and receives global influence.

However, it is beyond my ability to conduct nationwide research on the Chinese vegetarian community. Limited by the scale of my research, I by no means propose that what is discussed in my thesis represents the entire Chinese vegetarian population. The thesis only serves to reveal a new approach to understanding the global vegetarian movement that is not restricted to 'Western' society, which is to take a truly global view on the source of a local vegetarian scene while placing it in a local context. For this purpose, more studies in future are necessary, not only in China, but also in other parts of the world.

## 1.1 Historical Background

Although the term 'vegetarian' is a modern invention of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Gregory, 2007;

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics are from the website of the National Bureau of Statistics of China: <http://data.stats.gov.cn/easyquery.htm?cn=C01> (Accessed: 13 February 2017).

<sup>2</sup> This figure does not include Hong Kong SAR, Macao SAR and Taiwan Province of China.

<sup>3</sup> Although this is still quite high. A comparison of per capita annual meat consumption of different countries can be found in OECD (2017). The source only counts meat as beef, pork, poultry and sheep. Fish and seafood were not included.

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OED Online, 2014), as a practice and a set of ideas, it has existed in many parts of the world since ancient times (Spencer, 1995; Walters & Portmess, 1999). In the ‘West’, records of systematic ideas of vegetarianism can be traced back to Classical Antiquity, featuring philosophers such as Pythagoras, Aristotle, Plutarch and Porphyry (Spencer, 1995; Walters & Portmess, 1999; Preece, 2008). Their theses, although different from one another, are all to some extent concerned with the spiritual condition of humans. Some, such as Pythagoras, who believed in the transmigration of souls between human and animals, and Porphyry, who considered animals to be agents of reasoning and moral perception, had a relative equal view of humans and animals; they rejected meat because of the similarity between them (Spencer, 1995; Whorton, 2000). Others, such as Plutarch, discarded meat more for the sake of humans, as he proposed that the human body did not resemble the bodies of carnivorous animals, and therefore eating meat might not only cause physical health problems, but also damage spirituality because the behaviour encouraged cruelty and violence (Spencer, 1995; Walters & Portmess, 1999). The basic themes of their theses can still be identified in the discourse of contemporary vegetarianism.

The ‘Western’ tradition of vegetarianism as we recognise it today took shape in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In England,

(b)y the beginning of the eighteenth century...all the arguments which were to sustain modern vegetarianism were in circulation... By the end of the century these arguments had been supplemented by an economic one: stock-breeding was a wasteful form of agriculture compared with arable farming, which produced far more food per acre. (Thomas, 1983, p. 295)

The changing attitude toward animals around that period may have two indications. Thomas (1983) has suggested that the increasing compassion for animals at that time was part of the changing attitudes toward the relation between humans and nature. The early modern period saw humans gradually distanced from natural world in everyday life. Wild nature was no longer seen as a threat to humans but was considered a comfort for bored, urban hearts. In addition, Mennell has noted, ‘the development of opposition to cruelty to

animals can be seen to be very much bound up to parallel aspects of the civilising of behaviour' (Mennell, 1996, p. 306). However, the new attitudes toward nature seem inevitably in conflict with the fact that nature was being exploited on a large scale as it never had before (Thomas, 1983). It is possible that modern vegetarianism partially reflects and emphasises this ambivalence.

The economic argument for vegetarianism that cultivation is a more economical way of using land than husbandry flourished in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and became one of the most important motives for the global vegetarian movement that began in Britain. To understand how the early vegetarian movement came into being, it is important to see it as part of a broader, cross-border social reform movement at the turn of the century that was largely committed to improving the health and moral conditions of the working-class in terms of changing their lifestyle, such as adopting a vegetarian diet or temperance (Meyer-Renschhausen & Wirz's, 1999; Gregory, 2007). Gregory (2007) has noted that, although the vegetarian movement was often aimed at the working class - it was claimed that a vegetarian diet was more economical (which was not necessarily true) for the poor - its social base was actually middle-class, because

...vegetarianism addressed middle-class fears of failure in relationships and careers, by restoring a sense of agency to the individual whose body might be reformed though other aspects of life such as employment could not be; a creed of self-restraint marked off the vegetarian from aristocratic or plebeian members of the irresponsible classes. But non-material aspects to physical puritanism must not be neglected. Furthermore, there were good practical reasons for the relative prominence of the middle class in the official membership. Their income and leisure time allowed access to vegetarian materials and permitted sustained participation and activism. (Gregory, 2007, p. 153)

He also noticed women's significant role in the vegetarian movement, which has two dimensions. On the one hand, women were engaged in public activities, such as attending meetings, giving lectures and cooking demonstrations, which were consistent with what was considered to be 'progressive' and 'new' for women; on the other hand, women's maternal role, such as preparing meals and nurturing children, which conformed to the mainstream Victorian female model was stressed by vegetarian promoters in the hope of

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encouraging domestic reform. The ambivalent image of women in the early vegetarian movement is quite different from the image of innately anti-patriarchy women from the feminist point of view popularised in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century by writers such as Adams (2010). The relationship between females and vegetarianism, it seems, is open to different interpretations in different social contexts; thus any presumption should be treated with great precaution.

The vegetarian movement continued to develop in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Meanwhile, academic research on vegetarianism that only regards this lifestyle as one of the many life choices modern society can offer only started to prosper starting in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ruby (2012) provides a rather comprehensive review of literature on this topic from the field of social sciences produced during this period of time. Although his review is confined to English-language literature concerning issues mostly in English-speaking countries, Ruby's work summarises basic themes in recent research on vegetarianism from the definition and categorisation of vegetarianism to a series of comparisons between vegetarians and non-vegetarians. It provides a referential framework for future updates and is reflected in the construction of my literature review chapter.

In addition to the growing academic interest in the contemporary vegetarian scene, a systematic monograph has been written on the history of vegetarianism since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Spencer's (1995) chronological writing on the world history of vegetarianism from the omnivorous but largely plant-based diet of hominids in pre-history to the social movement against the large-scale meat industry in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is among the pioneering publications on this subject. Similar to other historical writings, a history of vegetarianism involves selecting and assembling fragmented facts scattered in time and space into one logical continuum. For modern readers, the writing provides a historical context to which the identity of contemporary vegetarians can refer. The experience of modern vegetarians therefore extends beyond the here and now, as it is linked with and supported by the continuous narrative stretching over time and space.

Due to the increasing population and information mobility worldwide as a direct result of



extensive globalisation, it should be more common than ever to note ideas of vegetarianism leaving their place of origin or interacting with other social elements. Indian vegetarian dishes are not unheard of in the British food scene. The spiritual aspect of Yoga is embraced by many vegetarians in ‘Western’ societies. However, in studies of vegetarians in the contemporary era, different vegetarian traditions are still treated as independent phenomena confined by political borders. For instance, in Ruby *et al.*’s (2013) study of the cultural difference between ‘Western’ vegetarians and Indian vegetarians, researchers made particular efforts to recruit Indian vegetarian participants from India because they worried the Indian vegetarians recruited through online testing service would be too Westernised to represent the Indian vegetarian community, thus deliberately ignoring the possible outside influence on the local vegetarian scene. In Donner’s (2008) investigation of female vegetarians in Bengali middle-class families, she proposed that the practice of vegetarianism among young, married women of middle-class households was a way to implement their individual agency in a society where women enjoyed far less freedom than men and to construct an ethnic identity in the face of escalating consumerism and increasing global influence, but she failed to indicate if there was any communication between the local tradition of vegetarianism and other traditions of vegetarianism in neo-liberal Bengali society.

Vegetarianism in China took a different trajectory. For the majority of the population, animal-derived food had always been rare in the diet until quite recently, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Chang, 1977). They were what Harris (1998) has called ‘involuntary vegetarian[s]’, which refers to those who had a virtually meatless diet not by choice but because of poverty. In China, a voluntarily chosen vegetarian diet has been traditionally related to religious practice, especially Buddhism (Mahayana). However, the institutionalised relationship between a vegetarian diet and Buddhism only began when Emperor Wu of the Liang (464–549 A.D.), a devout Buddhist, forbade meat-eating and drinking alcohol among religious professionals with state power (Li, 2007). Before that, it was not compulsory for Buddhist monks and nuns to follow a vegetarian diet, although it was highly recommended in the teaching of Buddhism to not eat meat based on the principles of loving, kindness and

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compassion.<sup>1</sup>

The Southern Dynasty (420-589 A.D.) was a critical period in the localisation of Buddhism in China, featuring a trending integration of Buddhist vegetarianism and Confucianism's appreciation of a simple lifestyle among intellectuals as they embraced the newly imported religion (Xia, 2006). It is stated in the early scriptures of Confucianism that being content with even the worst living conditions is one of the most important characteristics of a *junzi* (nobleman). A simple diet (usually plant-based) that symbolises a frugal lifestyle was therefore considered beneficial in moral development by intellectuals, and they highly praised it. It is comprehensible, then, why Buddhism gained a long-standing popularity among the moral-centred Confucian intellectuals,<sup>2</sup> although it should be pointed out that having an interest in Buddhism or Buddhist vegetarianism did not necessarily mean following a vegetarian diet. In addition, although the intellectuals tended to value plant-based food more than meat, they rarely promoted a strict meat-free diet; rather, they believed plant-based food should be the most important part of the ideal diet, both in quantity and quality (Leung, 2016). The plant-emphasised diet therefore had an implication of elegance and sophistication because of its link to the taste of intellectuals.

As Buddhism spread across China and penetrated every social class, various local folk religions borrowed its doctrine and practices, thus greatly advancing the familiarity of certain Buddhist elements among the public. For instance, adopting a Buddhist vegetarian diet was crucial for disciples to be accepted in three or four officially recorded folk religions in the Qing dynasty (Lin, 2005). The practice of eating Buddhist vegetarian food has developed different forms in everyday religious practice, from being full-time vegetarian to only applying a vegetarian diet on special, ritualised occasions (Tang, 2008). The concept of (Buddhist) vegetarianism was widely acknowledged in pre-Modern China.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, it is stated in *Brahmajāla Sūtra* that '(t)he consumption of meat is entirely unacceptable, as doing so will cut you off from the seed-lineage of great compassion' (Muller, 2012, p. 325). Although there has been much debate on who the original author of the text is, it is generally agreed that the Chinese version of the text has been available since the Northern and Southern Dynasties (386–589 A.D.) (Qu, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> For more detail of the close relationship between Chinese intellectuals and Buddhism in different periods of Chinese history, please see studies such as those of Guo (1993) and Zhang (2007).

No significant arguments for vegetarianism were developed until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when growing communication with the ‘progressive West’ prompted the Chinese elites to reflect upon the meaning of vegetarianism in China. The conventional vegetarian ideas that had been mainstream until the late Qing dynasty were still prevalent, however, and they are demonstrated in one vegetarian recipe book that was written in the late Qing dynasty and published in the early years of the Republic of China. The influence of Buddhism and Confucianism are explicit in its preface:

It is well known that the flesh-eaters are vulgar. No one of the learnt and the reputable does not demonstrate their ambition by leading a simple lifestyle. Anyone who pursues great achievements must follow the example of vegetable root eaters.<sup>1</sup> As to devout Buddhists, they abstain from killing, eating *hun* and drinking alcohol. These are their commandments which need no more explanation. [...] Men and animals are not so different in the sense of fearing death and craving for life. ‘(So is the superior man affected towards animals,) that, having seen them alive, he cannot bear to see them die.’ These words of Mencius are true indeed. The death of a sinless creature, even if it is a domesticated animal, is saddening. (Xue, 1984, p. 7, p. 9)

Influenced by the contemporary vegetarian movement in the ‘West’, arguments from ‘Western’ vegetarianism started to appear in the discourse of vegetarianism in China in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, Zhangfu Yang (1921) published a booklet on the benefits of having a vegetarian diet, in which he used scientific terminology that had only recently become familiar to Chinese intellectuals, such as the fact that eating meat might cause epidemic diseases, or that vegetables were rich in vitamins. The new trend of using a scientific narrative to promote vegetarianism by some Chinese elites was consistent with the trend of learning from the ‘West’ among Chinese intellectuals at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Growing nationalism was also a contributor to the reformed way of promoting vegetarianism, as keeping a largely vegetarian diet, whether voluntary or not, was the norm for the majority of the population, and the backing from scientific evidence from the more advanced ‘West’ might greatly boost the confidence of some nationalists. Sun Yat-sen (1994) even put following a vegetarian diet in his construction plan for a modern China, weaving vegetarianism into the grand discourse of nation state.

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<sup>1</sup> The saying ‘eating vegetable roots’ refers to having a frugal lifestyle.

However, the generally highly positive evaluation of the vegetarian diet among the Chinese elites started to change in the 1930s, when the vast rural area and the vegetarian diet consumed by impoverished peasants was increasingly considered backward and an object of reformation (Leung, 2016). The change of attitude towards vegetarianism had less to do with vegetarianism itself than with reflecting the change of attitudes towards tradition and the ‘West’.

Intellectual interest in vegetarianism hardly resonated with the impoverished population torn by war and political movements and was generally forgotten until decades later. In 2000, news coverage reported there were ‘new vegetarians’ in China who adopted the diet out of elegant taste (as opposed to the often-deemed kitsch flaunting of devouring meat) and a pursuit of health instead of religious concerns (Zheng, 2000). Since then, there have been a few articles on vegetarianism in China, yet the majority of them are brief descriptions either of the ethical and health concerns of vegetarianism in general (e.g. Luo, 2012; Xi, 2011) or of Buddhist vegetarianism in particular (e.g. Li, 2007; Xia, 2006). Few studies have paid attention to the everyday life of vegetarians in China.

In contrast to the seeming lack of interest in discussing vegetarian arguments by the public is the relative popularity of vegetarian dishes as a unique cuisine, which is reflected in food writers’ records of vegetarian dishes and vegetarian restaurants. More details concerning vegetarian cuisine in China are discussed in chapter 7, as it is more relevant.

## **1.2 Key Concepts of the Thesis**

Before I continue to the rest of my thesis, it is necessary to first clarify a few terms and concepts that repeatedly appear in the following chapters. Some of them are local concepts that need to be interpreted for first-time encounters, while others need explanation because I may not use them in the conventional way. Any further discussion of vegetarians in modern Beijing is only possible on the basis of a clear understanding of how and why these terms and concepts are used in my research.

## *Su* (素) or *Sushi* (素食)

The local term to refer to a meatless diet is *su* or *sushi*. *Su* has multiple meanings,<sup>1</sup> of which the earliest known usage of *su* as implying fruit or vegetables can be traced to the Warring States Period of China (Sun, 2001). When referring to meatless food or diet, *su* can be an adjective as well as a noun, whereas *sushi* can only be a noun. In Ding's Chinese translation of *The Great Dictionary of Buddhism* from Japanese, the interpretation under the entry *sushi* is: '(slang) *Su* means white or sketchy. (*Sushi*) is food that does not contain meat or fish' (Ding, 1922, p. 1711). Although in the English translation of the same dictionary, the entry *sushi* is simply translated as 'vegetarian food' (Soothill & Hodous, 2004, p. 336), the words '*sushi*' and 'vegetarian' are not absolute equivalents. In Chinese, *su* as a category of food is specifically opposed to *hun*. Each category is only meaningful when compared to the other, and their meaning is not rigid or definite but may vary according to context. In everyday context, *su* may refer to non-meat food material or dishes; therefore, a dish that contains both meat and vegetable may be described as 'having *hun* and *su* (有荤有素)', or a dish that does not contain detectable meat but was cooked with meat broth or animal fat may still be considered *su*. In a Buddhist context, *su* can only refer to food material and dishes that do not contain any form of animal flesh product or certain vegetables (see below); therefore, the same dish that may be considered *su* in an everyday context may not be *su* in a Buddhist context. *Sushi* that is prepared or consumed by Buddhist religious professionals is also called *zhai* (斋).

## *Hun* (荤)

*Hun* is the opposite concept of *su*. Like *su*, the meaning of *hun* may vary according to context, yet it always corresponds with *su* in the same context. In an everyday context, *hun* usually refers to meat. In a Buddhist context, *hun* refers to five *Allium* vegetables that are deemed inappropriate for Buddhist consumption. Because there are five of them, they are often called *wuhun* (五荤) or *wuxin* (五辛) in everyday discourse. Records of the

<sup>1</sup> A full compilation of the meanings of *su* can be found at: <http://www.zdic.net/z/21/xs/7D20.htm>.

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prohibition of *wuhun* can be found in the Mahayana scripture the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*:

My disciples, you should not eat the five pungent roots, which are garlic, scallion, leek, onion, and asafetida. Food that contains any of these five should not be eaten. If you intentionally eat them, you have committed a minor transgression of the precepts. (Muller, 2012, p. 327)

The *Śūrangama Sūtra* explained the reason for prohibition of *wuhun* as follows:

When eaten cooked, these plants arouse sexual desire; when eaten raw, they increase anger.

Gods and ascetic masters of the ten directions keep their distance from anyone who eats these plants, because the plants cause people to stink, including even people who can expound upon the twelve types of discourse spoken by the Buddha. Hungry ghosts, meanwhile, will come to lick and kiss the lips of people who have eaten these plants. Such people will always be accompanied by ghosts, and their blessings will lessen day by day. They will experience no lasting benefit. (Buddhist Text Translation Society, 2009, p. 324)

In summary, *wuhun* are shunned because they are believed to be able to bring about unwanted spiritual and physical traits in the human body. Influenced by Mahayana, some Chinese folk religions have also adopted the concepts of *su* and *hun* in their belief and practice systems, which helped to popularise the Buddhist vegetarian in wider society (Lin, 2005).

### ***Xing* (腥)**

*Xing* literally means an unpleasant fishy odour and can be used as an adjective or a noun. *Xing* can metonymically refer to meat, especially fish; in this case, it sometimes appears with *hun* in the compound word *hunxing*.

### **Vegetarian**

The word ‘vegetarian’ can refer to a particular diet when used as an adjective, or to a group

of people who adopt such a diet when used as a noun. A vegetarian diet is generally understood to include non-animal-derived food with or without certain animal products (e.g. eggs, dairy); therefore, if viewed from the definition alone, it includes the now-separate category of vegan (see chapter 2). Although it is recognised worldwide, the word ‘vegetarian’ and its derivatives originated specifically from a ‘Western’ background despite the existence of similar practices in other parts of the world. However, considering the localisation of ‘Western’ vegetarianism in China and its interaction with local tradition, in my research, I use ‘vegetarian’ to describe both people who follow the ‘Western’ vegetarian tradition and the Buddhist ‘*sushi*’ tradition. In addition, because vegetarianism and veganism are seen in China not as separate categories but as differing in strictness within a single category (see chapter 4), ‘vegetarian’ is used in my research to include vegan unless otherwise specified.

### **‘West’ or ‘Western’**

Said’s (2003) work popularised the concept of ‘orientalism’, which referred to an often-negative representation in Oriental studies of a static, exotic and homogeneous ‘Orient’ in comparison with the modern, familiar and ever-changing ‘West’. Decades later, the representation of orientalism is still alive in fields such as high fashion (Narumi, 2000) or the film industry (King, 2010), yet there has been much less attention to the twin of orientalism – occidentalism, which is equally absolutistic and essentialistic because it imagines an oversimplified ‘West’ from highly heterogeneous societies and individuals (Carrier, 1995). While a certain degree of essentialism is unavoidable in comparison studies involving large-scale geographical areas (Carrier, 1992), this is not to say that reflecting on any possible absolutism and essentialism is unnecessary. The ‘West’ in my research is used mainly in the geographic sense, which loosely refers to the area covering the whole of Europe and other English-speaking countries in North America and Oceania. ‘Western’ is therefore used to describe things that are perhaps most prevalent in or characteristic of but not necessarily exclusive to this area. For instance, in my thesis, the ‘Western’ tradition of vegetarianism indicates the set of vegetarianism ideas that were mostly proposed by thinkers who lived or live in Europe or North America and are the

mainstream vegetarianism ideas in modern Europe and North America; that is not to say that there cannot be other forms of vegetarianism in these societies. Similarly, the conventional tradition of vegetarianism in China does not mean there was only one kind of vegetarian ideas in Chinese history.

### **1.3 Research Setting**

I chose Beijing as the fieldwork site of my research for main two reasons. First, as one of the major cities in China, Beijing is renowned for its cultural diversity and the accompanying consumption of cultural diversity. This is a feature Beijing shares with other metropolises in the contemporary world, a remarkable sign of the fact that large cities have taken a central role in promoting a surging cultural economy, namely by generating and distributing products heavily imbued with cultural or symbolic content (Scott, 1997; 2001). It is in large cities such as Beijing that congregations of individuals following newly emerged and non-mainstream life-styles, such as non-religion-based vegetarianism, are possible, which means I had a better chance of finding enough participants there.

The second and a more personal reason is that Beijing is the city I am more familiar with compared to other major cities in China. I lived in Beijing between 2009 and 2012 as a full-time student. During that time, I gradually learnt, albeit roughly, the history of the city and the changes of its cultural and economic geography. In addition, many of my old acquaintances from that time still live in Beijing. Therefore, by choosing Beijing as my primary fieldwork site, I had the advantage of using my local knowledge and recruiting subjects via my existing contacts. Indeed, it is not uncommon that researchers conduct fieldwork in places and among individuals with which they already have a degree of knowledge (Peirano, 1998). Thanks to the unprecedented mobility of information and individuals today, it is also not uncommon that researchers find the experiences and activities of subjects may extend well beyond the boundaries the researcher initially defined for the field (Amit, 2000). As the following chapters show, the impacts received by and that emanated from vegetarians in Beijing often crossed political borders. An inquiry into vegetarianism in Beijing therefore transcends endemism and taps into a wider, more



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complex network.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative ethnographic research is to examine how self-defined vegetarians in modern Beijing construct their identity through everyday experience, and how it may contribute to a better understanding of the development of individuality and self-identity in Chinese society in a post-traditional order; it also contributes to understanding the development of vegetarian movements in a non-‘Western’ context and how they may inspire future policy-making in these societies.

In order to answer the overarching question, several sub-questions must be answered:

1. How is vegetarianism understood in the everyday context of modern Beijing? What sources are used in the formation of the understanding, and what may impact the degree of understanding?
2. What are the key motivations of becoming and remaining vegetarian, and what is the process of becoming vegetarian?
3. How do vegetarians in Beijing maintain their identity in everyday life? How are gender and socio-economical differences represented in their experience?
4. Buddhism and certain Chinese folk religions that are influenced by Buddhism have been seen as a key factor for the practice of adopting a (almost) vegetarian diet in China until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the vegetarianism of the ‘Western’ tradition was introduced. What is the relationship between religion and ‘Western’ vegetarianism in contemporary Beijing? How do vegetarians present their identity to wider society in this situation?
5. How do vegetarians in modern Beijing relate to and interact with 1) other

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like-minded vegetarians and 2) non-vegetarians?

6. How is vegetarianism represented in a consumerist environment such as modern Beijing? How is it linked to other lifestyle choices in a post-traditional society?

Questions 1 to 5 explore the individual aspects of being vegetarian/vegan in modern Beijing and view the adoption of a vegetarian lifestyle as a choice that, in each case, is based on unique personal history. Question 6 turns to the collective aspect of the phenomenon and tries to find the structural incentives behind the spread of vegetarian ideas by examining them within a wider social context. Together, the questions link the micro and macro level of the vegetarian phenomenon and seek to reveal the wider implications behind it.

## **1.5 Thesis Outline**

In what follows, first, Chapter 2 reviews the literature relevant to my research. Two types of literature are reviewed. One focuses on works concerning the issue of food and identity, and it forms the theoretical background of my research. The other concerns studies of ‘Western’ vegetarianism in the field of social sciences. In addition to reviewing what has been achieved in the field of the study of vegetarianism, Chapter 2 proposes the limitations of extent literature and how my research may contribute to the field of study.

Chapter 3 reflects on the methodology conducted in my research. In accordance with the chronological order in the progress of doing my research, this chapter delineates the choice of fieldwork site and the process of doing fieldwork. I explain in this chapter how participants were recruited and interviewed, how I obtained supplementary information by collecting texts from multiple platforms and observing vegetarians in their natural environment. Approaches used in data analysis are briefly accounted, as well as the ethics involved in my research and possible limitations of my fieldwork.

Chapters 4 to 7 are the main body of my thesis. These four chapters elaborate different

aspects of the identification of vegetarians in Beijing. To start, Chapter 4 discusses the understanding of the concept of vegetarianism in the context of modern Beijing. The definition of vegetarian is at the foundation of constructing vegetarian identity because it is the criterion against which being vegetarian is judged. Both vegetarians' and non-vegetarians' understanding of the idea is scrutinised and compared, which is a novel event in the discussion of the concept of vegetarianism in academia. In particular, Chapter 4 probes the uniqueness of the understanding of vegetarianism by the public in modern China as a consequence of receiving influence from both conventional forces such as Buddhism and the imported, 'Western' vegetarian tradition. I challenge the popular view in extent research of vegetarianism that often treats different vegetarian traditions as completely separate. I argue that communication between different vegetarian traditions is not only possible but may result in obscuring the boundary between those traditions. Because being vegetarian is an embodied experience, the body of a vegetarian became the reification of the image of vegetarianism. How a vegetarian body looks and feels inevitably reflects and reinforces one's understanding of vegetarianism. There is a consensus to some degree among vegetarians in Beijing on the image of a vegetarian body, which unsurprisingly shows a recognition of different vegetarian traditions.

After investigating how the concept of vegetarianism is understood in the local context, Chapter 5 explores how the transition to being vegetarian is accomplished. The motivations and processes of becoming vegetarian are the subjects of this chapter. The fusion of the two vegetarian traditions continues to show how vegetarians in Beijing defend their lifestyle choice, which is especially evident in the mutual verification between ethic motivations and religious teaching, indicating that the encounter of the two vegetarian traditions can result in a change for both as they gain new perspectives from each other. Even motivations seemingly borrowed from 'Western' vegetarianism, such as environmental protection and health, have been reinterpreted in local context. Compared to their 'Western' peers, vegetarians in Beijing do not show particular differences with regard to the conversion process, although I argue that a more complex model that takes into account both ideology and behaviour change is more accurate in describing the process of becoming vegetarian.

As identification is a constantly on-going process, Chapters 6 and 7 discuss how vegetarians in Beijing maintain their vegetarian identity in a mainly non-vegetarian environment. Chapter 6 focuses on the social life of vegetarians as a minority group in modern Beijing. Any form of inter-group communication, i.e., interaction with other vegetarians is proven to benefit vegetarians to maintain the level of confidence to lead a non-mainstream lifestyle. Meanwhile, such interaction helps establish the collective aspect of vegetarian identity to create a discursive mantra (Hills, 2002) that may serve to discipline novices in the community. For vegetarians in Beijing, and perhaps even the rest of China, the Internet and smartphones are the most useful tools for them to connect with one another. On the other hand, the boundary of being vegetarian is only possible in the face of non-vegetarian 'Others', whether they are people or non-vegetarian choices in general. Vegetarians in Beijing have applied various strategies in their interactions with non-vegetarian social relations, which usually means family and close friends. There was constant challenging, compromising and negotiating between the vegetarians and their non-vegetarian immediate social relations until some kind of equilibrium was achieved.

Since a vegetarian lifestyle is most eminently presented through diet, Chapter 7 explores how vegetarians in Beijing satisfy their dietary needs in everyday life. The chapter starts with individual endeavours to maintain a vegetarian lifestyle. For each vegetarian, their working pattern, the type of household they live in and their access to available vegetarian options in the market could all have an impact on how they choose to remain vegetarian and how they justify their action on a day-to-day basis. Depending on the strictness of each vegetarian, they might assess the degree of vegetarian friendliness in Beijing from relatively satisfactory to not satisfactory at all. The frustration many vegetarians experience is unlikely to disappear through individual efforts alone. Having vegetarianism recognised as a community and properly addressed in modern China requires collaborative efforts of ordinary vegetarians, policy-makers and social entities. Yet the political nature of the issue of vegetarianism may prove the largest obstacle in receiving recognition and support from the authorities. Meanwhile, the success of the commercialisation of vegetarianism in the 'West' gives hope to the future development of vegetarian alternatives as a niche market in China. The combined force of the depoliticalisation and commercialisation of

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vegetarianism may lead to vegetarians in China having different connotations compared with vegetarians in ‘Western’ society.

Finally, Chapter 8 revisits arguments of previous chapters and proposes how they may contribute to understanding the increasingly individualized identifications in the contemporary Chinese urban context. However, I predict the future of vegetarianism in China may not be as promising as some vegetarians expected despite the seeming consensus by the public as well as authorities that reducing meat consumption is likely to be beneficial on both individual and state levels. Depoliticalised vegetarianism may be unable to induce any significant social change in China because what vegetarianism has achieved in the ‘West’ relied so much on its constant participation in political discussions related to social issues.

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## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Since the goal of my research is to investigate the construction of unconventional identity in a modern Chinese context through the case of vegetarians in modern Beijing, the literature I intend to review in this chapter covers the fields of both identification and vegetarianism.

The main body of this chapter consists of two parts. In the first, I briefly illustrate the important role of food in the process of identification, the theories of which provide the premise for the analysis of my thesis. I demonstrate how food marks the boundaries of collective identities such as ethnicity, gender and social class. I then review the relationship between food and the construction of individual identity in the form of being part of the lifestyle in a society of mass consumption in which individualism is generally valued.

In the second part, I review the extant research of vegetarianism in the field of social sciences. Literature is categorised around the theme of the identification of vegetarians. Due to a lack of studies on everyday vegetarians in China, I only review studies on the ‘Western’ vegetarian tradition. There has been a persistent academic interest in vegetarianism in recent decades, mainly in the disciplines of sociology and social psychology. A pioneering review on studies of vegetarianism was given by Ruby (2012), which inspired the basic framework of the second part of my literature review. I categorise studies of vegetarianism into six sections. The first section concerns the definition of vegetarianism and how it changes over time. It is the foundation upon which the vegetarian identity is built. The second section summarises self-reported motivations of becoming and remaining vegetarian from ethnographic studies of vegetarians in ‘Western’ society. The third section reviews the processes of becoming vegetarian. A series of ideological and behavioural changes take place in the transition of identity. The fourth section turns the attention from inside the vegetarian community to outside world and reviews the interactions between vegetarians and their non-vegetarian immediate social relations. The

vegetarian's unique identity is only valid when the non-vegetarian option is also valid. The fifth section continues to explore the dynamic between vegetarians and non-vegetarians by reviewing the perception of vegetarians and non-vegetarians of each other and of themselves. Evaluations from others and the expectation of how others would evaluate us constitute important part of self-understanding. Finally, the sixth section reviews studies that compare vegetarians and non-vegetarians from a third party's view. The seemingly 'objective' view helps establish the boundary between vegetarians and non-vegetarians, which enables the legality of a collective identity for both groups.

## **2.2 Food and Identity**

Humans are logic-obsessed animals. Myers has claimed humans have 'an irresistible urge to explain behaviour, to attribute it to some cause, and therefore to make it seem orderly, predictable, and controllable' (Myers, 2012, p. 5). The same assertion could be applied to other aspects of social interaction, as individuals always try to make sense of themselves and others in social life. This involves assessing or speculating on theirs or others' positions in the society, and performing or anticipating others will perform in accordance with their assessment or speculation. This is where identity comes into play. Identity, defined by Fox and Ward, is an 'embodied, reflexive process grounded firmly upon practice and the relational context within which it takes place' (Fox & Ward, 2008b, p. 2593). Identity indicates the relationship of similarity and difference between combinations of individuals and collectivities (Jenkins, 2008). It is not an innate or learnt property but an 'on-going and open-ended processes of "identification"' (Jenkins, 2008, p. 9) which is sustained by social interaction. Regarding identity as a process therefore implies the flexibility of identification, in the sense of contextual strategies of performance (Goffman, 1956) and fluid relationships with others over time.

The process of identification involves a variety of representations of the physiological body and other objects attached or related to the body; together they constitute more or less what Goffman (1956) has referred to as 'expressive equipment', which is basically the external, visible part of identification, although he used a different criterion of

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differentiation based on the degree of intimacy to the body, and thus distinguished the 'expressive equipment' into scenic 'setting' and the more intimate 'personal front'. The idea is that objects other than the 'natural' body can be used as markers of identity, such as the universal usage of food and foodways. The prominence of food in identification may contribute to its universality and its vital role in human survival (Belasco, 2008). As Fischler (1988) has rightly noted, being omnivorous enables humans to develop extremely diversified cuisine around the world, and thus the possibility of differentiating individuals and groups with food; in addition, since food is absorbed, literally and figuratively, to become part of the body, or the self, having control over food thus directly impacts the control over the self and identity. All these properties make food an ideal instrument in the construction of identity.

The fact that food marks collective identity, such as ethnicity and social class, has been amply acknowledged by researchers in the study of foodways. 'Food' here refers to far more than the edible and is better perceived as 'cuisine', which, as illustrated by Belasco (2008), includes the range of edible items in a given community, the distinct way of preparing and eating food, the flavour principles which are distinct combinations of seasonings and the operation of the food chain. However, the flavour principles could be considered part of the food preparation. Therefore, Belasco's definition of 'cuisine' actually includes the edible itself and almost all activities involved in transforming raw materials from the place of origin into the meal on the plate.

For members of the same ethnic group, ethnic cuisine may 'provide added concreteness to the idea of national or ethnic identity' (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002, p. 109), and indeed, they reinforce each other. As Appadurai's (1988) investigation on Indian cookbooks in the postcolonial period shows, the process of textualising Indian recipes out of diverse regional and ethnic cuisines was also the process of constructing a national cuisine which reinforced and reified the relatively new national identity. In extreme cases, the ethnicity of one group may be indicated by the ethnic cuisine of another group, such as the almost traditionalised Chinese food consumption among American Jews, especially those who have lived in New York since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Miller, 2006). This unusual bond is widely recognised in



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the Jewish community as well as in popular culture. Miller (2006) has cited several hypotheses dedicated to explaining the bond, but none was provable. However, this particular example suggests the arbitrary aspect in the relationship between food and identity, and the relationship's normality as flux.

The relationship between food and collective identity is also manifested in the way that certain food may be used as the marker of antagonistic or disadvantaged communities and is treated with contempt. Wang's (2009) research of the indigenous population near the upstream of the Minjiang River, China has revealed how the change of attitudes toward buckwheat was accompanied by a change in the self-identification of the local communities. Before the official ethnic identification conducted by the Communist government in the 1950s, and before the title of being an ethnic minority could be traded with any economic or symbolic capital, locals preferred to be identified as the dominant Han ethnicity. People from one village would refer to those lived in villages near the upstream as 'the barbarians who eat buckwheat' while they were scorned by those living further downstream in just the same way. The description was not necessarily true, as it was not buckwheat but maize that was the staple of the locals ever since the latter was introduced into this area at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The locals' attitude towards buckwheat shifted rapidly as the context of being a member of ethnic minority group changed in China. In addition to the preferential policies issued by the government, the identity of being a member of ethnic minority group was endowed with economic and symbolic value thanks to the development of tourism. Many now demanded to be identified as members of an ethnic minority group. The buckwheat that was once denied as the food of barbarian was embraced by local communities and reinterpreted in the local narratives. This example illustrates how the undesirable food of Others could later become desirable as the food of Us. The opposite can be true, too, which in my research is manifested in the form that some vegetarians could develop negative attitudes towards animal-derived food they once enjoyed in the process of becoming vegetarian.

Apart from marking horizontal boundaries across communities, food also marks vertical or hierarchical boundaries within the community. One classic example is Bourdieu's (1984)

elaboration on how food, along with other presentations of taste, was used to differentiate class and status in 1960s France. As stated before, the relation between food and identity is always in flux. When the lower class tried to emulate the upper class's lifestyle by incorporating the latter's food choice, the upper class might start to seek new substitutes to differentiate themselves from the lower class. Therefore, the once-privileged food may gradually lose its connection with the upper class. One example is the dramatic transition of sugar in the 'West' from a luxury good enjoyed by the extremely rich to a bare necessity in every household (Mintz, 1986). In a multi-cultural society such as contemporary Britain, using food as markers of horizontal and vertical differentiation in social space is much more complicated. James (1997) has stated that the spread of foreign ethnic cuisine and creolised foreign food was accompanied by the renaissance of artisan local British food, and it is the quality and authenticity of food regardless of its place of origin that are valued as indicating class and status. Consumption of vegetarian food in modern Beijing may also be a marker of taste or class rather than a dedication to a vegetarian lifestyle *per se*.

Even seemingly biologically based identity, such as age and gender, involves food differentiation, which is not only determined by biology but also by social context. In Watson's (2006) illustration of McDonald's in Hong Kong, he especially noted the local branches' children-and-youth-centred feature. He proposed that this local feature of McDonald's reflected the company's marketing reaction to the local cultural and economic contexts. In addition, the success of McDonald's in Hong Kong indicated the locals' competence in incorporating new resources into existing social framework, and reinterpreting and redefining their identity in accordance with a changing social reality. Similarly, the idea of vegetarianism as understood in modern Beijing has undergone both localisation and internalisation, while the 'Western' tradition of vegetarianism and the conventional Buddhist vegetarianism have integrated, which I explore in detail in chapter 4.

Research on the relation of food and gender often concerns power relation between males and females, since who has control over such basic necessities for survival inevitably reveals the underlying power distribution (Counihan, 1998a). In her review of the existing

literature on food and gender, Caplan (1997) has summarised three approaches from extant research on the relation between food and gender. First, males and females often have different roles in the process of producing and preparing food. Second, males and females may differ in terms of food distribution and consumption. Third, males and females may encounter different situations concerning food-related body control, such as weight management. However, gender differentiation in food does not necessarily lead to antagonism. As Counihan claims, this differentiation may also be ‘a channel of connection’ (Counihan, 1998a, p. 7) which enables the two genders not only to define their complementary roles in society but also to cooperate in maintaining social integration. The gender dimension has drawn attention in the study of vegetarianism, as ethnographic studies across countries (Neumark-Sztainer *et al.*, 1997; Willetts, 1997; *Jabs et al.*, 1998; Worsley & Skrzypiec, 1998; Kalof *et al.*, 1999; Perry *et al.*, 2001; Hoek *et al.*, 2004; Fox & Ward, 2008a & b; Boyle, 2011) have shown that the number of female vegetarians always significantly surpasses the number of male vegetarians. A more detailed review of vegetarianism and gender is available later in this chapter and a discussion of the topic in the context of modern Beijing takes place throughout the thesis.

Growing individualisation accompanied by the process of civilization (Elias, 2001) prompted Caplan (1997) to assert that identity ‘now comes as much from “lifestyle” as it does from the classic sociological concepts of gender, class and race/ethnicity’ (Caplan, 1997, p. 15). The lifestyle or the closely connected concept of individual identity is represented by consumption in a mass consumption society (Warde, 1994; Inglis, 2005). Since food and eating constitute important segments of consumption, the role of food in marking individual identity surely deserves serious attention. However, it is essential to bear in mind that the classification of individual and collective identities is only a convenient tool to understand complicated contextual behaviour, and by no means do the boundaries of identities exist in everyday life. Rather, an individual at any given moment has only ‘individualised, multidimensional sets of identities’ (Bisogni *et al.*, 2002, p. 135) that connect and differentiate him or her from other individuals. In addition, this integrative view of identities indicates the subjectivity and fluidity of identification. Since identities and food practices are in a constant, mutually influential relationship, food

practices too are changeable and contextual (Bisogni *et al.*, 2002). The transition from non-vegetarian to vegetarian identity is most eminently accompanied by a change of diet. I also explore the individual and collective aspects of the vegetarian identity in Beijing in the following chapters.

## **2.3 Constructing a Vegetarian Identity**

The usage of food and food-related practices as part of identification has universal application. This is perhaps due to the universality of food and its vital role in human survival (Belasco, 2008). Food holds a special place in the embodied process of identification thanks to its unique characteristic in relation to the human body: it starts as something external to the body, and food is then absorbed, both literally and figuratively, to become part of the body, or the self. Having control over food therefore directly impacts control over the body, and thus impacts identity (Fischler, 1988).

As a special diet as well as a lifestyle, being vegetarian comprises a significant part of the self-identification of the practitioner. Considerable attention was drawn to vegetarianism in the field of sociology and social psychology. This section reviews the literature concerning the identification of vegetarians in these fields following a thematic order.

