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The American people are paying more and more attention to healthy food for themselves, their children and their pets. In the midst of U.S. citizens' growing concern of going green by purchasing environmentally friendly products, eating organic foods, saving endangered species, there have been few agricultural or environmental issues that have shocked the American conscience as much as the 2007 pet food crisis. The crisis, caused by the contamination of mainly pet food with ingredients imported from China, resulted in the largest recall in U.S. history. One March 16th, 2007 alone when the crisis was first publicized, 60 million cans of wet pet food were recalled (Menu Foods Pet Food Recall, 2007).

In this paper, I strive to cover four areas. First, I will summarize and analyze U.S. media's coverage of the China pet food recall crisis. Second, I will summarize and analyze U.S. media's coverage of the consequences of China pet food crisis toward Chinese products and



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Chinese brand names. Third, I will present our findings from a survey with college students on reaction of American consumer and pet owners toward the pet food recall. Finally, I will provide suggestions for the Chinese government and manufacturers for more positive image management in the U.S.

RESEARCH METHODS

A multi-method approach was adopted in investigating the U.S. media's coverage on the Chinese pet food recall as well as the reactions of American consumers and pet owners. This multi-method approach incorporates textual analysis and questionnaire survey. First, in a period of 20 days from May 6th to May 26th, 2007, over 2,000 web pages in major U.S. media reports were analyzed. To be particular, we focused the analysis on the digital outlets of major U.S. television and newspaper sources. To be particular, we analyzed the reports from CNN, MSNBC, and FOX (Three TV channels), New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, and USA Today (Four newspapers), as well as the Associated Press. Americans usually obtain news first from television, and then check details with its online version, major newspapers, and specialized websites.

From May 18th to 23rd, 2007, our research team surveyed over 200 college students in a major suburban university, from which, we received 137 valid responses. The survey (see attached) investigated U.S. consumers and pet-owners' knowledge and attitude toward pet ownership and pet food. The data analysis result will be reported in Part IV of this paper.

U.S. MEDIA'S COVERAGE ON THE PET FOOD RECALL

Impetus of problems

In order to fully comprehend the crisis of pet food contamination, one must trace it to its source. On September 27, 2006, Las Vegas-based ChemNutra, Inc. received a shipment of contaminated wheat gluten from Zuzhou Anying Biologic Technology Development Company in China. The tainted wheat gluten was then used in production of pet foods at Canada-based Menu Foods' plants in Kansas and New Jersey in November 2006 (ChemNutra Timeline, 2007). From December 2-6, 2006, Menu Foods distributed a wide variety of wet pet foods containing the contaminated wheat gluten to retail outlets nationwide in the U.S. (Pet Food Maker Sues, 2007). There are unconfirmed reports that Menu Foods was made aware of a possible quality issue with its pet foods as early as December 2006, shortly after the initial distribution of contaminated food (Pet Food Maker Sues, 2007). However, Menu Foods did not receive confirmation of a product contamination until February 20, 2007, when the first pet death with a known link to Menu Foods was reported (FDA Expects, 2007). On March 2, 2007, Menu Foods' test animals began experiencing acute renal failure; an estimated 17% of the company's test animals were recorded as fatalities (FDA Expects, 2007). Four days later, on March 6, 2007, Menu Foods ceased production of foods using the contaminated wheat gluten, and continued

production of pet foods with wheat gluten from a new supplier. Shortly thereafter, the company shipped pet food samples to Cornell State University and New York State Food Laboratory for testing and evaluation (ChemNutra Timeline, 2007). On March 16, 2007, Menu Foods ordered the first voluntary recall of more than 60 million packages of wet pet food (Menu Foods Pet Food Recall, 2007). It looks that wet pet food contamination is much more serious than dry pet food.

Waves of Recall

The March 16, 2007 voluntary recall by Menu Foods included canned and small foil packages of wet cat and dog foods (Menu Foods Issues Recall, 2007). The same day, P&G Pet Care (manufacturers of Iams and Eukanuba products) issued a statement announcing its voluntary compliance with Menu Foods' recall of specified wet pet foods. (P&G Petcare Announces Voluntary Participation, 2007). News of the pet food recall spread quickly and new stories and angles began emerging on a daily basis in the U.S. media. On March 18, consumer information website www.petconnection.com set up an online database for consumers to report illness and death related to the contaminated pet foods. On March 21, Hill's Pet Nutrition issued its pet food recall (Company Recalls Single Product, 2007).

