China’s Changing Diet: Meat and Sustainability
Within the Context of Culture
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Abstract
Rising incomes, urbanization, and changing palettes are all factors that have led to increased meat consumption in China. Historically, pork was the most commonly consumed meat in China but recently there has been a shift toward eating more beef and poultry. This change in preference poses a problem for sustainability as beef cultivation is the most energy and land intensive. There are also alternatives to eating meat; plant-based “meats” and vegetarian diets have long been an option due to Buddhism’s influence since the Han dynasty. Campaigns to reduce overconsumption of meat and outsourcing agriculture are some methods that China has implemented to counter the rising demand.

历史...............History
Historically, meat has been on the periphery of the Chinese diet. A typical meal consists of a main starch with sides of vegetables and meat.

Meat has been closely associated with socioeconomic status. While meat consumption used to be reserved for special social or ceremonial events it now can be enjoyed daily by most everyone regardless of class.

Pork has been a popular meat in China since the domestication of pigs ~6,000 years ago. In 2006, there was an outbreak of “blue ear pig disease” that prompted reforms in food safety and brought attention to practices concerning industrialized meat.

改变的原因..........Reasons for Increase
China has experienced rapid economic growth over the past three decades. This rise in income allows individuals to buy and eat more meat products. In China, meat consumption is estimated to increase 76% by 2050.

China has also become increasingly urban. In 2010, about half of China’s population lived in urban areas and this number is steadily increasing. Consumption rates of pork, beef, and poultry are all greater in urban settings than rural settings.

People living in urban areas generally have higher incomes, greater access to a wider range of food products, and are able to eat out at restaurants more often. These factors contribute to a greater consumption of animal products.

食物的延续..........Sustainability
Animal agriculture has been linked to a variety of environmental problems such as deforestation, erosion, water and air pollution, loss of biodiversity, and climate change.

Animal production is a significant source of greenhouse gas, as it contributes 14.5% of all human-related emissions globally. The global demand for meat is estimated to double by 2050, which would require an increase in global agricultural emissions of 80%.

China’s rising demand for meat would require more intensive and industrialized farming practices in China, as well as the import of additional meat and animal feed from surrounding countries.

未来.............Future Considerations
China is aware of the environmental repercussions of rising demands for meat and has taken steps to reduce its impact.

The Chinese Nutrition Society released new dietary guidelines in May 2016 along with an ad campaign backed by celebrities which recommended a 50% reduction in meat consumption.

In 2017, China signed a $300 million deal to import lab-grown meat from Israel. (See below)

肉食的选择 ..........Meat Alternatives
Meat alternatives have been present in China for centuries. Tofu was invented during the Han Dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD) and fermented soy bean is commonly made into sauce and milk products.

Buddhism was partly responsible for the popularity of meat alternatives as large monasteries with restaurants would entertain meat-eating guests and recreate meat-centric dishes with a vegetarian spin.

Many people in China are health conscious and want to prolong their life. Overconsumption of meat has always been regarded as unhealthy and there are a growing number of people who adhere to a vegetarian diet. While a strictly vegetarian or vegan diet is rare, intermittent vegetarianism is quite common.

Reference:
Retrieved from https://www.thehealthfocus.net/files/consumption-trends-in-china

FINDINGS: MOTIVATIONS
FIG. 12 WHY PEOPLE ARE WILLING TO EAT LESS BEEF AND/OR LAMB

Individual’s motivations for why they were willing to eat less beef and/or lamb.
Data gathered from a 700-person survey across 11 cities in China.