### **2.3.1 Defining Vegetarianism**

For group members and outsiders alike, a set of recognised terminologies is an important part of the linguistic aspect of identification. These terminologies provide nucleuses with which the category members being defined can in turn identify themselves. In the case of vegetarianism, although its major ideas and practices have existed for a long time, the term itself, which is now widely recognised and accepted, was only coined as late as the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a product of the emerging vegetarian organisations that marked the beginning of the modern vegetarian movement (Gregory, 2007; OED online, 2014). Unlike the notion of ‘homosexual’, which was born within an expert knowledge system and then adopted by the people under its categorisation (Foucault, 1978), the term ‘vegetarian’ was

an in-group product which then gained general recognition by wider society. The definition of vegetarian was first and foremost produced by vegetarians themselves. The definition approved by vegetarian organisations was especially important because it served as the basis of general agreement and guidelines for understanding the term among ordinary vegetarians and non-vegetarians alike in early stages of vegetarian movement as well as today. An early definition given by the oldest modern vegetarian organisation, the Vegetarian Society (England), described it as ‘the practice of living on the products of the Vegetable kingdom, with or without the addition of Eggs and Milk and its products (butter and cheese), to the exclusion of Fish, Flesh, and Fowl’ (Mayor, 1889, p. 2). By giving flexible standards on the consumption of eggs and dairy products this definition addresses the diversity within vegetarian practice yet also implies potential internal disagreement which, in future, would result in the split of vegans from vegetarians (Leneman, 1999). The up-to-date definition of ‘vegetarian’ given by the same organisation is much more elaborate but essentially the same:

A vegetarian is someone who lives on a diet of grains, pulses, legumes, nuts, seeds, vegetables, fruits, fungi, algae, yeast and/or some other non-animal-based foods (e.g. salt) with, or without, dairy products, honey and/or eggs. A vegetarian does not eat foods that consist of, or have been produced with the aid of products consisting of or created from, any part of the body of a living or dead animal. This includes meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, insects, by-products of slaughter or any food made with processing aids created from these.<sup>1</sup>

Certain animal products, such as eggs, dairy products and honey, are still more ambiguous than others in terms of their relationship with the vegetarian diet. In addition, the definition in fact still acts as an umbrella definition which includes the now-distinct category of the vegan diet. Perhaps due to the well publicised nature of vegetarianism in ‘Western’ society, almost no studies mentioned how everyday vegetarians understand the concept. I cannot assume that the same level of understanding is achieved in modern China. Therefore, chapter 4 explores the public’s understanding of vegetarianism, which is the undertone in all discussion that ensue.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://www.vegsoc.org/definition> (Accessed: 08 November 2016).

On the one hand, despite a certain degree of awareness of the diversity within vegetarian practice in the definition of them term from authoritative vegetarian organisations, in general, this definition is still considerably rigid and clear-cut. On the other hand, empirical research of vegetarians in ‘Western’ society shows that vegetarian practice in everyday life is much more diverse and less static. A wide range of diets were reported by self-defined vegetarians, from the strictest diet that only contained plant-and-fungi-derived food at one end to occasional meat consumption at the other end (Beardsworth & Keil, 1991, 1992; Neale *et al.*, 1993; Jabs *et al.*, 1998; Barr & Chapman, 2002; Boyle, 2011). It is perhaps surprising that ethnographic information collected from different countries suggests meat consumption is not at all uncommon among vegetarians. Using semi-structured interviews, Beardsworth and Keil (1991) found that five out of 76 self-defined vegetarian informants from East Midlands reported eating meat (excluding fish) occasionally, and 18 ate fish either occasionally or regularly. A similar study in the U.S. claimed that, within a randomly chosen sample of 14 self-defined vegetarians, ‘nearly two-thirds ... reported sometimes eating poultry, and only a fifth of self-identified vegetarians eat neither fish nor poultry’ (Dietz *et al.*, 1995, p. 539). Occasionally eating bacon and steak was reported in vegetarians in South-East London (Willetts, 1997). Barr and Chapman’s (2002) survey and interviews in Canada showed that more than half of the self-defined vegetarian informants ate fish occasionally. Meat-eating among self-defined vegetarians could either be because certain meat, such as fish, was seen by some vegetarians as part of a vegetarian diet, or they did so to avoid embarrassment or conflict, or they simply craved the taste (Beardsworth & Keil, 1991, 1992; Willetts, 1997; Jabs *et al.*, 1998; Barr & Chapman, 2002; Boyle, 2011). In either case, the meat-eating behaviour did not undermine vegetarians’ self-identification because it was either interpreted as normal vegetarian practice or only a lapse that did not represent the normal state.

It is clear that ordinary vegetarians do not always strictly follow the definition of ‘vegetarian’ given by vegetarian organisations based on dietary practice in everyday life for a variety of reasons. Furthermore, considering the extreme diversity of diets of both vegetarians and non-vegetarians, it is safe to say that, if combined, the boundary between vegetarians and non-vegetarians is actually implicit (Carmichael, 2002). The dichotomy of

vegetarians versus meat-eaters is more of rhetorical strategy than reality (Willetts, 1997). Because of the complicated reality, Weinsier (2000) has even suggested abandoning the word ‘vegetarian’ in scientific literature because it was too ambiguous to describe such diversified food practices. Within the vegetarian community, there was an attempt to re-define ‘vegetarian’ by replacing the practice-based definition with an ideology-based one so that the new definition could attract all self-defined vegetarians and vegans regardless of their actual diet, as shown in the following example:

Vegetarianism is a philosophy that manifests its reverence and respect for the well-being of all sentient life by advocating and striving for the ultimate adoption of a plant-based diet. (Sapon, 1996)

However, the act was criticised by other vegetarians for overemphasising an ethical motivation and therefore ignoring vegetarians who chose the lifestyle for other reasons, and a definition based on ideology may indicate the inclusion of people who agree with vegetarian ideology but do not adopt a vegetarian diet (Maurer, 2002). Until there is a better definition, the word ‘vegetarian’ and its current practice-based interpretation is still the most prevalent understanding of this lifestyle. Meanwhile, not everyone views the mismatch of actual diets of self-defined vegetarians and the food range covered in the authoritative definition given by vegetarian organisations as a problem. Caplan has suggested that ‘it appears to matter less whether or not vegetarians sometimes eat meat, than that people define themselves as vegetarians in the first place as part of their individual identity’ (Caplan, 1997, p. 15). What is revealed in the complex practice of self-defined vegetarians is the fluid and flexible nature of identification as a process (Willetts, 1997; Jenkins, 2008). One lacking aspect in extant research, however, is how non-vegetarians understand vegetarianism, which I incorporate in chapter 4 along with how vegetarians in Beijing understand vegetarianism.

### **2.3.2 Motivations for becoming and Remaining Vegetarian**

Vegetarians make ideal subjects for studies of the identification process not only because, in most cases, vegetarians were not raised as such but voluntarily converted to this food

practice at some stage of their lives (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992), but also because the majority of them can clearly identify their initial motive(s) for becoming vegetarians, which again shows a high degree of self-consciousness of their identity (Beardsworth & Keil, 1991).

People convert to a vegetarian diet for a variety of reasons, and several are significantly more prevalent than others. Beardsworth and Keil (1992) have classified the motivations reported in their research of English vegetarians into four categories: moral, health-related, gustatory (i.e., dislike the texture or flavour of meat) and ecological. Of participants who could clearly identify a primary motivation, the most-often mentioned one is the moral motivation, followed by health and gustatory preferences. In Santos and Booth's (1996) study of meat avoidance among the undergraduates at the University of Birmingham, the primary reason for meat avoidance is gustatory preferences, followed by ethical concern for partial meat avoiders, and ethical concern followed by gustatory preferences for vegetarians. Surprisingly, in their study, health was listed as the third most important primary reason for partial meat avoiders but was not mentioned at all by vegetarians, for which they did not give an explanation. In Stiles' (1998) research of self-defined vegetarians recruited online from a global population, health was reported as the primary motive, followed by ethical reasons and animal rights. Generally speaking, in the reports of self-defined vegetarians, ethical and health motivations tend to be the most common in determining and maintaining a vegetarian identity (e.g. Beardsworth & Keil, 1991, 1992; Neale *et al.*, 1993; Rozin *et al.*, 1997; Jabs *et al.*, 1998; Stiles, 1998; Fox & Ward, 2008a).

The dominance of ethical and health motives in becoming vegetarian shown in the research mentioned above is, to some extent, consistent with the records of pro-vegetarianism arguments in 'Western' history since many are ethical- and health-related (Thomas, 1983; Spencer, 1995; Whorton, 2000). The potential health benefits of a vegetarian diet are increasingly supported by medical evidence. After reviewing clinical research in Europe, Australia and the U.S., White and Frank (1994) found that, compared with omnivores, vegetarians tended to have lower weight, total serum cholesterol levels and blood pressures, and they also had lower mortality than the population at large. Appleby *et al.* (1999) have



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drawn similar conclusions based on a chronic study of 6,000 vegetarians and 5,000 non-vegetarians in the UK. However, for individual vegetarians, there might be a more practical reason that facilitated the transition, such as wishing to lose weight or suffering from certain health problems that required a reduction of fat intake (Stiles, 1998).

The environment or ecological motivation of vegetarianism is based on the argument that going vegetarian can reduce the negative human impact on nature. First, it is argued that raising animals is a less efficient way of producing food than cultivating plants; thus, more land is needed to support a population on a non-vegetarian diet than a population of the same size on a vegetarian diet, which could lead to either more intensified farming or more wilderness replaced by farmland, which then could cause land degradation and the loss of natural habitat for wildlife (Wenz, 1984). Although it seems a timely response to contemporary environmental problems, this argument can be seen as a variant of the earlier economic argument in the vegetarian movement mentioned in chapter 1. Both arguments are premised on the high efficiency of plant-based food production compared to meat production but interpret it for different purposes: one aimed to improve the moral and health conditions of the poor working class (Mayor, 1889; Gregory, 2007), whereas the other uses it to cope with the increasing pressure the human population has put on nature. In addition, it is argued that modern animal husbandry is an important source of greenhouse gas emissions, and reducing meat consumption may thus help mitigate climate change (McMichael *et al.*, 2007; Hedenus *et al.*, 2014).<sup>1</sup> The environmental consciousness of such vegetarians often extends beyond food choice to other aspects of their lives (Fox & Ward, 2008a).

In addition to the three major motivations mentioned above, namely health, ethics and the environment, studies of self-defined vegetarians from ‘Western’ society have recorded many less common motivations: gustatory preferences (Boyle, 2011), religion (Stiles,

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<sup>1</sup> However, food production is not the only aspect in the life-cycle of food that contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. Taking other factors, such as food processing and transportation, into consideration, Carlsson-Kanyama’s study (1998) of greenhouse gas emissions of different food in Sweden showed that a vegetarian meal did not necessarily generate less CO<sub>2</sub> than a non-vegetarian meal with the same energy and protein content.

1998), weight control<sup>1</sup> (Boyle, 2011) and social influences (Santos & Booth, 1996; Janda & Trocchia, 2001), to name but a few. Overall, the motivations revealed in studies of the ‘Western’ vegetarian tradition are predominately secular and individualised compared to non-‘Western’ vegetarian traditions, which are often seen as relatively static and driven by social conformity forces, such as religion and traditional values (e.g., Donner, 2008; Ruby *et al.*, 2013). It is not clear from the scarce English-language studies of non-‘Western’ vegetarian traditions whether the vegetarians knew of the existence of other vegetarian traditions or if there was any communication between different them. The drastic contrast between portrayals of the progressive, future-oriented ‘Western’ vegetarian tradition and the static, history- and tradition-bound ‘Others’, especially the ‘oriental’ vegetarian traditions, seems to be only another classic example of orientalism. A new approach that stops treating the ‘Western’ and other vegetarian traditions as total opposites but rather values their similarities and interaction is needed in order to deepen the understanding of the evolution of the vegetarian movement worldwide in an age of globalisation. This is the approach I adopt in my research.

Experienced vegetarians seldom support their lifestyle with only one motivation, although their vegetarian career could have been triggered by just one (Boyle, 2011), and they are usually able to identify the single most important motivation among the probably multiple motivations that sustain their lifestyle (Beardsworth & Keil, 1991). Furthermore, the motives individual vegetarians recognise can change over time. Thus, ‘(i)ssues once regarded as important may slip down the individual's personal agenda, and others once subsidiary, irrelevant or unknown may move upwards’ (Beardsworth & Keil, 1991, p. 271). However, ‘seldom are one’s initial motivations for conversion to vegetarianism totally replaced by the acquisition of more important motivations, but instead are incorporated as other issues of which one was previously unaware’ (Stiles, 1998, p. 220). Stiles has also suggested three reasons of the assimilation of motives:

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<sup>1</sup> Although weight control is sometimes included in the health motivation of vegetarianism (e.g., Stiles, 1998; Boyle, 2011), I treat them separately in my research because controlling weight does not necessarily serve a health purpose but is often related to perception of gendered body image.

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First, the process of assimilation of other motives may be perceived relevant for the person's identity and thus enhances one's self-esteem. Second, these new reasons may be perceived as a logical continuation of one's present identity and thus provides for a sense of continuity for how one sees him/herself. Third, the incorporation or assimilation of additional motives may serve to increase one's commitment to one's vegetarian identity and, therefore, the salience of one's vegetarian identity. (Stiles, 1998, p. 224)

A critique of the literature listed above could be that, since the accounts heavily depend on vegetarians' *ex post facto* discourse, which is constructed to rationalise their behaviour, it may not reflect what actually happened. Wilson *et al.* (2004) have suggested that the narratives told by current vegetarians could be a form of rhetorical strategy for legitimacy rather than a reflection of the truth. In fact, 'despite the difference in stances both vegetarianism and meat-eating can be supported by the same rhetorical resources and common-sense ideas. Eating meat and vegetarianism can both be construed as healthy *and* unhealthy' (Wilson *et al.*, 2004, p. 575). Boyle (2011) has also suggested that the motives vegetarians reported were a well-structured defence in the hope of showing the normality of their choice. Vegetarians might adopt the strategies of using excuses and justifications, such as attributing their conversion to a dislike of the taste of meat or conformity to friends and family. Often, motivations for being vegetarian are told as part of the conversion story. The motivations for being vegetarian and the processes of becoming vegetarian are all important parts of a vegetarian's autobiography. Like any story in the broadest sense, its validity relies on being consistent and logical. Thus, any usage of rhetorical strategies in constructing the motivations of becoming and remaining vegetarian seems inevitable. I discuss this argument in more detail in chapter 5 with examples from my own research.

Considering that there were almost always more female vegetarians than male vegetarians in studies of vegetarians around the world, regardless of the sample size of the research (e.g., Neumark-Sztainer *et al.*, 1997; Willetts, 1997; Jabs *et al.*, 1998; Worsley & Skrzypiec, 1998; Kalof *et al.*, 1999; Perry *et al.*, 2001; Hoek *et al.*, 2004; Fox & Ward, 2008a & b; Boyle, 2011), it is safe to declare that vegetarianism is to some extent a gender issue. Meat, especially red meat, is explicitly linked to masculinity in 'Western' society. For instance, drawing from hundreds of studies concerning men, meat and marriage in post-industrial 'Western' society, Sobal (2005) has concluded that meat was traditionally recognised as a

signature male food. He claimed that, for males, one important aspect of the image management of masculinity in heterosexual marriage was through negotiation with their partner regarding the meat consumption pattern in family meals, which often involved implementing a male-centred or meat-centred order. Sobal has also indicated that, although the dominant, singular model of macho masculinity has been challenged by multiple, flexible masculinities which resulted in new strategies of gender performance through situational meat consumption management, its dominant status was still valid. In Rozin *et al.*'s (2012) ground-breaking quantitative research of metaphors in human cognitive activities, researchers chose to experiment with their new methodological framework for large-scale quantitative analysis by testing the validity of the metaphoric relationship between meat and maleness in Western societies. Through a series of studies<sup>1</sup> concerning the assessment of individual attitudes, beliefs and behaviours under controlled conditions and one case study of linguistic analysis, researchers confirmed there was a cross-cultural metaphoric link between meat, especially mammal muscle, and maleness, but they also admitted that maleness might not be one of the most salient properties of meat. Rather, the linkage between meat and maleness may be indirect through their mutual linkage to strength and power. In Norway, Kubberød *et al.* (2002) have compared self-reported evaluations of meat and meat-eating between male and female participants consisting of both teenagers and adults, and the results revealed a significant gender difference: compared to males, females displayed significantly more disgust over properties of red meat, they were more concerned about the health risks of eating red meat and had much less desire to increase the intake of any meat.

However, the real question behind the phenomena of gendered differences in food preference is whether such difference has any biological or social determinants. Twigg (1979), in her symbolist and structuralist interpretation of vegetarianism, has proposed a hierarchy of food with red meat at the top, followed by white meat, other animal products that do not involve killing, and vegetables at the bottom. She then further suggests that the conversion process to vegetarianism tends to begin with renouncing red meat is partially

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<sup>1</sup> Participant samples across the studies consisted of mainly American undergraduates and randomly selected adults from several European countries.

due to a subconscious denial of blood and the animal nature within humans that it symbolises. The taboo of blood also appeared in Kenyon and Barker's (1998) ethnographic study of the attitudes toward meat-eating among teenage girls in Nottingham. Based on the recurring theme of a dislike of blood in the interviews of teenage vegetarian girls, they proposed that the popularity of vegetarianism among teenage girls might indicate some girls' difficulty in dealing with menstruation; however, there was no direct evidence to support their hypothesis. Furthermore, the hypothesis did not explain why some girls were troubled by menstruation while others were not.

The symbolic meaning of meat and meat eating has been explored further. Fiddes (1991) considered meat eating the ultimate symbol of humans' triumph over nature. He was critical of this dominator's view of the human-nature relationship and expected it to be further questioned by the public. He called for a more equal relationship between the human and non-human environment, which he believed would eventually end the social norm of meat eating. Fiddes realised that the domination world view represented by meat eating was particularly masculine in nature, but he did not pay much attention to the subject. Adams (2010) has provided an elaboration of the link between meat eating and patriarchy, arguing that the exploitation of animals by humans was parallel to the exploitation of women in patriarchal society. Vegetarianism was seen by Adams as empowering women to fight against patriarchy.

Persuasive as these arguments seem, they bear the same critique of structuralism in general (Leach, 1974) which is the nearly impossible falsifiability. It is arguable whether the claim of linking meat eating with gender inequality is valid outside modern 'Western' society (Morris, 1994), and the claim has received scepticism from vegetarians and non-vegetarians in the post-industrial 'West' (Hamilton, 2006). Of course, it can be argued that, because the link is subconscious, it may well contradict intuition. Exploring vegetarianism through the lens of feminism provides valuable insights, however, because it reveals the different and often unequal social expectations of male and female gender representation, which is at the root of the gendered difference in meat consumption. The different expectations based on gender means that male and female vegetarians-to-be may

not receive the same amount of social pressure even if they have the same degree of motivation. Thus, the fact that the majority of vegetarian community is women could simply be because it is more socially acceptable for women to become vegetarian than men. On the surface, the current situation seems to justify the gender stereotype, which, according to Adams, is ironically supposed to be undermined by vegetarianism.

### **2.3.3 Processes of becoming Vegetarian**

Although the life trajectory of every vegetarian is unique, there are patterns in the processes of becoming vegetarian. Beardsworth and Keil (1991; 1992) have proposed that there are two models in the process of becoming vegetarian: a gradual one and an abrupt one. In the first model, the individual gradually develops a dislike of animal products and an empathy toward vegetarianism. By inspecting the process of eliminating animal-derived food in the diet, Jabs *et al.* (1998) and Stiles (1998) have proposed that the gradual transition model was the more common one. Both Jabs *et al.* (1998) and Barr and Chapman (2002) have proposed that the process usually starts by decreasing red meat, then white meat such as poultry and fish, then dairy products and eggs. This conforms to the food hierarchy proposed by Twigg (1979) based on the status and power the food represents in the society. According to Twigg, the pinnacle of the food hierarchy in the 'Western' tradition is red meat, followed by white meat, and then dairy and eggs. The influence of family and friends was important in making the initial decision (Beardsworth & Keil, 1991), as was personal experience, such as feeling physiologically unwell after eating meat (Jabs *et al.*, 1998).

In the second model, the individual embraces the idea of vegetarianism abruptly, often triggered by what Beardsworth and Keil (1992) call a 'conversion experience'. In this case, the conversion moment is so impressive that the vegetarian can usually recall it in detail. The trigger for the abrupt conversion could be external stimuli, such as TV programme or books promoting vegetarianism (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; Stiles, 1998; Boyle, 2011), or a sudden recognition of the link between meat and death (Beardsworth & Keil, 1992; Jabs *et al.*, 1998).

Despite the popularity of the graduation-versus-abrupt models, Boyle (2007) has criticised them for two reasons. First, Boyle criticised how Beardsworth and Keil treated the conversion to vegetarianism inclusively as an ideology shift and ignored the embodied aspect of becoming vegetarian. Second, he argued that the classification of gradual and abrupt transitions was overly subjective and therefore was invalid when comparing different conversion stories. There is merit in the critique, but I believe the dichotomous models are useful, especially if self-defined vegetarians use them to describe their own experiences. The problem is to acknowledge that the gradual and abrupt transition models are basic elements in constructing more complex conversion processes in real life instead of assuming they only two types of conversion processes. Beardsworth and Keil (1992) already realised that the gradual and abrupt models could exist within the same individual. Carmichael (2002) has further declared that a combination of gradual and abrupt transitions is more common than either in the process of becoming vegetarian in his study of the identification of novice vegetarians primarily from the UK.

Just as motives may change over time in the life trajectory of vegetarians, so too does their practice. Beardsworth and Keil (1991) have devised a vegetarian scale based on the diets reported by the respondents, with occasional meat consumption at one end and absolutely animal-free food at the other end. The life experiences of vegetarians showed that, in most cases, vegetarians would move along the scale from a less restricted diet to a more restricted one after their initial acceptance of vegetarianism (Beardsworth & Keil, 1991, 1992; Neale *et al.*, 1993; Jabs *et al.*, 1998; Barr & Chapman, 2002; Boyle, 2011). However, moving in the opposite direction is possible. In Barr and Chapman's (2002) study of vegetarian women, former vegetarian women and non-vegetarian women in Canada, 10% of vegetarian respondents reported consuming more animal products than when they first became vegetarian. A variety of reasons were reported to explain the reverse, such as concerns about nutritional adequacy, missing the taste of meat and a lack of social support. Haverstock and Forgays (2012) have also recorded not having enough vegetarian choices as one of the reasons former animal product-limiters reintroduced animal products into their diet. In addition to incorporating more animal food in their everyday diet, occasionally breaking the rules and having some meat was also acceptable for some

vegetarians and even vegans, as shown earlier in the chapter, which again indicates the flexibility of vegetarianism and the obscurity and fluidity of identification.

The motive of becoming and remaining vegetarian may affect the process of becoming vegetarian. Jabs *et al.* (1998) have stated,

(i)n the process of eliminating additional animal products from their diets, an asymmetrical relationship existed between respondents motivated for health and ethical reasons. Although ethically motivated vegetarians mentioned the secondary benefits of health, they felt health was not an important motive in maintaining their diets. On the other hand, respondents initially motivated for health reasons often became more aware of animal welfare issues and reported that this awareness encouraged them to eliminate more animal products from their diets. (Jabs *et al.*, 1998, p. 199)

It is also claimed that, compared with health-origin vegetarians, moral/ethic-origin vegetarians are more likely to give up a wider range of animal products and become vegan (Rozin *et al.*, 1997; Maurer, 2002; Fox & Ward, 2008a). Arguably, this is because there is innate inconsistency in the lifestyle of moral/ethic-origin vegetarians between their moral objection of any form of harm and killing and the act of consuming any kind of animal product, which can only be overcome by either dropping out of vegetarianism or evolving to veganism (Kooi, 2010). Although I do not particularly differentiate between vegetarian and vegan in my research, such studies are important reminders that the vegetarian path does not have a definite destination for everyone, and the consistency of self-identification requires the correspondence of the idea and the embodied practice.

#### **2.3.4 Social Relations of Vegetarians and Non-vegetarians**

As a dietary minority in 'Western' society, vegetarians face constant interaction with non-vegetarians in everyday life, be it within private social circles or with the largely non-vegetarian social environment.

The relationship between vegetarians and non-vegetarians is not always harmonious. Kellman (2000) has reviewed the difficulties encountered by vegetarians, such as being



persecuted for heresy in medieval Europe and ancient China, but also admitting that vegetarianism is much more tolerated in the 'West' today. Nevertheless, minor conflicts between vegetarians and non-vegetarians continue to exist, as the life experiences of vegetarians in the UK and the U.S. (Beardsworth & Keil, 1991; Stiles, 1998; Jabs *et al.*, 2000; Roth, 2005) show that their non-vegetarian family and friends often appear worried, confused and sad when first learning that they had become vegetarian. There is constant challenging, compromising and negotiating between the vegetarians and their non-vegetarian immediate social relations until some kind of equilibrium is achieved: this might be a compromise by the vegetarian to eat meat on certain occasions, a relationship breakdown, or the non-vegetarian willingly accepting the vegetarian member's behaviour. In their research on teenage vegetarians in South Australia, Worsley and Skrzypiec (1998) have noticed that female informants were more likely to receive social support from friends and acquaintances than their male counterparts, and the support they received was more likely from their mothers and elder sisters than from fathers and elder brothers. The gender difference may reflect the different social expectations for females and males, although the authors did not provide this as an explicit explanation. More literature regarding vegetarianism and gender is reviewed later in the chapter. Teenage and youth vegetarians may cause particular disturbances in the family because changing diet in the stage of life marked by increasing autonomy and individuality may indicate a protest against dominant authority, such as parental figures and family ideology (Charles & Kerr, 1988; Kenyon & Barker, 1998). This assumption is supported by some ex-vegetarians in South-East London who referred to their vegetarian past as no more than youthful rebellion (Willetts, 1997).

Even though conflicts may result from the on-going relationship between vegetarians and non-vegetarians, the sometimes-troublesome relationship is critical to the identification of both sides because collective identity relies on interaction to constantly reproduce the nonetheless 'flexible, situational and negotiable' (Jenkins, 2008, p. 131) Us-Them boundary, as is shown in the example of the mutually defining relationship in the construction of ethnicity (Eriksen, 2010).

Contrary to the attention paid to social relations between vegetarians and non-vegetarians, there have not been sufficient studies on the relationship among vegetarians themselves. Although there are studies on the strategies or actions of vegetarian organisations (e.g., Smart's [2004] discussion of the policy shift of The Vegetarian Society in the face of the commercialisation of vegetarianism in the UK and Maurer's [2002] discussion of how vegetarian organisations promoted a collective identity of veg\*an regardless of in-group dietary variation in the U.S.), few have looked into the interactions among vegetarians on an informal and individual level. In my research, I explore the relationships between vegetarians in Beijing and their non-vegetarian social relations and consider how they develop a relationship with other vegetarians. The identification of vegetarians is thus understood from a more comprehensive perspective.

### **2.3.5 Perception of Vegetarians and Non-vegetarians**

In addition to the direct interaction between vegetarians and their immediate non-vegetarian social relations, the dynamic between vegetarians and non-vegetarians is also manifested in their perceptions of each other as a group. The perception of the 'other' often involves comparison with and the construction of difference from 'Us'.

Studies concerning vegetarians' and non-vegetarians' perceptions of each other have mainly focused on several themes, one of which is health. For those who adopted a vegetarian diet for health reasons, apparently, they hold the belief that the diet would make a positive difference in their health compared with their non-vegetarian past; in other words, for them personally, the new vegetarian body ought to be healthier than the old, non-vegetarian one. However, health concerns (e.g., feeling fatigue and having anaemia) can also be a major reason for former vegetarians to give up vegetarian lifestyle (Barr & Chapman, 2002). For them, a vegetarian body was believed to be less healthy than their non-vegetarian body in the past and/or in the future. Similarly, the tendency of associating being vegetarian with physical weakness is found within some non-vegetarians (Willett, 1997; Minson & Monin, 2012). This is in accordance with Povey *et al.*'s (2001) survey results concerning the attitudes and beliefs of meat eaters, meat avoiders, vegetarians and

vegans in the UK, in which each group believed their own diet was the healthiest, and the unhealthiest diet was the one most different from their own. Despite the divergent attitudes toward the health aspect of vegetarianism on an individual level, there seems to be a positive change with regard to the perceptions of vegetarian on a larger scale. At least in the field of nutrition research, there has been a paradigm shift since 1960s, which was marked by a decrease in concerns about nutrient deficiency and the health risks of a vegetarian diet and an increase in concerns about the health risks of a meat-based diet, and there is now a consensus in this field that a plant-based diet is in general far more beneficial than a meat-based diet (Sabaté, 2003), although an unbalanced vegetarian diet can be harmful, especially for adolescents (Perry *et al.*, 2001; Sabaté, 2003).

Another theme that can be summarised from the studies of vegetarians' and non-vegetarians' perceptions of each other is the evaluation of the other group's moral stance, which is essential for predicting whether an individual's response should be friendly or hostile towards the inter-group relationship. Kellman (2000) has claimed that, for most of history, vegetarianism was marginalised and treated by the mainstream with hostility or suspicion. He depicted a history of the relationship between vegetarians and non-vegetarians in which confrontation was the norm, but the pessimistic undertone of antagonistic sentiments has been challenged by other studies. Contrary to implementing thoughtless persecution and antagonism toward vegetarianism, two studies in North America have shown that individuals, regardless of whether they are vegetarian, tend to have positive attitude towards vegetarians and attribute a stronger sense of morality to vegetarians than non-vegetarians (Chin *et al.*, 2002; Ruby & Heine, 2011). However, Minson and Monin (2012) have found that the non-vegetarians' tolerance and even appreciation of vegetarians may be conditional. They asked a total of 302 non-vegetarian undergraduates from two universities in the U.S. to evaluate being vegetarian and how they perceived vegetarians would evaluate non-vegetarians; the results showed that the more the non-vegetarian participants anticipated they would be morally depreciated by vegetarians, the more negative they felt toward vegetarians. The correlation between anticipated moral reproach and do-gooder derogation not only indicates the power of social cohesion under stressful circumstances but is also a defensive mechanism for individuals to maintain a

consistent moral identity. Even if the perceived moral condemnation may be exaggerated, studies using point scale-based questionnaires revealed that non-vegetarians anticipated vegetarians would rate them lower in terms of morality than both the rating they gave themselves and the rating actually given by vegetarians (Monin, 2007; Minson & Monin, 2012); however, the antagonism towards being morally judged by others is not unreasonable. Hussar and Harris (2010) have collected the opinions on meat-eating 6 – 10 year-old independent vegetarian children, family vegetarian children and non-vegetarian children in the U.S. through interviews. The results confirmed that, in line with previous studies on adults and adolescents, children also viewed moral transgression as worse than social-conventional transgression and personal choice, even though these were only different interpretations of the same behaviour. Generally speaking, the moral evaluation of vegetarians tends to be positive, at least in modern ‘Western’ society. However, as long as being or not being vegetarian is considered to involve moral commitment rather than personal choice, the mild tension between vegetarians and non-vegetarians may still linger.

Finally, one Canadian study (Ruby & Heine, 2011) involving the evaluation of randomly received fictional characters with almost identical profiles except for food preference showed that vegetarian and non-vegetarian participants alike considered vegetarians as less masculine than omnivores. A highly similar study conducted among students at the University of Pennsylvania (Rozin *et al.*, 2012) came to the same conclusion, although researchers did not record the participants’ food preference. These studies confirmed the prevalent stereotype of linking meat eating with masculinity, which was mentioned earlier in this chapter. Individuals may have two possible responses to the stereotype: they either identify with it and construct self-identity in accordance with it, thus reproducing the gender stereotype, or they question the conventional dualistic gender image and look for more diverse ways to express self-identity.

### **2.3.6 Cognitive Comparison between Vegetarians and Non-vegetarians**

In terms of investigating the difference between vegetarians and non-vegetarians that may be correlated to their different diets, more researchers have chosen the more ‘objective’

stance of adopting a third party's view than inviting vegetarians and non-vegetarians to directly evaluate each other. This could be done either by comparing ethnographic information about vegetarians and non-vegetarians on the same set of items, or asking vegetarians and non-vegetarians to perform the same task in a laboratory based environment and hoping the result would reveal any group-related difference.

One obvious difference between vegetarians and non-vegetarians consists of their attitudes toward meat and meat-eating. Interviews of and written surveys collected from vegetarians and non-vegetarians in the UK and Canada showed that non-vegetarians tend to have positive views of the sensory properties of meat and positive associations with meat-eating, whereas vegetarians tend to view the sensory properties of meat negatively and are likely to be physiologically and emotionally repelled by the idea of eating meat (Kenyon & Barker, 1998; Barr & Chapman, 2002; Hamilton, 2006). Although the difference was generated by participants' self-report, it may exist not only on the level of narrative, as is supported by a study of a topic relevant to meat eating, that is, animal welfare. A European study compared brain MRI scans of omnivores, vegetarians and vegans when viewing upsetting scenes of humans and animals; they found significant differences between each group in terms of brain activity in areas relating to empathy, self-awareness and so on (Filippi *et al.*, 2010). This study demonstrates the internal aspect of embodiment, that mind and body are not opposite but two sides of the same coin. If applied on a larger scale, it could be seen as mass body regulation powered by ideology.

Health and fitness is another easy-to-think-of topic toward which vegetarians and non-vegetarians are often found to differ in attitudes. Interviews of a population-based sample in British Columbia showed that compared to non-vegetarians, vegetarians tend to be more 'health conscious', such as having a higher intake of fruits and vegetables and a lower prevalence of smoking (Bedford & Barr, 2005). A study of 4,746 American adolescents, however, came to the opposite conclusion: compared to their non-vegetarian counterparts, the vegetarian adolescents were 'more likely to care about eating healthy food, and less likely to care about being healthy' (Perry *et al.*, 2001, p. 411); they were more body conscious, more likely to apply extreme weight control methods and more

prone to eating disorders and suicidal attempts. Perry *et al.* (2001) have attributed the difference in health consciousness between vegetarian adolescents and adults to the difference in the prime motivations behind their action. They argued that, unlike vegetarian adults whose prime motivations tend to be health and ethics, the single most important prime motivation of vegetarian adolescents was weight control, regardless of whether the methods adopted were healthy. This seems to suggest that the socially desirable body image of being slim imposed more pressure on adolescents than adults, although it was not mentioned in this study.

Some studies have indicated possible differences between vegetarians and non-vegetarians in terms of values and views on certain topics other than those mentioned above. Dietz *et al.* (1995) have interviewed 194 randomly selected residents from a suburb of Washington, DC about their value orientations; their results suggest that people with ‘traditional’ values<sup>1</sup> were significantly less likely to be vegetarian, and people with ‘altruistic’ values<sup>2</sup> were more likely to be vegetarian. This is in line with the findings of Kalof *et al.*’s (1999) study of randomly selected adults in the U.S. that altruism had a significant positive correlation, and traditional values had a significant negative correlation with beliefs about the benefits of vegetarianism. Allen *et al.* (2000) have conducted two survey studies in New Zealand in which they asked participants of mixed diets to grade a 10-point range of the Vegan-Omnivore Scale. They found that a greater tendency towards omnivore was positively correlated to greater right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation, although the correlation was small. In an interview-based study in the UK, participants were asked about their views on a series of topics such as abortion, nuclear weapons, capital punishment, boxing and fox hunting, and the results showed that vegetarians tend to be more liberal than non-vegetarians, and ‘ethically motivated vegetarians are more sensitive to and concerned about actions involving violence than the population in general’ (Hamilton, 2006, p. 172). In Chin *et al.*’s (2002) pilot test of their

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<sup>1</sup> Evaluated by respondent’s degree of approval of ‘honouring parents and elders, honest, family security, self-discipline, obedient, clean, politeness, social order, loyal’ (Dietz *et al.*, 1995, p. 538).

<sup>2</sup> Evaluated by respondent’s degree of approval of ‘unity with nature, protecting the environment, preventing pollution, respecting the earth, a world at peace, equality, social justice, helpful, a world of beauty, sense of belonging’ (Dietz *et al.*, 1995, p. 538).

originally designed *Attitudes Toward Vegetarians Scale* on a sample of American undergraduates, they found that negative attitudes toward vegetarians were significantly correlated with authoritarianism, although the correlation was small, while attitudes toward vegetarians were not significantly correlated to homonegativity and political conservatism. They attributed the latter to the restriction of the sample, which was student-exclusive and female-dominant, indicating the authors' presumption that attitudes toward vegetarians might differ in different social categories. In a sense, this presumption is the reverse of studies that compare vegetarians and non-vegetarians. Arguing that vegetarians are more likely to have certain characteristics compared with non-vegetarians from the same environment also implies that individuals who have certain characteristics are more likely to be vegetarians. The factors are correlated, but not necessarily by causality. Characteristics that strongly influence or predict an individual's inclination towards vegetarianism include being female, being younger in age and having stronger concerns about animal welfare (Kalof *et al.*, 1999; Janda & Trocchia, 2001). Some characteristics such as ethnicity and beliefs concerning health and the environment have been revealed in contradictory results in different studies (Kalof *et al.*, 1999; Janda & Trocchia, 2001; Perry *et al.*, 2001), indicating the degree of heterogeneity in both vegetarians and non-vegetarians. This is exactly the deficiency of studies that have made comparisons between vegetarians and non-vegetarians: although they help establish boundaries that are important in sustaining both groups' collective identity, they bear the risk of over-simplifying the bigger picture because there is much heterogeneity among non-vegetarians as well as vegetarians.

## 2.4 Conclusions

The topic of food and identity has attracted the interest of many scholars in the field of social sciences ever since the establishment of the disciplines. Using food to mark identity is prevalent in all human societies due to the universality of food and its vital role in human survival. Food is used to mark collective identities such as ethnicity, gender and social class, yet the relationship between food and collective identities is not one of one-to-one correspondence and is subject to change due to the fluidity of the process of

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identification. In an age of growing individualisation and mass consumption, food choice serves to denote the individual identity in the form of lifestyle. The vegetarian lifestyle is absolutely essential to the vegetarian identity.

Extant research on vegetarianism has explored a range of aspects of the vegetarian identity, including its definition, the motivation and process of becoming vegetarian and the comparison between vegetarians and non-vegetarians, which is the framework of my thesis. However, there are gaps in extant research of vegetarianism that I wish to fill with my own research. For instance, extant research has mainly focused on the ‘Western’ tradition of vegetarianism and seldom paid attention to other traditions of vegetarianism or whether there was any communication between different traditions of vegetarianism. Furthermore, the understanding of vegetarianism by non-vegetarians is often ignored by academia. Even with areas in which extant studies have made extensive research, such as the gendered aspect of vegetarianism, my research can serve to supplement or revise the current understanding with data from the non-‘Western’ social context. In the next chapter, I explain the methodology adopted to conduct my research.



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## Chapter 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explain and evaluate the methodology used in my research. I start by providing a rationale of selected methods, and I then elaborate the process of data collection and analysis, followed by a brief statement on the potential ethical issues in my research.

### 3.2 Research Methods and Rationale

As stated in chapter 1, this research aims to explore the identification of vegetarians in modern Beijing in the hope of reaching a deeper understanding of individual identification in metropolitan China in a transitional context. Qualitative methodology was adopted because, defined by Denzin and Lincoln as ‘a situated activity that locates the observer in the world’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3), it allows the researcher to ‘study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Over the decades, qualitative methodology has become prominent in the social sciences (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). It has great strength when studying values and meanings that cannot be ‘experimentally examined or measured ... in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10), which are precisely the subject of this research.

I conducted ethnographic research in Beijing for a total of around six months between 2014 and 2016 in two three-months periods.<sup>1</sup> The research is ethnographic in nature in the sense that it recognises a unique vegetarian community in Beijing with its members sharing a collective identity and similarities in terms of lifestyle, and it aims to present a comprehensive picture of the life of vegetarians in Beijing by adopting multiple qualitative

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<sup>1</sup> More information is given in the ‘overview of the sample’ section.

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research methods. I mainly used semi-structured, one-on-one interviews supplemented by participant observation and analysis of printed and digital materials to collect in-depth information on vegetarians' and some non-vegetarians' everyday experiences.

Most data were obtained by semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Mason has proposed that a qualitative interview is based on the assumption that 'it is possible to investigate elements of the social by asking people to talk, and to gather or construct knowledge by listening to and interpreting what they say and to how they say it' (Mason, 2002, p. 225). She has rightfully noted that conducting an interview is not like excavating; it is 'a site of knowledge construction, and the interviewee and interviewer as co-participants in the process' (Mason, 2002, p. 227). Far from being a plain description of the past, the narrative generated in the interview is part of the on-going identification process, making sense of the here and now by reinterpreting the past (Bourque, 2006). The same could be applied to focus groups, which have a more complex group dynamic than one-on-one interviews.

I intended to use focus groups as a complement to the one-on-one interviews. They are supposed to be more efficient than one-on-one interviews and generate a different type of data due to the group dynamics that are unavailable in one-on-one interviews (Frey & Fontana, 1991; Lunt & Livingstone, 1996), which is especially obvious if the same individuals are involved in both one-on-one interviews and focus groups. However, I encountered some difficulties in the process of conducting focus groups, which I elaborate later in this chapter.

Some data were acquired by participant observation. This method is meant to record events or activities in their natural context (Bernard, 2006). Qualitative data collected in this way are often experiential. They can be participants' experiences recorded by the on-site researcher or the experience of the researcher in the same or at least similar circumstances as the participants. In my case, it was a combination of both. This method was necessary because it increased the validity of data and complemented participants' narratives. I give more detail on this subject in later sections of the chapter. These data are supplemented by

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other texts<sup>1</sup> constructed by self-declared vegetarians, the majority of which are from the Internet. Again, these texts should not be taken at face value but should be treated as strategic constructions in the service of identification.

I did not use a questionnaire or survey because of the difficulty of obtaining enough valid responses. This and the lack of any official statistics regarding the vegetarian population in Beijing (or rather, anywhere in China) means it is impossible to conduct valid quantitative analysis in this research.

To analyse these qualitative data, I adopted thematic analysis with thematic networks (Attride-Stirling, 2001). This approach is similar to grounded theory in the process of systematising the complex raw data and breaking up the data into manageable clusters of themes, but it has a relatively unilinear development from raw data to abstract theoretical themes compared to the inter-development of data collection and theme generation in grounded theory (Bryman & Burgess, 1994).

### **3.3 Data Collection**

#### **3.3.1 Fieldwork Setting**

In chapter 1, I stated the main reason for choosing Beijing as the main fieldwork site, i.e., because Beijing is ideal for recruiting individuals who follow unconventional and non-mainstream lifestyles and because I am familiar with Beijing. In this section, I describe the basic settings for the fieldwork site.