On March 23, the New York State Food Laboratory reported identification of "aminopterin," a toxin found in some rodent poisons, in samples of wet pet foods sent in for testing by Menu Foods (ASPCA Sheds Light on Toxin, 2007). Later that day, Menu Foods closed down its Kansas production plant (ChemNutra Timeline, 2007). On March 27, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ("ASPCA") warned consumers that "aminopterin" was probably not the cause of the kidney symptoms suffered by pets across the country. Such suspicions were confirmed on March 30 when the FDA and Cornell University reported the presence of "melamine," a chemical sometimes found in plastics, fertilizers and pesticides, in contaminated pet foods (Breaking News from FDA, 2007). As a result, the FDA ceased import of wheat gluten from China's Zuzhou Anying Biologic Technology Development Company and ordered inspection of all wheat gluten entering the United States from China (Import Alert #99-29, 2007).

In April 2007, Hill's Pet Nutrition expanded its recall of wet pet food to include dry pet food, and major manufacturers Nestlé PurinaPetCare and Del Monte also announced recalls of specified wet and dry pet foods and pet treats (Del Monte Pet Products Recalls, 2007). Meanwhile, ChemNutra announced a recall of the wheat gluten it had distributed to various pet food manufacturers (ChemNutra Timeline, 2007), and Sunshine Foods joined Menu Foods, Hill's Pet Nutrition, Nestlé PurinaPetCare and Del Monte in the recall of wet foods, dry foods and pet treats. (Sunshine Mills, Inc. Issues Voluntary Recall). On April 9, 2007, "melamine" was identified in other pet food brands not yet participating in the recall, and Menu Foods expanded its own recall to include pet foods manufactured in its Ontario production plant (Menu Foods Recall Information)

The pet food contamination epidemic continues. On April 11, 2007, agricultural product importer and distributor Wilbur-Ellis discovered a bag labeled "melamine" among bags of



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rice protein from China's Binzhou Futian Biology Technology Company (FDA: Tainted pet food, 2007). Shortly thereafter, Natural Balance Pet Foods recalled products containing the melamine-tainted rice protein, and Wilbur-Ellis recalled the contaminated rice protein from several U.S. pet food manufacturers (FDA: Tainted Pet food, 2007). In mid-April, another pet food manufacturer, Royal Canin, announced a recall of specified wet and dry pet foods (Royal Canin Announces, 2007).

On April 19, pet food researchers reported discovery of three additional chemicals, including "cyanuric acid," an organic compound used as a water treatment stabilizer for swimming pools and hot tubs, in the contaminated rice protein from China, as well as in animals that had consumed products containing such rice protein from China (Roebuck, K., 2007). Consequently, on May 2, 2007, Menu Foods, suspecting cross-contamination of melamine-tainted glutes with products that did not contain glutes, expanded its product recall once again to a larger scale. The next day, SmartPak Canine issued a voluntary recall of potentially affected pet foods in its product line (SmartPak Canine Voluntarily Recalls, 2007). In summary, there are a series of chemical contamination issues for imported China-made pet food, which result in nationwide pet food recall from all major U.S. manufacturers, for fear of pet death across the nation.

Conflicting Reports of Pet Death Tolls

There have been conflicting reports about pets' death tolls in the U.S. By the end of March 2007, the Veterinary Information Network recorded 104 deaths linked to the contaminated pet food (104 Deaths Reported, 2007), while the online database hosted by Pet Connection network reported a total of 4,867 pet deaths, a much greater number. Initially, the United States Food & Drug Administration ("FDA") reported fewer than 20 pet deaths related to the recall (Pet Connection). However, an FDA report dated April 27, 2007 stated that more than 17,000 consumer complaints had been received regarding the nationwide pet food recalls, and that those complaints reported that an estimated 3,150 dogs and cats had died as a result of ingesting tainted pet food (FDA Import Alert #99-29, 2007). Still up to today, it is not certain how many pet death is related to the contaminated food from China, however, it is certain that such fear of contaminated pet, poultry, fish and human food from China is growing among American journalists, consumers, lawmakers and government officials.

Legal Actions in the U.S.

Soon after news of the pet food recall was reported, pet owners began filing lawsuits against U.S. manufacturers who import from China. The first reported lawsuits by consumers were filed on March 21, 2007 in Illinois and Tennessee. A federal class action lawsuit was filed by 95 consumers against *Menu Foods* in Madison, Wisconsin on March 23, 2007. Less than a week later, 200 additional pet owners joined as petitioners in the class action suit. According the reports by CNN, the lawsuit included charges of fraud for the intentional addition of melamine and failure to report ingredients properly (Pet owners join class action, 2007).

Tainting the Human Food Supply

On April 24, 2007, the China-made pet food crisis expanded to include livestock animals that are destined for sale as human food. The FDA announced the discovery of melamine in hogs and pigs in three states, and thus initiated investigation into six different human food ingredients imported from China as a precautionary measure (FDA Begins Investigating, 2007). On April 28, California state officials reported an estimated 45 people had consumed pork from hogs that had ingested melamine-tainted livestock feed (FDA Begins Investigating, 2007).

In a joint press release issued April 28, the FDA and U.S. Department of Agriculture (“USDA”) acknowledged that melamine-contaminated meat had indeed entered the human food supply (USDA Newsroom Update 0121.07, 2007) through 38 chicken farms in Indiana. (USDA Newsroom Update, 0134.07, 2007). On May 1, 2007, the FDA announced that millions of chickens fed with contaminated product had been purchased and/or consumed in the United States (Weiss, 2007). However, such contamination is later interpreted as low risk to human health (USDA Newsroom Update 0128.07, 2007). Further, on May 9, melamine was discovered in U.S. hatchery fish food (Fish Meant for Humans, 2007). In May, the FDA began investigating several additional foods that contain China-made “rice protein or wheat gluten” as a preemptive measure. According to reports, these proteins are often used in baked goods and other prepackaged foods (FDA Begins Investigating, 2007). It seems that not only pet health, but also human health is in danger if one consumes directly or indirectly products made in China.

Governmental Action in the United States

The U.S. media’s coverage on the Chinese government has been comparatively balanced in a positive light, not so for the Chinese factories, workers, and regulators though. For example, David Acheson, FDA’s assistant commissioner for food protection, told Washington Post that despite appearances, U.S. investigators in China “have received good cooperation and support” from Chinese authorities”(Weiss, 2007). Walter Batts, Deputy Director of FDA, was one of the team members sent over to China for investigation, said that the suspect facilities had been hastily closed down and cleansed up. He said “We are satisfied that they have shared with us documents that they obtained and anything they found during their investigation” concerning the Chinese authorities cooperation. “Batts, also applauded the rapidity with which the Chinese embassy granted Visas to FDA inspectors” (Washington Post, 2007b)

By April 1, 2007, U.S. congressmen and senators began criticizing the FDA’s handling of the pet food crisis and the lack of federal regulations on pet foods. Members of Congress called for greater regulation and protection of pet food products (FDA’s Response, 2007). On April 5, the U.S. Senate ordered congressional hearings on the pet food recall and the subsequent response by the FDA (Durbin Presses FDA, 2007). Following the hearings beginning on April 12, 2007, the FDA issued an import alert on April 27 calling for detention without inspection of all imported vegetable proteins from China (FDA Import



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Alert #99-29). More precautions continue under such pressure. The U.S. media's coverage on U.S. governmental actions have been up to date and objective. The U.S. governmental agencies (FDA, USDA, the White House, etc.) also utilize their own outlets, such as news releases, TV channels, and websites to speak directly to the American people about this issue in time.

Governmental Action in China

On April 5, the Chinese government denied any connection to the contaminated proteins causing pet deaths across America. However, on April 6, the Chinese government asserted that it would begin an investigation into the wheat gluten exported for use in pet food products (Barboza, 2007). On April 26, the Chinese government acknowledged the export of food products containing melamine and other contaminants, and announced a ban on the use of melamine in food products (Jianchao, 2007). On April 29, reports began leaking about common use of "melamine scrap" to boost the appearance of protein levels in pet and livestock foods (Barboza and Barrionuevo, 2007).