Modern Beijing is an extremely diverse place. This huge metropolis now covers an area of 16,410.54 square kilometres and consists of 14 districts and 2 counties.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The text here refers not only to literal records, but also to other tangible and intangible entities such as artefacts, images, behaviours and events (Bernard, 2006, p. 463).

<sup>2</sup> From 2010 onwards. The information source is the same as the one listed in footnote 1 on page 60.

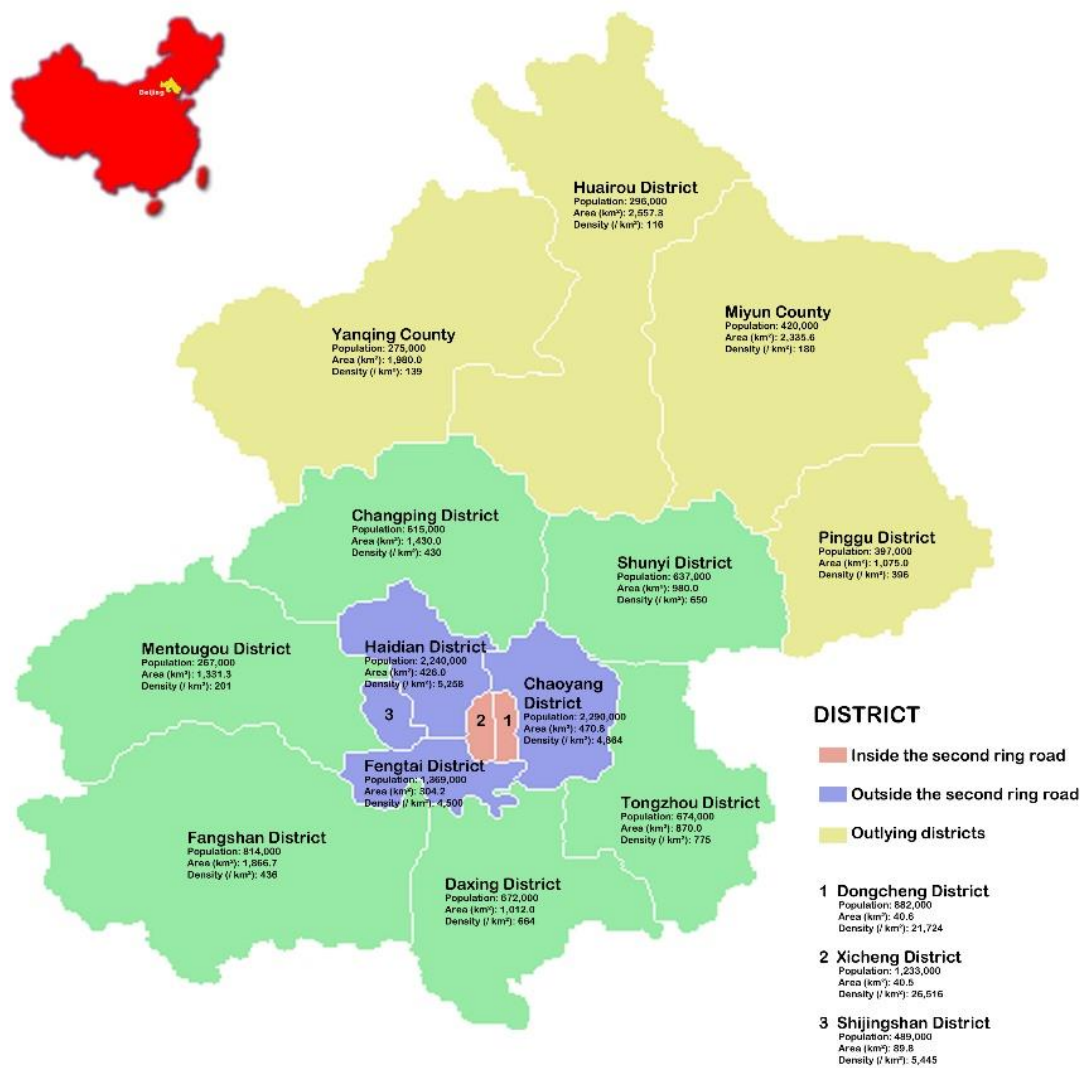


Figure 3-1 Map of Districts in Beijing<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://beijingconflict.wordpress.com/maps/> (Accessed: 3 November 2016).

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There are great variations in a range of variables in different areas of the city, such as size, the income levels of the population and the nature of the local economy. In 2006, the government of Beijing proposed guidance on the prior functions and future development for each district and county, which I summarise as follows:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All information is from the website of the government of Beijing, which can be found at: <http://www.beijing.gov.cn/rwbj/bjgm/bjfm/t1290961.htm> (Accessed: 3 November 2016).

Guidance	Districts and counties
<p><b>The core functions area:</b> this area is a representation of Old Beijing and the political, cultural and international communication centre of the nation.</p>	<p>Doncheng District, Xicheng District, Chongwen District, Xuanwu District<sup>1</sup></p>
<p><b>The metropolitan functions extension area:</b> this area is the extension of the core functions area. The priority of this area is to develop services for an export-orientated economy and encourage commercial-oriented innovation.</p>	<p>Chaoyang District, Haidian District, Fengtai District, Shijingshan District</p>
<p><b>The new development area:</b> this area is the future centre of manufacture and modern agriculture in Beijing. It is also where overcrowded industry and population in city centre will be relocated.</p>	<p>Tongzhou District, Shunyi District, Daxing District, Changping District, Fangshan District, Yizhuang Economic-technological Development Area</p>
<p><b>The ecological preserve area:</b> this area is the ecological fence and water source of Beijing. It is critical for the sustainable development of Beijing. If developed properly, it can be used as leisure space for Beijing citizens.</p>	<p>Mentougou District, Pinggu District, Huairou District, Miyun County, Yanqing County</p>

<sup>1</sup> In 2010, the four districts merged into two, which are now Dongcheng District and Xicheng District.

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Table 3-1 Guidance for Districts and Counties of Beijing by the Government of Beijing

Districts that belong to the first two categories constitute the original territory of Beijing before 1949, and they have the highest degree of urbanisation compared to other parts of Beijing. Districts and counties that belong to the last two categories are mainly the products of Beijing's rapid expansion in recent decades. They were once industrial and rural suburbs and have been under the transition of urbanisation since the 1980s (Gao and Zhu, 2015). However, modern Beijing is still a place where urban and rural contexts coexist. Statistics provided by the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics show that the proportion of rural population in the resident population in Beijing has dropped from 45% in 1978 to around 13.5% in 2015.<sup>1</sup> This means that, even today, more than one-tenth of Beijing's resident population still lives in rural areas.

Except for the contrast between urban and rural, it is clear from the form that the government of Beijing had different priorities for each particular district and county which encouraged different industries to develop in that area. As a result, different types of populations and services dedicated to that population are gathered around those industries.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, there is an imbalance in the distribution of residential space and working space in the city. Whereas the major location of residences has expanded from the city centre to inner suburbs since the 1980s, the distribution of working space shows a centripetal tendency (Sun *et al.* 2012), which also impacts the distribution of the service industry.

These are only some of the factors that have shaped the diverse geo-economic conditions within Beijing which both had a great impact on and are reflected by the distribution of vegetarianism-related landmarks and events, which I demonstrate in more detail in chapter 7. Here, I would like to point out how it affected my choice of fieldwork accommodation in Beijing. Because the people and places I intended to visit were highly dispersed and I

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<sup>1</sup> Original figure is available at: [http://www.bjstats.gov.cn/tjsj/cysj/201511/t20151109\\_311727.html](http://www.bjstats.gov.cn/tjsj/cysj/201511/t20151109_311727.html) (no date) (Accessed: 3 November 2016). Calculation by the author.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics on the gross value of production and number of employees of each industry in every district and county between 2009-2015 can be found on the website of Beijing Statistical Information Net: <http://www.bjstats.gov.cn/tjsj/qxsj/qysjfpfb/2015n/> (Accessed: 12 December 2016).

relied on public transport to move around in this enormous metropolis, my choice of accommodation was partly determined by its distance to multiple public transport lines, especially subway lines. I chose hotels and privately rented apartments located between the Second Ring (二环) and the Third Ring (三环), not because they were near any particular place I intended to visit, but because the geologically central location meant that, wherever my destination might be in the city, it would not be too far away or too difficult to reach. I stayed in Chaoyang District, Haidian District, Xicheng District and Fengtai District, all within the core area of Beijing. Fortunately, and perhaps not surprisingly, it turned out that most of the fieldwork I undertook happened within the same area.

### 3.3.2. Sampling Procedure

Although my research concerns vegetarianism in Beijing, not only vegetarian but also non-vegetarian participants were recruited for the sake of comparison. To obtain a comprehensive picture of vegetarianism in modern Beijing, I intended to interview vegetarians who only practiced the diet on a personal level as well as those who incorporated vegetarianism promotion into their career, such as vegetarian restaurant owners and vegetarianism-related event organizers.

Anyone who counted as a member of the resident population in Beijing met the criterion for being a participant. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China,<sup>1</sup> the resident population in an area consists of: a) those whose household is registered or will be registered in this area and currently live where the household is or will be registered, b) those whose household is not registered in this area but have been living in this area for more than six months, c) those whose household is registered in this area but are temporarily away (less than six months) yet still within the border of China and d) those whose household is registered in this area but are working or studying abroad.<sup>2</sup> In order to

<sup>1</sup> The definition can be found on the bureau's website:

<http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsz/tjbk/nsbzb/201402/P020140226567304137520.pdf> (Accessed: 31 May 2016). English translation by the author.

<sup>2</sup> There is no time limit in the last situation.



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obtain a more comprehensive view of the vegetarian scene in modern Beijing, non-Chinese vegetarians residing in Beijing were recruited as expert witnesses since the experience they have of being vegetarian in different contexts gives them an advantage in distinguishing the unique characteristics of the vegetarianism in Beijing. In addition, because they practiced their vegetarian lifestyle in Beijing, they technically constituted part of the local vegetarian scene.

Initially, I only intended to recruit non-religious vegetarian participants because my research is about unconventional vegetarianism, i.e., non-religious-based vegetarianism. I initially believed it had little crossover with conventional vegetarianism, which was closely related to Buddhism in China. However, as I made acquaintances with more and more vegetarians, I gradually realized that the relationship between religious and non-religious vegetarianism was far more complicated than I had expected, and that they were not always incompatible within the same individual. Therefore, I became more inclusive in terms of religious belief when recruiting participants. All the vegetarian participants are self-defined, although in everyday life they may use different expressions to refer to their identity and have different practices, which I illustrate in the following chapters.

To recruit non-vegetarian participants, I used snowball sampling. I am aware that snowball sampling cannot ‘produce a random, representative sample’ (Bernard, 2006, p. 193) in large populations, yet the method is appropriate for my research because it was difficult to gain enough trust from strangers to persuade them to participate in my research in a short period of time. In this circumstance, I had to rely on existing social networks. I distributed my research information to family members and friends and asked them if they knew anyone who met the criteria and might be interested in participating in the research. After they had found a suitable candidate and received permission from that person, the mediator would interchange contact information between the potential participant and me, and then we were left to discuss further information between us.

I recruited most of the vegetarian participants using this same strategy. I felt confident in adopting snowball sampling to recruit vegetarian participants. There have been no

authoritative statistics on the percentage of the vegetarian population in China today. The Public Radio International (PRI) estimated the figure to be around 4% to 5% but gave no reference or explanation of how the figure was calculated.<sup>1</sup> In Mao *et al.*'s (2015) study of vegetarians in Shanghai, the percentage of vegetarian (including vegan) was 0.77% in a randomly recruited sample of 4,004 participants. Even though the first figure may not be reliable and the second was conducted in a Chinese metropolis other than Beijing, using them as references, it is still reasonable to speculate that the vegetarian population in Beijing is quite small compared to the city's entire population, and the members are geographically scattered. Snowball sampling is efficient in recruiting participants in this situation once the first few participants have been found, as indicated by Beardsworth and Keil's (1992) study of vegetarians in the UK. Boyle (2007) also used snowball sampling when recruiting vegetarian participants in the U.S. because of the method's strength in studying a stigmatised population which, in his case, was the vegetarian population in the U.S. The stigma, if there was any, was not explicit as far as I observed, but I did frequently notice scepticism from both vegetarian and non-vegetarian participants towards each other, and many vegetarian participants reported having been under the pressure of family and friends. This may partly explain my failure in random sampling. I tried to send messages to active vegetarians on social networks such as Weibo, but only two responded, and one of them later turned out to be an acquaintance of an acquaintance of mine. Those who did not respond might have learnt to be vigilant and suspicious towards an outsider.

Although the strategy used to recruit members for one-on-one interviews and focus groups was essentially the same, in practice, it was significantly more difficult to arrange focus groups because it was not easy to have several individuals be available at the same time. I persuaded just one participant of each focus group to also participate in one-on-one interviews. Finally, I conducted two focus groups. The first consisted of five Chinese students who were recruited by a family friend who was a postgraduate at Peking University. In the second, I visited a monk in his temple and then realised he invited others to join our conversation. It was a spontaneous occasion, but it followed the same key

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pri.org/stories/2013-06-27/vegan-lunch-going-meatless-beijing> (Accessed: 08 March 2017).

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themes as the first focus group.

### **3.3.3 Interview Procedure**

In order to answer how vegetarians in modern Beijing construct their self-identity, detailed information on vegetarians' and some non-vegetarians' everyday life was necessary. In practice, I found that the most efficient way to acquire such information was through in-depth interviews.

Before entering the field, I listed a series of questions I intended to ask participants in the interviews and focus groups. Questions were classified into different groups to accommodate different types of interviewees. Vegetarian participants were further divided according to the degree of involvement in promoting vegetarianism. People who actively promoted vegetarianism (i.e., vegetarian influencers) through opening vegetarian restaurants or organising vegetarian-related events would answer questions specifically designed for them in addition to the questions designed for all vegetarian participants.

These questions were improved in pilot work. I also added new questions as new problems emerged during fieldwork. I then returned to ask previous participants those questions to ensure everyone was asked the same set of baseline questions. Below is the final version of questions at the end of the fieldwork.

#### **Individual Interview Questions for Vegetarians**

1. Can you give a brief self-introduction? How would you describe yourself in terms of diet? Do you consider yourself to be vegetarian? What do you think this word means? Where did you learn the concepts?

This question was designed to generate demographic information and the self-identification of the participant. Furthermore, asking for their own understanding of vegetarianism, especially in terms of diet, helped to reveal diverse practices among

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vegetarians.

2. Are you from Beijing? If not, how long have you been in Beijing? Were you in Beijing when you became a vegetarian? When did that happen? How did it happen?
3. Have there been any changes with you over this period of time, such as your reason for being a vegetarian, or your mental and physical health condition?

These two questions solicited participants' motivation(s) and processes of becoming vegetarian. I hoped their narratives of individual histories would provide significant information about their self-identification at the time of the investigation. Furthermore, as part of the embodiment of identity, I wanted to see if being vegetarian could bring any change to the body either physically or spiritually.

4. What was the reaction of your family and friends to you becoming vegetarian? Has their attitude changed over time? Did any of them become vegetarian, as well?
5. Do you know any other vegetarians? How did you meet each other? How do you keep contact?

These two questions concerned participants' social relations because interaction with inner-/outer-group members is essential in the identification process.

6. Who is responsible for grocery shopping and cooking at home? Where do they do the grocery shopping? How many people are they responsible for? Of those people, how many are vegetarians?
7. Do you eat out of the home? What are your criteria in choosing where to eat?
8. Do you take any dietary supplements? Since when? Who made this decision?

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9. Can you recall what you have eaten and drunk in the past 24 hours?

10. What do you think of the food environment in Beijing in general?

These questions concerned participants' everyday experiences as vegetarians. I hoped to learn how they maintained their identity in everyday life in terms of diet. In fieldwork, I found that question 6 could also reveal what type of household they lived in, e.g., shared accommodations or living with other family members, while question 8 might relate to their perceptions of food and health.

11. What do you think are the obstacles, if any, of being vegetarian in Beijing/your hometown? Do you think things have changed since you became vegetarian?

This open-ended question was usually asked at the end of interview to see participants' interaction with wider society from their point of view, e.g., how they felt they were treated. I hoped to see whether the existence and needs of vegetarians as a community were recognised by wider society.

### **Interview Questions for Non-vegetarians**

1. How much do you know about vegetarianism?

2. Do you personally know any vegetarians? How do you know them? Did they ever explain why they adopted this diet to you?

3. Who is responsible for grocery shopping and cooking at home? Where do they do the grocery shopping? How many people are they responsible for? Of those people, how many are vegetarians?

4. Do you eat out of the home? What are your criteria in choosing where to eat?

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5. Do you take any dietary supplements? Since when? Who made this decision?
  6. Can you recall what you have eaten and drunk in the past 24 hours?
  7. What do you think of the food environment in Beijing in general?
  8. Have you ever had meals with vegetarians? At home or in a restaurant? Who decided what to cook/eat?
  9. Have you ever had meals in a vegetarian restaurant? Who chose the restaurant? What do you think of the food and the environment?
  10. Do you think there have been any changes in your diet in recent years (e.g. last three to five years or since you came to Beijing)?

The questions for non-vegetarians were designed to make comparison to vegetarians. Thus, many questions were the same as or complementary to the questions for vegetarians. Some questions were designed to show non-vegetarians' understanding of vegetarianism, while aimed to see if their everyday experience and attitude towards certain topics significantly differed from those of the vegetarian participants.

### **Interview Questions for Owners of Vegetarian Restaurants and Cafés**

1. Questions in the first section if applicable.
2. When did you open this restaurant/café? What motivated you to do that? Have you run a business before? What kind of business?
3. How did you recruit employees? Are they vegetarians?
4. What are the standards of the cooking ingredients?

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5. How do you develop new dishes?
  6. What do you think is the niche of the restaurant/café? Who are the target customers?
  7. What do you think are the obstacles, if any, of opening a vegetarian restaurant/café in Beijing?
  8. What is your perspective of the restaurant/café? Would you say that it is successful?

### **Interview Questions for Vegetarian Event Organisers**

1. Questions in the first section if applicable.
2. Is this a single event or one of a series? If it is the latter, how long has the series been going? What are the topics of the events?
3. Why do you want to hold the event? How did you determine the topic?
4. Who sponsored the event?
5. What do you expect to achieve with the event?
6. Do you think that this event will raise awareness of vegetarianism?
7. How important is the event organising at this stage of your life? Do you have a career other than event organising?

The owners of vegetarian restaurants and cafés and vegetarian event organisers were different from other vegetarian participants because they managed to incorporate their lifestyle into their career. Questions designed for them focused on this aspect.

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The questions for focus groups were designed to encourage discussion on participants' opinion on certain topics. I also asked for demographic information and life experiences, if applicable. Questions were as follows:

1. Can you give a brief self-introduction?
2. Do you know each other before today? If yes, how did you meet each other?
3. Questions in section 1 and 2 if applicable.
4. How do you feel when you see meat products?
5. What do you think the relationship is between diet and health? What do you think are elements of a healthy diet?
6. What do you think of traditional Chinese medicine and nutrition in terms of their interpretation of health and healthy eating?
7. What do you think of modern bioscience, such as GM and cultured meat?
8. What do you think the relationship is between meat-eating and gender?
9. What do you think of the food environment in Beijing in general? If you could change anything, what would you like to change?

In practice, the questions were used to stimulate discussion. I tried to encourage participants to probe in more detail if they mentioned anything unexpected in conversation. I then asked additional questions based on that. This meant that not everyone was asked the same set of questions. In that sense, the interview process was intended to be open-ended. The central purpose of this was to review the motives of those involved and the nature of the beliefs they held about vegetarianism. For instance, I found that many white-collar



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participants had workday meals at canteens at work, so I would ask them what kind of food was available at the canteen and how they chose what to eat.

Two languages were used in the interviews. The majority of the interviews were conducted in Mandarin, whereas interviews with non-Chinese living in Beijing were conducted in English. In the former cases, because many of the terminologies and arguments about non-religious-based vegetarianism are not native to China, communicating with participants in their native language, i.e. Mandarin, enabled me to see how the imported concepts were translated (or why they were sometimes untranslated) and reinterpreted in a local context. I did my best to have a face-to-face interview with the participants whenever I could because communication is not only about speech but also about body language and the tone of voice. However, six interviews were conducted online. Of the six interviewees, two were not in Beijing at that time, and the others were in Beijing but were too busy or lived too far away to meet me in person. I did one interview via Skype voice call, one via WeChat<sup>1</sup> voice messaging and four via typing in QQ.<sup>2</sup> The advantage of a written form of interviewing is that the records can easily be copied and edited; however, I have noticed that, in general, the answers generated this way tended to be shorter and less spontaneous compared with the answers generated in spoken interviews. In addition, emotions and feelings were expressed indirectly and more artificially managed through emoji usage; thus, I might have come to a different conclusion in terms of their feelings on certain topics if I had the chance to observe their reaction in real life. However, meeting face-to-face would not necessarily make my judgment truer or more objective than communicating via written text, as what I have or could have perceived could be regarded as performances devoted to giving the impression of what the participant considered suitable for that specific situation (Goffman, 1956). However, there were clear trends in the answers from the groups of subjects and these were apparent across the different interview formats. The analysis of responses made it possible to tabulate answers and group them into broad thematic categories. It was therefore possible to indicate the nature of these trends.

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<sup>1</sup> An instant message app. This app is crucial in the everyday communication within the vegetarian community. More is explored in chapter 6.

<sup>2</sup> An instant message software.

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When I had the chance to meet the participant in person, I preferred to let them decide where and when we would meet. Often, we met in a public location such as a café or a fast food chain and had our conversation over a few drinks. As a researcher, I felt obligated to pay for the participant's bill as a way to thank them for their participation, but the reality was often the other way round; they always paid for me because, in their eyes, I was a full-time student who has not started to make a living for myself yet. In return, I gave them souvenirs from the University of Glasgow, such as a marking pen and lip balm with the university's logo on it in the hope of adding a sense of authority so that they might take me and my research more seriously. Although I preferred to meet in public, two participants invited me to have interviews at their homes because it was more convenient for them. Since I asked the participants to choose the time and location that suited them, I felt it would be impolite to reject their suggestion. I told someone else where I was going for the interview for my own safety.

The first focus group was held in a conference room at Peking University. The second took place in the storeroom of a Buddhist temple. In a sense, both focus groups were conducted in the participants' authentic environment, in which they felt comfortable.

Before each vocal interview started, I asked the interviewee's permission to record the interview. Interviews were only recorded with permission; all but one subject granted permission. In that case, I took notes on a notebook during our conversation. In other cases, I used a voice recorder and my smartphone to record the conversation then copy the file to my laptop for future transcription.

I exchanged contact information with every participant in case future communication was needed. I asked follow-up questions using mobile phone and WeChat during and after fieldwork, but not all of them responded.

### **3.3.4 Overview of the Sample**

I recruited 17 participants (12 current vegetarians and five non-vegetarians) for interviews

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in my first leg of fieldwork (December 2014 – March 2015). Basic demographic information of interviewees is listed below. In order to protect the identities of the interviewees, all participants are referred to by pseudonyms generated by a random baby name generator from the Internet.

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Time Being Vegetarian</b>
Calvin	Male	36 <sup>1</sup>	NGO manager, musician	14 years
Codey	Male	50	Professor	10 years
Ziva	Female	27	Structural engineer	7 years
Kofi	Male	56	Professor, founder and director of dongbaowang.org	18 years
Kaja	Female	33	Social media advisor	6 years
Vanessa	Female	25	Teacher	2 months
Maison	Male	n/a	Student, president of the Vegetarian Society of Peking University	2 years
Klara	Female	46	Restaurant	12 years

<sup>1</sup> Participants' age and time of being vegetarian are at the time of interview.

			manager	
Weronika	Female	N/A	Teacher	Had been vegetarian for a year
Marlee	Female	28	Student, director of the Vegplanet	3 years

Table 3-2 List of Current and Former Vegetarian Interviewees from the First Leg of Fieldwork

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Time Being Vegetarian</b>
Nelson	Male	28	Freelance writer, founder and director of Vege Vegan BJ WeChat Group	British	7 years
Alvin	Male	44	Cameraman	Canadian	4 years
Viola	Female	30	Freelance writer, teacher	Polish	14 years

Table 3-3 Non-Chinese Vegetarian Expert Witnesses from the First Leg of Fieldwork

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Ashton	Male	28	Editor of a children's magazine
Cecilia	Female	29	Editor at a private publisher
Savanna	Female	26	Environmental engineer
Wayne	Male	N/A	N/A

Table 3-4 List of Non-vegetarian Interviewees from the First Leg of Fieldwork

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I recruited a further 23 interviewees in my second leg of fieldwork (December 2015 – March 2016). These were all different people from the interviewees I recruited in my first leg of fieldwork. Their basic demographic information is shown as follows:



	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Time being Vegetarian</b>
Austin	Male	21	Student	Was vegetarian for one academic term
Stanford	Male	43	University lecturer	6 years
Erick	Male	40	Vegetarian restaurant owner	Around 12 years
Dona	Female	50	Pensioner	Around 5 years
Linda	Female	33	Civil servant	5.5 years
Jason	Male	36	Environmental engineer	Was vegan for 2 months
Barry	Male	39	Musician	8 years
Deven	Male	35	Musician	8 years
Hamilton	Male	60	Vegan restaurant owner	33 years

Table 3-5 List of Current and Former Vegetarian Interviewees from the Second Leg of Fieldwork

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Evaline	Female	28	Editor at a national publisher
Maxine	Female	31	User interface designer
Sherie	Female	42	Researcher at the National Library
Denise	Female	28	Editor at private publisher
Alaina	Female	30	Researcher
Jocelin	Female	23	Editor at a private publisher
Estelle	Female	33	Unemployed (former assistant of a business supply chain in a wholly foreign-owned enterprise)
Timmy	Male	28	Medical company manager

Tamera	Female	25	Data analyst
Martha	Female	27	Police
Rusty	Male	27	Scriptwriter
Billie	Female	25	Employee of China Railway Construction Group Co.
Tyron	Male	27	Advertising agency PR
Darcy	Female	31	Advertising company manager

Table 3-6 List of Non-vegetarian Interviewees from the Second Leg of Fieldwork

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In total, I recruited 40 interviewees, including 19 current vegetarians (11 males, eight females), 2 former vegetarian (one male, one female), one former vegan (male) and 18 non-vegetarians (five males, 13 females). The age range of former and current vegetarian participants was between 21 and 60 with an average age of 38. The age range of non-vegetarian participants was between 23 and 42 with an average age of 29.

The social status of each interviewee was not easy to judge, not only because I failed to collect enough information concerning the educational and income levels of each participant, but also because there is a lack of consensus concerning what indicators of social strata are reliable in China (e.g. Liu, 2007; Li & Zhang, 2008). However, most interviewees in my research may be categorised as what Li and Zhang have called ‘occupational middle-class’, that is, the ‘non-manual labourer who enjoys a salary and has some level of administrative responsibility or skill’ (Li & Zhang, 2008, p. 6).

There were five people in the first focus group and three in the second focus group. They were either vegetarian or vegetarian sympathisers. In either focus group, fellow participants shared a similar background: in the first, all participants were students, and in the second, they were religious professionals and a semi-professional. The like-mindedness might have a significant impact on the group dynamics and the results I obtained.

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Time being vegetarian</b>
Shawn	Male	23	Postgraduate	n/a
Willie	Male	22	Undergraduate	n/a
Henry	Male	28	Prospective postgraduate	n/a
Justin	Male	28	PhD	n/a
Maison	Male	n/a	Postgraduate	2 years

Table 3-7 Members of Focus Group 1

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Time being vegetarian</b>
Aiden	Male	n/a	Monk	n/a
Tanner	Male	n/a	Monk	n/a
Dona	Female	50	Pensioner	Around 5 years

Table 3-8 Members of Focus Group 2

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### 3.3.5 Observation

I adopted participant and non-participant observation in my research. The essence of participant observation is on-site experience. Modern urban life brings special challenges to the traditional approach of participant observation, i.e., immersing oneself in the community under study 24/7, since ‘(m)any of us live segmented lives, embedded in different networks of family, leisure and work. Thus, most “communities” formed within these networks are spatially dispersed, and many are occasional or intermittent’ (Crang and Cook, 2007, p. 39). To compensate, in addition to taking part in vegetarianism-related events with vegetarians such as off-line meet-ups, I tried to live like a vegetarian during my stay in Beijing. It was difficult for me because the fact that I could not cook for myself limited my food choices, let alone the longing for the taste of meat. With only a small budget, I experienced what many participants described as a tricky situation when eating out. The auto-ethnography-inspired practice gave me a glimpse of an insider’s view of a lifestyle I am not familiar with (Anderson, 2006). It enabled me to reflect on how knowledge was generated in the field through interaction.

Bernard (2006) has distinguished all observations into direct and indirect forms; both were adopted in my research. In direct observation, I was part of the scene even though sometimes I was only part of the background. I experienced the scene in real-time while it unfolded around me. The observation process can be reactive or non-interactive from the observer’s point of view (Bernard, 2006); in the former case it is *de facto* participant observation. I visited four Buddhist vegetarian restaurants and two vegan restaurants as an ordinary customer and later interviewed one vegan restaurant owner. I chose the restaurants based on word of mouth and reviews on websites. They all had a reputation of good food at affordable prices. Although I did not participate in running the restaurant, I still contributed to its construction by fulfilling my expected role as a customer. I actively sought vegetarian-related events on the Internet. In fact, all events I attended were found online. I attended a vegetarian and vegan potluck organised by a vegetarian WeChat group. The potluck took place in a charity meeting room. Of the 15 attendees, 12 were vegetarians. The majority of the attendees – 10 out of 15 – were non-Chinese living in Beijing. The

high proportion of non-Chinese was probably because the event was launched by a WeChat group dedicated mainly to non-Chinese vegetarians in Beijing. My attendance of the non-Chinese dominated event was justified by the fact that it is an organic part of the vegetarian scene in modern Beijing. As I demonstrate in later chapters, the vegetarian scene in Beijing is multi-sourced and international. The seemingly non-Chinese-oriented event was created in and contributed to this unique context.

I volunteered in an animal shelter run by several vegetarians, and many volunteers were vegetarian, too. This was a valuable opportunity to see how they socialise in their spare time. I attended a food tasting and fair held in a Western-style vegetarian restaurant. Every attendee had to register and pay online beforehand to secure a position. I went to a home-cooking vegetarian food tasting event held in the host's luxury suburban house. On both occasions, I found vegetarian and non-vegetarian attendees alike.

Bernard has called indirect observation 'the archeology of human behavior' (Benard, 2006, p. 413), which includes purely non-interactive activities consisting of trace studies and archive research. In my research, I delved into mostly online archives, e.g., forum threads, blog posts, other social network contents, interviews and news coverage. The drawback of heavily relying on social media is that the users may not be representative because using the Internet requires resources such as time and skill, which are not available to all. Information collected in this way is often not restricted to Beijing alone, which is not a surprise because, thanks to the unprecedented mobility of information and individuals today, it is not uncommon for researchers to find that the experiences and activities of subjects may extend well beyond the boundaries the researcher initially defined for the field (Amit, 2000). As the following chapters show, the impacts received by and which emanated from vegetarians in Beijing often crossed political borders. An inquiry into vegetarianism in Beijing is bound to transcend endemism and tap into a wider, more complex network.

In addition to online data, I also collected hardcopy data, such as menus and posters. They are valuable data on how vegetarianism was represented towards the mostly



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non-vegetarian public.

### **3.3.6 The Issue of Auto-ethnography**

Adopting participant observation resulted in incorporating my own experience as a source of information for my research. Although not critically, this makes my research to some extent auto-ethnographic. Despite the common critiques of auto-ethnography, such as the charges that it is self-indulgent, unscientific and uninteresting (Campbell, 2017), this methodology is legitimate and valuable in conducting qualitative research. It puts the researcher at the centre of their work, embracing the perspective of the author that was traditionally silenced or disguised in the name of objectivity in writing qualitative research (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). In my research, auto-ethnography constituted only an insignificant part of the methods. However, it complemented the reflexivity and revealed information that would otherwise have been inaccessible through conventional methods. For instance, I once attended a pre-booked vegetarian food event/fair in a vegetarian restaurant on a Christmas night. I was alone, which was extremely rare for that occasion. Being a non-vegetarian and having never visited that particular venue, I was unsure of what to expect of the atmosphere or other attendees. I felt reasonably nervous and slightly confused in an environment where others seemed at ease and were familiar with the ‘codes’ of the occasion. Such emotions and reactions were impossible to realise through interviews or observations of other participants.

## **3.4 Data Analysis**

All audio data was transcribed in the original language and arranged according to the date of recording. Written text was then coded by the topics identified in the interview question lists. Interview questions were designed to be grouped around several general research themes under the main research question; thus, the transcription can be grouped further into thematic categories. During the process, the links between categories across and within level(s) were generated, thus creating a thematic network.

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### **3.5 Ethics**

I did not encounter any significant ethics dilemma in fieldwork. Since I did not sense explicit stigma attached to vegetarians, as Boyle (2007) described in his study of U.S. vegetarians, there was no need to keep my fieldwork a secret to protect participants. I never concealed the truth that I was not vegetarian in my communication with participants. I was challenged by a vegan once, but as long as I showed respect for their lifestyle, this did not lead to any problems. Sometimes participants showed contempt for people who had a diet that differed from their own. In that case, I tried to remain as neutral as possible instead of showing agreement or challenging them.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Because of the nature of my research and the limitations of conducting a quantitative study of vegetarianism in modern Beijing, my research is completely qualitative. I adopted one-on-one interviews, participant observation and archive research to collect in-depth information on vegetarians' and some non-vegetarians' everyday experiences. This is a low-risk research; I did not encounter any significant ethics dilemma in my fieldwork. I used thematic analysis with thematic networks for data analysis, which formed the basic structure of the following chapters.

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## **Chapter 4 Understanding vegetarianism in modern Beijing**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Before any exploration of how vegetarianism is practiced in everyday life in Beijing, it is first necessary to clarify the definition of vegetarianism in the Chinese context. The meaning of vegetarianism is far from unified in modern Beijing. In this chapter, I first discuss how vegetarianism is understood locally under the influence of two vegetarian traditions. I then examine the perception of the vegetarian body among vegetarians because it reflects and reinforces their understanding of being vegetarian.

### **4.2 (Re)interpreting Vegetarianism: Vegetarianism in the Local Context**

#### **4.2.1 How Vegetarians Understand Vegetarianism**

I stated in chapter 2 that the understanding of vegetarianism in ‘Western’ society is heavily influenced by definitions given by authoritative vegetarian organisations. Such definitions started to appear in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the modern vegetarian movement began. Prevalent definitions from then on are often practice-based, in which appropriate and inappropriate food items for a ‘proper’ vegetarian are indicated. Usually, animal flesh is avoided, but certain animal products, such as dairy and eggs, are more tolerated. The definition approved by vegetarian organisations served as the basis of general agreement and as a guideline for understanding the vegetarianism of ordinary vegetarians and non-vegetarians alike. For them, the concept of vegetarianism simply pre-dated them, and it waited to be accepted, (re)interpreted and/or internalised.

Unlike in ‘Western’ society, where the public’s understanding of vegetarianism (regardless of dietary preferences) in general comes from one single interpretive tradition, the understanding of vegetarianism for vegetarians in modern Beijing is under the sway of a

mixture of translation and local conventions. As mentioned in chapter 1, the Chinese word for a vegetarian diet is *su* (素, adjective and noun) or *sushi* (素食, noun), which traditionally refers to a meatless diet (regardless of whether it contains dairy and/or eggs) or a diet that meets the Buddhist standards (in this case, also written as *zhai* [斋]). However, in everyday life, sometimes a meal that does not contain visually detectable meat may also be regarded by non-religious people as *sushi* even if animal fat or meat broth is used during food preparation. The confusion and inconvenience vegetarians experience because of this obscure definition of *sushi* are discussed later in the thesis. Here, I want to explore how local and imported concepts adapt to and (re)interpret each other in local context.

The local concept of *su* and vegetarian in ‘Western’ tradition covers food ranges that largely overlap but do not totally coincide with each other. Conventionally, in China, abstinence (even if visually) from meat is necessary in the definition of *su*. Other animal products such as eggs, milk and honey that do not involve killing an animal are not as problematic. On the contrary, eggs and dairy products were problematised even in the early stages of the vegetarian movement in the ‘West’ (Mayor, 1898), and the dispute finally resulted in the convention of ‘vegan’ to distinguish from the more general category of ‘vegetarian’ (Leneman, 1999). Moreover, a Buddhist vegetarian diet may pay less attention to the distinction within animal products but emphasises the abstinence of the ‘five fetid vegetables’ (*wuhun* [五荤] or *wuxin* [五辛]) (Wang, 2010) and sometimes alcohol, which again does not exist in the ‘Western’ vegetarian tradition.

The introduction of vegetarianism from the ‘Western’ tradition enriched and complicated the local lexicon. When the non-religion-based vegetarianism of the ‘Western’ tradition was introduced to China, it was translated as *su* despite the fact that it is not exactly the same as Buddhist vegetarianism, with which the public in China is more familiar in terms of rationale or the range of food covered. There was no counterpart concept to vegan in Mandarin, so new words were coined when the concept was introduced. The word ‘vegan’ is translated either as *chunsu* (纯素), meaning ‘pure vegetarian’, or *yangesushi* (严格素食),

meaning ‘strict vegetarian’. Unlike in the West, where ‘vegetarian’ and ‘vegan’ are now viewed as separate categories (Maurer, 2002), in China, they are considered as belonging to the same category but vary in degree of strictness. The translation of ‘vegan’ literally puts vegetarian and vegan diets into comparison and seems to suggest that one is at a more advanced stage than the other. A more neutral word, *weigen* (维根), which is the transliteration of ‘vegan’, is also used, although less frequently. In addition to these Mandarin words, ‘vegetarian’ and ‘vegan’ also appeared in English in some vegetarians’ discourse in modern Beijing.

One aspect in common in the understanding of vegetarianism among all current and former vegetarian interviewees was that they all agreed a vegetarian diet should abstain from meat, which refers to the flesh of any animal. Apart from that, there were many variations from individual to individual. However, it should be pointed out that what the vegetarian interviewees perceived as a vegetarian diet did not always coincide with what they actually ate. In my research, vegan interviewees admitted to having eggs and dairy, and vegetarians to having meat, although according to their explanation of vegetarianism, such items should not be in their diet. More details concerning the circumstances under which they did so and how they justified it are provided in later chapters. In this chapter, the analysis of the understanding of vegetarianism is based on the interviewees’ interpretations rather than their actions, although nearly all of their interpretations are practice-centred.

Many vegetarians who are open to resources concerning the ‘Western’ tradition of vegetarianism, regardless of whether they are religious, have adopted and internalised the distinction between vegetarian and vegan. The resources could be foreign vegetarian organisations and influential vegetarian writers. For instance, the definition given by IVU is quoted verbatim in Mandarin translation by the Vegetarian Society of Peking University on its website, along with the categories of vegetarian practices defined by the same organisation, as the only authoritative explanation of the concept.<sup>1</sup> Kofi started avoiding meat 18 years ago after becoming a Buddhist and then learnt about the concept of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.vspku.org/> (Accessed: 15 November 2015).

vegetarianism and veganism by reading writers such as Peter Singer and Tom Regan, whose major works are all available in Chinese translations.

Mass media and, more importantly, the Internet played an important role in disseminating information about vegetarianism. Marlee admitted that her initial knowledge of vegetarianism and veganism came entirely from the Internet. She is now the director of a vegetarianism promotion company. One of the company's major activities is publishing original or translated articles concerning vegetarianism in multiple styles, such as news, recipes and interviews on a daily basis via the company's accounts on a variety of digital platforms. Marlee explained the objective of the company as follows:

First, I wished to share vegetarian knowledge I knew; second, I felt such activity was far from enough in China. Most of... a lot of the promotion of vegetarianism in China...of course, there have been articles that promoted vegetarianism from a Western perspective, such as animal rights and environment protection, but in general, the influence of such information was very limited; most people were not familiar with vegetarianism, they had many misunderstandings about vegetarianism. So I established Veg Planet in order to let more people to know more about vegetarianism, to promote vegetarianism. I want to make vegetarianism more popular and make it more convenient for vegetarians to eat out. Because through promoting vegetarianism online and in mass media and business cooperation, if I do it long enough... many businesses will discover the market of vegetarian, they will have a better understanding and be more tolerant of vegetarianism and will start to fulfil the needs of vegetarians. In summary, my initial intentions [of founding Veg Planet] were promoting vegetarianism and providing convenience for vegetarians, making vegetarianism popular.

Marlee's company and many of its kind are valuable media between non-China based sources and numerous novice vegetarians and vegetarianism sympathisers in mainland China because, due to the tightening Internet censorship and the application of the 'Great Firewall' by the Chinese government, it is increasingly difficult for people in and out of China to access information from the other side (Stevenson, 2007). The impact of such media can be twofold. On the one hand, they give those who have no access to or are unwilling to search for foreign resources an opportunity to expand their horizon; on the other hand, the mediated information is the result of careful selection and reassembly via the translating and editing process, which means that whatever information is received by

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the final readers is first adapted to accord with the values of the media.

Another resource of knowledge about vegetarianism is more experienced vegetarians, especially foreign vegetarians. Calvin said:

After I chose to have a *su* diet, I made acquaintance with some vegetarians, especially some foreign vegetarians living in Beijing. Through them, I learnt the distinction [between vegetarian and vegan].

Similarly, Ziva claimed that, in addition to a health TV programme she used to watch with her mother, she picked up the concept of vegetarianism via some vegetarian exchange students in her university and, later, her vegetarian colleagues:

I knew some vegetarians, mostly foreigners. They were quite strict. Sometimes I offered them snacks, and they would ask, ‘What’s in it? Do you have the list of ingredients?’ Little by little, I realised what they did and didn’t eat.

Sometimes, the influence of foreign resources may not be direct. For example, followers of Marlee’s company can receive new foreign information regarding vegetarianism even though it is second-hand. Similarly, vegetarians who have first-hand experience with foreign resources may also act as mediators through which ‘Western’ vegetarian terminologies are passed down to novice vegetarians who have no direct contact with foreign resources. Vanessa, who had only been vegan for two months, said her knowledge of vegetarianism came from the staff of an animal shelter where she had been a volunteer. Because the founder of the animal shelter, Calvin, initially learnt the concept from foreign vegetarian friends residing in Beijing, Vanessa’s understanding of vegetarianism was thus to some extent descended from the foreign vegetarian friends of Calvin.

For vegetarians with a religious influence, their understanding of vegetarianism varied from person to person. The first variable was whether they were familiar with different vegetarian traditions. Some, like Kofi and Hamilton, were familiar with concepts and terminologies from both vegetarian traditions. Their idea of a vegan diet was a combination of the two: no animal products, and also no *wuhun*. Some others, like Klara,

who has been a devout Buddhist for 12 years, were unaware of the ‘Western’ vegetarian tradition. Her definition of ‘vegetarian’ is more conventional. In terms of diet, she described herself as:

I’m a quite strict vegetarian. I don’t eat Chinese chives, scallion and garlic, because they are *hun* according to Buddhism. Meat, on the other hand, is *xing* (腥).

Although Klara may think her understanding of vegetarianism is entirely based on Buddhism, she is not immune to the problematisation of dairy and eggs characteristic of ‘Western’ vegetarian. She claimed that she had stopped consuming milk and eggs several years ago because a monk told her not to when she sought medical advice in a Buddhist temple:

‘You should not eat eggs or drink milk’, he said. He said there was a book, the title was something about health. I didn’t read it. Some kind of survey report of China he said. The book says it’s not good [to have eggs and milk] [...]

The book she mentioned is almost certainly T. Colin Campbell *et al.*’s *The China Study*. The same book was claimed by Stanford, a Buddhist for 14 years, as his guidebook to veganism. It was originally published in the U.S. in 2005 by an independent publisher, BenBella Books, and translated into Chinese in 2006, when it was reprinted under another title in 2011. From the very beginning, it is not oriented towards academic readers. There have been many critiques of the book’s methodology and conclusions since its publication in the English-speaking world (e.g. Hall, 2010). However, the dissenting voices seem to have been filtered out during the process of translation, which may again suggest for those who totally rely on translated resources that there is higher risk of receiving partial information. Klara’s case is only one example of how subtle yet pervasive the influence of ‘Western’ vegetarianism is on local understandings of vegetarianism. It is arguable that the influence of vegetarianism in the ‘Western’ tradition accounted for the problematisation of eggs and dairy products<sup>1</sup> which is now prevalent in Chinese vegetarian discourse. Indeed,

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<sup>1</sup> One reason that dairy products were unproblematised in defining Buddhist vegetarianism may be that they were uncommon in traditional *Han* cuisine. However, the consumption of milk and other dairy products has



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all vegetarian interviewees in my research noted the problematisation of eggs and dairy products, even if some of them were not aware of different vegetarian traditions, such as Buddhist vegetarianism and the vegetarianism of the ‘Western’ tradition.

The second variable that impacts the religion-influenced vegetarians’ understanding of vegetarianism is how they understand *wuhun*. The majority of self-defined Buddhist vegetarian interviewees believed a vegetarian diet should abstain from *wuhun*. However, there is a lack of consensus among common Buddhists (that is, not religious professionals such as monks or nuns) on what is actually considered *wuhun*. Scallions and garlic are the most common items on the list. Other potential candidates are ginger, Chinese chives, onion, Sichuan pepper, star anise and coriander. These plants are believed by many Buddhists to share certain features that make them unsuitable for consumption by Buddhists. I discuss the reason these plants are shunned in further detail in chapter 5. Here, I would like to note that it is possible to have *wuhun* and be a devout Buddhist. For instance, Stanford did not give up *wuhun* in his diet. He rationalised his identification by reinterpreting the religious convention. In his opinion, abstaining from *wuhun* is a product of communal monastic life in ancient times, when personal hygiene was difficult to maintain, and *wuhun* tends to have strong, unpleasant odour. He did not feel the need to give up *wuhun* in modern Beijing since keeping oneself odour-free is relatively easy to achieve. Similarly, Christian-convert-Buddhist Hamilton kept scallions and garlic in his diet because, for him, the health benefits he could gain from these plants outweighed religious convention.

Overall, the sources of vegetarianism knowledge reported by vegetarian interviewees (exclusive of non-Chinese expert witnesses) can be summarised as follows:

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grown rapidly in the last decade, especially in urban areas (Fuller, Beghin & Rozelle, 2007). The wide availability of dairy products in everyday life makes it possible and necessary for Chinese vegetarians to re-evaluate these foods’ position in their diet.

Sources	Times Reported
Religion (Buddhism)	8
Vegetarian acquaintance	7
Internet	4
TV	3
Book/magazine	6
Public lecture	1
Experience of living abroad	2

Table 4-1 Sources of Vegetarianism Knowledge Reported by Vegetarians

Different sources may overlap in the same person. For example, one can have a vegetarian acquaintance who is also Buddhist. Therefore, the source is both having a vegetarian acquaintance and religion. Due to the limited size of the sample, the ranking of frequency of sources mentioned by interviewees may not be an accurate representation of the actual degree of influence of each source on the whole vegetarian community. However, it is still a useful reference in terms of demonstrating the types of sources available to the public.

It was indicated earlier that the various personal understandings of vegetarianism at least partially result in the diverse dietary practices of vegetarians in everyday life, which may not always conform to the practice-based definition of vegetarianism given by authoritative vegetarian organisations. As stated in chapter 2, a movement to redefine vegetarianism to embrace instead of reject the various practices within self-defined vegetarians was initiated in the late 1990s in the U.S. (Sapon, 1996; Maurer, 2002). Inspired by the movement, the phrase ‘plant-based diet’ was sometimes used to replace ‘vegetarian’ by vegetarianism promoters to appeal not only to vegetarians and vegans but also to vegetarianism sympathisers in an effort to lower the tension that might be evoked by the dualism of vegetarian and non-vegetarian (Maurer, 2002). The same idea was introduced to China by the founder of the Vegan Hut (维根蔬食小屋, a vegan restaurant in Chaoyang District). He coined the word *shushi* (蔬食, literally, vegetable-based food) based on the idea of a plant-based diet promoted by John Robbins and T. Colin Campbell. He actively promoted *shushi* through his restaurant and lecture tour. He interpreted *shushi* in an interview:

The idea of *shushi* nutrition is originally from the U.S. It is called ‘plant-based nutrition’ in English. *Shushi* is a plant-based diet; your food comes from plants. In fact, every single one of us is *shushi* eater. The only difference is the proportion of it in our whole diet.<sup>1</sup>

He disliked the use of *sushi* and explained the difference between *sushi* and *shushi* in another interview:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.yogeev.com/article/35505.html> (Accessed: 11/11/2016).

*Sushi* is vegetarian in English. *Shushi* is plant-based diet or plant-based food. You can see that the concept of *shushi* is more focused on balancing the diet structure. [...] Firstly, ‘*sushi*’ is a negative definition, it means no meat. Traditionally, people distinguish food into animal-based and plant-based, either one or another. But because of the development of the modern food industry, now food can be categorised into animal-based, plant-based and highly processed. Highly processed foods are things like margarine, trans fat, artificial condiments and fake meat (*soy protein products*). Remove the animal-based food [from diet], you still have plant-based food and highly processed food. *Shushi* is to take a further step and remove highly processed food. Together with the adoption of natural cooking methods and condiments, it assures a healthy diet. Secondly, the word *sushi* reminds people of religious connotations and therefore may cause a sense of distance and repulsion. Whereas the character *shu* as in *shushi* has the connotation of being natural and safe. Everyone eats *shushi*, the only difference is the proportion of it in the whole diet. It is to increase the proportion of *shushi* in their diet that the public feels acceptable. In my opinion, this is promoting vegetarianism in a positive way (Yu, 2015, p. 77).

Like his predecessors in the U.S, he hoped to create a new kind of vegetarianism that could unite as much of the population as possible. By using rhetorical strategy, he tried to eliminate 1) boundaries between vegetarian, vegan and non-vegetarian; and 2) the possible tension between groups resulting from such boundaries. Furthermore, the coinage of *shushi* shows another possible response when facing the collision of different vegetarian traditions. Instead of incorporating and (re)interpreting different traditions with a single set of terminologies, the use of *shushi* is an attempt to establish a new tradition (albeit a localised, imported one) that is parallel to and independent of all the merits and burdens of local tradition. However, the effort to expand allies at the cost of eliminating boundaries drew critiques from within the vegetarian community, such as that the activity is likely to weaken instead of empower the vegetarian identity (Maurer, 2002). There have been no critiques of *shushi* among vegetarians in Beijing yet, perhaps because the word has not yet drawn enough attention from the public. Indeed, none of the participants in my research mentioned the word, even though the Vegan Hut and its founder are well known in the vegetarian community in Beijing.

#### 4.2.2 How Non-vegetarians Understand Vegetarianism

Similar to the vegetarian interviewees, the non-vegetarian interviewees’ understanding of

vegetarianism was heavily determined by the extent of their exposure to different sources.

The sources reported are listed below:

Sources	Times Reported
Religion (Buddhism)	6
Vegetarian restaurant	2
Vegetarian acquaintance	6
TV (celebrity)	4
Book/magazine	2
English learning	2
Internet	1
Nutrition course	1
Experience of living abroad	4

Table 4-2 Sources of Vegetarianism Knowledge Reported by Non-vegetarians

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Again, the table serves only as a reference of the possible sources of vegetarianism knowledge available to the public. There may be other sources available but that were not reported in my research. The actual extent of the influence of each source on the whole population may not rank as shown in the table. Despite the deficiencies, it is still worth comparing the reported sources of information between vegetarian and non-vegetarian interviewees.

In general, there is no dramatic difference in terms of the sources of information of vegetarianism between vegetarian interviewees and non-vegetarian interviewees. Several types of sources were reported by members from both categories, including religion, vegetarian acquaintances, Internet, TV and books/magazines, and the experience of living abroad, or, in other words, social conventions, social network, mass media, the Internet and life experience. The sources in the form of public lectures in table 5 and nutrition courses in table 6 suggest the influence of self-education. Although vegetarian interviewees did not report learning English as a direct source of vegetarianism knowledge, presumably, the skill was the basis of some other sources they reported, as some acquired vegetarianism knowledge through reading relevant English material or life experiences in English-speaking countries. One aspect that appeared in non-vegetarian interviewees' responses is that they described vegetarian restaurants as a source of vegetarianism knowledge. This is not to say using vegetarian restaurants as a source of vegetarianism knowledge is exclusive to non-vegetarians because there is a possibility of vegetarians not included in my research having received their first impression of vegetarianism from vegetarian restaurants. The fact that vegetarian restaurants were listed as a source of vegetarianism knowledge suggests their success in promoting vegetarianism. In fact, promoting vegetarian ideas is far from a side-effect of the vegetarian restaurant business and is sometimes actively sought after by vegetarian restaurant owners who are, not surprisingly, often vegetarian or vegan. I elaborate on the role and strategies of vegetarian restaurants in promoting vegetarianism in modern Beijing in chapter 7.

Perhaps the real difference between vegetarian and non-vegetarian interviewees was their degree of understanding vegetarianism. Although the majority of non-vegetarian

interviewees agreed that a vegetarian diet should not contain meat, there was disagreement on what counted as meat. Two of 19 non-vegetarian interviewees did not consider fish and seafood to be meat.

Unlike vegetarian interviewees, not every non-vegetarian interviewee was aware of the problematisation of eggs and dairy products. Nine mentioned egg and/or dairy products in their understanding of a vegetarian diet, even if only by raising questions such as, ‘Is egg vegetarian?’. Eight mentioned there are different types and/or degrees of vegetarianism, showing an awareness of the diversity within vegetarian practice. However, their view of diversity may not be quite the same as that of vegetarian interviewees’. Some, however, noted that there are different vegetarian traditions, such as Ashton:

I think the vegetarian diet is not the same as the Buddhist vegetarian diet. The Buddhist vegetarian diet doesn’t include *hun* and *xing*. Besides meat, it also excludes scallion, ginger and garlic because they belong to *xing*. The vegetarians probably only eat vegetables, including scallion, ginger and garlic.

Some others identified different degrees of vegetarianism within a single tradition according to the strictness of diet, such as Tyron:

I think there are ordinary vegetarians and strict vegetarians. Strict vegetarians probably can’t even have dairy products and eggs. Ordinary vegetarians probably still can.

Sometimes, the supposed vegetarian diet indicated by non-vegetarian interviewees covered a wide range of food and was not necessarily free of meat. For example, Billie proposed that the least strict kind of vegetarian could still have meat as long as they did not kill the animal themselves.

First-hand experience of vegetarianism, for instance, going to a vegetarian restaurant or spending time abroad, where vegetarianism is more visible in everyday life than in China, helped some non-vegetarians develop more detailed understandings of vegetarianism. After a visit to a vegan restaurant in Beijing, Cecilia developed more understanding yet also more questions regarding vegetarianism:

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My understanding of vegetarian is green vegetables, including scallion, ginger and garlic. ...But I don't think eggs and dairy are vegetarian. Because I've been to a restaurant in Wudaoying called The Veggie Table (吃素的). They don't serve anything containing eggs and dairy products there. So I don't think they are vegetarian. But then I thought: is honey vegetarian? I don't know how to categorise that.

Savanna received higher education in France. She described how she came across the concept of vegetarian:

I think you would have more or less heard of [the word 'vegetarian' and 'vegan'] if you have learnt English or if you are interested in nutrition. When you go abroad, sometimes you can see the word 'vegan' on menus.

As a result, she is quite familiar with the 'Western' tradition of vegetarianism and is aware of the diversity within vegetarianism:

[...] some are vegan, some are ovo-lacto vegetarian. Anyway, none of them eat meat. But I think there is a certain kind of vegetarian that can eat fish.

A more explicit example of absorbing vegetarian knowledge through experience in a vegetarian-tolerant environment is shown in Timmy's account:

I first became familiar with vegetarianism probably when I doing part-time in a restaurant in the UK. A lot of the customers, about 30% of them, were vegetarian. So it was through my boss there that I first knew what the everyday dietary habits of vegetarians were actually like and what I should bear in mind when serving such customers. But even before that, I might have seen [vegetarianism] in literal resources such as articles, but my understanding wasn't comprehensive then.

Like Timmy, Alaina received higher education in the UK. She expressed her understanding of *sushi* or vegetarianism and how she came across it as follows:

There are two types [of *sushi*]. In simple terms, the vegetarian can have eggs and milk, the vegan cannot. [...] When you go to a restaurant [abroad], when you see vegetarian option is marked in every menu, then naturally you will know there is a group of people [that is vegetarian]. Besides, I have a good friend, both she and her partner are vegetarian [...]



Her experience abroad prompted her to reflect on the phenomenon she has already been aware of in China:

I think China has a long history of *sushi*, because monks and nuns don't eat *hun*. My mom is Buddhist. When I was little, she sometimes took me to the temple, so even then I knew there were people who didn't...in modern words, they were vegetarian. [...] I really think vegetarian is exotic. Although in Chinese culture there have always been people like this, we didn't call them vegetarian.

Alaina not only noticed the synchronic existence of different vegetarian traditions, but also realised the diachronic dimension of the vegetarian scene in a locale. Vegetarian knowledge from a different tradition can be imported and incorporated into local tradition, which brings new possibilities for the future vegetarian scene.

#### **4.3 What does a Vegetarian Body Look and Feel Like? The Image of Vegetarianism**

Since being vegetarian is an embodied practice, the understanding of vegetarianism of vegetarians and non-vegetarians is inevitably reflected and reinforced by their perceptions of a vegetarian body. The idea of what a vegetarian body looks and feels like is not so much about 'objective facts' but about the construction of a boundary between different groups – in this case, vegetarians and non-vegetarians.

Extant studies show that vegetarians and non-vegetarians may feel or believe there is a physical difference between vegetarians and non-vegetarians. For instance, in Potts and Parry's study of vegetarians and vegans in New Zealand, one vegan respondent claimed she would not have sex with a non-vegetarian partially because '(n)on-vegetarian bodies smell different to me' (Potts & Parry, 2010, p. 54). Some non-vegetarians in South-East London believed vegetarians were pale and peaky-looking people because their diet was unhealthy (Willetts, 1997). On the contrary, vegetarianism promoters believe the vegetarian diet is generally healthier than an omnivorous one, and thus a vegetarian body is healthier than the omnivorous counterpart either of another individual or their own

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non-vegetarian self in the past.<sup>1</sup>

The positive physical image of a vegetarian body appeared repeatedly in my research. It could be a healthy body, such as the one reported by Hamilton:

I used to feel sick all the time. Always had tonsillitis that could last more than a week. [Since becoming vegetarian,] I haven't had a flu for 32 years; even if I did, I would recover within half a day. I don't suffer from tonsillitis as often as I used to, and I would recover in a day, whereas in the past, it would take over a week.

Similarly, Barry said he had not had constipation again since he became vegetarian. These are examples of healthy bodies from a medical perspective. The positive image of a vegetarian body can also be shown as an attractive body. Maison mentioned a major reason for female students to join the Vegetarian Society of Peking University was to lose weight. Although he disapproved of their motivation, his words suggest the common stereotype of a vegetarian body as slender, which is the socially preferred female figure in modern China as well as in the 'West'. Erick believed a vegetarian diet alone would ensure females over 30 would have beautiful skin and therefore would have no need for make-up. His belief is another example of relating being vegetarian to having an attractive body, especially for the female body.

As is shown in chapter 2, the relationship between meat eating and masculinity has been extensively discussed in the 'Western' vegetarian tradition, and the positive correlation between meat eating and masculinity was confirmed by real-life vegetarians and non-vegetarians alike (e.g. Ruby & Heine, 2011). A larger percentage of female than male vegetarians in randomly selected vegetarian samples of many studies of vegetarians suggests the gender difference in meat and meat eating from another perspective.

The link between a meat-eating body and masculinity was found in my research, too,

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<sup>1</sup> For example, 'scientifically proven' evidence of the healthiness of the vegetarian diet is a necessary in the section of the rational explanation of many vegetarianism-promoting organisations, such as The Vegetarian Society, The Vegan Society and Viva!. Health is also one of the most important motivations for becoming vegetarian.

although it may not be as explicit or prevalent as other perceptions of the vegetarian body. Only two vegetarians and two non-vegetarians believed there were significantly more women than men in the vegetarian community with which they were familiar. The higher possibility of a vegetarian body being a female body indicates the different expectations of male and female bodies in popular culture. Meat is believed to better support a strong and energetic masculine body, which some males desire. This is clearly shown in the following narration from Austin:

I think for a young person, if they don't eat meat nor eggs, then they have to obtain most of the energy from staples;<sup>1</sup> [as a result,] perhaps they won't be energetic. Taoism is about *yin* and *yang*, *yang* is important. I think beef can supplement *yang qi*, boys will be more masculine if they eat a lot [of beef] but will be weak if they abstain from it. But middle-aged people should be fine to eat *su*, the [energy from] staples is absolutely enough to meet their needs.

Males are believed to enjoy meat eating more than females. Ashton commented on a female vegetarian friend of his:

Because girls are not particularly enthusiastic about meat-eating, anyway. If they are not interested, then why not stop eating [meat] altogether?

But he went on to admit that the fact that females were not keen on meat eating might partially be due to socialization because of the different social expectations of males and females:

For example, a man can eat four huge meatballs without receiving any dirty looks. But a woman simply can't get a Lion's Head<sup>2</sup> and eat it all by herself. [...] Of course, I don't mean she can't do that, I'm just saying, there is such a view [that women should not enjoy meat-eating too much] under the current social situation.

The different expectations of male and female body image may be the gendered motivation of following a vegetarian diet. This topic is discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> In China, staples usually refer to grains.

<sup>2</sup> A dish consisting of a huge meatball in Chinese cuisine.

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Some vegetarians can use the assumed physical difference between vegetarians and non-vegetarians to attract new members. The purpose is implicitly displayed in the posters at the entrance of the Vegan Hut. On the top of the entrance is a row of photos of vegetarian celebrities under the description 'veggie hero'. Among them are respectable scientists, politicians, singers and actors. Interestingly, only one of them is Chinese. Beside the entrance are two side-by-side, life-size figures. One is a slender female contour filled with fresh fruit and vegetables, and the other is an obese female contour filled with junk food, processed meat and desserts, such as burgers, pizza, sausages and donuts. The sharp visual contrast between the two figures delivers a clear message: compared to a non-vegetarian body, the vegetarian body is healthier and looks more attractive. Adopting a female contour may suggest that females are its major target customers, or the designer assumed that females are more body-conscious than males and will thus be more easily attracted by the image.



Photo 4-1 The Entrance of the Vegan Hut

A female vegetarian expressed similar ideas of attracting non-vegetarians to a vegetarian lifestyle by presenting the vegetarian body as socially desirable. She was one of the fellow attendees at a Buddhist vegetarian meal tasting event that I participated in at a luxurious house in suburban Beijing. She was there with her 10-year-old daughter; both were vegetarian, and the daughter was raised as vegetarian. She was extremely proud of her daughter's height and general health, which she attributed solely to the vegetarian diet. She was also proud of her own appearance: slender, bright skin tone, with no wrinkles on her face at the age of over 40. 'How can you persuade others that being vegetarian is good if you look sick and weak yourself?' She merrily told us before the dishes were served.

For some vegetarian participants in my research, a vegetarian body not only looks better but also feels better than a non-vegetarian one. Commonly reported positive changes in mental wellbeing after adopting a vegetarian lifestyle include better sleep quality, more energy, more clear-headedness and less aggressiveness/impetuousness. For instance, Calvin expressed the changes he experienced:

The change I felt in terms of spirituality is that I find the world more lovable. I can feel more love. This is the spiritual change. Physiologically, I feel more energetic. I sleep less than before.

Erick reported a change to a better temper:

Before I became vegan, I was self-indulgent and grumpy. But since I have become vegan, my heart became much softer. This is the biggest change.

Similarly, Linda said:

I feel calmer and more peaceful after becoming vegetarian. I think what ancient people say about 'meat-eaters are vulgar' actually makes some sense. I do feel like I have less desire than before. Because eating meat gives people more energy or what, I'm not sure, all I can say is that after becoming vegetarian, my digestion and teeth are improved.

However, she realised there was not necessarily a causal relation between these changes and a vegetarian diet, as she continued:

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I can't guarantee that these changes are only caused by my change of diet, though, because I've been doing other things at the same time.

In an article entitled 'What are the benefits of being vegetarian? We'll tell with our own experience',<sup>1</sup> the editor classified readers' responses under the categories of 'relatively stable weight', 'healthy body', 'peaceful mind', 'full of energy' and 'others'. The similarities between the readers' responses and reports from my research are clear. Considering the possible similarities of sources of vegetarian knowledge and the influence of the social network of the vegetarian community, it is difficult to say whether the perceived common characteristics of a vegetarian body are due to the possibly similar diet or the individual simply learning and internalising the positive stereotypes about vegetarian from other vegetarian community members.

It seems that the perception of a vegetarian body by vegetarians, at least, is positive regardless of whether it is male or female. However, for some male vegetarians, it may not be a conscious challenge to the mainstream ideal body image but rather aims to conform to it because there could be several ideal body images simultaneously in modern China. For males, a strong and energetic body is perhaps as desirable as a calm, graceful body, which comes from the intellectual tradition in Chinese history. In a way, it still challenges the somewhat monotonous image of the ideal male body in the 'West' and perhaps enables some Chinese male vegetarians to have a unique identity.

Another potential characteristic of a vegetarian body concerns its physical reaction towards meat. A vegetarian body may show negative physical reactions towards meat, such as feeling disgust:

Meat to me is dead body, rotten flesh. I can't stand the smell. To me, the smell of meat is the smell of rotten animal bodies. (Hamilton)

Although the emotion of disgust towards meat is more common among morally inspired vegetarians than health vegetarians (Rozin *et al.*, 1997; Fessler *et al.*, 2003), it was

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<sup>1</sup> <http://xingqiu.me/p/5352/>.

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reported mainly by health-inspired vegetarians as well as ethical vegetarians in my research.

Furthermore, the finding of Beardsworth and Keil (1991) that eating meat could cause digestive disease for vegetarians is supported in my research, such as the experience of Jason:

[...] I accidentally ate a piece of meat once and found that I couldn't digest it. My digestive system was upset. From then on, I don't want to eat meat at all. Even now, if I smell meat, I will physically feel disgust. So now it's... If at first I was only having a trial of a vegetarian diet, now I physically can't accept the smell of meat. I can't eat it even if you put meat in front of me.

For these vegetarians, being literally unaccepting of meat seems to draw an ultimate line between a vegetarian body and a non-vegetarian one.

#### **4.4 Conclusions**

The understanding of vegetarianism in modern Beijing is the outcome of the complex interactions of two vegetarian traditions. This is reflected in the terminological repertoire of vegetarianism used in everyday life and the varied (re)interpretations of vegetarianism on the personal level.

In my research, regardless of diet, participants tended to interpret vegetarianism from a practice-based perspective; in other words, they tended to equate the understanding of vegetarianism with the understanding of vegetarian dietary practice. The degree of their understanding of vegetarianism was more related to the ability of accessing different sources than whether the individual was vegetarian themselves.

Although a widely accepted, standard definition of vegetarianism is lacking in modern Beijing, there is consensus to be found among vegetarians, such as the agreement of the abstinence of meat and the problematisation of eggs and dairy products. However, such



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agreement exists more in discourse than in action, as I discuss in chapter 7, given that some vegetarians do consume food that they consider inappropriate for a vegetarian diet.

The unsuccessful attempt to redefine vegetarianism in Beijing in the example of *shushi* seems unavoidable. Unlike in the U.S., there is a lack of influential vegetarian organisations in China and a widely recognisable definition of vegetarianism approved by such organisations, which gives more room for individualised (re)interpretations of vegetarianism without the risk of disagreeing with a ‘standard’ definition. Thus, there is less need for vegetarians to redefine vegetarianism to better adapt to a complicated reality. In addition, the flexible understanding of vegetarianism in modern Beijing enables diverse practices, each of which is self-consistent.

Because being vegetarian is an embodied experience, the understanding of vegetarianism can be represented through the image of a vegetarian body. A physically and mentally healthy and attractive vegetarian body depicts being vegetarian as positive and socially desirable. A positive correlation between meat eating and masculinity is implied by both vegetarians and non-vegetarians, although it is not emphasised. The image of a vegetarian male body is not specifically negative, but can be desirable. This shows that there are other ideal body images in different cultures which challenge the dominant ideal body image in the ‘West’. For some vegetarians, having a body that is unaccepting of meat may be the ultimate statement of drawing a boundary between vegetarian and non-vegetarian. The vegetarian body in this sense is the visual presentation of the vegetarian identity.

## Chapter 5 Life Trajectory: Motivations and Process(es) of Becoming and Remaining Vegetarian

### 5.1 Introduction

Ethnographic studies of vegetarians in ‘Western’ societies show that the majority of this group was not raised as such but chose the lifestyle later in life. As a result, the motivation and process of becoming and remaining vegetarian were extensively discussed in those studies for the purpose of understanding the transition from a non-vegetarian to vegetarian identity. All vegetarian participants in my research voluntarily converted to vegetarianism at some point in their lives. For the same reason, this chapter explores the identity transition of vegetarians in modern Beijing through their self-claimed motivation and process. This is not a repetition of previous studies; rather, it aims to complement extant research and find the unique feature of vegetarians in modern Beijing by comparing the results with previous studies within a similar analytical framework. One highly noteworthy feature of vegetarianism in ‘Western’ society is its political nature. The discourse of vegetarianism is actively involved in the public discussion of public issues such as animal welfare and global warming.<sup>1</sup> However, in China any discussion of political issues is closely monitored by the authorities, if not discouraged, which definitely has an impact on the discourse of vegetarianism in China.

### 5.2 Motivations of Becoming and Remaining Vegetarian

As shown in chapter 2, extant studies on self-defined vegetarians worldwide have revealed that people convert to vegetarianism for various reasons, among which health and ethics are the most commonly reported motivations. This tendency is replicated in my research. Another prominent motivation from the literature is the environment, which was also

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<sup>1</sup> Take, for example, the article about the argument between some vegan campaigners and a local politician about promoting vegan ideas using outdoor advertisements (<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/jan/05/bus-ads-for-veganism-are-a-disgrace-says-conservative-shropshire-councillor>). This shows how vegetarian (including vegan) activists in the UK try to cause real social change with their proposition in the interaction with other agents of social and political influence.

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prevalent among participants of my research. A full list of motivations and the frequency with which each was reported by participants is shown below:

<b>Motivations</b>	<b>Times Reported</b>
Ethics	12
Religious influence	9
Health	8
Environment	6
Gustatory	4
Social influence	4
Weight control	2
Others	6

Table 5-1 Reported Motivations of Becoming and Remaining Vegetarian

Some degree of over-simplification is inevitable in making this table for analytical reason. I have summarised the types of motivations rather than the participants, even though I borrowed the categorisation from extant research of vegetarians. Later sections in this chapter show that different individuals may have highly distinct approaches and interpretations even if they were categorised as holding the same type of motivation.

In accordance with Carmichael (2002) and Boyle (2011), the majority of vegetarian participants in my research gave multiple motivations for their vegetarian career. In fact, all but two participants listed more than one motivation to justify their lifestyle choice. I first explore each category of motivations and then elaborate on the combination of multiple motivations.

### **5.2.1 Ethics**

Ethical motivation is the most frequently reported motivation among my research participants. There are two possible routes that can lead to an ethical objection to animal products. One is through personifying animals. By making animals more like humans, it seems legitimate that the ethics that are generally acknowledged as applying to human society should be extended to other animals, as well:

I realised animals are living beings, just like us. They have emotions, feelings and moods. They love and they hate. They are all afraid of death. They have their own children. The children love their mother and their mother takes care of her children. Besides, the suffering animals have in the farm is unreasonable either from the point of humanism or health, environment and nature, as the suffering is unnatural and inhuman. I thought I didn't have to hurt their lives. I didn't want to hurt their lives. I could choose not to eat them. I didn't want to eat them. So I chose to be vegan. (Marlee)

The tendency to romanticise animals may come from personifying them, especially to portray them as unconditionally kind and innocent beings. One example is how Vanessa anthropomorphised all animal as friends of humankind:

There is one thing I remember very clearly. I was told that the meat you eat looks like meat, but actually it's, in effect, lots and lots of dead bodies of your friends. It shocked

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me. From that moment I really felt that every mouthful of meat I ate was... You can say they are animals, but they are actually our friends, so every mouthful of meat you eat you are eating your friend's body. I felt I was so cruel.

This tendency is clear in the Chinese animal protection NGO Don't Eat Friends (DEF), the logo of which is a crying human face made up of images of animals.

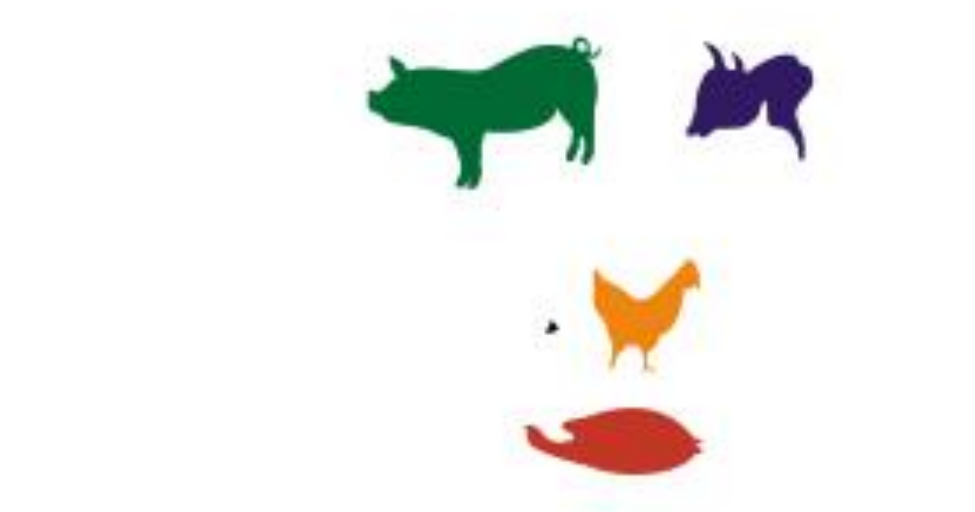


Figure 5-1 The Logo of Don't Eat Friends

In a music video DEF made in 2016 to promote the welfare of stray animals, they told a story of two street cat fairies that saved a man from hitting by a car. The narrative directly aims to evoke empathy from its potential audience. However, anthropomorphising and even romanticising animals for animal protection purpose is a risky strategy because it essentially judges animals by moral criteria of human society, implying animals as the subjects of rights that must first prove their worth based on their moral condition. It draws an unfair link between the subject of rights and the moral subject.

The other route to an ethical objection to animal products is through developing a general respect for life and a reluctance to cause pain to other being, regardless of whether it shares the same level of emotional or intellectual qualities as humans. Calvin and Kofi represent vegetarians with this view. Ethical arguments about vegetarianism from this perspective are closely related to the animal rights campaign:

In the language of Western discourse, I'm an animal rights campaigner, I believe the animals have rights. It's like, no matter how humble a pauper is, he has human rights, and you can't violate his rights. Animal rights theory extends the concept of rights. Why do you draw the boundary line just around human? Why don't you extend it to the realm of animal? This boundary is unfounded. You can't treat it differently in terms of ethics simply based on a biological boundary between species. From this point of view, whether you are vegetarian or not is an issue concerning the social justice of human society, which includes animals. So I believe it's an ethical issue, an issue of institutional arrangement, a public issue. [...] Theoretically, I think it has the same nature as the emancipation of slaves.

However, Kofi was the only person I encountered in my fieldwork who openly related the ethical argument of vegetarianism to social justice and addressed it as a public issue, which is not surprising because much of the theoretical framework of his vegetarianism was based on animal rights writers such as Peter Singer and Tom Regan. For the majority of ethics-inspired vegetarians in my research, it was the personal aspect, such as the emotional feeling, that they often emphasised when interpreting their ethical stand. Kofi criticised the lack of discussion of vegetarianism as a public issue in China and believed this had to do with the nature of Chinese society:



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[...] in traditional society, people were not interested in public topics, they only cared about themselves, their own things. They could only be in control of their own things. Seldom did people say, 'alright, let's work together to change the social arrangement'. It is a feature of modern society. Even the democratisation of China has something to do with it.

Even if Kofi is right, this is difficult to confirm for other ethic-inspired vegetarians. However, I doubt that the lack of discussion of vegetarianism as a public issue is because most vegetarians fail to see their cause as a public one. Later in the chapter, I explore the environmental motivation of vegetarianism, which clearly shows that vegetarians can link their action to public interest. It could be a deliberate avoidance by Chinese vegetarians to relate the ethical argument of vegetarianism to animal rights and social justice because anything related to rights and social justice is considered somewhat politically sensitive under the Communist Party's regime. Unauthorised discussion of political issues can bring unwanted attention from the authorities and may even lead to unexpected outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Vegetarians in modern Beijing must tread carefully if they wish to express their needs and demands. I discuss more on the topic in the following chapters.

### **5.2.2 Religious Influence**

There is a tendency in the limited contemporary discussions of Chinese vegetarianism to separate modern Chinese vegetarian practice into two distinct categories; that is, one is traditional and governed by religious beliefs, especially Buddhism (e.g. Sivelle, 2005; Zhou, 2008), while the other is new, inspired by secular demands such as health and environmental protection (e.g. Zheng, 2000; Luo, 2012). Even though it is admitted that practitioners in the former category may appropriate arguments from the latter, their purpose is often presented as utilitarian, and the newly recruited arguments are simply used to support the validity of the pre-existing religious belief (e.g., Pu, 2006; Wen, 2010; Klein, 2017). However, in my research, the relationship between the supposedly traditional religious vegetarianism and the secular 'new' vegetarianism (Zheng, 2000) is proved to be

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<sup>1</sup> Controversial figures in China such as Ai Weiwei or Gui Minhai are often used as examples by the Western media to criticise the lack of freedom of speech in China. There is little surprise that Calvin only agreed to meet me under the condition that no political issue would be discussed in the interview.

much more complex than unidirectional appropriation. The boundary between the two categories, if there is one, is obscure at best, and such a boundary may in itself be questionable.

It is apparent that Buddhism poses a clear presence among the vegetarian participants in my research. Of the 18 current and former Chinese vegetarian interviewees, 11 are self-defined Buddhists, including one former vegetarian. Along with one interested in Buddhism who did not consider herself Buddhist, two-thirds of the current and former Chinese vegetarian interviewees received significant influence from Buddhism. All Buddhism-influenced vegetarians except one listed multiple motivations, confirming the implication from the literature mentioned above that religious and secular motivations can coexist in the same individual. The reason Buddhism advocates a meatless diet is often believed to be an act of mercifulness, to avoid the killing of all ‘sentient beings’ (Muller, 2012, p. 325). Through interpretation, this teaching is compatible with the ethical arguments from the ‘Western’ vegetarian tradition, as when Kofi explained why he became vegetarian:

Because I’m a Buddhist. If you believe in Buddhism, you believe in rebirth, in the equality of all life forms. You ought not to harm any life. So animal protection in the light of Buddhism is more or less the same as animal protection in the West in the form of animal rights, only that the former involves a religious worldview, such as the belief of an afterlife. But in terms of protecting the living, they are more or less the same.

However, he also believed there was difference between the ethical teachings of Buddhism and the ethical arguments of ‘Western’ vegetarianism, which is shown in his elaboration of Buddhists’ attitude towards egg products:

[The reason] Buddhists eat *su* is mostly for the sake of [avoiding the] killing of life, so eggs, like the eggs produced by industrial farming, are lifeless; most of them are not fertilised, so they (*the Buddhists*) have less obstacles to eating them. But the problem of chicken farms is about animal welfare, and this involves the different emphases Buddhism and Western zoophilists have on the care of life. The Westerners may not value the deprivation of life as much as the Buddhists do. They may say it is probably better to end its life and its pain earlier than to let it dwell in pain, so to some extent they can bear killing, but not let it live in misery. In contrast, Buddhists are like... Of course

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it's not good to leave it in misery, but it's even worse to kill it, so the emphasis is different.

The decision Kofi made in recognition of this difference concerning ethical emphases between different vegetarian traditions was to adopt the standpoint of 'Western' vegetarianism while retaining his self-identity as a Buddhist. I have mentioned in chapter 4 how Kofi's understanding of vegetarianism was shaped by the conventional ideas and writings of 'Western' animal welfare activists. Accordingly, his practice was also a mixture of both traditions. In his self-narration, he used both vegan and Buddhist terms to describe his self-identity; both are independently valid, yet they also revalidate each other in his case.

Interestingly, not all Buddhism-influenced vegetarian participants explicitly referred to Buddhism as a motivation for their lifestyle choice, as is indicated from the difference between the number of times religious influence was directly reported as a motivation for a vegetarian lifestyle and the number of vegetarian participants who received significant religious impact. However the lack of explicitness does not necessarily suggest the lack of Buddhism's contribution to their vegetarian lifestyle. It could be that some, such as Maison and Linda, felt that specifically stating Buddhism as a motivation would be a repetition of the already elaborated ethics of their vegetarian lifestyle, since the ethical values that inspired them to be vegetarian, which to them coincided with the values taught by Buddhism, were exactly the reason Buddhism promoted vegetarianism. The compatibility of ethical vegetarianism and Buddhism may explain why some ethics-inspired vegetarian participants in my research were attracted by Buddhism, which is unlike the general presumption in extant literature that the only relationship between Buddhism and secular motivations of vegetarianism, including ethics, is a pragmatic one, in which the former incorporates the latter as an updated safeguard. Kaja gave one example of Buddhism attracting self-defined vegetarians:

Another reason that I am still vegetarian is I started to notice, to study Buddhism as I became vegetarian, because Buddhism – I don't know if there are differences between sects – I think followers of mahāyāna are required to eat *su*. Because of this requirement, I became interested in Buddhism. I'm definitely not a Buddhist, but now I'm getting

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more and more interested in Buddhism, so... I guess since I become increasingly interested in it, I can kind of say I like Buddhism. Then I feel like it's a circle, I don't know how to put it, but I feel like now that I like Buddhism so much, and Buddhism requires its followers to eat *su*, this makes it even more impossible for me to eat meat.

Because an interest in Buddhism may develop at any stage of the vegetarian path, and the impact of Buddhism on an individual is not restricted to the form of conversion, it is more appropriate to use the term 'religion-influenced' rather than 'religious' (such as in Stiles, 1998; White *et al.*, 1999) to describe the vegetarian participants who proposed Buddhism as a motivation of their lifestyle because the latter indicates that the person should be a believer.