On April 25, 2007, Chinese officials shut down Binzhou Futian Biology Technology and arrested manager Tian Feng on charges of involvement with the purposeful contamination of pet food products. In an interview with CNN at the detention center in Shandong Province, Tian said, "I didn't do anything wrong...I don't know about melamine. I don't even know what this melamine is. I have never heard of anyone using it" (China detains manager, 2007). However, Chinese workers readily acknowledged the addition of melamine as a widespread practice for years. Ji Denghui, general manager of melamine seller Fujian Sanming Dinghui Chemical Company stated to the *New York Times*, "Many companies buy melamine scrap to make animal feed, such as fish feed. I don't know if there's a regulation on it. Probably not. No law or regulation says 'don't do it,' so everyone's doing it. The laws in China are like that, aren't they? If there's no accident, there won't be any regulation" (Barboza and Barrionuevo, 2007). On May 8, reports of intentional adulteration of pet food with "cyanuric acid" in China began to appear (Barboza and Barrionuevo, 2007). U.S. media's coverage on Chinese government actions has been up to date, but the initial denial from China signals that the Chinese government is trying to hide something. A lack of effective and direct channels for the Chinese government to speak to the American people also worsens such distrust.

Analysis of U.S. Media's Coverage

Through the textual analysis of U.S. media's coverage on China-made pet food, we conclude four recurring themes. First, it is more about human health than pet health. A common theme in the media reports of the pet food crisis is the fear of human illness or death as a result of contaminated foods. Since the initial discovery of melamine in feed for hogs, chickens and fish destined for human consumption, both print and broadcast media outlets continuously report on the FDA and USDA's actions regarding the food animals, but have seemed to place a larger focus on the possibility of melamine contamination in pork.

Second, consumers think enough is not being done for notification. While consumers appreciate the availability of comprehensive lists of affected pet foods both online and in print, consumer interviews discussed in media reports suggest that retailers should have made, and should continue to make, a greater effort to advertise affected pet products in stores, perhaps by posting lists or signs near pet products. Many consumers now appear to doubt the quality and safety of goods imported from China, especially food and hygiene products.

Third, trust for Chinese government, manufactures is seriously damaged. The initial denial of responsibility by Chinese government officials and manufacturers create distrust from American people in Chinese products and services. While many honest Chinese workers are coming forward to discuss intentional tampering with food products, the blatant refusal to accept responsibility for any part of the crisis, at least initially, is a cause for Americans' loss of trust in Chinese manufacturers and products.

Finally, U.S. media's intensive and continuous coverage on the actions of American government, Congress and Senate and U.S. manufactures shows the U.S. government is taking swift action to prevent further contamination of pet and human foods. In contrast, reports on the Chinese government's actions to regulate production and prevent future contamination have not been as readily available in American media. This imbalance may create the perception that the Chinese government is less concerned with the health and safety of American pets and people than the U.S. government.

Consequences for Chinese Products

When a majority of the pet food products purchased in America was recalled, there as been much speculation on how the poison was contaminated into the food chain. The American media's concern with Chinese products and brands continue to grow as pet food is only a fraction of products imported from China. In this section of the paper, three aspects of the media's coverage will be analyzed. When researching articles concerning the Chinese pet food recall, we found a lot of articles addressing past incidences of contaminated food and low quality products from China. These past stories will continue to hurt China's reputation as well as American consumers' trust for Chinese products and brands. The pet food recall surfaced many problems with Chinese products, both in the global and Chinese markets. One related "old news" story that stood out to us was the tragic baby formula incident that occurred three years ago. When hundreds of babies fell ill in an eastern Chinese province, a fake milk powder was unveiled. The sever malnutrition of babies consumed such fake milk powder caused many to die. If an American consumer's baby is hurt, this consumer will probably tried to never buy Chinese products again.