In sum, the Buddhist influence that was traditionally linked to vegetarian practice in China did not lose its attraction for the new generation of Chinese vegetarians, who were often exposed to 'Western' vegetarianism. On the contrary, Buddhism's teachings and 'imported' vegetarian arguments seem to be highly compatible with each other, and their hybrid is what makes the local vegetarian scene unique. Together, they can attract a wider audience than either vegetarian tradition could do alone, for not only has the conventional spiritual force gained new means to help it adapt in the mainly secular society, but the originally non-indigenous 'Western' vegetarianism adopt terminologies that are already established in public discourse, which helped normalise the ideology and create a comfortable way to practice vegetarianism in a local context.

### 5.2.3 Health

Another strong motivation behind the vegetarians' lifestyle choice in my research is health. When a vegetarian invoked health reasons to support their choice, the connotation could be twofold: a vegetarian diet was supposed to prevent disease if the individual was in a reasonably healthy state, or if the individual already had a health problem, it was meant to restore the body to a healthy state. Stanford summarised two possible situations in which individuals may find and strengthen a link between vegetarian diet and physical health; one is through personal experience:

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[...] you see this person is ill. He is Buddhist. He stopped eating meat after conversion to Buddhism. His cancer is cured. [Then you see] that person is also Buddhist, he also has cancer, but he still eats meat. Then he dies. This is personal experience.

The other is through exposure to health information presented in the style of a scientific narrative, like Stanford himself, who accidentally encountered the idea online that animal protein was strongly related to cancer; this became the definitive moment for him to finally become vegetarian, an idea he had been considering for nearly nine years after he converted to Buddhism. Scientific narrative and personal experience may mutually confirm each other's validity and make the link between vegetarianism and health more convincing. In the example of Hamilton, he first read in a magazine in 1983 that so-called alkaline foods could fight cancer. At that time, his father was suffering from late-stage cancer. As a desperate gesture, Hamilton decided to try the alkaline food diet on his father. He started to research first:

[...] in those days, there was no Internet. I called or wrote to friends all over the world to help me find, to ask dieticians what alkaline food was. Later, I found that almost all alkaline foods were vegetables, some seafood was alkaline too, but hardly any mammal. However, if you didn't cook fish properly, it would become acidic. So I thought, 'Well then, basically, it means my dad needs to be vegetarian'.

His father lived on for another seven years instead of the six months predicted by the doctor. Hamilton believed the vegetarian diet cured his father's cancer. From then on, he became a firm believer in and promoter of the great capacity of vegetarian food in the sense of restoring and maintaining health. In the process of promoting vegetarianism, Hamilton's knowledge and personal experience were passed on to novices for whom, in time, this become their own knowledge and experiential evidence – albeit second-hand – from which they could draw confidence to support their new lifestyle.

As illustrated in chapter 4, vegetarian-related information in the name of health is available in a variety of traditional and new media, and it appeals to vegetarians and non-vegetarians alike. The successful dissemination and acceptability of such information demonstrates a prevalent interest in maintaining health among the public that involves not only diet but all

aspects of lifestyle. Health and longevity are such popular social topics in modern China that, in a sense, using health as a motivation to adopt a vegetarian lifestyle is not simply enlisting evidence but a way to normalise a seemingly non-mainstream choice by showing how vegetarians value and take care of their own body because doing so is socially appraised behaviour:

From a rhetorical perspective, articulation of health as an explanation for adoption of a particular diet does not necessarily reflect something about that person or their dietary choice, but that health is an important and desirable concept, and one that can be used to justify observable behaviour (and not just diet). (Wilson *et al.*, 2004, p. 569)

The growing attention to health on the individual level in China is the result of many factors working together. It may be an attempt to further improve the quality of life after the basic need for survival has been satisfied since the economic liberation. It may be an expression of stronger self-awareness and self-autonomy in the form of body regulation in an era of unprecedented choices and mobility. The same theory may also explain the passion for fitness in Western society. However, what makes the health obsession in modern China different is the unique social circumstances in which the obsession is rooted. One possible trigger for the health obsession may be the prevalent anxiety over food safety in China. The rapid growth of the Chinese food industry since economic liberation and the laggard monitoring and regulation system has resulted in a series of food safety scandals which severely affected Chinese consumers' confidence in the safety of domestically produced food (Ortega *et al.*, 2011). These scandals may have long-lasting effects that are difficult to reverse. One example is the melamine milk scandal in 2008, which severely damaged the whole Chinese dairy sector, especially the fields of liquid milk and baby formula (Li *et al.*, 2008). Despite a stricter regulatory system has been established along with other administrative and legal measurements that seem to produce satisfying, quality inspection results,<sup>1</sup> a study of baby formula purchasers in Beijing and Xi'an revealed that 'place of origin being abroad' was still the most preferable trait in choosing which baby

<sup>1</sup> For instance, the defect rate of Chinese dairy products in 2016 was 0.5%, of which the defect rate of Chinese baby formula was 1.3%; both were lower than the defect rate of Chinese food in general. See the *Report of the Quality Appraisal of Chinese Dairy Sector (2017)* by the Dairy Association of China (<http://www.dac.org.cn/upload/fckupload/file/1500348352177849679367.pdf>) (Accessed: 29 October 2017).

formula to purchase (Quan *et al.*, 2017). A review of 34 studies conducted from 2000 onward of urban Chinese consumers' decision-making process in terms of purchasing safe food showed that Chinese consumers were willing to pay extra for safe food, yet they generally possessed limited knowledge about food safety (Liu *et al.*, 2013). In addition, legitimate information concerning domestic food supply chain was often vague or absent (Ortega *et al.*, 2011). Mass media became the main source of information, followed by word-of-mouth, for consumers to obtain food safety knowledge (Liu *et al.*, 2013). In response to food safety scandals and rumours concerning animal products, consumers might adopt different tactics that were influenced by financial status, social background and values, including reducing or avoiding certain animal products and finding alternative source to obtain certain animal products (Klein, 2017). These tactics can all be found in my research. For instance, Kaja claimed that the more she knew about vegetarianism, 'the more you realise that there are so many things you can't eat, can't touch', things like eggs and dairy products because of the hormone in eggs and antibiotic in milk; Sherie gave up domestic beef from local supermarket and turned to premium imported beef from online store because she distrusted the quality of the former; pork was once the most important meat in Maxine's household but was replaced by mainly white meat such as fish and poultry. Concerns about vegetable safety were as prevalent among vegetarian as well as non-vegetarian participants, yet no one proposed to reduce the vegetable intake for safety reason, which may suggest that vegetable is generally considered more indispensable than animal-derived food in the Chinese diet.

Another trigger may be the fear of the potentially heavy financial burden caused by health expenditure in the case of serious illness. The once-universal health coverage in Maoist China ended in late 1970s with the beginning of economic liberation, which left many urban residents with no tie to state- or collectively owned entities, and most rural residents were vulnerable to increasing healthcare costs (Barber & Yao, 2010). The portion of out-of-pocket expenditure of total health expenditures rose sharply from 20% in 1980 to the peak 59% in 2000 (Hu *et al.*, 2008). Although this figure has decreased, according to

the newest data from the WHO, the ratio was still almost 32% in 2014.<sup>1</sup> Generally speaking, urban residents enjoy better healthcare than rural residents, in the sense that medical resources are mostly concentrated in urban area, and urban residents enjoy higher inpatient reimbursement rates than rural residents through different national social health insurance programmes,<sup>2</sup> although the highest inpatient reimbursement rate for urban residents was still under 70% in 2010 (Hu *et al.*, 2008; Ling *et al.*, 2011). The high rate of out-of-pocket expenditure of total health expenditures, coupled with the increasing cost of healthcare, meant that the risk of catastrophic health expenditures and impoverishment that might ensue was real, particularly for households with members with chronic or critical illness (Li *et al.*, 2012). In these circumstances, the pressure of healthcare was partially transferred from the state to common individuals, forcing them to seek help outside conventional medical systems. Potential remedies may include commercial medical insurance, private healthcare and alternative therapists. Adopting vegetarianism on the grounds of health also seems to be a cost-effective way of self-regulating the body. It shows how individuals actively take responsibility for their own body in a time when it is easy to feel powerless to the wider social environment.

#### 5.2.4 Environment

Unlike the motivations discussed above, in my research interviews, no participants presented detailed arguments about why being vegetarian would benefit the environment. This may suggest that the mechanism of why adopting a vegetarian diet is beneficial to the environment was unclear to many vegetarians, even if they held the belief that the former was beneficial to the latter. The low awareness of the relationship between meat and dairy consumption and climate change among the Chinese public seems to support my assertion (Wellesley *et al.*, 2015). Only two participants briefly mentioned specific environmental benefits they believed vegetarianism could achieve, which are when Stanford listed

<sup>1</sup> <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/view.main.GSWCAH41v>.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, in 2010, the inpatient reimbursement rate for urban residents were higher by 4% and 24%, respectively, through the Urban Resident Basic Medical Insurance (URBMI) and the Urban Employee Basic Medical Insurance (UEBMI) than the inpatient reimbursement rate for rural residents through the New Cooperative Medical Scheme (NCMS) (Yip *et al.*, 2012).



reducing his carbon footprint as one of the motivations that drove his vegetarian career and when Erick suggested that the infamous smog in Beijing would not be so serious if everyone became vegetarian. One Chinese vegetarian activist gave a systematic account of how promoting vegetarianism is beneficial to environmental protection in the form of an article, in which he argues that vegetarianism benefits the environment in three main ways: 1) alleviating the rapid loss of rainforest for farmland as less farmland is needed to support vegetarian population than meat-eating population, 2) reducing pollution produced by industrial husbandry and 3) retarding global warming by reducing greenhouse gases generated by cattle industry (Jiang, 2014). These are not original ideas, but common arguments that have appeared repeatedly in the ‘Western’ vegetarian movement.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of whether the eco-motivated vegetarian in my research can provide a vigorous demonstration of their argument, it is certain that these individuals accepted this perhaps ‘imported’ idea and even justified it in local context. It is interesting that Erick proposed using vegetarianism to fight air pollution in Beijing as there is no clear evidence the two are related. This shows the confusion of vegetarians in Beijing concerning the relationship between vegetarianism and the environment and the accompanying freedom they have to interpret it according to their own understanding. Pollution happens to be the environmental issue most Chinese are most familiar with because of their direct experience of pollution in everyday life. On the other hand, pollution is much less significant in ‘Western’ vegetarian discourse about the environment; instead, more abstract and global issues such as global warming and food security<sup>2</sup> are prevalent, probably because pollution is not experienced as directly and as seriously as it is in China.

In any case, the vegetarian participants’ accounts demonstrate that what they were concerned about transcending immediate, individual feelings and experiences. The fact that some of them proposed solving a grand global problem such as environmental protection by changing individual lifestyles shows an awakening sense of duty to actively engage in

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, in the promotion materials of multiple vegetarian organisations such as the Vegetarian Society or the HappyCow and in chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, in *Why It's Green to go Vegetarian* by the Vegetarian Society (<https://www.vegsoc.org/document.doc?id=524>) and the ‘environment’ section of the Vegan Society (<https://www.vegansociety.com/go-vegan/environment>).

public interests, which is fairly different from the attitude towards public issues in traditional Chinese society, as Kofi pointed out:

[...] in traditional [Chinese] society, people were not interested in public issues, they cared more about themselves, about their own interests. Their own business was what they were able to control. Seldom did people propose to work together to change the *status quo* of the society. This is a modern thing. The democratisation of China is similar to this. [...] I always believe we should make vegetarianism and animal preservation a public issue. This is where the work should start. It is not the same as how Buddhists traditionally promoted vegetarianism. Many of them did not think of the issue in a modern context but regarded it as a problem of personal enlightenment and personal spiritual lifting. I'd say it's not enough. It should be a public issue.

This reflexiveness, which emerged from the relationship between individual choice and social implications, thus becomes vital in the identification process of the eco-inspired vegetarians, which, according to Giddens (1991), is an unmistakable sign of urban Beijing entering high modernity.

### 5.2.5 Gustatory preference

Disliking the sensory properties of meat can be a motivation for a vegetarian lifestyle, although this is not necessarily the case. Beardsworth and Keil (1991) and Janda and Trocchia (2001) have equated the gustatory/sensory motivation of vegetarians with an indiscriminating aversion to meat. In my research, however, I found two types of scenarios with different indications in vegetarians' accounts of their dislike of the sensory properties of meat. In the first scenario, they described their dislike as a neutral, 'innate' food preference with no additional values. Boyle (2011) has classified such accounts as 'excuses' in terms of accounting techniques, in the sense that they portray the action as a somewhat passively accepted consequence in contrast to an actively achieved outcome. By doing so, the narrators deliberately avoided any value judgement and perhaps responsibility in relation to their lifestyle choice. Instead, they highlighted the 'naturalness' and 'normality' in their dietary practice: they enjoy vegetarian food in the same way that non-vegetarians enjoy meat, and both are true to themselves. However, disliking meat alone is not enough to convert to vegetarianism, as is shown in Cecilia's case. She hardly ate meat because she

did not like the taste, but she refused to be labelled vegetarian because she did not think there was anything wrong with eating meat. In addition, she believed meat was necessary in certain circumstances regardless of personal dietary preference:

For example, in adolescent years, when your body is growing, you are studying and preparing for the National Higher Education Entrance Examination, this is the time when you need more nutrition, so you need to eat more healthy meat. [...] Or if in pregnancy, like I usually don't eat meat because it makes me feel sick, but if I'm pregnant, then I'll have to eat meat even if I can't stand it. Because the development of the foetus requires all sorts of nutrients, and they are indispensable.

The example of Cecilia suggests that, compared to behavioural accordance, the acceptance of the values supporting the behaviour may be more decisive in the identification process. Thus, the gustatory preference can be a bonus to the more decisive motivations, such as ethics or health, something to make the conversion process to vegetarianism easier, but it is not necessary. If an individual identifies with a vegetarian identity, even the occasional behavioural transgression cannot harm the integrity of her identity as a vegetarian, which enables the reconciliation between the often-complicated everyday situation and the relatively rigid dietary regulations. More detail is provided in chapter 7. Having said that, quoting gustatory preference as a motivation to become vegetarian provides more than an excuse, and it certainly made the transition easier than it was for those who used to enjoy the taste of meat.

In the second scenario, the aversion to meat is a learnt behaviour which can either be a 'side effect' of other ideas concerning meat eating or a consequence of having had a period of a meat-free diet. The former situation is in line with Fessler *et al.*'s (2003) conclusion that the feeling of disgust towards meat some ethically inspired vegetarians experienced is the result rather than a cause of their moral stands concerning meat. An apt example is the narration of Kaja. Her story clearly shows how her physical reaction to the sight of meat is induced by emotion and is strong enough to overcome the residual desire for meat from previous life experience:

You asked me if I would crave meat; well, sometimes I do, then I'd go to a vegetarian

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restaurant and order some fake meat. But I never ate meat again after I became vegetarian. [...] Like once or twice a year, I'd want to eat meat so badly, but when the meat is offered in front of you and you remember the stuff, like the documentaries you have watched before and how the animals suffered, then the desire would recede.

Health-inspired vegetarian may also develop a physical aversion to meat as a result of linking negative values to meat. For instance, Hamilton described meat as 'dead body' and 'rotten flesh', claiming it could bring nothing positive, only illness, to the human body. It is on these grounds that he denied the position of meat in the category of food, showing the flexibility in the construction of the definition of food via discourse (Wiggins *et al.*, 2001). He justified his change of diet by providing an underlying rhetorical consistency in terms of his idea of a single relationship between food and health, that is, food should only be beneficial to health. Accompanying his change of perception of the relationship between meat and human health was the change of his feeling towards meat from craving to aversion.

It is clear that both ethics- and health-inspired vegetarians can experience the feeling of disgust towards meat. This feeling may be induced by negative values attached to meat eating which are not restricted to the realm of ethics. The intensity of the disgust feeling those participants experience is not straightforward, however. After asking moral- and health-inspired vegetarians to rate three key features of disgust measurement, Rozin *et al.* (1997) found that, compared to health-inspired vegetarians, moral-inspired vegetarians reported higher scores of emotional discomfort about the idea of meat-eating and of revulsion towards food contaminated by the trace of meat, yet lower scores of physical feelings of nausea at the thought of eating meat. Based on the overall scores from each group, researchers then concluded that moral-inspired vegetarians felt that meat was more disgusting than health-inspired vegetarians did. In my research, however, participants who reported feeling disgust towards meat as a result of linking negative values to it did not make any distinction between emotional and physical aspects in their feelings. Instead, they described an integral experience in which the emotional and physical aspects are inseparable.

Examples of the latter situation can be found in chapter 4 and the following section of this chapter. Participants of this kind did not feel emotionally negative toward meat, yet they claimed that their body could no longer accept meat after its absence in their diet for a period of time. From this perspective, it is similar to what is described in the first scenario because, in both situations, the participants renounced responsibility for their dietary choice. Apart from using the same justifying technique, as in examples in the first scenario, these accounts suggest that reducing exposure to a certain flavour may result in a change in taste preference, which may to some extent be supported by Logue's (1985) argument that less familiar food is more likely to cause aversion. On the other hand, increasing exposure to an initially unpleasant flavour may also change taste preference in that the flavour becomes less unpleasant and even desirable, as is the case of the acquired taste for chilli peppers (Rozin & Vollmecke, 1986). This shows the possibility that the previous level of acceptance of meat for some vegetarians may be restored if they receive more exposure to it. In my research, one participant, Weronika, admitted to having experienced this transformation:

When I was on a pure vegetarian diet, I only ate the vegetable part if the vegetable had been cooked with meat. There was a time when I was unused to vegetable with the flavour of meat. I didn't like vegetable contaminated by the flavour of meat when I was having a pure vegetarian diet. It made me feel sick. Then, I became less persistent and restarted eating meat. But I only ate a little for convenience, so my family didn't feel uncomfortable. [...] Now, I don't feel anything [when eating meat].

She specifically noted there had been a change in her attitude (i.e., she became less persistent) before she reincorporated meat into her diet and eventually became used to it, which seems to suggest that the emotional acceptance of a previously undesirable food precedes physical acceptance.

Whether they developed an aversion to meat through the internalisation of negative values attached to meat or as a result of the consistent absence of meat in their diet, none of the participants deliberately proclaimed aversion as a motivation to become or maintain vegetarian. Rather, their aversion to meat was indicated as a symptom of other motivations. However, once they developed the aversion to meat, this in effect helped them maintain a

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vegetarian lifestyle because the prospective negative experiences could prevent them from reverting to old dietary habits.

### **5.2.6 Peer Influence**

The element of social influence in making the initial decision to go vegetarian in my research sample is demonstrated exclusively in the form of conformity with friends. Three out of four social influence references pointed to Calvin, which is not surprising since he is the core figure of a closely knitted charity group to which the three referrers belong. The impact flow on a peer level, instead of originating from a conventional patriarchal authoritative figure, may suggest that peer-to-peer relationships play a more important role for individuals in urban environment.

### **5.2.7 Weight Control**

The only two participants who explicitly mentioned weight control – both in the form of weight loss – as an initial motivation to become vegetarian were male, which seems to disagree with the popular idea that, at least in places heavily influenced by ‘Western’ culture, females are more likely than males to be victims of pursuing the socially recognised ‘ideal’ yet unrealistic slim body (see, for example, Furnham *et al.*, 2002; Bordo, 2013). This may due to the limited size of my research sample. There is indication from some participants’ accounts that links a vegetarian diet to a slim, female body, such as when Maison criticised the girls who comprised the majority of the members of the Vegetarian Society of Peking University: ‘their thinking seems to be unhealthy. They just want to lose weight.’ However, considering the discussion of the perception of the vegetarian body in chapter 4, it is possible that, in the context of modern Beijing, the idea of a vegetarian body may not be as closely related to slimness as to other characteristics, such as cleanness and calmness.

### 5.2.8 Other Motivations

In addition to the seven major motivations listed above, there are several other motivations to become and remain vegetarian reported in my research that are difficult to categorise. For instance, one of the reasons Maison went vegetarian was that he ‘could not find any excuse to eat meat, which did not mean I thought eating meat was bad’. After curing his father’s cancer with a vegetarian diet, Hamilton made a vow to be vegetarian himself for five years as a statement to pray for his father’s health. Calvin and Ziva resorted to a vegetarian diet when they faced spiritual discontent in life, as Ziva explained:

In 2008, I felt my life was meaningless, my mind was chaos. I tried different ways to tackle the problem, but none had any effect. Then I recalled when I was little, I would eat vegetable porridge whenever I was sick, and after that I would recover. I thought [vegetable] could be helpful, so I started to eat *su*.

These unique motivations are not simply exceptions to common categories; rather, they show that what prompts people to become and remain vegetarian can be so diverse and highly individualised that it cannot fit into an oversimplified model.

### 5.2.9 Development of Motivations

The literature review chapter showed how the motivation to remain vegetarian can develop over time. However, before any further discussion on the topic, I must reiterate that, in everyday life, the boundaries of different motivations are often not as clear-cut as they appear. The ethical and religious motivations, for example, are intimately intertwined. In addition, even the same ‘fact’ can be interpreted in different ways and support multiple arguments. For instance, Xiaobai, a vegan writer and entrepreneur based in Beijing, commented the following in a speech at a vegetarian lifestyle-themed seminar in Shanghai:

...we mistook our desire for our needs, we wanted to have meat in every meal, but we didn’t realise that, **for every acre of land that could support 22 potato-eaters, it could only support one person who ate beef.** Because raising animals needs a huge quantity of corn and drinking water, so many resources were consumed in the process. We need

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to restrain our needs and satisfy our needs reasonably, we really don't need that much.<sup>1</sup>  
(*original emphasis*)

The efficiency of a vegetarian lifestyle that is often used to prove the environmental benefits of vegetarianism is thus linked to the spiritual pursuit of refraining from unnecessary desires.

For vegetarians with multiple motivations, the majority (10 out of 16) saw some kind of change in their motivations over time. Usually, this was a process of assimilation, of incorporating new motivations while not abandoning the initial motivation:

I became vegetarian simply because I sympathised with animal suffering. [...] At first, I just felt sorry for the animals, so I didn't want my parents or my friends to eat meat. We quarrelled. Then I realised there's no point in quarrelling. I started to search for evidence to show how *humans* can benefit from a vegetarian diet, like eating meat is bad for your heart and can increase serum cholesterol level and so on. I collected this kind of evidence, then I told them having a vegetarian diet was good for their body, for the human body. [...] I found myself accepting the argument as well. But to be honest, I wouldn't have become vegetarian had it only for health reasons because everybody knows meat is tasty. (Kaja)

Sometimes, the decision to go vegetarian could produce unexpectedly satisfying results, which, in turn, became another motivation to maintain the original choice:

Initially, it was quite deliberate [for me to have a vegetarian diet], like, I could not bear to eat fish after the life release ceremony, I felt sick if I ate it. So I started to try [to go vegetarian], then it became a habit. Besides, I've always felt my body functions well after becoming vegetarian, the digestion process got faster, and I quite like the feeling of it. Also, perhaps due to the religious practice I had in recent years, I feel warm whenever I see a living being, so maybe it is a more natural choice not to eat them. (Linda)

As more motivations were assimilated to sustain the vegetarian lifestyle, there was a need for each individual vegetarian to integrate them so that each motivation was related to one another in a way that made sense to the individual. Some vegetarians might identify one major motivation over others, or they ordered them in a particular sequence:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/RnGaGasVmomELGJxcjvV2A> [Accessed: 20 December 2017].



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It's healthy; it's eco-friendly; it complies with nature. This is the rank of my motivations. From micro to macro. It's healthy, which is to say you are responsible for yourself. It's eco-friendly, which is to say you are responsible for society. It complies with nature, which is to say you believe in something spiritual, metaphysical. (Codey)

Other vegetarians might feel there was no hierarchy in their motivations because, to them, all the reasons that helped them remain vegetarian were intrinsically different facets of the same fact; one could either accept them all as a whole or abandon all of them:

By eating *su*, I conformed to my Buddhist belief, my body benefited from it, my carbon emission was reduced, I won't be troubled by killing and animal protection problems, and I complied with my ethical values, there is no conflict between them. From my current point of view, I don't [eat *su*] particularly because any one of them. [...] if I have to abandon one of them, I don't think I can do that, abandoning one is to abandon all. (Stanford)

No single belief system regarding being vegetarian is the norm or standard. Each vegetarian has to find their own interpretation of what makes them choose this lifestyle. The interpretation of motivations constitutes part of the individual's vegetarian history, along with the conversion story, which is explored in the next section.

### **5.3 The Process of Becoming Vegetarian**

All vegetarian participants in my research were not raised as such but intentionally converted to this lifestyle at some point in their life, which raises the question of what the transition process from their previous lifestyle to their current one is like. The most prevalent models regarding the process of becoming vegetarian have been proposed by Beardsworth and Kail (1991; 1992), and they consist of a dichotomy of a gradual transition process versus an abrupt one. Although Boyle (2007) has criticised this set of models as overly subjective and ignoring the difference between cognitive and behavioural change, I find that they are useful and indeed practical in my research because, often, the vegetarian participants would actively describe whether their conversion process was gradual or abrupt, cognitive or behavioural; therefore, it seems to them that such wording was sufficient to depict their experience.

In research where the gradual and abrupt models were applied, the gradual transition model is often claimed to be the more common path to becoming vegetarian (e.g., Jabs *et al.*, 1998; Stiles, 1998; Maurer, 2002). It is true that, in my research, among vegetarian participants who did not make a distinction between a cognitive change and a behavioural change in their process of becoming vegetarian, those who reported having a single, gradual transition to vegetarianism (five times) outnumbered those who reported having a single, abrupt change prior to their vegetarian career (three times). However, neither model alone was the most common among all vegetarian participants. Instead, a combination of both gradual and abrupt transitions, which may have separately applied to a change in mind or behaviour, was the mainstream.

In cases where animal products were gradually removed from the diet, the process was generally believed to follow a fixed order of red meat, white meat, eggs and dairy (Beardsworth and Keil, 1992; Jabs *et al.*, 1998; Chapman, 2002), which is in accordance with the food hierarchy in ‘Western’ society (Twigg, 1979). This trend was partially observed in my research in the sense that fish and seafood often remained in the diet longer than any other kind of meat, and most current vegans had previously experienced a vegetarian period, which shows that the eggs and dairy were the last to be removed from the diet. However, in terms of meat other than fish and seafood, there was no obvious additional resistance to red meat over white meat; instead, several other possible routes of meat elimination in the diet were reported. The first was by reducing the frequency of the consumption of any animal-derived food, as in the case of Vanessa:

At first, it was just a thought: what if I start to eat *su*? But after all, I had been eating *hun* for so long. Then gradually... I realised at the time of cooking that I seldom purchased meat, even milk, anymore. It’s not that I deliberately became vegetarian one day, but I gradually reduced the meat in my diet until, one day, I suddenly realised I had not eaten meat for a long time.

The second route is to reduce different types of meat based on individual dietary preference or the meat’s popularity in local cuisine. For instance, the first meat Kaja abstained from was chicken in KFC; then, it extended to include all chicken dishes, and

after that,

[I stopped eating] beef and lamb... Because I'm of *Han* ethnicity, I had been eating pork since I was young, all my family eat pork, so the last meat I gave up was pork because I really loved eating pork.

The third route is to gradually remove different types of animal-derived food from the diet based on how that food is prepared, such as Stanford:

Strictly speaking, I have gone through three stages. In the first stage, I stopped eating the meat of animals killed in front of me. That was from 2006 to around 2009. Then, from 2009 to 2012, I stopped eating big chunks of meat. Occasionally, I might eat a bit of minced meat if it was in the dish. That is a reduction of more than 90% [of my meat consumption]. From 2013 onwards, I eliminated 99.9% of the meat in my diet, except for what I might eat unknowingly.<sup>1</sup>

The varied routes of eliminating animal-derived food shown in my research suggest that the hierarchy within the category of meat in Chinese cuisine may not be the same as in 'Western' cuisine. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines red meat as the meat of livestock (beef, lamb, veal, pork);<sup>2</sup> presumably, the meat of any other animal is graded as white meat. The specific type of meat in each group may differ in different sources, yet the classification of all meat into 'red' and 'white' with unequal status is widely accepted in public discourse. In contrast, although the concepts of 'red meat' and 'white meat' certainly exist in the repertoire of modern Chinese language, they are not the conventional meat classification system in Chinese cuisine. It is difficult to know to what extent the connotation of status difference behind the concepts of red and white meat the public realises. In Chinese oral expression, fish and other aquatic animal meat are often described as parallel to other kinds of meat, which are of roughly equal status. If people do reduce animal products in the order of food hierarchy, then the partial lack of this in Chinese cuisine compared to its 'Western' counterpart may force people to find new ways

<sup>1</sup> Although he used the word 'meat', it is clear through context that actually he reduced the consumption of eggs and dairy products in the same period through the same route.

<sup>2</sup>

[https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/meat-preparation/fresh-pork-from-farm-to-table/ct\\_index](https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/meat-preparation/fresh-pork-from-farm-to-table/ct_index) (Accessed: 29 January, 2018).

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to arrange their dietary change.

In cases of experiencing an abrupt change in diet, the participant sometimes provided detailed accounts of that defining moment; the most dramatic example from the participants' accounts is from Calvin:

I was told by someone that molluscs didn't have pain-sensing nerves. But one day...I was swimming in an outdoor swimming pool. Suddenly it began to rain and thunder. Many people left. But I didn't because I thought it was fun. I lay at the bottom of the pool staring at the surface. The raindrops were so big that they hit the surface as if the water was boiling in a saucepan. And I thought, if I were noodles, then I would have been boiled. At first I didn't feel much, but then I thought if I were fish or prawn, then this must be a horrific scene for me. After having this feeling, I thought it didn't matter if they had pain-sensing nerves. That was not something we should care about. What mattered was they didn't want to be cooked. From then on, I never ate molluscs again.

However, in most cases, the trigger of a sudden vegetarian career was far less dramatic, such as attending a seminar (Codey), a summer camp in a Buddhist temple (Kofi), or starting a full job in a vegetarian restaurant (Erick). It is even possible to have no obvious trigger in order to achieve an abrupt change, as with Marlee, who, after extensive online research, made an instant determination to be vegan. In general, what may trigger an abrupt change to vegetarianism is not significantly different from what may inspire a gradual transition to vegetarianism. The trigger event is only impressive because of the way it is told in the vegetarian's narrative.

Like Carmichael (2002), the most common path to becoming vegetarian in my research could not be reduced to fit into a simplified gradual or abrupt model; rather, it was a complex process that often evolved at different speeds, and it sometimes included internal conflict within an individual due to the non-synchrony of a change in mind and a change in practice. Below are a few examples of the diverse scenarios that came with this synthetic nature. The speed of the process to vegetarianism means that an individual can experience both gradual and abrupt dietary changes in different stages of the transition. This was exemplified by Calvin, who took over a year to gradually eliminate meat and fish from his diet, and he then stopped eating molluscs instantly after an enlightenment moment. To

some vegetarians, the differentiation between cognitive and behavioural change means that the process of becoming vegetarian happens on more than one level and can progress relatively independently. Maison's account shows that it is possible for a cognitive change and a behavioural change to not overlap at all in one's timeline:

I'd say there are two dramatically different stages [in my conversion process to be vegetarian]. In the first stage, my attitudes toward meat changed a lot in a short time. [The meat] was differentiated from other food from an ethical aspect, especially those that don't have advanced nervous system and can't feel pain. That was the first stage. It was around my fourth year in the college. In the second stage, I completely abstained from meat. So it's like, in the first stage, even though I have changed my attitudes, I still didn't [stop eating meat]... So the changes in my ideas and behaviour were totally separate.

Marlee's conversion story exemplifies the potentially underlying tension between will and practice when the behavioural change could not keep pace with the change in mind:

I made an instant decision to become vegan, but in real life, no one can abstain completely from any egg or dairy products immediately. As far as I can recall, I wanted to be vegan, but for at least one month, I might eat eggs and dairy from time to time, like cheesecake, dumplings containing egg filling, yogurt, and some biscuits and bread also contained egg and dairy. But gradually, I would choose alternatives. Because in this process, you need to do your own research, and you need to, like, when you visited the supermarket or a restaurant, at first you would feel like there was little to eat if you didn't have meat, you did feel that in the beginning, you felt you have to, maybe have some egg in the meal as you couldn't have meat. You are in a process of learning, and gradually, you will find there are better alternatives, so you can gradually give up eggs and dairy products. It is a process of discovering and learning.

The period of discordance between her will to be vegan and her inability to abstain from egg and dairy entirely was interpreted as unavoidable because the lifestyle of being vegan is like a skill that needs time to be learnt and perfected. Furthermore, unlike in traditional societies, where individual's life trajectories are mostly determined by external regulating forces (Elias, 2001), an individual in modern society is responsible for their own lifestyle selection and embodiment.

In addition to the conversion processes to vegetarianism that can be described with the

categorised themes regarding time (gradual and abrupt) and field of change (cognitive and behavioural), two participants gave conversion stories that are difficult to categorise. One (Nora) claimed that she never liked meat; in her account, the vegetarian self has always been the underlying tone, even in the meat-eating days:

In the past I ate *su*, but I would eat fish and egg. Then, for a while, because [when I was] pregnant, everyone said the baby needed nutrition, so I ate bones and stuff like that for a short period of time, [because] the doctor said I had calcium deficiency. I stopped after giving birth. Now I have been eating total *su* (*Buddhist vegetarian diet*) for about five to six years.

Therefore, for her, to ‘become’ vegetarian was not valid as a dietary conversion because the vegetarian self was always there. The seeming change from non-vegetarian to vegetarian was thus resolved and retold as a reconciliation between will and practice.

The other story (Linda) shows how becoming vegetarian can be the result of a somewhat arbitrary process without obvious direction:

I stopped eating meat because I didn’t feel like doing it after participating in the life release ceremony. Then, maybe some time later, I ate some beef jerky, but I didn’t resume eating any other meat, I intended to though – I probably stopped eating meat in May, at first there was no meat at all in my diet, but then probably in June I had beef jerky and convenient noodles that contained meat during a business trip. When I returned to Beijing in July, I tried to add fish back in my diet, but I couldn’t eat it, I threw up. After that, I never ate any meat again.

Of course these two examples are exceptions and not only show the unpredictability of individual experience but also emphasise the detectable pattern in most vegetarian conversion accounts, which is the permutation and combination of dualistic concepts of gradual and abrupt change, cognition and behaviour.

Having explored the motivations and processes of pursuing a stricter diet in terms of the range of food covered, it is important to acknowledge that the process does not lead to a destined result. Just like people can move from a less strict diet to a stricter one, they can also move back on the ladder. Thus, they may go from vegan to vegetarian, or even drop

out of vegetarianism completely. Among my research participants, one vegetarian reincorporated eggs and dairy into her diet after experiencing health problem as a result of inappropriately implementing veganism for over a year; one former vegan reincorporated eggs, dairy and seafood back into the diet because the vegan diet could not meet his body-building needs; one former Buddhist vegetarian reintroduced herself to the taste of meat because she did not want to create tension with her non-vegetarian family members. The reasons proposed – concerns over health and nutrition and lack of familial support – could all be found in extant research on former vegetarians from other societies (Barr & Chapman, 2002; Haverstock & Forgays, 2012). These and other obstacles to a vegetarian lifestyle, such as limited vegetarian choices and social occasions that require having meals with non-vegetarians (Stiles, 1998), did not prohibit everyone from being vegetarian. In the following two chapters, I discuss how current vegetarians maintain their identity despite the obstacles they face in everyday life.

## 5.4 Conclusions

In this chapter, I investigated the motivations and process of becoming and remaining vegetarian in modern Beijing; in other words, why and how the vegetarians became who they were.

Most vegetarians identified more than one motivation, and the most commonly reported are ethics, religious influence, health, environmental protection, gustatory preference, peer influence and weight control. However, in reality, the boundary between different motivations can often be obscure.

Vegetarians with ethical motivations often emphasised how their decision was inspired by their individual feeling and emotion toward animals. Although many vegetarians acknowledged the issue of animal welfare, few openly proposed it as a public issue, which is in contrast to vegetarians with an environmental motivation, who often expressed their concern for public welfare and considered their choice to be taking the responsibility as a citizen. Part of the reason the environmental motivation was more openly discussed in the

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framework of public issues than the ethical motivation may be that the former is regarded as less politically sensitive.

There is a noticeable infusion of ethical arguments from 'Western' vegetarianism and Buddhist values. The two vegetarian traditions learned from and reinforced each other. This is a process of the localisation of 'Western' vegetarianism and the adaptation of Buddhism in modern China, a process of both vegetarian traditions adapting to the changing local context.

The health motivation of being vegetarian in modern Beijing is heavily influenced by concerns over food safety and the fear of becoming ill. Arguably, being vegetarian is one of the tactics the public has developed in reaction to prevalent low consumer confidence and unsatisfactory healthcare policy.

The role of gustatory preference in being vegetarian shows how it is an embodied experience. The vegetarian body can be trained to dislike the taste of meat, consciously or unconsciously achieving a consistency of negative values and physical reactions toward meat. The body becomes a project to be worked upon in the construction of self-identity (Giddens, 1991).

The most common process of becoming vegetarian in my research is a complex process that combines gradual and abrupt transitions, and it sometimes can include internal conflict within an individual due to the non-synchrony of cognitive and behavioural change. Although the standards seem subjective, vegetarians actively used them, thus proving that they adequately describe the conversion process.

The occasional situation of former vegetarians returning to a less strict diet corresponds to the process of becoming vegetarian. This may be a result of health concerns or a lack of social support. However, they are illustrative examples in demonstrating the fluid and directionless nature of self-identity.



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The narration of motivations, combined with conversion stories, provides logical and self-justified narratives of vegetarian histories. In retrospect, these narratives serve as stories in the sense that they provide a series of events with a logic: where there is ‘an initial situation, a change involving some sort of reversal, and a resolution that marks the change as significant’ (Culler, 1997, p. 84). With the story, the whole conversion process becomes apprehensible and meaningful to the vegetarian narrator. It also indicates that history is not fixed based on the narration. By reinterpreting the past, individuals are able to make sense of their here and now (Bourque, 2006).

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## Chapter 6 Social Relations of Vegetarians in Modern Beijing

### 6.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I discussed the motivations behind the lifestyle choice of the vegetarians in Beijing and the process of their conversion to the vegetarian lifestyle. I gave a brief account of how the lack of family support could be a reason for some former vegetarians to give up vegetarianism, which hints at the extent of the difficulties vegetarians face in a largely non-vegetarian environment. The predicament of some novice vegetarians is vividly described in an article entitled, ‘Why is it so difficult for you to be vegetarian?’:

Some friends would encounter various difficulties shortly after becoming vegetarian. Family would try to dissuade them, friends would not understand them, colleagues would laugh at them. Their social relationships went wrong, they did not know what to eat, they became malnourished, all of which made people around them oppose vegetarianism more.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that the potential issues around social relationships vegetarians face were a major concern for the author. Considering the social environment a vegetarian usually inhabits, it can be said that maintaining the vegetarian identity is a full-time job and involves negotiating with surrounding people and material that often do not favour the vegetarian lifestyle. It is of little surprise that, in the six pieces of advice given in the above-quoted article on how to be vegetarian more easily, two were guidance regarding social relationships. The author suggested ‘do not create conflicts with others’ and ‘finding like-minded’ people, which correspond with social interaction with outer- and inner-group members of the vegetarian community.

Accordingly, this chapter aims to explore the identification of vegetarians in modern Beijing through their social interaction with others. I start by considering social

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<sup>1</sup> <http://xingqiu.me/p/26576/为什么你吃素会困难重重?> / [Accessed: 07 October 2016]

interactions inside the vegetarian community, followed by an examination of the equally if not more important social interaction between vegetarians and non-vegetarians. In the latter part of the analysis, I incorporate accounts from both parties of the social interaction, namely vegetarians and non-vegetarians, to understand how the rapport between two groups with very different propositions can be achieved. Using the model of the internal-external dialectic of identification perfected by Jenkins (2008), this chapter presents the identification of vegetarians through constant interaction and reflection.

## **6.2 Inner-group Social Relations: How Vegetarians Interact with Each Other**

According to the model of the internal-external dialectic of identification, the collective identification ‘must always be understood as generated simultaneously by group identification *and* categorisation’ (Jenkins, 2008, p. 111), which respectively emphasises the internal inspection of similarities and the external judgment of differences. This model recognises the roles of both parties in any process of identification, which, in my research, means that both vegetarians and non-vegetarians make equally important contributions to the collective identification of vegetarians in Beijing through their interaction. For the convenience of analysis, I discuss the interaction within the vegetarian community and between vegetarians and non-vegetarians separately, although in reality, they often mingle and can influence each other.

### **6.2.1 How Vegetarians Meet Each Other**

Since I recruited my research participants mainly through snowball sampling, it is unsurprising to find that many of them were connected to each other in one way or another. All vegetarian participants claimed they were not the only vegetarian in their social network at the time of interview. While the social influence of experienced vegetarians as a motivation in becoming vegetarian<sup>1</sup> may explain the vegetarian social network of some vegetarians, it cannot be presumed that every vegetarian was already in a social network

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<sup>1</sup> See the previous chapter.

that included other vegetarians. The fact that all vegetarian participants had other vegetarian social contacts suggests that social interaction with other vegetarians is important enough that, sooner or later, each of them found a way to bring interactions with other vegetarians into their social life.

With regard to being passive or active in developing a vegetarian social network, only one vegetarian participant stated he had never initiated any contact with other vegetarians but always waited to be contacted first. For other former and current vegetarian participants, there are two major approaches for them to form contacts with other vegetarians: one is through personal social networks such as family, friends and colleagues, the other is through participating in vegetarian-related activities, such as religious activities in Buddhist temples and events (e.g., seminars, concerts) organised by vegetarian-related organisations. Other, less common approaches to find other vegetarians include searching for vegetarian activists on social media or running a vegetarian enterprise.

It is common for a vegetarian to find like-minded people via different approaches, but the majority of vegetarian participants (11 out of 18) reported they met at least some other vegetarians via the second approach, and among them, nearly half (five) had experience attending Buddhist activities, which suggests that religion still plays an important role in forming and bonding the vegetarian community in contemporary Chinese society. Within the frames of the two major approaches, each vegetarian could have very different experiences depending on the degree of their influence or the circumstances at any particular time. Below is the self-account of Kofi on how he developed his vegetarian social network over the 18 years of his vegetarian career as a vegetarian influencer:

For instance, my Buddhist friends with whom I participated in Buddhist activities in temples were definitely vegetarian because of their religious belief. Also, I have actively participated in the animal protection movement, and at least the senior and most devoted members were vegetarian. Because I often promoted vegetarianism and animal protection through various media and on the Internet, other promoters of vegetarianism and animal protection would contact me and invite me to be an honoured guest to their events, so I got to know them in this way. Now that we have Weibo and WeChat, [other vegetarians and I] could get to know each other on WeChat and join all sorts of social circles. Because we built The Voice for the Voiceless website, we would do some

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campaigns. At that time, we<sup>1</sup> were an organiser of vegetarian and animal protection activities, [I was] kind of a celebrity in the community of vegetarians and animal protectors, so I knew more [vegetarian] people [than ordinary vegetarians].

An influencer like him is the node in the social network of a large vegetarian community. In Kofi's case, he not only attracted other vegetarians with his influence but also built a website as a platform for other vegetarians to meet each other. The vegetarian-related organisations are usually well aware of their importance in the social life of vegetarians because it is often one of their objectives to create opportunities for vegetarians to communicate, as in Marlee's description of what she expected to achieve with the events planned by the organisation she founded:

[...] it enables communication between vegetarians, because many vegetarians have a great need of making friends, they want to have vegetarian friends. This objective can be easily and effectively achieved [by attending events organised by Veg Planet], since many people have found friends from the same city [in this way] and... There are many such examples, they must have learnt a lot from the vegetarian friends they have made either online or through offline events.

Marlee realised the isolation many vegetarians experienced as marginalised members in their respective social networks and the difficulty of forming an exclusively vegetarian social network by any one individual. She was inspired to build a bridge between the highly scattered vegetarians by providing an online public platform. The spontaneous self-organisation of vegetarians is more clearly presented in the social relation of foreign vegetarians residing in Beijing, perhaps due to the additional language and culture barriers. However, because foreign vegetarians are an organic part of the vegetarian scene in modern Beijing, the pattern of their interaction not only reflects the choices available for local vegetarians but also inevitably impacts Chinese vegetarians who share their milieu. Nelson, a British person who has been living in Beijing for three years, helped found the Vegetarian Vegan Beijing WeChat Group – a group initially dedicated to foreign vegetarians (including vegans) in Beijing – around 2014:

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<sup>1</sup> Here, 'we' refers to the administrative team which runs the website.

When I first came here (*Beijing*), I didn't really know that many people... Like the first meeting, we had five people there, and two of them were meat eaters. One of them was someone's boyfriend, the other one came by accident. That's when we agreed to start the WeChat group. Back then, there were like three people in it. Now, we got the second one<sup>1</sup>, like a hundred in it. I mean, I met them mainly through things like meet-ups and through that, meeting more and more people, friend's friends. [...] It's not just going to be like vegan things. I always bump into other people. And a lot of times, when I meet people that are vegetarian or vegan, especially foreigners, they say, oh, we didn't know there were any other ones. So that's what keeps stuff going: to find actually, there are loads and loads of people. It's often hard for people to know where to go, how to find people. So I think sometimes people just sort of feel that they are alienated and weird and are the only people in Beijing or in China. I think it's important to try to get people together. So yeah, I keep in contact with them.

As of 5 December 2017, there were 484 members in the Vegetarian Vegan Beijing WeChat Group and 383 members in the Vegan Group. English is still the everyday language in both groups' daily communication, even though both groups are now open to recruiting Chinese members. Kaja is one of the Chinese recruits:

I now work for the Dutch Embassy; before that, I didn't know any other vegetarians. It was really strange that I didn't know even a single one except for my best friend's mum who I knew when I was in high school. [...] After I came to the Dutch Embassy, [I found out] many Netherlanders were vegetarian, so I... You know for a crazy person like me, I'd ask them why they were vegetarian. [...] Later, my Dutch teacher invited me to join a WeChat group, everyone in that group was vegetarian, some were vegetarian, some were vegan. Sometimes, we'd meet up in Beijing, but most of them were foreigners. I think there were more vegetarians in foreigners [than in Chinese], but if there were Chinese vegetarians, I think we'd have more shared topics, it felt so awkward to chat in English.

Apart from the fact that most of the group members are foreigners, about whom Kaja complained she did not have enough shared interests, this group shares many features with other local groups in terms of the mode of organisation and the interaction between group members. Like many others, it is based on one of the most influential social media platforms in China; the content of interactions between members are exclusive to the group members themselves, and new members have to be recruited by old ones; the Internet is

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<sup>1</sup> The new group is called the Vegan Group. As the name implies, it is for the more exclusive vegan community in Beijing. The divergence of groups seems to reflect the refining process of vegetarianism that happened in the early stage of the vegetarian movement.

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the place where most of the interaction happens, although occasional offline events are possible.

From the examples given above, it is clear that the Internet has significantly shaped the contemporary vegetarian community in Beijing. This is only possible because of the rapid growth of Internet usage in China. Although there were only 22.5 million Internet users in China in 2001 (Liu, 2011), the number has been growing rapidly. By June 2017, there were 751 million Internet users in China; the Internet penetration rate was 54.3%, and in urban areas, it even reached 69.4% (CNNIC, 2017a). Thanks to the ever-increasing popularity of the Internet, individuals that would have been isolated by geographic distance found it easier than ever to locate potential companions and reach out to them. The administrative boundary became less and less important in determining the scale of a group. Although they resided in Beijing, the vegetarian participants in my research were not limited to socialising with vegetarians only in Beijing, their vegetarian social network often included vegetarians from out of Beijing or even from abroad. As a result, the vegetarians in Beijing did not show much regional identification but would rather identify with a vegetarian community that transcends political borders.

### **6.2.2 How Vegetarians Communicate with Each Other**

Everyday communication between vegetarians in modern Beijing relies heavily on the Internet, which not only provides a cheap and convenient way for connecting long-distance social relationships, but is also connected to conventional, face-to-face activity by becoming the place where offline activities were often planned and publicised. All the vegetarian gatherings I attended in my fieldwork were found on social media, and the application or registration process was often completed on an online platform, too.

As the pattern of Internet usage in general changed, online communication between vegetarians changed with it. The example of how Kofi developed his vegetarian social network illustrates how the vegetarians have adapted to the changing environment online

from the early era of websites and forums to later social media platform such as Weibo<sup>1</sup> and WeChat. The use of WeChat is especially prominent in the communication of vegetarians. At the time of my fieldwork, nearly every vegetarian participant used WeChat as one of the most important communicating tools. The popularity is not so much a personal choice as a reflection of the growing Internet usage on mobile devices, since WeChat was originally developed exclusively for smartphones. From June 2012 to June 2017, the percentage of Internet users on mobile devices of all Internet users has increased from 72.2% to 96.3% (CNNIC, 2017a). Meanwhile, instant messaging (IM) application usage also experienced a shift from PC to mobile devices. By December 2016, 91.1% of all Internet users in China used IM, and the percentage of IM users was even higher (91.8%) among mobile Internet users. IM 'is no longer simply a tool for online chatting but has become a comprehensive information platform that combines multiple functions such as communication, news distribution, entertainment, search engine, e-commerce, work collaboration and customer service' (CNNIC, 2017b, p. 5). It was with this background that WeChat rose to become the most successful IM. WeChat has seen major growth since it launched in 2011. By 2015, over 90% of the smartphones in mainland China had installed WeChat.<sup>2</sup> By December 2016, 92.6% of IM users in China used WeChat (CNNIC, 2017b). In order to keep up to date, Calvin transferred the online base of his animal shelter from Weibo to WeChat.

WeChat transformed the notion of what can be communicated on mobile devices because it took on functions that traditionally belonged to other applications. Its users can now exchange free text and audio messages, make audio and video calls, update their status, share links, form groups and receive articles from subscribed public accounts. I noted in chapter 4 that the Internet was one of the major sources of obtaining knowledge on vegetarianism. Often, such knowledge and other information about vegetarianism, such as news about local vegetarian venues and vegetarian events, would spread through the vegetarian social network through IM applications such as WeChat. The Internet helped

<sup>1</sup> The Chinese equivalent of Twitter.

<sup>2</sup> Figure from CuriosityChina. The full report on WeChat users in China is available at: [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/VDPO\\_j4i9xLLDGO3-AzAZA](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/VDPO_j4i9xLLDGO3-AzAZA) (Accessed: 1 December 2015).



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shape the collectiveness of the vegetarian community not only in the way it could easily convey much-needed emotional support for individual vegetarians by linking them to potential companions, but also in the sense that it helped create a discursive mantra of being vegetarian. Online communication enables novice vegetarians to learn a vocabulary as well as narratives of vegetarianism from life experience and advice shared by the senior members of the vegetarian community. In this way, vegetarians from different parts of China could develop a somewhat ‘standard’ way of expressing vegetarianism, a collective discourse shared by all.

The prevalence of the usage of the Internet in everyday life makes a nationwide social network of vegetarians possible for the first time in Chinese history, but the development of social interaction within the vegetarian community is not without its problems. First, although there are growing numbers of vegetarian groups in Beijing and beyond in China, they tend to be informal and casually constructed. The connection between vegetarians in these groups is often loose and personal. In terms of the format of interaction between vegetarians, it hardly goes beyond casual communication and meet-ups. The lack of authoritative national vegetarian organisation led to more than the generally loose and purposeless social interaction between vegetarians; the needs of the vegetarian community as a minority group in China are as a result underrepresented and often ignored, which is discussed in next chapter. Second, the shift in the major vegetarian communication platform from websites and forums to online social media to IM applications, especially WeChat, may create further divisions between vegetarians and non-vegetarians. WeChat was initially created for communication between strong-tie social relationships, such as family and friends, by linking each account to one mobile number and only allowing new contacts to be added through invitation. Although it has increasingly transferred to weak-tie social relationships such as colleagues and acquaintances, it still requires some level of familiarity to initiate the online communication. By dividing its users into relatively closed groups, WeChat created a comfort zone for vegetarians to freely express their ideas, yet the discussion with people out of the vegetarian community was to some extent suppressed.

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### **6.3 Inter-group Social Relation: How Vegetarians Interact with Non-vegetarians in Close Social Relationships**

Being a member of a minority group in China, vegetarians inevitably need to interact with non-vegetarians in everyday life. In this section, I interrogate their interactions using accounts from both sides to provide a comprehensive picture of how vegetarians construct their identity in interactions with others.

#### **6.3.1 Stories Told by Vegetarians**

If we agree with Belasco's assertion that 'sharing food has almost magical properties in its ability to turn self-seeking individuals into a collaborative group' (Belasco, 2008, p19), it is little wonder that, when an individual decides to become vegetarian, their friends and family – those with whom the individual is most likely to share food – are often the first social relation obstacles the novice vegetarian confronts. Interviews on the life experiences of vegetarians in the UK and the U.S. (Beardsworth & Keil, 1991; Jabs *et al.*, 2000; Roth, 2005) suggest that the vegetarians' non-vegetarian family and friends often appeared worried, confused and sad when first learning that they had become vegetarian.

The tension between vegetarians and their non-vegetarian immediate social relations is reflected in the discourse of vegetarian participants in my research. Defending their lifestyle is the most common theme when the vegetarian participants discussed revealing the new lifestyle to their family and friends. Noticeably, however, there were still six vegetarian participants who claimed they encountered no objection at all from their family and friends, and another two did not reveal their vegetarian identity to their family. In general, family members were often worried or even angry about the vegetarian's choice, regardless of whether there was religious motivation behind it. Friends tended to show less antagonism and more curiosity towards the vegetarian's conversion, probably because their food practice was less directly impacted than the family members of the vegetarian.

The disagreement of friends and family was based on multiple reasons. Some worried the

vegetarian's choice might lead to social exclusion since not eating meat might make the person unpopular in important social occasions which, in China, often involve sharing food. The worry is not unfounded. It is true that some vegetarians can feel socially restricted because of their diet (Jabs *et al.*, 2000). However, the family may fear more that the vegetarian voluntarily seeks social exclusion. Maison's parents believed his conversion to vegetarian was only an early sign of him renouncing the secular order and becoming a monk.

More often, the worry concerned the vegetarian's health because meat is generally considered a highly nutritious and desirable food (Fiddes, 1991). In Marlee's case, the difference in terms of the degree of concern between friends and family is clear:

My friends were supportive. They'd be curious and asked why [I] chose to be vegan, and I'd explain to them, but not too much; they all knew it was a personal choice and they showed a lot of understanding and support. My family were worried at first, they worried that I won't have enough nutrition, I would be unhealthy, they were mainly worried from the aspects of health and nutrition, but over time they didn't find any problem, so they stopped worrying. They couldn't quite accept it at first and would try to persuade me to eat some meat, but later, they realised I was very determined, so they would not try to persuade me anymore.

The opposition may be more severe if the vegetarian was considered frail even before the conversion, as Kaja recounted:

My mom said, 'You have never been very healthy, and now you want to be vegetarian?', by which she meant I was seeking my own death. Back then, even though there was only me who was vegetarian, my parents would think I was seeking death, there was no way I could ask them to be vegetarian.

In addition to the objections listed above, there may be a deeper, less obvious cause that concerns meat's symbolic meaning. In households where meat used to be enjoyed by everyone, the vegetarian's behaviour may be deemed a betrayal of the established family traditions (Roth, 2005). Moreover, meat is widely endowed with many positive values – delicious, nutritious, a symbol of a well-off life and power (Fiddes, 1991). The long-term scarcity of meat in Chinese history only makes it more desirable to common people (Chang,

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1977). In Beijing, for example, meat was not widely available to the public until quite recently. The common household diet under the planned economy was mainly made up of grain and fresh or pickled vegetables (Zhang, 2001). The repressed desire for meat means that, once given the chance, there was a surge in terms of meat consumption. The charts below show the annual meat consumption per capita of Beijing citizens between 1956-1965 and 1978-1998:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Data between 1966-1977 is unavailable most likely due to the Cultural Revolution.

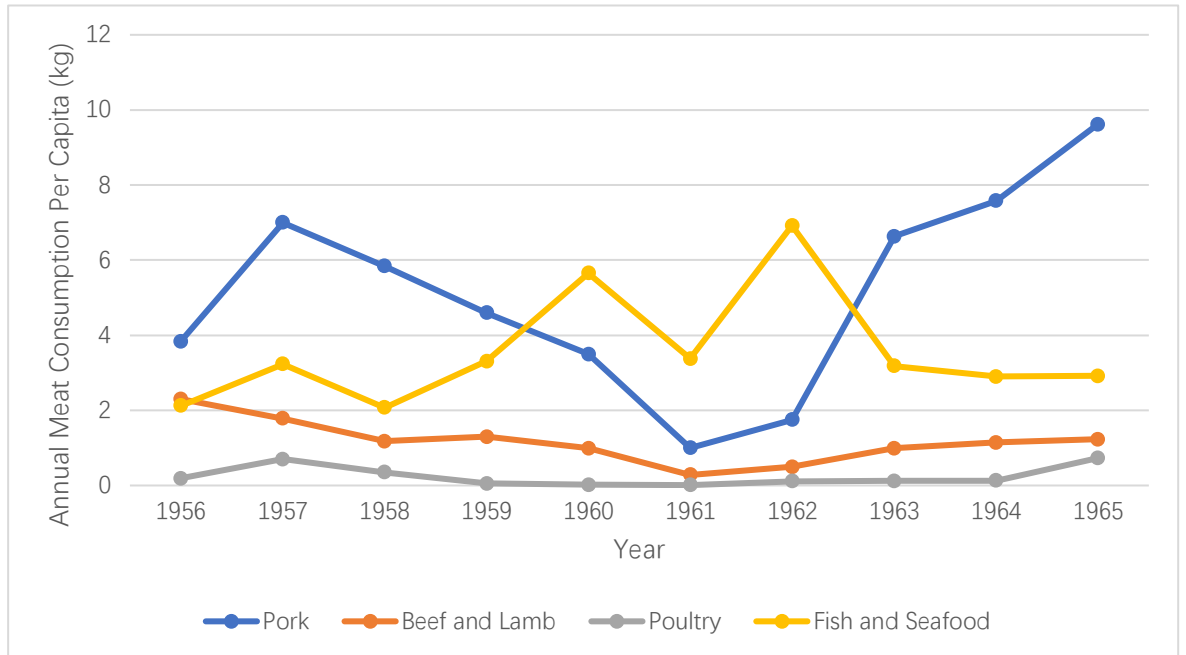


Figure 6-1 Annual Meat Consumption Per Capita of Beijing Citizens between 1956-1965<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Source: Zhang (2001).

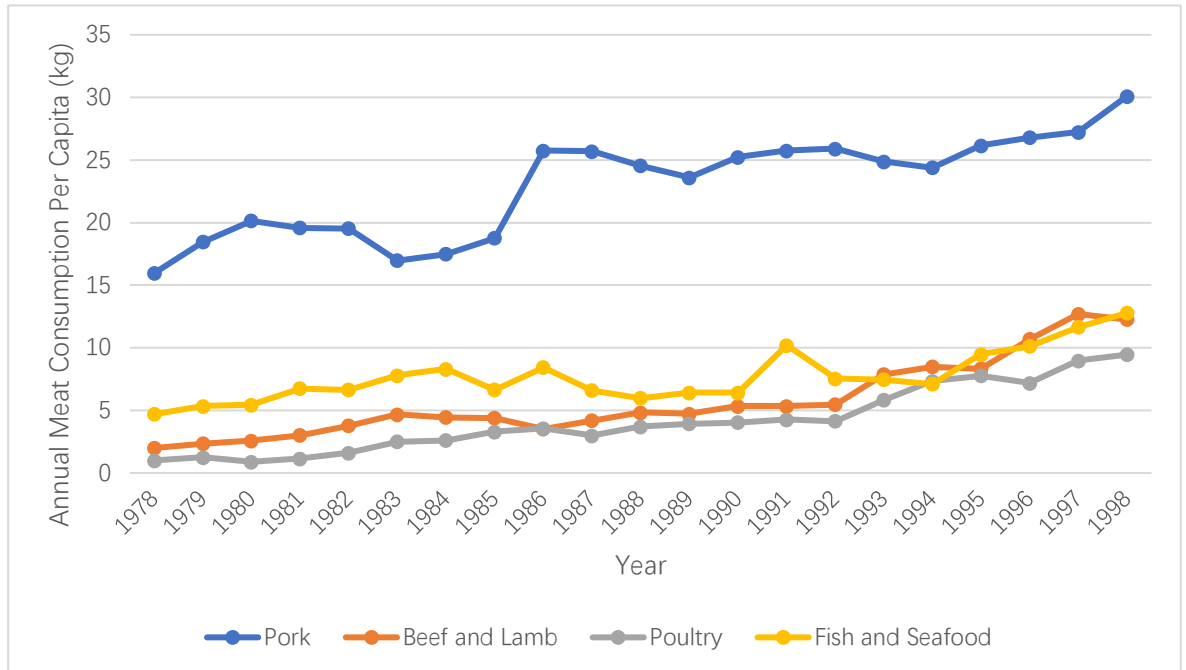


Figure 6-2 Annual Meat Consumption Per Capita of Beijing Citizens between 1978-1998<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Source: Wang (2005).

Meat consumption between 1956 and 1965 fluctuated but generally maintained a low level. A significant growth in meat consumption of any kind only occurred after 1978, when the planned economy started to loosen its grip. From 1978 to 1998, the annual consumption of red and white meat together per capita of Beijing citizens nearly tripled, increasing from 23.68kg to 64.63kg (Wang, 2005). The transformation of having little meat in the diet to abundant meat literally happened within one generation. In these circumstances, the vegetarian's choice may seem particularly incomprehensible for older generations who still remember the hunger and longing for meat in the old days.

There was constant challenging, compromising and negotiating between the vegetarians and their non-vegetarian immediate social relations until some kind of equilibrium was achieved. In the most extreme case, the vegetarian gave up vegetarianism under the pressure of family members. Only one participant (Weronika) fell into this category, as she restarted to eat meat so that her family 'didn't feel uncomfortable'. This partially contributes to the de-vegetarian process indicated in chapter 5.

A more common scenario is that vegetarians make a temporary compromise in important food-sharing events with non-vegetarian family and friends. They might eat food that is usually not part of their diet, which Codey described as contextual vegetarianism. Ziva recalled the occasion when she ate meat without reluctance:

It was during Spring Festival, some relatives from my father's side of the family visited my family, we had the New Year's Eve dinner together, I said 'I don't eat [meat]', they said 'just eat a little bit please', even my mum said 'it's not a big deal to have some fish', so I ate some. Then I played with a kid, the kid gave me a chicken wing, because I really liked that kid, I ate it.

Usually, the vegetarian who had such a lapse would explain that the action of compromise was because they did not want to cause trouble or offend others. Similar explanations are common even in societies where individuality is highly valued (Willettts, 1997; Roth, 2005). Although it can be argued that the vegetarian was simply showing respect to social etiquette, it may also indicate there is still some level of shame or embarrassment attached

to being vegetarian. Being a member of a dietary minority, the vegetarian may feel they have to make compromises in far more circumstances than just social life, which is the topic of the next chapter. Yet none of the vegetarian participant who admitted to a lapse considered their vegetarian identity was threatened in any way. On the other hand, there were people like Cecilia who virtually followed a vegetarian diet but would not label herself vegetarian. All of this challenges what it means to be vegetarian. It seems that being vegetarian is meaningful on two levels, nominal and virtual. While viewing identity as a process of identification does place visible acts ('going vegetarian') in the centre, it allows flexibility that is open to individual interpretation. A consistent identity for any individual requires the consistency of behaviour and explanation of the behaviour at any given time, rather than strictly abiding to a set of unchangeable rules.

Vegetarianism then, is not a food practice that is rigorously defined, but is a fluid and permeable category embracing a wide range of food practices. It is also an identity that one can dip in and out of. (Willetts, 1997; p. 117)

The majority of vegetarian participants in my research refused to compromise on their diet in order to fit in with social events. Calvin recalled how he reacted to the negative reaction from his friends and family after he converted to vegetarianism: 'I didn't dispute vigorously or what... There was little discussion [on my choice], [I] just did it firmly, presented them my true self.' In the end, '*some* of the friends and *some* of the family accepted and changed in some way. After all, I have far too many friends (*laugh*), it is impossible for all of them to change. But happily, all my closest friends, those who live in Beijing, they accepted and changed'. Actually, according to the participants' own accounts, most of the time, their non-vegetarian family and friends tried to meet the vegetarian's dietary needs, even though sometimes they did not agree with the vegetarian's lifestyle. Kaja's parents, for example, never approved of her decision, but they cooked vegan food when she visited. It is difficult to estimate how many of the non-vegetarian family and friends who intended to meet the vegetarian's needs truly accepted the vegetarian's choice, while others simply reluctantly compromised, although Jason suspected that the latter situation was common:



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In fact, many people don't understand why I ate *su*. I think how they see the whole thing (*being vegetarian*) is – and my parents are the same – although they are supportive, they don't actually understand, that is, most people can't 100% accept what vegetarians do, they think being alive means you have to eat what you should eat, and how can your diet satisfy your basic physiological needs if you don't eat meat. I think not everyone can – in fact most people can't – accept vegetarianism.

This could help explain why, even though many vegetarian participants were determined to stick to their lifestyle, they still developed different strategies to avoid direct conflict with their non-vegetarian social relations. One such strategy was to take control of the household diet. About one-third of the vegetarian participants lived with non-vegetarian family members, usually their parents; the rest either lived alone or in shared accommodations. Usually, the vegetarian who did not live with non-vegetarian family was responsible only for their own meals, which gave them greater freedom in choosing their own lifestyle than living with non-vegetarians. Although it was perhaps still inevitable for the vegetarians to occasionally socialise with their non-vegetarian family members, the family members were more likely to compromise on these occasions than if they argued over household diet on a daily basis, even if they still disapproved of the vegetarian's lifestyle. If the vegetarian had to live and share meals with a non-vegetarian family, it was better if they could be deeply involved in every step of meal preparation so that they could make sure there was always food they could eat. Below, Cecillia explains how she negotiated the household menu with her meat-loving husband:

Because sometimes he would skip dinner, if he didn't eat [dinner], then I would definitely cook vegetarian food, I would never cook meat if it's only for myself. If he ate [dinner with me], for instance we had noodles, then I would add a poached egg for him at the last stage. Or we have, sometimes we have bacon, at home then I'd fry a piece of bacon for him or add some bacon lardons in his serving of noodles.

As the cook of the family, Cecillia could always reserve something for herself while trying to meet her husband's needs. Her husband was reasonably satisfied with the arrangement. But perhaps a more important reason why her husband did not feel repelled is because she did not challenge the idea of meat eating but rather believed in its nutritious value.

Another strategy of avoiding conflict in non-vegetarian social relations is to develop tailor-made rhetoric that aims to maximise resonance for the particular non-vegetarian who challenges the vegetarian lifestyle. In chapter 5, I discussed the various motivations for becoming and remaining vegetarian. On the one hand, it is common for a vegetarian to have multiple motivations behind their lifestyle; on the other hand, different non-vegetarians may have different expectations of a vegetarian. Therefore, a vegetarian can choose how to present their identity based on what they think they will be accepted. For instance, Ziva defended her diet in different manners according to the object of conversation:

Some people, not very close to me, felt it interesting and asked if I was doing it only temporarily to lose weight; some close to me tried to persuade me to eat meat or else I would age fast. To those I hardly met on a yearly basis, I would say, 'Yes, I'm doing it to lose weight'; to those I met more regularly, I would say, 'I'm religious'; to those trying to persuade me to eat meat, I would say, 'Don't worry, I still eat eggs and drink milk'.

Sometimes the vegetarian used the expectations of them based on aspects of their identity other than being vegetarian. Unsure of what kind of response she would receive, Vanessa kept her dietary change a secret from her family. This worked while she remained in Beijing, but she inevitably stayed with her family during Spring Festival; here is how she intended to reveal her new lifestyle:

Because I had always been eating meat, if I suddenly stopped doing it, they would definitely think my body would lack the nutrient it needs. So if I just tell them I eat *su* now, they will definitely be against it. It probably will be too complicated to explain to them why humans are innately built to eat *su*, like the absorption of protein and amino acids, this kind of thing. Maybe if I tell them this is about spirituality and cognition, like making the whole thing sounds rather ambiguous, it will be easier for them to accept. I think if I tell them this is my personal pursuit, they'll give me that odd look, just like when I told them I would stay in Beijing. They will say, alright, young girl, you have grown up, do what you want.

By implying that vegetarianism was too esoteric for the older generation of her family to comprehend, Vanessa hoped they would have to accept, perhaps unwillingly, that they were too old-fashioned to keep up with young people's behaviour. These examples demonstrate

the vegetarian's autonomy in choosing how to present their identity under particular social circumstances. However, the success of the 'performance' relies on the successful cooperation of every party in the social interaction, which is based on a shared expectation of a certain character (Goffman, 1956). In the vegetarian's case, the vegetarian participant was aware of the common expectation for or the stereotype of vegetarians among non-vegetarians, such as being religious, body-conscious or youth-oriented; they then performed to the expectation they believed would make them more easily accepted in that situation. This was not deception because the vegetarian felt consistent with the most fundamental part of the vegetarian identity, the diet. However, the power distribution in these cases is unequal between vegetarians and non-vegetarians because the discourse of non-vegetarians determined the undertone of the social interaction.

In general, most vegetarian participants maintained a harmonious relationship with their non-vegetarian social relations; only one reported having a temporary relationship breakdown with a friend because of the difference in their diet. However, the harmony can be unstable and needs to be maintained through efforts from both sides. Basically, both vegetarians and non-vegetarians need to show respect for each other by not judging each other. Even a vegetarianism activist such as Kofi chose not to preach to people close to him:

When promoting a set of ideas, if it concerns people around you, then there is a feeling, they will feel like you are interfering with their life, and they will easily be repelled. So I basically only say I eat *su*, and people around me would know there is a person like that. [If I] have meals with them and they asked, I would explain my idea, but I would not voluntarily tell them [if they don't ask].

According to Kaja, the relationship with her parents has definitely improved since she became vegetarian. Kaja believed the ease of the tension between her and her parents was due partially to her simultaneous change of attitude toward non-vegetarians over time:

It was 2009 when I became vegetarian, and Weibo has already come into existence at that time, so I followed a lot of vegetarian-related or animal protection-related public accounts on Weibo. The animal protection-related public accounts would also post content about how good vegetarianism was, how good [being vegetarian was] for health

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and how terrible meat was. I would constantly forward such posts on social media. And I used to nag people who were close to me, like whenever they ate meat, I would say how disgusting or how bad meat was. I used to be like that, but I'm not that crazy anymore. Also, whenever we ate out together, such as my colleagues and I went out for a meal, I would say can we go to a vegetarian place or can we have more vegetarian dishes, like that. Now, I really think whether to be vegetarian is a personal choice. If we could travel back to six years ago [before I became vegetarian] and you asked that me from the past to be vegetarian, I wouldn't want to talk to you, either; I'd even think that person might be a bit crazy, for who do you think you are to ask me to be vegetarian. I'm really not as radical as I was.

Finally, she learnt to accept the fact of diverse lifestyle choices in modern society. Since she had the freedom to choose her lifestyle, she must respect others when they make their choice.

### **6.3.2 Stories Told from the Other Side: Non-vegetarians' Narratives**

Compared to the vegetarian participants in my research, the non-vegetarian participants reported having less interaction with vegetarians in everyday life. This is perhaps due to the fact that vegetarians are a minority in modern China and are often geographically distributed, providing less chance for non-vegetarians to develop social relationships with them. Sixteen out of 19 non-vegetarian participants claimed to personally know someone who self-defined as vegetarian, yet in most cases, there was only one vegetarian in the participant's whole social network, and their interaction was an insignificant part of the participant's social life. Unlike the vegetarian participants, it was extremely rare among the non-vegetarian participants to voluntarily seek out vegetarians for social interaction purposes. The vegetarian social relations they reported almost exclusively came from the categories of relatives, schoolmates and colleagues, which means these relations entered the participant's social circle passively.

In general, non-vegetarian participants showed a neutral attitude towards vegetarians. They tended to talk about vegetarian acquaintances in a matter-of-fact manner, giving few comments on the vegetarian lifestyle. Only one non-vegetarian half-jokingly described himself as a 'firm opponent of vegetarianism', which he explained as follows:

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You see those people, they are simply hypocritical, and they do want to eat meat, yet they have to have vegetarian food, so they have to pay for it (fake meat), which is not even out of religious belief. [...] They premise meat as a negative thing, a thing they try their best to avoid and replace, but their premise is wrong. [...] In human evolution so far, how many of our ancestors shed their blood so that we can stand on the apex of the food chain? Now you don't eat [meat], what do you make of our ancestors who fought woolly mammoths? If we all think like that, then we would have eaten fruits in the very beginning. Why bother with inventing spears and traps? (Ashton)

He started the complaint by criticising the inconsistency in the behaviour of some vegetarians but soon turned to vegetarians in general. It seems his disapproval of vegetarianism ultimately derives from their divergent attitude towards meat-eating. For Ashton, eating meat represents the human race's hard-won triumph over nature, whereas abstaining from meat as vegetarians do is not only disrespectful of human history but also a threat to his conviction that humans could and should have total control over nature. His view indicates a typical dualism of human (culture) and nature which has been heavily criticised in the discipline of sociology and anthropology, but which may still be prevalent among the public.

It is notable that he did not choose to criticise any individual vegetarian but rather judged the whole vegetarian community as a homogeneous, faceless Other. At the same time, it was perfectly acceptable for him to have a vegetarian acquaintance and a virtually vegetarian partner. This seeming paradox is more comprehensible if compared to the infamous rhetoric of 'some of my best friends are black' in the discourse of colour-blind racism in contemporary America (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). These are both examples of a subtler, more disguised form of discrimination that is more resistant to individual protest. However, a change of attitude towards vegetarians is underway, as Timmy recounted:

I think in terms of my friends, if you told them 10 years ago that you were vegetarian, unless you were religious or had never had meat in your life – like my mom's colleague and my schoolmate, if you ate lots of meat one day and the next day you said you wanted to be vegetarian, people would definitely say you were mad. But 10 years later – and in fact my friends have been experiencing the process too, they would have contact with such people (*vegetarians*) – if you tell them now that you want to be vegetarian, they would claim they understood but would also look at you with pity in their eyes. This is how it changed in the last 10 years.

According to the participants' accounts, although socialising with vegetarians around food and drink was uncommon even among the non-vegetarian participants who had vegetarian social contacts, when it did happen, the non-vegetarians often showed considerable tolerance of vegetarians' dietary needs, or at least would not display any concern for inconvenience:

My friends, like if they were vegetarian and they would ask me to eat out, then obviously they would choose a vegetarian restaurant because they need to eat, too. [...] None of my [vegetarian] friends is so strict that they can't stand even the slightest trace of animal fat, so we don't have to dine in a vegetarian restaurant if we eat out together, only they don't eat *hun* dishes, they eat... We'd order vegetarian dishes for them. They'd also eat vegetables from the non-vegetarian dishes we ordered. (Sherie)

[I] respect their choice. It doesn't matter whether they eat [meat] or not. If we eat out together, we always order... Sometimes we share [dishes], sometimes we don't. It depends. If there is something containing meat, either the meat is picked out or we eat separately. (Billie)

Three possible reasons explain the general tolerance of vegetarianism among the non-vegetarian participants in my research. First, none of the vegetarian acquaintances they reported was a member of the participant's household; therefore, they did not have to negotiate with the vegetarians over the household's menu on a daily basis. In other words, the lifestyle of the non-vegetarian participants was hardly impacted by any vegetarian social contacts, which made it easier for them to have a relaxed attitude towards vegetarianism. This is further supported by the fact that nearly all the personal conflicts the vegetarian participants reported happened between them and their family members. Second, there may be a change of attitude towards meat eating among the public, even though it has not reached the point of decreasing the annual meat consumption per capita. A report by Mintel published in 2017<sup>1</sup> claimed that 35% of Chinese people between the ages of 20 and 49 chose vegetarian food sometimes because they believed it was a healthier option than non-vegetarian food. Several non-vegetarian participants implied they would like to increase the vegetable intake in their diet or claimed they had noticed a trend of favouring

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<sup>1</sup> A free copy of the report is available by request at <http://china.mintel.com/quanqiu-shipin-yinliao-qushi-2017>.

a more plant-based diet in their social circle. Third, the tolerance of vegetarianism shown among the non-vegetarian participants may reflect a tolerant attitude towards vegetarianism in wider society, which in itself part of the increasing promotion of individualism among urban youth in China. Discussion of the development of individualism in China against the background of economic and social transformation often emphasises its amoral and apolitical aspects (e.g., Lao, 1992; Steele & Lynch, 2013). Inspired by discussions of the change of individualism in American society, Liu (2011) has proposed that the form of individualism prevalent among the Chinese urban youth, especially the ‘post-80s’ generation, was marked by an integration of simultaneous and equally important expressive individualism and utilitarian individualism that were often achieved via consumerism. However, few studies have specifically noted how Chinese youth’s striving for individuality may simultaneously be accompanied by increasing respect for social diversity, since essentially, they are two sides of the same coin. The young generation in China is willing to defend not only their own right to be different but also others’ right to be different from them. This is clearly shown in their support of minority groups such as the LGBT community, which is exemplified in a successful online protest summarised below. On 13 April 2018, the influential Chinese social network Weibo made an announcement to remove any content concerning gay issues, erotica and violence from its platform, which caused extensive online protest from its users for Weibo’s stance toward LGBT community. Three days after the original announcement, Weibo made a further announcement claiming that the clean-up action would continue but would ‘no longer target gay content’.<sup>1</sup> It is hard to say to what extent the public appeal contributed to Weibo’s decision to repeal the ban on gay content, yet the open support for the LGBT community from Chinese netizens was an impressive demonstration of the degree of tolerance of individuals and ideas that do not conform to mainstream and often conservative values in contemporary China. Equally important is the fact that, at least at the moment, such a liberal voice is still allowed in Chinese mainstream social media, which gives hope for the possibility of more open, healthy discussion on controversial issues in the future. It is reasonable to predict in this social context that vegetarianism and

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed recap of the event in English, please see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-43779650>.

its demand for social change will be more and more acceptable in mainstream Chinese society. However, any demand for social change will not be easy in China. I explore more on the conflict between some vegetarians' demand for their right for their dietary needs to be met on a larger social scale and the seemingly unavoidable depoliticalisation and commercialisation of vegetarianism in the next chapter.

## 6.4 Conclusions

In this chapter, I discussed the collective identity of vegetarians in modern Beijing through their interactions with other vegetarians and non-vegetarian social relations. The vegetarians have a genuine need for communication with other vegetarians in a generally non-vegetarian society. Interaction with other vegetarians can significantly boost the vegetarians' confidence and help form a sense of belonging to the vegetarian community. The vegetarians in Beijing relied heavily on the Internet and mobile devices in terms of meeting new vegetarians and communicating with each other in everyday life. Thanks to the prevalence of the Internet, the social network of vegetarians often transcends political borders; as a result, there was little regional identification within the vegetarian community. Vegetarian-related organisations, including Buddhist temples, played an important role in forming the vegetarian community by providing an online platform and organising offline events. However, these organisations tended to be informal and casually constructed and had limited impact on increasing the awareness of vegetarianism in wider society or promoting the rights of vegetarians as a minority group in China. The over-reliance on IM applications, especially WeChat in everyday communication, between vegetarians might further hinder healthy discussion between vegetarians and non-vegetarians regarding vegetarianism.

Converting to vegetarianism can create tension between vegetarians and their non-vegetarian social relations. Family members tended to show more antagonism than friends towards the vegetarian's choice. Disagreement with vegetarianism was usually due to concerns of possible social exclusion or health problems for the vegetarian, or they could be upset because the vegetarian disobeyed social convention. However, most



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non-vegetarian participants showed a neutral attitude toward vegetarians, which reflected an increasing respect for personal choice and boundaries between individuals in modern Beijing (Elias, 2001), and perhaps a change of attitude towards meat eating among the (urban) public. Both vegetarians and non-vegetarians might need to make compromises in order to achieve peaceful coexistence. The vegetarian might make temporary compromises in their diet or develop other strategies to maintain the consistency of their vegetarian identity around their non-vegetarian social relations.

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## Chapter 7 Doing Vegetarian: Maintaining a Vegetarian Lifestyle in Modern Beijing

### 7.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I explored how vegetarians in modern Beijing maintain their vegetarian identity while in constant interaction with close, non-vegetarian social relations. This only covered half the picture of the construction of vegetarian identity in the relationship with non-vegetarian wider society. In this chapter, I discuss how the vegetarians strive to maintain a vegetarian lifestyle in modern Beijing and how the needs of vegetarians as a group are promoted through commercial activities.

### 7.2 Individual Endeavour

As the term implies, the vegetarian lifestyle is most eminently presented through diet. For vegetarians in modern Beijing, they, like most people living in a post-industrialised society, have lost direct contact with food production (Goody, 1982). What they put on the plate is determined by what is available on the market. In addition, any consumer's choice is restricted by their income level, ability to access information and other factors. However, the vegetarians manage to maintain their lifestyle, and therefore, their self-identity as vegetarian through their individual endeavour.

Although there have been many Chinese vegetarian recipe books and vegetarian gourmet online accounts,<sup>1</sup> there is little record of what common vegetarians eat in everyday life or how they obtain the food. Eighteen current vegetarian participants in my research agreed to share what they had eaten in a period of 24 hours. The results are highly random and thus cannot represent the typical diet of any individual vegetarian; however, they may to some

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<sup>1</sup> The two are not totally separate. For example, the vegetarian public figure Xiaobai first became famous because of her food blog established in 2011 (<http://blog.sina.com.cn/eachbai>); she then published two recipe books based on her blog content in 2012 and 2014. She continued to make her hobby of cooking her career and opened the first branch of her vegetarian chain restaurant in Beijing in 2013. Her experience is a successful example of the commercialisation of vegetarianism in China.

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extent reflect the everyday food choices available to the vegetarian community in modern Beijing. The food items reported are categorised according to eating occasions. Setting a period of 24 hours means I could collect information about the meal plan of an individual in the full cycle of a day, but because the time could start at any time of the day depending on when the interview occurred, the sequence of meals each participant had in the 24-hour period does not necessarily follow the breakfast-lunch-dinner sequence shown in the table below. In addition, I included non-Chinese expert witnesses because, as residents of Beijing, their food choice is similarly determined by the food environment there, just like other vegetarians. The level of detail of each meal (e.g. ingredients, cuisine, cooking method) varied from person to person depending on how much detail the participant could recall, but it is enough to tell whether the food is vegetarian and if it is categorised as staple or side dishes. Meals not prepared at home (eating out, takeaway) are in bold. For the purpose of comparison, I also listed the food consumption of 19 non-vegetarian participants in a period of 24 hours in a separate table.