In a *Washington Post* article, it is reported that "Last year, farmers raising duck eggs were found to have used a red dye so the yolks would look reddish instead of yellow, fetching a higher price. The dye turned out to be a cancerous causing substance not approved for human consumption." Additionally, "in Shanghai, 300 people were poisoned by a chemical additive in pork." (The Associated Press; Bodeen, Christopher)



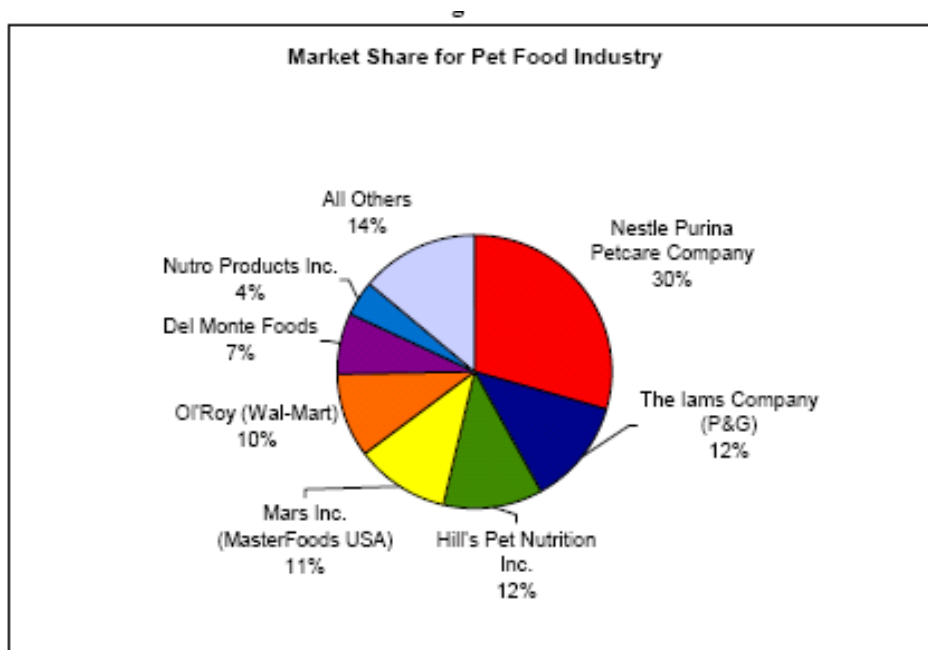
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There is a global epidemic in banning animal and human food products from China. Aside from the U.S., “Excessive antibiotic or pesticide residues have caused bans in Europe and Japan on Chinese shrimp, honey and other products. Hong Kong blocked imports of turbot last year after inspectors found traces of malachite green, a possibly cancer-causing chemical used to treat fungal infections, in some fish” (The AP 2007).

The pet food recall created new obstacles for Chinese exports, igniting fear and caution into its global trading partners.

REACTION OF U.S. PET OWNERS

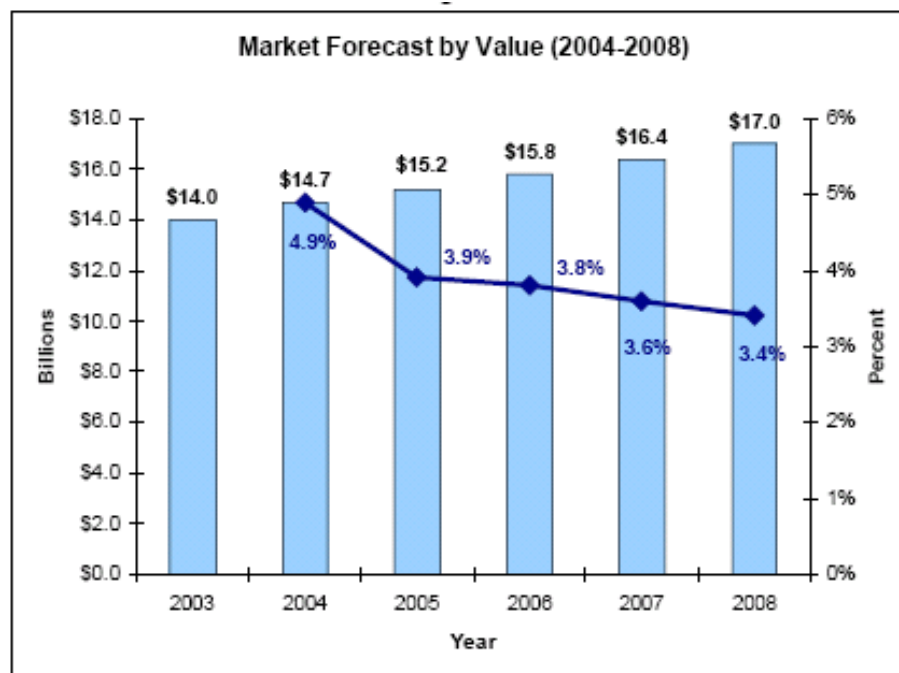
The pet food industry is a \$14.7 billion industry with steady growth in market size, with expectation of reaching \$17 billion by 2008. In the US, seven large companies with a combined 86% of the market share, dominate the industry. The top three companies Nestle Purina Petcare Company, The Iams Company (Proctor & Gamble) and Hill's Pet Nutrition hold a combined 54% share of the market. All major companies have been affected by the Chinese pet food recall and the whole industry is losing the trust of American consumers. The U.S. market share is shown below in figure 1.



(Source: Snapshots International Ltd., July 2004)

The pet food industry is divided into six segments: dry dog food, dry cat food, moist dog food, moist cat food, cat and dog treats, and other. Dry dog food is the dominant market

segment with a value of 30.4%. The other top two segments are moist cat food (18.9%) and dry cat food (18.7%).



(Source: Snapshots International Ltd., July 2004)

Currently, 62% of US households own a pet according to figures from the National Pet Owners Survey conducted by the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, Inc. A 2002 survey shows over 36% of all US households have one or more dogs while nearly 34% of all Americans have at least one cat. Today the dog population is approximately 60 million, and the cat population is 75 million. It has become increasingly apparent that people need pets as companions, both for mental and physical health reasons. Research done on pets in homes has confirmed that pets speed the recovery of illness, reduce stress and promote family bonding and can provide many of the same support functions that humans do for one another. Pet owners, in general, have lower blood pressure and lower triglyceride and cholesterol levels. Pet owners also have better psychological health (www.deltasociety.org).

Most American pet owners treat their pets as “children,” and “companion,” based on our survey. In the U.S. media report on pet food recall, pet owners are also called as “pet parents.” Among the college students ranging from 18 to 50 years old that we surveyed, 70.1% currently own pets, including dogs, cats, fish and other pets (Table 1.). If we count those who have owned pets in the past (16.7%) and wish to own in the future (5.1%), a total of 92% currently, had or wish in the future to own pets. Pets are an important part of American families and most people consider pets as family members, particularly as children. If their pet children get hurt from China-made pet food, consumers feel angry and



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sad. It is reported that many U.S. Congressmen's pets also ingested the contaminated food, which infuriated key lawmakers such as Speaker Pelosi.

Table 1: Survey result on pet ownership among American college students

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid currently own	96	70.1	70.1	70.1
past 6 months	5	3.6	3.6	73.7
over 6 months	18	13.1	13.1	86.9
Future	7	5.1	5.1	92.0
Never	11	8.0	8.0	100.0
Total	137	100.0	100.0	

It appears that health conscious consumers are also projecting their own health concerns onto their pets. There is growth in the organic and natural segment of the human food industry and similar growth is projected in the pet food sector. Physical health is not the only concern of pet owners these days. Behavioral issues are also bringing pets to the doctor's office. Owners see their pets as members of the family and instead of wanting to get rid of them when behavior issues occur, as owners have done in the past, they want to try and work on their pet's behavior with the assistance of professionals.

In a 2004 study conducted by the American Animal Hospital Association, 98% of the respondents said they would risk their own lives for their pets. Forty-five percent said their pets listen better than their significant others, and 94% think their pets have humanlike personality traits, such as being sensitive, outgoing, inquisitive, or stubborn. These statistics only emphasize the fact that pet owners today do not see their pet as a household fixture, but a member of the family. Through our survey with college students, it is found that 88% agree or strongly agree that pets are good mediums to teach children sense of responsibilities. Pet food recall has made 55% of respondents concern pet food and its ingredients imported from China, while 47% become concerned with the human food quality from China.