	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Other
Calvin	ground sesame porridge, wholemeal bread	stir-fried noodles with vegetable	steamed bun, sweet potato, shredded potato, stir-fried rice, bean sprouts, carrot, Chinese leaf	-
Codey	wholefood porridge (black sesame, Chinese yam, azuki beans, rolled oats, walnut, jujube, goji berry, apple) with honey, biscuits	noodle soup with red cabbage, fried egg	<b>icewine, sake, rice, one fried meatball, lettuce, peanut, shredded dried tofu, green bean, aubergine, tofu</b>	-
Ziva	<b>vegetarian sandwich from Subway</b>	stir-fried Chinese leaf, cucumber salad, noodle with soybean paste, stir-fried egg	tomato soup, rice, stir-fried garland chrysanthemum	nori

		and tomato, tofu, cornmeal porridge		
Kofi	noodles with vegetables	<b>vegetarian takeaway, fruit</b>	<b>vegetarian dumplings, fried rice, mapo tofu, stir-fried vegetables and fungi</b>	-
Kaja	Danish cranberry cake, coffee	<b>home-style tofu and rice, pickled vegetable platter</b>	avocado, jujube, biscuits	-
Vanessa	millet porridge	potato, aubergine, green pepper, rice	-	durian, clementine
Maison	-	<b>tofu</b>	<b>Chinese pancake</b>	-
Nelson	cereal (wheat flakes, banana, nuts,	n/a	chili (lentil, tomato, kidney beans)	coffee, tea

	almond)			
Alvin	<b>dumpling (courgette and egg, chive and egg), aubergine, potato, green pepper, rice</b>			apple
Klara	shaobing, instant noodles, pickled cucumber, soy milk	<b>Chinese leaf and tofu, enoki mushrooms, rice</b>	millet porridge, pickled cucumber, aubergine	-
Viola	fried tofu	quinoa, tomato, broccoli, cauliflower, pak choi	fake meat, currants, apple, nuts	-
Marlee	homemade apple and cinnamon bread	<b>vegan sandwich and samples from a New York vegan festival</b>	<b>vegetarian Indian food</b>	-
Austin	-	<b>noodles with meat</b>	<b>vegetable and meat stew</b>	-
Stanford	pickled vegetables,	<b>broccoli,</b>	vegetarian dumplings	-

	steamed bun, soy milk, millet porridge	<b>potato</b>	(mooli, Chinese leaf, tofu)	
Erick	<b>porridge</b> <b>(millet,</b> <b>maize, sweet</b> <b>potato,</b> <b>jujube),</b> <b>wholemeal</b> <b>steamed bun,</b> <b>mooli and</b> <b>tofu stew,</b> <b>kelp</b>	<b>stir-fried</b> <b>mixed</b> <b>vegetables,</b> <b>brown rice,</b> <b>tofu, kelp,</b> <b>dumplings</b> <b>(shiitake,</b> <b>lotus root,</b> <b>cabbage,</b> <b>Chinese toon,</b> <b>mooli, dill)</b>	-	pomelo
Barry	millet porridge, steamed bun, kelp	stir-fry (mushroom, vegetable, tofu, kelp), rice	<b>kimchi</b>	-
Deven	-	rice, oyster mushrooms, mooli and carrots	orange	-
Hamilton	coconut oil, black coffee,	<b>soybean</b> <b>paste noodles</b>	avocado sandwich	-

	avocado	<b>(dried tofu, soybean, shiitake, celery, radish, cucumber, bean sprouts)</b>	(coleslaw, potato salad, lettuce, tomato)	
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Table 7-1 Food Consumption of Vegetarian Participants in a Period of 24 Hours



	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Other
Ashton	-	<b>eggy bread, pork baozi, chicken wings, yu-shiang shredded pork, glutinous rice balls with fermented rice wine</b>	<b>pig liver soup</b>	coffee, brownie, cake, toast, apple
Cecilia	coffee, biscuits	<b>rice, spicy pot (fish cake, Chinese leaf, kelp, cauliflower, lotus root, dried tofu)</b>	<b>hotpot (mooli, lettuce, tofu, shiitake, oyster mushrooms, red cabbage)</b>	-
Savanna	<b>jianbingguozi (Chinese pancake)</b>	<b>fried chicken</b>	<b>fried chicken</b>	-
Weronika	maize porridge, cabbage	<b>beef noodles</b>	fried rice (potato), shaobing	-
Evaline	<b>soy milk, azuki porridge, meat baozi,</b>	<b>fried meatball, fish, noodle, lotus root</b>	-	brioche, waffle, cake

	<b>corn on the cob, sweet potato, cabbage, pickled vegetables</b>			
Maxine	milk, shaobing, meat floss cake	<b>grilled fish, lamb skewer</b>	porridge, stir-fried vegetables	-
Sherie	beef and carrot stew, rice, potato	-	-	tea
Denise	blueberries, coffee	<b>zhajiang noodles (non-vegetarian), pig heart</b>	nori, crisps	-
Alaina	-	rice, hotpot (red meat, green leafy vegetables)	rice, hotpot	orange, tea
Jocelin	-	<b>fried chicken, kung pao chicken, rice</b>	pork floss cake, Coke, clementine	tea
Timmy	bread, yogurt,	<b>kung pao chicken, Chinese</b>	pear, apple,	-

	fruit	<b>sauerkraut and lamb, cauliflower, potato, rice</b>	cookies	
Estelle	millet porridge, fagao (glutinous millet, flour), pickled sweet potato shoots, peanut, hard-boiled egg	<b>tuna sandwich from Subway</b>	millet porridge, pickled sweet potato shoots, peanuts	-
Tamera	-	rice, sausage, peanuts, aubergine, egg and tomato, vegetable salad (broccoli, carrots, lotus root)	<b>beer, corn on the cob, bread, pork, sausage</b>	-
Martha	edamame, taro, egg, sweet potato, millet and jujube	potato, tomato and beef stew, naan bread	fish stew, broccoli, garlic sprouts and pork, mushrooms,	yogurt, apple, clementine, orange, walnuts, peanuts, sunflower

	porridge		rice	seeds
Rusty	apple	<b>steamed bun, broccoli, pork ribs, rice</b>	Chinese pancake, mooli, radishes	almonds, beef jerky
Billie	baguette, black tea	<b>mapo tofu, duck blood and tripe, Chinese yams</b>	<b>hotpot</b>	-
Tyron	-	<b>fish hotpot (vegetables, mushrooms, sweet potato, garland chrysanthemum), soy milk</b>	<b>pork ribs and kelp noodles,</b> boiled egg	-
Jason	toast, orange	<b>azuki scone from Starbucks</b>	bamboo shoots	-
Darcy	rice porridge, vegetarian baozi, coffee	<b>rice, pork, green beans, aubergine</b>	rice porridge, baozi (vegetarian, beef and scallions, prawn and choy sum), stir-fried beef	orange, apple, pomelo, milk, rose tea

			and shiitake	
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Table 7-2 Food Consumption of Non-vegetarian Participants for a Period of 24 Hours

Important points emerge from these patterns of eating. First, the vegetarian and non-vegetarian participants share the same meal pattern and meal format. It is clear that nearly all the vegetarian and non-vegetarian participants followed the three-meals-a-day meal pattern, which is the mainstream in the modern working routine, although the tendency of grazing replacing breakfast and dinner is detected in some vegetarians and non-vegetarians. Chinese cuisine dominates both vegetarians' and non-vegetarians' diets in the sense that ingredients and cooking methods are mainly local, and the most common meal structure is a combination of staples (usually starch) and dishes. Unlike the traditional meal format of English cuisine, which is often comprised of a centrepiece of animal product and vegetarian side dishes (for instance, the 'meat and two veg' of the Sunday lunch) (Douglas, 1972; Willetts, 1997), the contrast between meat and vegetarian ingredients is not particularly emphasised in the meal format of Chinese cuisine. This means that removing meat from the meal does not pose a threat to the conventional meal format. This provides some protection to the vegetarians because they do not have to challenge the social convention of the meal format, but, at the same time, this may cause less motivation for innovation in meals, which is reflected in their food choice.

Second, the contrast between a vegetarian diet and a non-vegetarian one may not be so drastic and dramatic. Two out of 18 vegetarian participants had at least one meal containing meat in the period of 24 hours, 12 out of 19 non-vegetarian participants had at least one vegetarian meal in the 24-hour period and six out of 19 had at least two vegetarian meals in the 24-hour period. In the literature review, I cited studies showing the diets of self-defined vegetarians fell on a spectrum from strictly abstaining from any animal products to occasional meat consumption. Similarly, the diets of non-vegetarians also vary in terms of meat intake. The frequency of meat consumption reported by non-vegetarians in my research ranges from very rare to almost daily consumption. It seems that the dichotomy between vegetarians and non-vegetarians is more useful for analytical purposes than as a description of reality. The classification helps maintain the validity of the identity of both vegetarians and non-vegetarians. Meanwhile, it is similar to the finding of Carmichael (2002), who noticed that the boundary between the actual diets of vegetarians and non-vegetarians in everyday life can be porous. Efforts to break the

dichotomy and eliminate the boundary within and outside of the vegetarian community are discussed in chapter 4 in the case of the proposition of *shushi*. However, as I said before, these efforts did not receive much recognition from either within or outside the vegetarian community. None of the participants in my research suggested that the difference between vegetarian and non-vegetarian was too insignificant to be valid. They all had very self-clear identification as vegetarian or non-vegetarian, regardless of their actual diet. There is no reason to suspect the presumed opposition between vegetarians and non-vegetarians will disappear any time soon.

However, there may be a change among the generally non-vegetarian public. I proposed in the last chapter that there might be a change in non-vegetarians' attitude towards meat eating among urban citizens. The tendency is to some extent reflected in the annual meat consumption per capita, shown in the charts below. Although, on average, urban citizens in China have always consumed more meat of any kind than rural dwellers, it seems their meat consumption has reached a plateau in recent years, while the meat consumption of their rural counterparts continues to grow. Considering that the percentage of vegetarians in the population of China cannot be too high, this change is unlikely due to people becoming vegetarian. In addition to the change of attitude towards meat eating, the changes in population structure, namely an aging population, may also have a negative impact on meat consumption (Xin *et al.*, 2018). Policy-makers in China welcome this change; the recommended daily meat intake<sup>1</sup> of an adult in the Chinese Dietary Guidelines (2016) is 40g-75g, which is lower than the recommended 50g-100g in the 1997 edition of the Guidelines, and the minimum recommendation is lower than the 50g in the 2007 edition of the Guidelines. The 2016 edition of the Guidelines also encourages people to prioritise fish and poultry over red meat in their diet.<sup>2</sup> Slowing the growth in meat consumption and even reducing meat consumption are considered important strategies to maintain national and international food security (Tang, 2012; Yu, 2015). It is obvious that the policy-makers in China realised the political nature of the issue of meat consumption

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<sup>1</sup> Fish and seafood are not included.

<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://dg.cnsoc.org/article/2016b.html>.

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and are willing to use policy tools to affect the public's meat consumption. There is no reason they should not recognise the political connotations of vegetarianism; however, no policies have been made in favour of vegetarian activity, even though the proposition of vegetarians is clearly beneficial to the goal of reducing meat consumption. Vegetarians in Beijing still felt it was often inconvenient to fulfil their dietary needs, which is discussed later in this chapter.



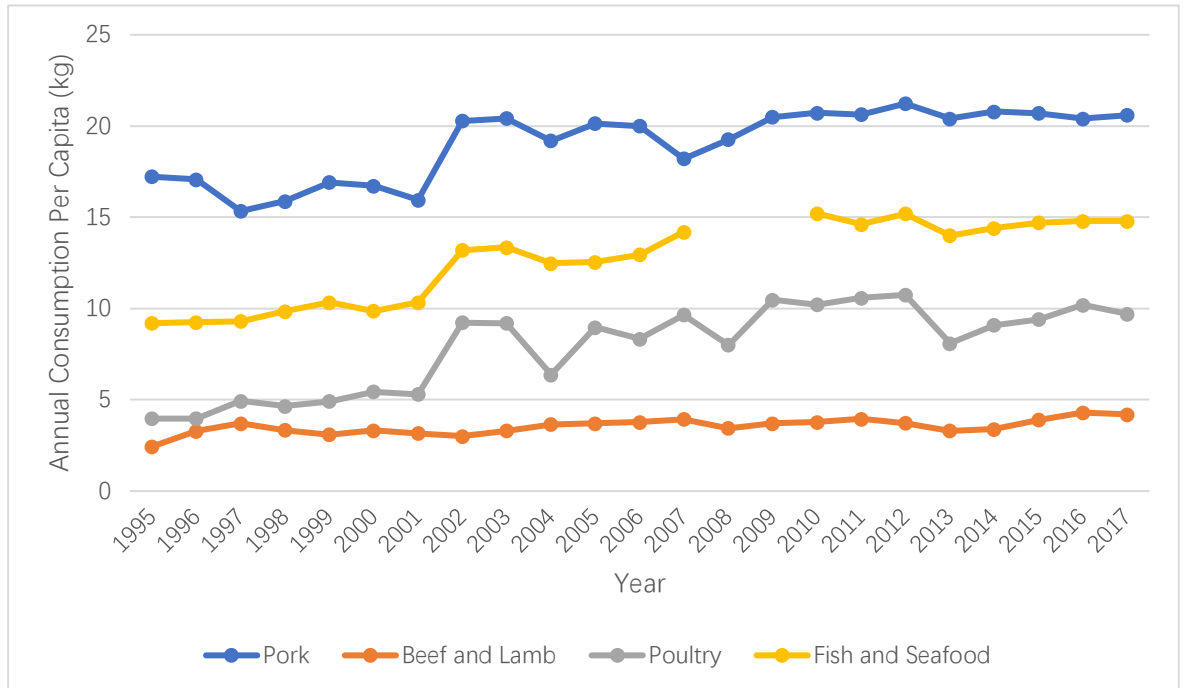


Figure 7-1 Annual Meat Consumption Per Capita of Chinese Urban Citizens<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Source: China Statistical Yearbook (中国统计年鉴) (1999-2018) compiled by the National Bureau of Statistics of China. The yearbooks are available online at: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/>. The data of the annual consumption of fish and seafood per capita in 2008 and 2009 is missing from the original source.

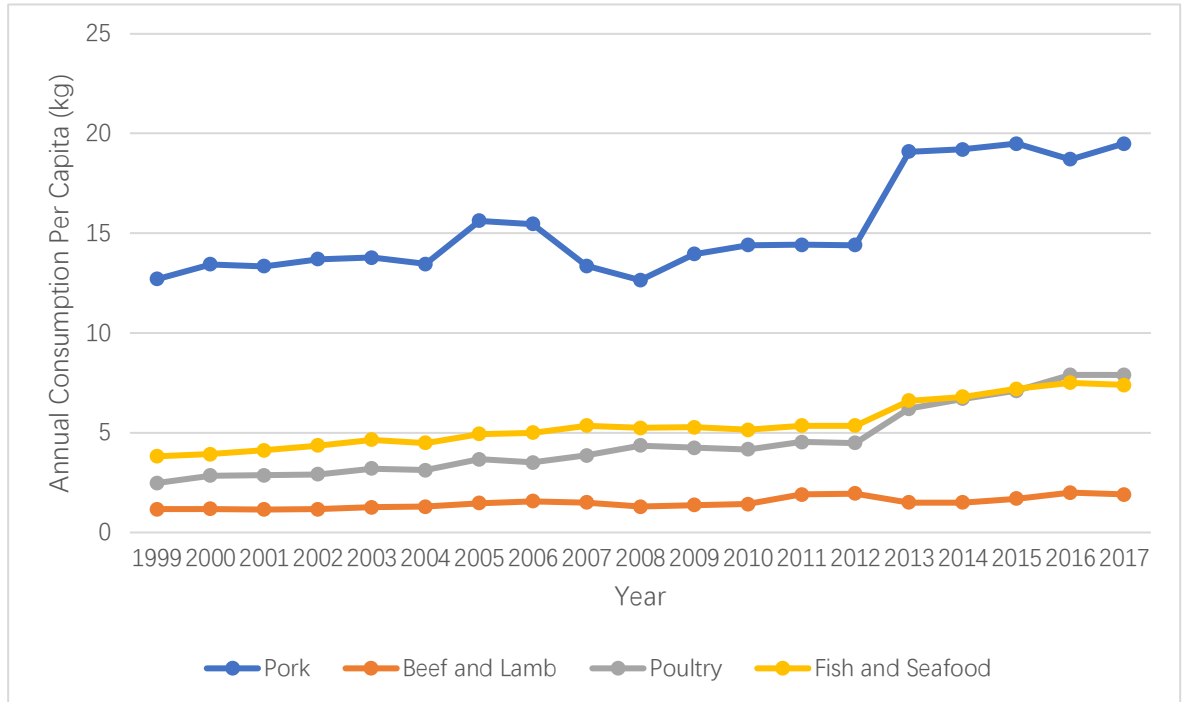


Figure 7-2 Annual Meat Consumption Per Capita of Chinese Rural Habitants<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Source: China Statistical Yearbook (中国统计年鉴) (2001-2018) compiled by the National Bureau of Statistics of China. The annual meat consumption per capita before 1999 was not categorised by type of meat in the original source, so I did not incorporate the data in the chart.

Third, 13 out of 18 vegetarians and 16 out of 19 non-vegetarians had at least one meal that was not prepared at home in the period of 24 hours. Having meals not prepared at home, be it eating out or having takeaway, is often not for leisure but out of necessity. Students had to rely on university canteens because cooking is strictly forbidden in Chinese university dormitories. Young professionals often resorted to company canteens or takeaway as a result of their busy lifestyle, the often long commute time and the characteristics of the household in which they lived. From 2005 to 2010, the one-way commute time in Beijing increased from 38 minutes to 43.6 minutes (Meng *et al.*, 2011); in 2017, the average commute time in Beijing was 56 minutes,<sup>1</sup> and 15% of commuters spent over one hour on a single-way commute journey (Jiguang, 2018). The long commute time means commuters have inadequate motivation to cook from scratch. Fortunately, the highly developed takeaway industry in Beijing provides affordable meal choices, and many companies have subsidized canteens which provided cheap or free meals for their employees. Denise explained her typical meal plan on a working day:

In Beijing, because there is no lunch break if you work [in a company], very often there would be a canteen [in the company]. [I] have lunch in the canteen. They provide dinner, as well. Basically, ever since I joined the company I have been having meals in the canteen. If I cook, then it would be simple things like noodles, because everyone is so busy, we don't have time to cook elaborate meals. [...]

Denise lived in a shared household with other single professionals. Living alone or with other unrelated adult flatmates was common for both vegetarian and non-vegetarian participants in my research: 50% of vegetarians (nine out of 18) and 37% of non-vegetarians (seven out of 19) lived in a single or shared household. For vegetarians, moving out gave them more freedom in terms of food choices, as pressure from parents to eat meat was common among teenage vegetarians or vegetarian-sympathisers (Worsley & Skrzypiec, 1998) and might suppress their will to convert to vegetarianism during their time living at home (Beardsworth & Keil, 1991). A study of adolescents' attitudes towards meat-eating in Norway showed that some females changed diets when they left home for

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<sup>1</sup> As a contrast, the average commute time of people working in London in 2017 was 46 minutes (Great Britain. Department for Transport, 2017).

exactly this reason (Kubberød *et al.*, 2002). Ironically, although the percentage of people living in single or shared households is higher among vegetarians than non-vegetarians in my research sample, the percentage of not preparing meals at home is lower in the former category than in the latter. If this is not a coincidence caused by the randomness of the sample selection, then it seems, despite a genuine need for convenient food to fit in a busy lifestyle, the vegetarians were perhaps less willing than non-vegetarians to have meals not prepared at home, which may partially be due to a lack of confidence in finding appropriate food to fulfil their dietary needs. Vanessa's words exemplify this:

Ever since I became vegetarian – before that, I used to order takeaway at work – I realised I started to cook for myself after I became vegetarian. Because it's perhaps easier to take control of what you eat if you cook for yourself. Besides, since I started to cook for myself, whenever I eat out, I'd feel like first [the food] is greasy and unhygienic, second it tastes so much worse than my home-cooked food. I wasn't good at cooking before [I became vegetarian], but since I became vegetarian, I found out that actually you can cook more delicious food without meat.

She cited food safety, health and taste as the main reasons she chose to cook her own food instead of having meals not prepared at home. The concern over health and hygiene was raised by several non-vegetarians but did not prevent them from eating out. Therefore, it seems that not having satisfactory vegetarian options is the largest obstacle that prevents some vegetarians from having more meals not prepared at home. Later in the section, I try to prove this argument.

Among people living with family members, such as spouses or the elder generation, five out of nine vegetarians and six out of 12 non-vegetarians often directly participated in the process of food preparation.<sup>1</sup> Three out of five vegetarians who participated in the process of food preparation in the household with family members were male, and two out of six non-vegetarians who participated in the process of food preparation in the household with family members were male. For a sample size as small as this, it can be argued that there was no significant difference in the rate of male participation in the food preparation between vegetarian and non-vegetarian participants when they lived with family members,

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<sup>1</sup> It means they took on at least 50% of the work of buying and/or cooking food in the household.

and for both groups, the male participation rate was around 50%. The traditional gender division of labour that often assigned the unpaid work of feeding the family to women (DeVault, 1991) was not obvious in my research sample, probably because the traditional gender division of labour was no longer realistic when both males and females have to financially contribute almost equally to the household. Since living in a single or shared household means the person has to be responsible for their own diet, therefore, generally speaking, the vegetarian participants in my research had greater involvement than non-vegetarians (78% compared to 68%) in the process of food preparation in the household, which may be a manifestation of implementing greater control over their diet than their non-vegetarian peers because more efforts were needed to maintain a vegetarian diet in modern Beijing, which is still not vegetarian-friendly.

When having meals prepared at home, there was little difference between vegetarians and non-vegetarians in terms of where they obtained the ingredients. Supermarkets, farmers' markets and online grocery stores were reported as the main places to obtain meal ingredients. At the time I did fieldwork, spontaneously appearing and organised farmers' markets were still a common scene in traditional residential areas in Beijing, although a movement aimed at transforming them had been in progress for nearly a decade. The farmers' markets have been demolished and replaced by fewer and more standardised chain markets regulated directly by the city government<sup>1</sup> in accordance with the recent policy of upgrading the usage of urban space and evacuating 'low-end' migrants (Chen & Liu, 2019). However, the government-led movement to transform farmers' markets without consulting the actual users of those markets (vendors and customers) has received considerable complaints about the often-decreasing convenience and quality after the transformation.<sup>2</sup> Generally speaking, the movement is less the result of any real needs of citizens in Beijing than the government's wish to landscape the megacity to an 'international standard'. This shows how market performance in Beijing is heavily

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<sup>1</sup> [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/KtIw5j5w47f\\_Sr2NY3kPA](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/KtIw5j5w47f_Sr2NY3kPA).

<sup>2</sup> See the report of farmers' markets in Beijing conducted by 食通社 KnowYourFood. The first half of the report is available at <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/n8FoN2xcnsFbwUL6d4OEOw>. The second half is available at <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/HjY-Ry2pY6uZkGmv1PmBaA>.

influenced by policy-makers who are sometimes not supportive of the market performance itself. It is difficult to improve market performance without the help of favourable policy. In this case, the needs of consumers, for example, the dietary needs of vegetarians, are unlikely to be met by developing commercial activity alone, regardless of how urgent and genuine the needs can be. This is unwelcome news for vegetarians in Beijing, as they did suffer from inadequate vegetarian options in the catering market. This is especially obvious for someone who has lived in a more vegetarian-friendly environment than China. For example, Marlee has lived in Beijing and New York as a vegan. She commented that, compared with New York, the vegetarian options in non-vegetarian restaurants in Beijing were 'limited and unreliable'. There was always a risk of having chicken powder, animal oil or meat broth in the dish, whereas

in New York, almost all restaurants are able to list every ingredient in a dish, which makes it easy [for vegetarians] to choose. If you tell them 'I'm vegetarian' or 'I'm vegan', they know immediately there cannot be dairy or eggs, etc. in the dish. In China, people don't have that kind of knowledge of vegetarianism.

Although not every vegetarian participant in my research thought Beijing was a bad place to be vegetarian, it is certainly unfriendly to stricter vegetarians. Kofi admitted:

I'm vegan. I definitely would not eat meat, dairy or eggs when eating out. However, in fact, I don't think it's completely possible. For instance, sometimes when I was out and wanted to eat something, I would buy bread which might have [dairy and eggs]. I could do nothing about it. Giving up bread because it contains dairy and eggs, well, I just can't do it.

Even Alvin, the Canadian expat, observed the frustration some vegetarians experienced:

I think obviously, with Buddhism, you have a very long history of people not eating meat. But I guess in Beijing it's more like a religious thing, I don't know. 'Cause if I go to a normal restaurant, it's not...obviously, I'll ask them to not add meat, but often they will forget, they'll add the meat because that's how they make the dish because I don't think they get it (...) I think most people are not really... It's not a common thing, I think, to be a vegetarian in China. [...] I'm not picky, I don't care. Like I'll pick out the meat... 'Cos I like the taste of meat, I just don't really want to eat it. But it doesn't bother me at all. I know a lot of vegetarians, this will really bother them. If you become strict, you'll really have a hard time in Beijing. In Beijing, it's better than most other places in China.

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So if you go to other cities in China, you just have to be more flexible.

This reinforces my earlier statement that vegetarians may be less willing than non-vegetarians to have meals not prepared at home because of the lack of adequate vegetarian choices. When having home-cooked meal is impossible, it could pose immense difficulty in maintaining a vegetarian diet, which is shown nowhere more clearly than among students.

[...] Tsinghua University is a very traditional university, that is to say, it cares a lot about the physical health of the students, so the canteen in Tsinghua University is a great place from a meat-eater's point of view, the food is cheap and of high quality, by which I mean there is a lot of meat. [...] Of all the social groups, the students have the most difficulty in keeping a vegetarian diet, because they don't have a lot of money and basically have to rely on university canteens. It's very difficult to eat vegetarian in the canteen of Tsinghua University, almost [every dish] has meat. (Kofi)

Although he was not a student, Stanford, as a lecturer, relied on the university canteen for workday lunches. He explained how he chose what to eat in this situation:

[...] there is no vegetarian window [*a stall in the canteen*] in the University of Science and Technology Beijing. Almost every dish has some meat added. The only vegetarian option is a side in the fried chicken meal.

According to Buddhist principle, what I do is called eating 'vegetable that is adjacent to meat (肉边菜)', that is, to pick out the meat and eat the remaining vegetables [*in the dish*]. We also have a fried chicken window [*in the canteen*], they sell fried chicken, but the free side is vegetarian. Sometimes I'd eat that.

The reasons there are not adequate vegetarian options in the catering market in Beijing can be complicated, which in turn makes fighting for vegetarians' rights difficult. I return to this topic in the next section. Meanwhile, the vegetarians often have to be flexible in order to maintain their vegetarian identity, which means sometimes compromising on what to eat. Whether they chose to cook their own food or have meals not prepared at home, they were consumers at the end of a long food production and distribution chain. Essentially, they were purchasing the vegetarian diet which was at the heart of a vegetarian lifestyle. Since

in post-traditional society, self-identity has increasingly been manifested in the form of lifestyle, it is arguable that the self-identity of vegetarians in modern Beijing is in a sense a purchasable commodity that is not so different from other newly emerged lifestyles available in the ‘green’ consumption market.

### **7.3 Striving for the Needs of Vegetarians as a Social Group**

#### **7.3.1 Vegetarian Restaurants: The Unofficial Centre for Promoting Vegetarianism**

##### **7.3.1.1 Vegetarian Cuisine in China: An Overview**

Textbooks used in higher education on Chinese food and cooking in China often list vegetarian dishes as a sub-cuisine under the general category of Chinese cuisine (e.g., Du, 2011; Xu, 2005), which is comprehensible for those who have visited multiple ‘traditional’ vegetarian restaurants in China, as dishes in such settings clearly display ‘a shared set of “protocols,” usages, communications, behaviors, etc.’ (Belasco, 2008, pp. 15-16) that differ from dishes of other Chinese restaurants or even of vegetarian restaurants with a modern or exotic touch. Throughout Chinese history, it was the norm for the majority of the population to have a largely plant-based diet, which was often not out of choice but because of the scarcity of meat in a traditional farming society (Chang, 1977). It is easy to assume that the vegetarian dish as a unique cuisine in China must be a natural product of this background. While the ingredients of vegetarian cuisine in China are indeed determined by the local environment, the cuisine owes more to the taste of traditional Chinese intellectuals and the requirements of Buddhist teaching; that is, the vegetarian cuisine is an inherent component of the Chinese vegetarian tradition. As the materialisation of vegetarian ideas, vegetarian cuisine in China often features a taste for elegance and abstinence from *wuxin*.

The first feature of vegetarian cuisine in China was promoted by traditional intellectuals in their writings on food. The earliest available record of a purposefully meat-free banquet



was written in the Song Dynasty (960-1279) (Chen, 1985), which happens to be the time when Chinese cuisine as we know it today started to take shape (Chang, 1977). The record is a menu of a banquet held by an elderly intellectual. According to the record, a guest of the banquet praised the dishes as ‘not contaminated by the fire and smoke of the earthly world’ (无人间烟火气), which is a conventional expression to refer to elegance and sophistication – the aesthetics at the heart of the intellectuals’ attitude toward a plant-based diet described in chapter 1. Another influential book concerning the ideal diet for an intellectual was also written in Song Dynasty. Titled *Pure Food of the Mountain People* (山家清供), it is a recipe book that is based on the aesthetics of intellectuals. ‘Pure food’ means that the dishes recorded in the book are largely plant-based, and even the few meat dishes are delicately cooked to keep as much of its authentic flavour as possible. It is noteworthy that the book includes several fake meat dishes, such as ‘vegetarian steamed duck’ (素蒸鸭) which is made of gourd and ‘fake fried meat’ (假煎肉), which uses sliced gourd and gluten (Chen, 1985). They are some of the earliest records of the unique category of fake meat dishes featured in most vegetarian restaurants in China that claim to serve ‘traditional’ Chinese vegetarian cuisine as a selling point. The origin of fake meat dishes is unknown, even though this kind of food sparks significant debate between vegetarians and non-vegetarians and within vegetarians, which is further demonstrated in the next section. The idea that people who had sophisticated taste preferred plant-based food to meat continued in the intellectual tradition and was popularised in the tradition of *yangsheng* (养生)<sup>1</sup> (Leung, 2016) and still has great influence in contemporary China through the revival of *yangsheng* in recent decades.

The second feature of vegetarian cuisine in China is highlighted in the vegetarian dishes inspired by Buddhist vegetarianism, such as the food in Buddhist temples or Buddhist vegetarian restaurants. Buddhist temple food became the most influential element in the

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<sup>1</sup> Literally meaning ‘nurturing life’, *yangsheng* is a set of ideas and practices for self-caring without the help of modern medicine or medical system. Although the concept is traditional, its recent revival has much to do with the international trend of self-help movements and may also be a reaction to the healthcare crisis in contemporary China (see, e.g., Farquhar & Zhang [2012]).

development of fine vegetarian cuisine in China no later than the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) through its communication with the secular world. In Beijing, for example, in the late Qing Dynasty, there were three temples and one nunnery famous for their gourmet vegetarian food. Large temples regularly gave vegetarian dishes to powerful sponsors in exchange for large sum of donations, which was one of the main sources of income for the temple (Tang, 2008). Temples also catered vegetarian banquets for lay people on demand, but the price was beyond what most people could afford (Jin, 2014).

Until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the degree of commodification of vegetarian cuisine in China has been extremely low. Although vegetarian cuisine was not reserved for Buddhist temples and could be found in the royal court and common households (Lin & Wang, 2016), it was mostly prepared and consumed in a domestic scenario. In Beijing, the relatively large scale of commodification of vegetarian cuisine began in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the process of which vegetarian dishes from the royal court, temples and other sources were integrated to a degree never seen before.

### **7.3.1.2 Vegetarian Restaurants in Modern Beijing**

There have been records of vegetarian restaurants in Beijing since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Lin & Wang, 2016), but records before the 20<sup>th</sup> century were extremely rare and imprecise. A new wave of vegetarian restaurants started to appear in Beijing in the early years of the Republic of China (1912-1949) (Tang, 2008), but none continued to exist after 1949 (Ke, 2009; Tang, 2008). Under the total planned economy, restaurants in general were considered symbols of ‘old’ hierarchical Chinese society because they were reserved for the elites. Restaurants were either shut down or reformed to cater to the proletariat. In addition, the elegant and pricy traditional vegetarian cuisine was not attractive to the involuntarily vegetarian proletariat in any way. However, as the market economy was re-introduced to mainland China, a movement of restoring ‘old brands’ supported by the government began in the early 1980s, and it saw many brands founded before 1949 that had ceased due to political change reappear in the market. In Beijing, two vegetarian restaurants reopened in the 80s (Ke, 2009), only one of which is still open today.

It is safe to say that, like most commercial establishments in modern Beijing, almost all vegetarian restaurants could not have been in the city scene for more than three decades. Vegetarian restaurants, even those using ‘traditional vegetarian cuisine’ as a selling point, are not the direct descendants of the vegetarian restaurants in ‘old’ Beijing; rather, they are born out of the needs of modern consumers. They are a rediscovery or reinvention of the old taste to cater to the new palate, which is growing used to tastes from around the world.

Vegetarian restaurants are now an established type of restaurants in Beijing. The VegPlanet listed 109 vegetarian restaurants and three vegetarian-friendly restaurants in its latest edition of the Map of Vegetarian Restaurants in Beijing.<sup>1</sup> The inclusion of vegetarian-friendly restaurants was a new feature in the newest edition of the Map, which was a breakthrough in the VegPlanet’s strategy of promoting vegetarian food. For each vegetarian restaurant, the map made a note of whether the food was ovo-/lacto-vegetarian or vegan and if it contained *wuxin*; the latter was apparently listed based on the needs of Buddhist vegetarians. Compared with other world-renowned vegetarian-friendly cities, Beijing is not too far behind in terms of the number of vegetarian places,<sup>2</sup> but the number of vegetarian-friendly places is disappointing. Interestingly, despite the repeating complaints of a lack of satisfactory vegetarian options when eating out, none of the vegetarian participants in my research proposed increasing the vegetarian options in restaurants in general. Instead, many hoped there could be more vegetarian restaurants to make eating out more convenient. Promoting a more vegetarian-friendly environment in restaurants in general, as the VegPlanet suggested in its Map, is actually uncommon among the vegetarian community. There may be two reasons behind the seeming reluctance.

First, although many vegetarians may feel frustrated when they have to negotiate with non-vegetarian restaurants about their dietary needs, they may also feel that this is not

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<sup>1</sup> <http://xingqiu.me/p/20563/北京素食地图3-0版全球首发!> (内附餐厅详细信息/ (Accessed: 7 October 2016). The content of the map was updated on 27 April 2016. The restaurants were understood in the broadest sense, which included canteens of Buddhist temples and farms which were open to the public.

<sup>2</sup> For example, London, the most vegan-friendly city in the world nominated by the HappyCow, had 110 vegan places in a five-mile radius within the city in 2018 (<https://www.happycow.net/vegtopics/travel/top-vegan-friendly-cities>).

something they can change on their own. They would rather choose a vegetarian restaurant in the first place than embark on the formidable mission of improving the understanding of vegetarianism in non-vegetarian restaurants in general. Kofi's criteria of choosing where to eat out of the home demonstrate this:

If there are vegetarian restaurants, of course we'd choose a vegetarian restaurant. First, it's cleaner in a vegetarian restaurant, because the cooking oil in a Chinese restaurant in China could have cooked meat and stuff [before it's used to cook vegetarian dishes], it doesn't taste well, it's not clean, it's contaminated. Second, although you can order vegetarian dishes in a non-vegetarian restaurant – sometimes we have no choice but to go to a non-vegetarian restaurant – they don't know what vegetarian means. You tell them you are vegetarian, they'd probably cook fish or prawn for you, and they don't know Buddhists can't eat scallion or garlic, either. Anyway, there would be a lot of dispute, or they don't understand your enquiry and cook something you did not ask.

Even a vegetarian activist like Kofi did not show enthusiasm towards promoting vegetarian options in non-vegetarian restaurants. This could be another consequence of not having any authoritative vegetarian organisation in China apart from not having a widely recognisable definition of vegetarianism, as mentioned in chapter 4. Without any authoritative vegetarian organisation in China to negotiate with the catering industry about the needs of vegetarians, to set a widely recognisable standard for vegetarian-friendly businesses to follow, or simply to raise awareness about vegetarianism on a large scale, it is almost impossible to find an effective way to promote the needs of vegetarians in a generally non-vegetarian society. The less effective dialogue there is between the vegetarian community and wider society, the more segregated the vegetarians and non-vegetarians are. Having more vegetarian instead of vegetarian-friendly restaurants is not the answer to the problem of the lack of satisfactory places for vegetarians to eat out, not only because vegetarian restaurants are and probably will remain a small section in the vast catering market, but also because it may imply that vegetarians could or should not feel comfortable in the same dining environment as non-vegetarians, as is indicated in Erick's explanation of why he thought there should be more vegetarian restaurants:

It's totally different to have 100 vegetarian restaurants and 100 restaurants that serve both vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes. Non-vegetarian restaurants serving vegetarian dishes is still for commercial reasons. Actually eating *su* is a comprehensive

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experience for us, that is, I think it will be really difficult [for me] to stay inside [a restaurant] when I'm eating *su* while I can smell beef or lamb, but inside a... vegetarian restaurant, it's relatively pure. Non-vegetarian restaurants only serve vegetarian dishes so as to give meat-eaters supplementary choices. Vegetarians still hope there can be more vegetarian restaurants. They have a totally different atmosphere and magnetic field. Eating *su* in a non-vegetarian restaurant makes people anxious, uneasy and insecure. When we went out for hot-pot – there are non-vegetarian restaurants where you can have vegetarian hot-pot – you would... The air smelt so foul that it was so difficult to continue eating. [...] So in fact, [I] still hope there will be more affordable vegetarian restaurants or different forms of vegetarian restaurants to make eating *su* more convenient.

Second, as I stated earlier in the chapter, vegetarian food in China is traditionally seen as a unique cuisine which has its own signature dishes and set of principles in cooking. Although new types of vegetarian dishes, especially 'Western'-style vegetarian dishes, are challenging the old conventions, the tendency to treat vegetarian food as a separate category is still prevalent. For example, one of the most influential review sites in China, *dianping.com*, listed 'vegetarian' as a separate category alongside region-based cuisines (e.g. Sichuan cuisine, Japanese cuisine or 'Western' cuisine), eating-occasion-based food places (e.g., breakfast or afternoon tea) and format-of-food-based eating places (e.g., noodle bar or hotpot place) in the website's navigation bar. In contrast, the Chinese edition of Tripadvisor listed 'vegetarian' as one of the filter conditions along with gluten-free, Halal and Kosher in the filtering section of dietary needs. It may be that *dianping.com* did not consider it necessary to further categorise all the different categories in the navigation bar, but they obviously did not find it problematic to group vegetarian food with other types of cuisine, either.

Until now, the 'traditional' kind of vegetarian restaurants which conform to the criteria of a Buddhist vegetarian diet are still the mainstream of all the vegetarian restaurants in Beijing. Therefore, they were mostly accountable for making the first impression of 'proper' vegetarian food for many non-vegetarians. The fact that the 'traditional' vegetarian restaurants often featured fake meat dishes in their menu which could not be found in non-vegetarian restaurants not only reinforced the idea of vegetarian food as a unique cuisine, but also caused confusion and repulsion in some non-vegetarians. For instance:

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Actually, there is something I don't understand, that is why vegetarian restaurants have to make vegetarian dishes feel and taste like meat, such as making it taste like beef or fish. It's obviously made of soybeans, but they have to make it taste like braised pork belly. If you are already vegetarian, why would you pursue the taste of meat? Isn't it not pure [vegetarianism]? (Denise)

Even a vegetarian sympathiser like Timmy found the idea of fake meat meaningless, if not harmful:

I think making vegetarian dishes look like meat may cause misunderstanding to non-vegetarians, like, why do I have to eat the fake meat? I can just eat the real deal. They would feel confusing toward vegetarians. Actually, true vegetarians don't like such dishes very much. The reason restaurants develop this kind of dish is to attract more customers, to make people who have never had vegetarian food before feel comfortable, to make them feel they can retain their taste. It's actually the intersection between non-vegetarians and vegetarians. In fact, people who have moved beyond the intersection don't like this kind of flavour.

Of course, the ultimate reason the fake meat dishes are on the menus of many vegetarian restaurants is probably that they are profitable. It may also be because the fake meat dishes are the symbol of authentic vegetarian cuisine for many 'traditional' vegetarian restaurants and perhaps represent a mismatch between the owners of vegetarian restaurants and ordinary non-vegetarians in terms of their anticipation of the target customers of vegetarian restaurants. Many non-vegetarian participants in my research believed vegetarian restaurants were mainly for vegetarians, while in reality, most of the customers were non-vegetarian, which was confirmed by several vegetarian businesspeople from the catering industry:

A lot of white collars came to our [restaurant] to eat *su*, they do it out of health rather than religion. Because our restaurant is in the Tsinghua Science Park, most [customers] are young white collar. There are customers who are Buddhist, but overall, we have more white collar customers than religious customers, and there are more and more of the former. (Klara)

Our customers from Changping District are mainly intellectuals, such as doctors, teachers, professors and some university students, of course there are some local vegetarians or Buddhists, and that's basically it, and some companies, many of their employees come here to eat. [...] Of all the customers, probably one-fifth are actually

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vegetarian. (Erick)

It was clear to them that the fake meat dishes were supposed to cater to the tastes of non-vegetarians:

[...] We'd keep a tiny proportion of fake meat [in the set meal], such as the vegetarian sausage, it's only to satisfy a craving [for meat], because vegetarian restaurants are not for vegetarians only, there are many meat-eaters, too (*as customers*). They want to know more about [vegetarianism], to have a taste [of vegetarian food], there is a transition period [to becoming vegetarian]. (Erick)

Regarding fake meat dishes, it is unclear if the vegetarian restaurants realise the gap in perception between them and their increasingly critical customers. Certainly, though, the non-vegetarians will be their main source of customers for a long time to come; thus, the vegetarian restaurants must pay more attention to what their non-vegetarian customers need and want.