Regarding the fact that the American consciousness is framed with terrorism, we asked whether respondents view the pet food contamination as a act from China of terrorism,

aiming at pet and human health. About 17.7% somewhat agree, 10.6% agree and 8% strongly agree, therefore, cumulatively, about 36% respondents think that it could be a terrorist plot from China of attacking pet and human health by using contaminated food (Table 2.)

Table 2: Pet food as terrorism action from China

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	38	33.3	33.6	33.6
	Disagree	20	17.5	17.7	51.3
	Neutral	20	17.5	17.7	69.0
	Agree	12	10.5	10.6	79.6
	Strongly agree	9	7.9	8.0	87.6
	NA	14	12.3	12.4	100.0
	Total	113	99.1	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.9		
Total		114	100.0		

The pet food industry, like most industries today, is experiencing dramatic changes. Spending on pet products has increased over the past decade, as the overall demand for pets has increased. There are now more pets in the US than there are people (377.8 million pets versus 290 million people). The “humanization” of pets is a continuing trend where pets are being treated like members of the family. As consumers are humanizing their pets, there is a growing concern for their pet’s physical health. This has resulted in an increase in the purchase of organic and natural pet food products.

It is crucial that Chinese government and Chinese manufacturers cooperate with U.S. authorities as well as publicize positive actions in the U.S. media. More structured regulations on food quality control, a more transparent policy sharing from the Chinese government and food manufactures, as well as a systematic Chinese products and brands campaign are necessary to revive the reputation of Chinese products and reconstruction of American consumers’ trust toward Chinese brands.



CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

To promote a more positive image of Chinese government and business in the U.S. media's coverage, we have three aspects of suggestions. First, a systematic food quality control laws and regulations need to be initiated and executed in China. Second, a more transparent media coverage in both China and the world is desirable on measures taken in crisis. Third, a systematic image management public relations campaigns for Chinese products/brands need to be developed in the U.S. and other overseas markets to restore damaged images.

It is found from textual analysis and questionnaire survey that most American families own cats and dogs as pets, and pets are mainly treated as essential part of families, in the roles of children and companion. Such humanizing of pets increases American pet owners concern for their pets' health and overall wellness. The pet food recall, which is the largest recall in U.S. history, triggers American pet-owners (or pet parents) consciousness with China-made pet food. Further, the pet food contamination was extended to investigation of the feed for pigs, poultry and fish, which will enter human food supply chain. There is a series of concern and distrust from the part of American consumers for food and products China. The whole American pet food industries become victim of this recall. The totality of trustworthiness of Chinese products is damaged. However, some scholars argue that the American and Chinese economies are so much intertwined that American manufactures rely on their Chinese suppliers and that business people and authorities need to continue cooperate for this and other quality related matters.

The epidemic of recall for pet food, fish, pig and poultry food in the U.S. is only an extension of the deeper food and medical control issues in China, as shown in fake baby milk power case. More systematic quality control laws and regulations need to be developed and executed in China to ensure global food safety for both animals and humans. Recently, it is found that 6,000 toothpaste for sale in the Panama market contains poisonous ingredients. It is estimated that they are imported from China (Voice of America, May 22, 2007).

More transparent media coverage is desirable for Chinese manufacturers' cooperation and Chinese government's supervision. Though some reports are included in concerning FDA being allowed to investigate in China and the arrest of Chinese pet food factory managers, it is far from enough to provide a positive image of Chinese producers and authorities in the U.S. and in the global stage. A more proactive utilization of global media, including U.S. media outlets (television, radio, newspapers) is suggested, We also suggest that Chinese government and manufacturers use more active web presence for instant two way communication with the public.

A more dynamic image management is imperative to be adopted by Chinese government and Chinese companies for long term credibility. Since the pet food recall is one of those quality problems originated in China, the contemporary world's production center, a series of public relations campaigns can be desirable to present a positive image of Chinese

products and Chinese brand names. Until the day when “Made in China” equals high quality, safety and reliability, a lot need to be done to progress toward that stage.

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