A perhaps unexpected outcome from the realisation that the vegetarian restaurants in Beijing are mainly for non-vegetarians is that the vegetarian restaurants in a sense took on the function of vegetarian organisations and became the physical locale to promote vegetarianism. First, for many non-vegetarians, the vegetarian restaurants were important places of education about the definition of a vegetarian diet, which I mentioned in chapter 4. The food choices on the menu gave a straightforward demonstration of what a vegetarian diet could and could not contain. Second, the vegetarian restaurants provided an integrated dining experience that consisted not only of food but also decoration, atmosphere, *et cetera*. For example, the Good Earth Noodle Bar claims on the menu that their food was highly alkaline, full of antioxidants and anticancer agents; the Amrta Shakahara vegetarian restaurant featured a piece of Chinese calligraphy stating, 'endless mercy and love' on the interior wall, and it also had a display of healthy whole foods from affiliated brands and homemade skincare products by volunteers in the restaurant on the corner shelves. It is common for vegetarian restaurants in Beijing to boast a healthy, ethical or environmentally friendly dining experience, which are all concepts closely related to vegetarianism. Third, the vegetarian restaurants were often the physical locales for

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Internet-based, vegetarianism-related organisations to hold offline activities. There were often collaborations between vegetarian restaurants and vegetarianism-related organisations in the forms of meet-ups, lectures, lifestyle fairs and so on. The collaborations were commercially beneficial for the vegetarian restaurants because they guaranteed customers, and they were beneficial for the vegetarianism-related organisations, too, because the depoliticalisation of the activities in a commercial venue ensured the survival of such activities in an authoritative society.



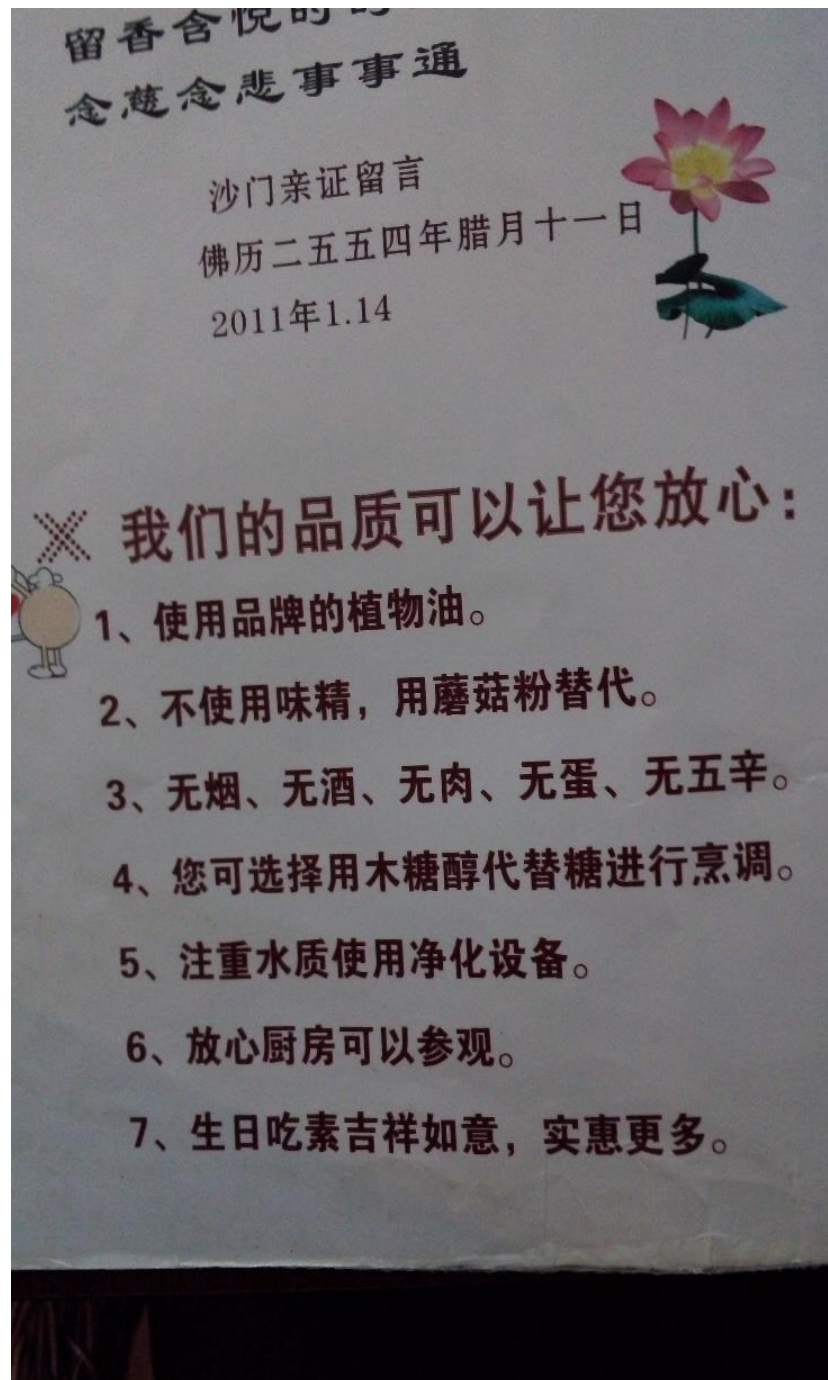


Photo 7-1 The Statement of Quality Guarantee of the Food in Boruo Vegetarian Restaurant, Beijing<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The first three items in the statement concern the criteria of food used in the restaurant. They are: 1) branded vegetable oil only; 2) no monosodium glutamate, which is replaced by ground mushrooms; 3) no smoke, no alcohol, no meat, no egg, no *wuxin*.



Photo 7-2 The Exterior of Zhaixiangyuan Vegetarian Restaurant, Beijing<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Slogans on the exterior wall are (from up to down, from left to right): vegetarian food for the public; environmentally friendly and healthy; eating vegetarian and tasting tea; catching up with friends and developing new relationships.

The vegetarian restaurants often did not see promoting a vegetarian lifestyle as a marketing strategy; rather, they claimed it was their real mission. Erick said, 'True vegetarian restaurants are not only about selling vegetarian food, it's about promoting a lifestyle.' The vegetarian fast food restaurant Have Fun originally did not emphasise itself as a vegetarian place, but the owner admitted that might change soon:

The proportion of vegetarians in our customers is small. Most [customers] are ordinary people (*non-vegetarians*). You don't need to promote vegetarianism to vegetarians, do you? For ordinary people, it's quite enough as long as the food fills their belly and makes them comfortable. It's a very gentle way to penetrate [with the idea of vegetarianism]. In future, we would emphasise more on vegetarianism. What we are doing is a bit ahead of the time, but the situation has been changing in recent years, and we would slowly introduce the idea [of vegetarianism].<sup>1</sup>

It is wrong, however, to presume there is anything unique to or particularly idealistic regarding vegetarian restaurants in Beijing in terms of promoting ideas and lifestyle. For example, the health and beauty industry is (in)famous for portraying its products as delusional solutions to achieve an often-ideal body image. The body shape industry knows exactly how to sell its products in the name of promoting health, confidence and self-responsibility (Peterson, 2007). Nevertheless, consumers are not entirely passive in the game of marketing; to some extent, they reflect on their choices and have their own interpretations of how the commodities would be chosen and used. Despite the efforts of vegetarian restaurants to promote the idea of vegetarianism, customers of the vegetarian restaurants might have other interpretations of their consumption of vegetarian food, such as showing body consciousness, presenting a concern for environmental problems or simply demonstrating a refined taste, since many vegetarian restaurants were expensive.

### **7.3.2 Availability of Vegetarian Options in Other Social Situations**

Lacking good vegetarian options is not unique to the catering industry in modern Beijing; it is prevalent in the consumer markets in China. Kaja complained about the lack of vegan alternatives in the food industry in general, which forced her to make certain compromises

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.yogeev.com/article/61294.html>.

in her lifestyle:

[...] In China, it's probably still a luxury to be vegan, because, for example, [even if] you want to cook a very ordinary dish, you have to buy condiments that are suitable for vegans from [special] supermarkets. It seems the Chinese manufacturers particularly don't care if there are animal ingredients in such products (*condiments*), if you want to buy [the vegan version of the condiment], you have to buy imported products which are much more expensive. So I usually don't particularly care whether the product is vegan... If I saw good vegan condiments or ingredients, I'd definitely buy them, but I won't buy super expensive things only because they are vegan – sometimes I do, but not 100%.

In fact, Stiles argued that 'the relative lack of good vegetarian fast/convenient food sources' (Stiles, 1998, p. 222) could be the largest difficulty in maintaining a vegetarian diet worldwide.

Small-scale vegetarian organisations with no support from the authorities can hardly change the eating environment for vegetarians. Even one of the most successful vegetarian societies in Chinese universities, the Vegetarian Society of Peking University, has only managed to ensure that a vegetarian stall that met their standards was in one of the 10 canteens in the campus. However, the president of the society was satisfied with the achievement:

[The object is] to ensure a basic vegetarian stall for the students, you can't ask for more, because the university canteens have got their own, bigger problems, such as the problem of the dining environment, the problem of people from outside the university dining in the university canteens, they have got many... They have their own problems so they simply can't [waste time] on this trivial issue... (Maison)

The vegetarian lifestyle includes more than a vegetarian diet. In terms of the vegetarian options in non-food areas, cruelty-free health and beauty products are rare in China, which many ethically inspired vegetarians may find difficult to accept. Although a new regulation issued by the China Food and Drug Administration (CFDA)<sup>1</sup> has meant that, since 30 June 2014, animal tests were no longer compulsive for Chinese brand non-special-purpose

<sup>1</sup> <http://samr.cfda.gov.cn/WS01/CL1870/95194.html>.

beauty and skincare<sup>1</sup> before they were launched in the market of mainland China, this is still far from having widely available, cruelty-free products on the market. This prompted a grey area in the market of unlicensed products through unconventional marketing, such as using shopping websites like Taobao (淘宝). For example, the vegan brand Taipinglaonong (太平老农) had a physical store in Beijing but mainly relied on Taobao for business. Products sold in the store included organic Oolong from Taiwan, homemade vegan snacks and semi-homemade vegan skincare products. In spite of the verbal assurance I received from the staff of the brand that all ingredients in their products were of great quality and the production met the highest standards, I was told the products were not registered with CFDA. It is arguable that this was against the interests of consumers, since the quality of unlicensed products could not be guaranteed, but under the current regulations, it was impossible for their skincare products to pass the official registration regardless of the quality of the product. Therefore, in order to have safe and reliable health and beauty products, vegetarians will first have to call for changes in the relevant legislation. On the surface, lacking satisfactory vegetarian options in the health and beauty market in China is about the ignorance of a niche market, but it is first a political issue because it reflects a lack of political power that represents the interests of the vegetarian community.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the CFDA, special-purpose beauty and skincare include hair growth products, hair dye, hair perms, hair removal products, breast enhancing products, body shaping products, deodorant, anti-dark spots products (including whitening products) and sun protection products (<http://samr.cfda.gov.cn/WS01/CL1166/110201.html>).





Photo 7-3 The Stall of Taipinglaonong at a Spring Festival Fair, Beijing Kerry Centre

Kofi commented that the dietary needs of vegetarians should be met because they were human rights, but vegetarians in China have always been unwilling to fight for their rights:

In China, vegetarians are generally discriminated against. Vegetarian food is unavailable in many restaurants because there is no such concept [of vegetarianism]. The other day, I was talking about my experience of booking an in-flight vegetarian meal on Weibo. There are many people who are well-educated, who travel a lot domestically or internationally, and some are even professors and friends of mine, didn't know they could have a vegetarian in-flight meal as long as they required in advance. Some long-term vegetarians would even bring some bread on board or go hungry without knowing the flight company had the service [of providing vegetarian meal]. Why? Because he has always been discriminated against in China, his dietary needs were never met, so he thinks it's perfectly natural that his needs can't be met. He accepts the status quo as normal. It shocked me greatly that most vegetarians in China are Buddhist, and many Buddhists are so modest that they don't know how to defend their rights or how to claim their rights. The vegetarians have their dietary needs, which are human rights and should be met. But no one has raised the issue, and this is the result: the vegetarians' dietary needs are invisible to the food service industry, so the industry doesn't realise there is a reasonable niche market to be satisfied. It becomes a vicious circle that the environment for being vegetarian is bad, and as a result, many who could have been vegetarian are not, so it's a vicious circle. [...] I've always believed there is a huge problem with vegetarianism in China, which is [not considering] the vegetarians' dietary needs as human rights; of course it has a lot to do with the general neglect of the rights of minority groups in China. But, on the other hand, for example the Muslims, because they have always strongly defended their dietary needs, their needs would be satisfied, in every [Chinese] university there would be a Halal canteen, and there would be explicit signs for the Muslim in many other places.

Kofi was not the only vegetarian participant in my research who compared the treatment received by (Buddhist) vegetarians with the treatment received by Muslims in China. They proposed that the predicament vegetarians in China faced reflected the discrimination against Buddhism by the wider society, or rather, the authorities. However, I doubt it has anything to do with the religious policy in China. The dietary needs of vegetarians have not been met through policy-making in China perhaps precisely because the authorities did not relate the vegetarian lifestyle to any particular political force, such as Buddhism. The vegetarians in China face a dilemma that their dietary needs may be met if they were acknowledged by the authorities as a political force; on the other hand, if the authorities realised the political connotation of vegetarianism, it is difficult to say if the freedom the vegetarians enjoyed in promoting vegetarianism through events could continue.

Is it possible, then, to successfully promote vegetarianism in China solely through the commercialisation of vegetarianism while steering clear of politics? The chance may be small. The development of the vegetarian movement in the 1990s in the UK suggests that the commercialisation of vegetarianism might undermine the moral foundation of vegetarianism as ideology. In order to attract as many audiences as possible, the vegetarian lifestyle was normalised by emphasising the health aspect over its moral connotation in exchange for wider acceptability (Beardsworth & Keil, 1993; Smart, 2004). The compromise at least led to more vegetarian options in the market. However, vegetarianism in China may not even reach the degree of commercialisation it has in the 'West' because there is no organisation to represent the interests of the whole vegetarian community and to pursue the rights of vegetarians as a social group; however, any large-scale cooperation can only happen between authoritative vegetarian organisations and the food industry.<sup>1</sup>

## 7.4 Conclusions

Despite of the low level of awareness of vegetarianism among the public and unsatisfactory vegetarian options in every field in the market, vegetarians in modern Beijing manage to maintain a vegetarian lifestyle through great efforts. There were three main approaches for the vegetarians to keep their lifestyle: 1) to be independent, 2) to actively participate in food preparation in the household and 3) to be flexible. To summarise, they must strive for greater control over their food choices and be ready to make compromises if the circumstances require it.

The vegetarians and non-vegetarians in modern Beijing shared many similarities in terms of food and eating, which gives hope for a higher level of tolerance of vegetarianism in society. They shared the same meal pattern and meal format and used the same channels for grocery shopping, and the actual diet of vegetarians and non-vegetarians in everyday life was more of a continuum than drastic contrasts.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the Vegetarian Society Approved vegetarian and vegan trademarks are generally adopted by the food industry and widely acknowledged by consumers.



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Lacking vegetarian options was the primary difficulty of maintaining a vegetarian lifestyle in Beijing, as well as in other parts of the world. Similar to the obesity issue as a social problem because it has less to do with self-control than with living in a social environment that is unfriendly to healthy eating ('Obesity', 2018), the vegetarian-unfriendly environment in Beijing means that it is difficult to ensure the production and reproduction of vegetarians' habitus because, as the embodiment of self-identity, habitus is predominantly shaped by one's social environment (Bourdieu, 1984). Vegetarians have attempted to change the food environment in Beijing in the form of commercial activities, but it is unfair and unrealistic to presume it is the sole responsibility of individual vegetarians to guarantee vegetarian options on their table. Any real change in the society requires the cooperation of authoritative vegetarian organisations, the market and policy-makers. While the first of these is absent in China, luckily, some have recognised the niche market of vegetarians, and the policy is in favour of less consumption of meat in general. However, the vegetarians in Beijing face a dilemma that, while the situation of not having enough reliable vegetarian options may improve if the authorities were to recognise their needs, the possibility of having more rights as vegetarians may be undermined if the authority realises the political connotations of vegetarianism.

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## Chapter 8 Conclusions and Discussion

### 8.1 Research Questions and Main Findings of the Study

#### 8.1.1 Body and Identity through the Everyday Practice of Vegetarians

This thesis aimed to explore how self-defined vegetarians in modern Beijing construct their identity through everyday experience, namely, how they think and do vegetarianism. It is inspired by the contemporary theory of the body in sociology, which breaks the dichotomy of spirit and flesh and puts the body at the centre of the identification process (Turner, 2008). The body is not a tool or a medium through which the self is manifested; rather, the self exists because of the body. As a result, the identity of any individual cannot exist without a body. The process of identification is performed through embodiment. Thus, the vegetarian identity is constructed through the embodiment of vegetarian ideas and practice.

The vegetarian body is different from the non-vegetarian one. By definition, they should consume different food, even though from a virtual instead of normative perspective, the boundary between a vegetarian's diet and the diet of a non-vegetarian was often not clear-cut. It seems that vegetarians and non-vegetarians have different 'techniques of the body' which are defined by Moss as 'the ways in which from society to society men know how to use their bodies' (Moss, 1973, p. 70). Vegetarians in modern Beijing have argued that, compared to a non-vegetarian body, the vegetarian body is socially desirable in the sense that it is physically and mentally healthy and attractive. Vegetarians have claimed that a vegetarian body should be slim, youthful-looking, free of illness, calm and peaceful. Some vegetarians even presented bodies that were physically unaccepting of meat.

Although vegetarians have argued that the image of a vegetarian body as summarised above is what a natural body should be, by publicly displaying it, they promoted a certain body image that attracted other vegetarians to copy. Indeed, many features exhibited by vegetarians in Beijing could be explained by the concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). Members of the vegetarian community produce and reproduce the vegetarian identity

within the existing milieu, which is the community itself. Vegetarians' narratives were exchanged through social media, allowing the geographically dispersed vegetarian community to develop a discursive mantra that could serve to discipline novices of the community. The expression of motivations to become and remain vegetarian in my research were highly similar not only to each other but also to extant studies of vegetarians in 'Western' society, which is a clear example of how being vegetarian can be a learnt experience.

Goffman's (1956) theory of performance suggests that the image of an individual only exists at the time of interaction with others. He inspired scholars such as Jenkins to treat the process of identification as constant interactions 'between individuals, between collectivities, and between individuals and collectivities, of relationships of similarity and difference' (Jenkins, 2008, p. 18). The identification of vegetarians in modern Beijing exists in the relationship between vegetarians themselves and between vegetarians and non-vegetarians. The communication between vegetarians in Beijing and nationwide relies heavily on the Internet, which has helped form a vegetarian community without obvious regional characteristics. Thus features found in the vegetarian participants of my research who were based in Beijing may also be found in vegetarians not based in Beijing, which further proves my argument that being vegetarian can be learnt. Vegetarianism-related organisations were important in forming the vegetarian community by providing an online platform and organising offline events. However, these organisations tended to be informal and casually constructed, which led to various problems, one of which was the inability to provide a widely recognisable definition of vegetarianism.

The interactions between vegetarians and non-vegetarians could be further categorised into the interactions between vegetarians and their close social relations and between vegetarians and the generally non-vegetarian society. The vegetarians in Beijing developed different strategies to maintain their vegetarian identity, including taking more control of their own diet, using rhetoric to avoid direct confrontation and making certain degrees of compromise. In the last scenario, they might choose to consume food they did not approve of, but the breach of a strictly defined vegetarian diet did not undermine their vegetarian

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identity, as they could always justify their action. This suggests that a consistent narrative is essential to the integrity of the self.

The interactions between vegetarians and their close, non-vegetarian social relations is a classic example of performance; they manifested the degree of autonomy of vegetarians in terms of how they would like to present themselves. However, Goffman failed to link 'the body management of individuals within the bounded sphere of the interaction order to wider norms of body idiom or to social order in general' (Shilling, 2012, p. 89). The vegetarians chose to present themselves as health-concerned or weight-conscious to meet certain social expectations, which clearly indicates their power of social expectations. If they truly believed what motivated them to be vegetarian by internalising the ethical, health and ecological arguments of vegetarianism, then their experience demonstrated the operation of knowledge (scientific knowledge in particular) through self-discipline (Foucault, 1977).

Contemporary governmentality in 'Western' societies has increasingly relied on self-governmentality in the form of encouraging people to take responsibility for their own body. The body is increasingly seen as a project, and it is the duty of a 'good citizen' to make the best decisions for it (Peterson, 2007). However, this does not mean that the body is 100% subject to the will of the individual.

In conditions of high modernity, the body is actually far less 'docile' than ever before in relation to the self, since the two become intimately coordinated within the reflexive project of self-identity. The body itself - as mobilised in praxis - becomes more immediately relevant to the identity the individual promotes. (Giddens, 1991, p. 218)

In the case of the vegetarian body, although the image of the vegetarian body as socially desirable is presented for all to see, in reality, the perfect body is hardly achievable. The human body is not immune to biological defects such as obesity, wrinkles or acne. In that case, the body is seen as a betrayal of the 'true' self, and the modification of the vegetarian body is therefore considered action to restore the 'authentic' self-identity.

### 8.1.2 A New Type of Vegetarianism, or Simply Vegetarianism?

Compared to extant studies of vegetarians in ‘Western’ societies, it is noticeable in my study that the religious factor and in particular Buddhism have a prominent role in constructing a vegetarian identity in modern Beijing. Buddhist principles were important to some vegetarians and non-vegetarians when defining the range of a vegetarian diet and determining the food choices in many vegetarian restaurants, which in turn shaped the perception of vegetarianism for many members of the public. The religious influence was one of the most important motivations for vegetarians in Beijing to become and remain vegetarian. The religious influence did not appear in isolation but was often combined with ethical arguments from the ‘Western’ tradition of vegetarianism. Buddhism’s teaching of mercifulness was linked to the promotion of animal welfare. Furthermore, vegetarians in Beijing often adopted different motivations to support their lifestyle choice. Therefore, a vegetarian who was heavily influenced by Buddhist teachings might also firmly believe in the health benefits of a vegetarian diet. It is impossible to distinguish a pure Buddhist vegetarian community from a ‘new’ vegetarian community that adopted the lifestyle solely for secular reasons.

Does this indicate that there is now a new type of vegetarianism in China that combines the elements of both conventional Buddhist vegetarianism and the ‘Western’ tradition of vegetarianism? The reality may be too complicated to be addressed in this way. By exploring the expressions of vegetarians in modern Beijing, it is clear that the ‘Western’ tradition of vegetarianism and the Buddhist vegetarianism draw from each other in their interaction. By incorporating terminologies that are already established in public discourse, the imported arguments of vegetarianism are localised and normalised, making them easier for the public to understand. On the other hand, by incorporating the scientific and rational aspects of ‘Western’ vegetarianism, Buddhism increased its validity and rationality in a mostly secular society and can attract a new generation of Chinese vegetarians who grew up under the influence of scientific discourse. Adopting scientific discourse is not unique to Buddhism in China; other conventional areas, such as the practice of *yangsheng* and traditional Chinese medicine, have also used scientific discourse to validate themselves.

For instance, for her discovery of artemisinin, the 2015 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine winner Yoyo Tu was used to validate traditional Chinese medicine by the official media in China (Xia, 2019), even though the adoption of scientific discourse precisely shows the power of modern medicine within scientific discourse rather than the traditional Chinese medicine, whose narrative is deliberately ignored.

Therefore, it seems that, instead of a new breed of vegetarianism, there is simply the vegetarianism that is always evolving to better adapt to the local context. It highlights the communication between different vegetarian traditions and their ability to change and adapt.

### **8.1.3 Vegetarianism and Gender in a Chinese Context**

Due to the small sample size of my study, my research does not reflect the almost universal tendency shown in previous studies of vegetarians in ‘Western’ societies that there are always more female vegetarians than male ones if the sample is representative enough; yet however, the theme of vegetarianism as a gendered issue was evident throughout my study.

In accordance with the extant literature on the symbolic relationship between meat eating and masculinity (Fiddes, 1991; Adams, 2010), the vegetarians and non-vegetarians in Beijing also linked meat eating to characteristics of masculinity, such as strength and energy. They considered the vegetarian body less masculine than the non-vegetarian body, which is consistent with previous studies on the perception of vegetarians among vegetarians and non-vegetarians alike (Ruby & Heine, 2011; Rozin *et al.*, 2012). However, the macho type of masculinity was not the only desirable trait for a male in a Chinese context. Because of the influence of Buddhism and the intellectual tradition, a calm and graceful body can be as desirable as a strong and energetic body. The rather proud presentation of a vegetarian male body in this way in modern Beijing challenges the dominant ideal body image in the ‘West’. Extant research suggests that the dispersion of ‘Western’ ideas brought related social issues to cultures and societies where the issues might not have been observed before (Peterson, 2007; Bordo, 2013), yet the example of the

image of a socially desirable vegetarian male body not conforming to the traditional ‘Western’ standard of masculinity, as shown in my study, gives hope to more diverse standards of ideal body images in the era of globalisation.

Several vegetarian and non-vegetarian participants proposed weight management as a major reason for many females to reduce meat consumption or adopt a vegetarian diet. This stereotype conforms with previous findings in the ‘West’ that females tend to be more body-conscious than males because of the rather monotonous ideal body image of females as slim (Counihan, 1998b; Furnham *et al.*, 2002). However, it is unfair to let the ‘Western’ standard of beauty take all the blame, since the appreciation of a thin female body in a morbid way has been the mainstream among intellectuals since the Ming Dynasty, which is clearly reflected in the traditional Chinese paintings of beautiful ladies (仕女画). Neither of the two images of ideal female body is better than the other, since they are both the result of females as objects under the male gaze.

A rather unexpected finding under the theme of vegetarianism and gender in the Chinese context concerned male participation in food preparation in the household. There was no significant difference between vegetarians and non-vegetarians in my study in terms of the gendered division of labour in food preparation in the household, and in both groups, males and females performed around half the work concerning food preparation. It seems that feeding the household is no longer reserved for women in modern Beijing. This is in line with the trend found in ‘Western’ countries of increasing male participation in performing unpaid housework (Bianchi *et al.*, 2000; Hook, 2006), which is related to an increase in women’s employment and a decrease of household size (Flagg *et al.*, 2013). It is unknown, though, if the somewhat equal distribution of food preparation found in my study is due to the small sample size or whether it is a single case in a country with gender inequality; recent research has suggested that Chinese women still undertake the majority of unpaid housework (Yu, 2014).

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#### 8.1.4 The Politicised Diet

The modern vegetarian movement in the ‘West’ is highly political, which is manifested in its goals of promoting animal welfare and the welfare of the poor in its early stages to reducing the human impact on global warming in the present. It is arguable that the vegetarian diet is one of many politicised diets, and it constitutes part of the vegetarian’s political identity (Chuck, 2016). Some vegetarians in modern Beijing realised the political connotation of vegetarianism, although their degree of involvement in the public domain was not as high as their ‘Western’ peers. The public’s awareness of their responsibility to the wider society as citizens represented by many vegetarians is still quite impressive. They were ready to participate in public affairs by promoting animal welfare, environmental protection and their own rights as vegetarians. This is the result of decades of effort of developing the civil society in China (Ming, 2011).

However, China is not yet a liberal democracy, which poses many obstacles for anyone who wishes to promote a political objective. To begin, even though there have been many vegetarianism-related organisations, and they have played an important role in the construction of a vegetarian community, none of them is large enough or influential enough to represent the interests of the vegetarian community in China and negotiate with the authorities to pursue for the rights of vegetarians. The commercialisation of vegetarianism may to some degree fulfil the dietary needs of vegetarians, but it can never further promote their political objectives on their behalf. While gaining support from the authorities is essential for the development of NGOs in an authoritarian society (Tai, 2015), it can be risky if the authorities recognise the political connotations of a group. For vegetarians in China, their dietary needs may be met more easily if they are recognized by the authorities as a political force, but they may also risk losing a degree of freedom to promote other aspects of vegetarianism.

There is still hope, however, since more members of the public have started to reflect on the relationship between an individual and society as a whole. Increasing individualism in China has not only led to more diverse lifestyle choices but has also encouraged people to



feel more responsible for their own actions. This welcoming trend can be perfectly summarised by the words of one vegetarian:

In my opinion – of course my understanding may be partial – I really admire the [non-religious] vegetarians, whether they do it for health or animal protection, I admire them because they have a public spirit. They believe everyone has a responsibility and obligation to the society, and they hold onto the belief dearly, I really admire that. I think the Chinese should raise the awareness to protect our... from a macro perspective, the Planet Earth, the environment, but actually our country and society. If we only care about the trivial thing of what to eat, the businessmen only care about profit, and the people who grow [plants] and keep [animals] only care about their own interests, then the society won't change as a whole. We as individuals must start to change from ourselves if we want to have any chance of changing the reality. (Dona)

## 8.2 Implications of the Findings and Recommendations for Future Study

There are significant social, political and commercial implications from the findings of my research, which in turn can lead to future study.

To start, this study opens up new perspectives on the study of vegetarianism. It is only the first step into the fascinating field of study of the Chinese vegetarian community. Because of the unique historical background in China, the vegetarian community in Beijing as it is today has only formed quite recently. Many vegetarians are young, single and the first generation of vegetarians in their family. As a result, I suggest there should be follow-up studies in the future on how vegetarians choose their partners and raise their offspring. This will contribute to understanding the production and reproduction of vegetarians in China.

Moving beyond the study of vegetarianism in China, this thesis extends our view on the understanding of the global vegetarian movement. It verifies Urry's statement that

...globalisation should not be viewed in this way, as one larger region replacing the smaller *region* of each society. Rather globalisation involves replacing the metaphor of society as region with the metaphor of the global conceived of as *network* and as *fluid*. (Urry, 2000, p.33)

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A global view on the contemporary vegetarian movement can realise its ability to have dialogue with different cultural traditions and make adjustments to better adapt to the local context.

In addition, current research about different vegetarian traditions tends to focus on making comparisons and finding differences (Ruby *et al.*, 2013). However, more studies should focus on the communication and mutual influence between different vegetarian traditions.

The study is also an attempt to explore individual choice in an authoritative society. It is hard to predict the future of vegetarianism in Beijing, let alone China. However, based on the development of the vegetarian community in ‘Western’ societies, there may still be room for the vegetarian population in China to increase, but the percentage of the population in the whole society is likely to reach a plateau at some point. It is likely that vegetarianism may never achieve the high degree of popularity that many vegetarians hope. Being vegetarian is only one of many lifestyle choices the modern world can offer. The development of the vegetarian community in China shows the viability of pursuing an alternative lifestyle in a society that highly values social conformity. It is already a popular research topic in studies of authoritative society, but there is always room for future study due to the changing social scenario, such as the tightening censorship and growing nationalism in China.

The findings of this study may find application in the political sphere. There has already been discussion of how to incorporate the promotion of vegetarianism in policy-making in a global context (Wellesley *et al.*, 2015). For policy-makers in China, the suggestion is worth considering because reducing meat consumption in general is part of the agenda of the current regime of China. The Certification and Accreditation Administration of the People’s Republic of China may consider promoting collaboration with the commercial sector and NGOs, such as developing a widely recognisable verification and registration process for vegetarian products. This is feasible based on the examples of Halal or organic certification in China. However, choosing which organisations can have the qualification for vegetarian certification can impact the future development of vegetarianism in China.

Considering the historical background of its development there, the Buddhist Association of China may be a candidate because it is an established national organisation and fits the public's expectation of linking vegetarianism to Buddhism in China. However, I would argue that this is a lazy way of promoting vegetarianism not only because Buddhist vegetarianism is only part of the vegetarian discourse in modern China, but also because the religious connotation may hinder the development of a vegetarian movement as a secular, political movement.

The Chinese government can also make changes in legislation to encourage more efficient and environmentally friendly ways of food production. Taxing can be used to regulate the price of animal- or plant-based food and therefore to encourage or discourage the consumption of certain foods. More public education on how food production can impact climate change is urgently needed.

The most significant application of my research may be in the commercial sector. The narratives of vegetarians in Beijing show a genuine need for more vegetarian choices that are not only confined in the catering market. Current commercial attempts to provide vegetarian choices are far from enough to meet the demand; therefore, the potential reward is significant in this niche market. However, I would suggest that commercial organisations should not treat vegetarians as the only target consumers when promoting vegetarian choices. My research shows that there is no cut-clean boundary between the diet of vegetarians and non-vegetarians in everyday life. Emphasising features of vegetarian choices that can attract both vegetarians and non-vegetarians, such as the product being healthy or ethical, not only helps popularise the idea of vegetarianism in the public, but also greatly expands the target customer. This business model is likely to be profitable, as is proven by the growing green economy in the 'West', where consumers increasingly seek 'feel-good' or 'guilt-free' products as well as products that are cheap or of high quality.

### **8.3 Limitations of the Study**

There are several deficiencies of my studies that need to be addressed. First, the limited

sample size and the adoption of snowball sampling means that what was discussed in the thesis is only a fraction of the vegetarian population in Beijing. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that the results of this study are representative of the vegetarian population in Beijing, let alone China. Although I suspect that the features I found among the vegetarian participants of my research may be detected in larger samples, this can only be proven by future studies. It is beyond the ability of any individual to conduct such a large-scale study. I can only hope that, in the future, some institute may take on the responsibility to conduct a quantitative study of the vegetarian population in the whole of China.

Second, I failed to incorporate enough valid focus groups in my research. Due to the highly dispersed nature of the vegetarian community, it was extremely difficult to coordinate meetings with multiple individuals. As a result, I was unable to observe how the group dynamic might impact the individual's expression of ideas, especially when they hold different opinions from other members of the group. For future studies, it is better to first build rapport with local vegetarianism-related organisations and ask them to recruit focus group members on the researcher's behalf because such organisations can be gatekeepers to the vegetarian community who not only hold more resources but are also more trusted than an outsider researcher.

Third, a problem arose when I collected information regarding the menus of participants of my research, and it was related to the characteristics of Chinese cuisine. Chinese cuisine loves to assemble many ingredients in one dish in order to achieve an imagined balance in terms of nutrition or flavour. For example, a range of meat and vegetables are often cooked together because it is believed to be the best way to draw the perfect flavour from both sides. The side effect of this cooking discipline is that it often makes it difficult for the consumer<sup>1</sup> to recall what the ingredients were. Several participants of my research could not tell whether the food they had was non-vegetarian or vegetarian even though it had been less than 24 hours since they ate it. In addition, different regulations of the food market from the EU means it is legal to sell food in China without giving a full list of

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<sup>1</sup> Consumer here refers to who only consumed but did not prepare the dish.

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ingredients, which caused confusion for some vegetarians and made it harder to analyse the menus of the participants if they included such food items. It is impossible to fully resolve this problem in future studies, but asking participants to write a food diary and take pictures of what they eat instead of relying entirely on their memory can improve the precision of the data.

## Appendix A: Information sheet for one-on-one interviews



College of Social  
Sciences

### Plain Language Statement for Interviews

**Project: Vegetarianism in Contemporary Beijing**

**Researcher: Yahong Wang**

*I would like to invite you to participate in this original research project. You should only participate if you want to. Choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.*

#### What is the purpose of the study?

This study is about the everyday experiences of vegetarians and vegans in contemporary Beijing, China. I am interested in the origins and development of unconventional (i.e. non-Buddhist) vegetarianism at the individual level in modern Beijing and I am curious about what this movement might reveal about how social, economic or scientific change is perceived and responded to within Chinese society or indeed any change the movement itself might lead to.

#### Why have I been chosen?

I am looking for current vegetarians, vegans and non-vegetarians whose primary place of residence is Beijing. While my main focus is on vegetarians and vegans, it is important to also include non-vegetarians as they can provide a comparison. I am also interested in interviewing the organisers of vegetarian/vegan events and the owners of vegetarian restaurants and cafés.

#### Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide to join the study. I will describe the study and go through this information sheet. If you agree to take part, I will then ask you to sign a consent form. If you feel uneasy about signing a form, I will ask you for your verbal consent. You are free to

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refuse to answer any question and you may terminate the interview at any time without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be expected to have an interview with me, which will last about one hour. I would also like to record your interview so that I have an accurate account of what you said. However, if you do not wish to be recorded, your wishes will be respected. You may participate in the interview even if you do not wish it to be recorded.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes. I will follow ethical and legal practice and all information about you will be handled in confidence. Your name will be changed when writing my research results in order to protect your identity.

**Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.**

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of my research will be presented in the form of a PhD thesis and may also appear in published academic work and presentation at academic conferences both while I am working on my PhD and after I have completed it.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is self-funded and monitored by the University of Glasgow, Scotland, UK.

Who has reviewed the study?

The study has been reviewed by my supervisors and the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee in the University of Glasgow.

Contact for Further Information

Please contact Yahong by email at, by phone at +44(0)7565679215, or by post at Glasgow University Media Unit, Adam Smith Building, Glasgow, UK, G12 8RT.

My supervisors are: Dr. Nicole Bourque (Nicole.bourque@glasgow.ac.uk) and Prof. Gregory Philo (Gregory.Philos@glasgow.ac.uk) who are both at the University of Glasgow.

**If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project, you can contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer Dr Muir Houston, email: [Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk)**

## Appendix B: Information sheet for focus groups



University  
of Glasgow

College of Social  
Sciences

### Plain Language Statement for Focus Groups

**Project: Vegetarianism in Contemporary Beijing**

**Researcher: Yahong Wang**

*I would like to invite you to participate in this original research project. You should only participate if you want to. Choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.*

#### What is the purpose of the study?

This study is about the everyday experiences of vegetarians and vegans in contemporary Beijing, China. I am interested in the origins and development of unconventional (i.e. non-Buddhist) vegetarianism at the individual level in modern Beijing and I am curious about what this movement might reveal about how social, economic or scientific change is perceived and responded to within Chinese society or indeed any change the movement itself might lead to.

#### Why have I been chosen?

I am looking for current vegetarians, vegans and non-vegetarians whose primary place of residence is Beijing. While my main focus is on vegetarians and vegans, it is important to also include non-vegetarians as they can provide a comparison. I am also interested in interviewing the organisers of vegetarian/vegan events and the owners of vegetarian restaurants and cafés.

#### Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide to join the study. I will describe the study and go through this information sheet. If you agree to take part, I will then ask you to sign a consent form. If you feel uneasy about signing a form, I will ask you for your verbal consent. You are free to



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refuse to answer any question and you may terminate the interview at any time without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be in a focus group with about 4 other people. The discussion will last between one to two hours. I will facilitate the discussion by asking questions, but the emphasis will be on what the members of the group choose to discuss. I would like to record the group discussion so that I have an accurate account of what you said. However, if you do not wish to be recorded, your wish will be respected.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Yes. I will follow ethical and legal practice and all information about you will be handled in confidence. Your name will be changed when writing my research results in order to protect your identity.

**Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.**

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of my research will be presented in the form of a PhD thesis and may also appear in published academic work and presentation at academic conferences both while I am working on my PhD and after I have completed it.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is self-funded and monitored by the University of Glasgow, Scotland, UK.

Who has reviewed the study?

The study has been reviewed by my supervisors and the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee in the University of Glasgow.

Contact for Further Information

Please contact Yahong by email, by phone at +44(0)7565679215, or by post at Glasgow University Media Unit, Adam Smith Building, Glasgow, UK, G12 8RT.

My supervisors are: Dr. Nicole Bourque (Nicole.bourque@glasgow.ac.uk) and Prof. Gregory Philo (Gregory.Philos@glasgow.ac.uk) who are both at the University of Glasgow.

**If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project, you can contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer Dr Muir Houston, email: [Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk)**

## Appendix C: Consent form for one-on-one interviews



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### Consent Form for Interviews

**Title of Project:** *Vegetarianism in Contemporary Beijing: Identification as Individual Resistance*

**Name of Researcher:** Yahong Wang

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I understand that the interview will be audio-taped under my permission.
4. I acknowledge that I will be referred to by pseudonym in any publications arising from the research.
5. I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Person giving consent  
(if different from participant, e.g. Parent, Carer)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## Appendix D: Consent form for focus groups



University  
of Glasgow

College of Social  
Sciences

### Consent Form for Focus Groups

**Title of Project:** *Vegetarianism in Contemporary Beijing: Identification as Individual Resistance*

**Name of Researcher:** Yahong Wang

6. I confirm that I have read and understand the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
7. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
8. I understand that the focus group will be audio-taped under my permission.
9. I acknowledge that I will be referred to by pseudonym in any publications arising from the research.
10. I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Person giving consent  
(if different from participant, e.g. Parent, Carer)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

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