THE ETHICS OF COMMERCIAL PET CLONING

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ABSTRACT

With the commercialization of cloning technologies, it is not surprising that the pet cloning business is gaining more traction. Owners generally want to keep their pet companions for as long as possible, but since they are unable to control the demise of their pets, the demand for cloning is on the rise. Cloning pets is becoming popular among people who want to "reclaim" their pets that have passed away. With cloning technology being commercialized, a key question is whether it will bring positive benefits or more ethical problems for society. This paper examines the ethical issues that commercial cloning enterprises face despite some benefits they may bring to society. It will also take a special look at the situation in China since many issues have emerged from there lately.

Keywords: *Commercial cloning technology; Pet cloning; Ethics; China*

1. INTRODUCTION

Huang Yu, a 22-year-old Chinese man, spent more than two years with "Garlic," an English short-haired cat. When Garlic passed away due to illness in 2019. Huang Yu "revived" Garlic with 250,000 Chinese Yuan in order to relieve his sadness (Wee, 2019). After the media publicity about the cloned cat, the pet cloning business caught people's attention once again. As early as 1997, the pet cloning business first appeared in the United States, but due to ethical problems and legal issues, the business did not grow. However, when the cloned cat "Garlic" was revealed, the pet cloning industry in China was revived. By mid-2017, pets like dogs and cats had already reached 87.46 million in China. The number of family units with pets reached 59.12 million, representing 17% of all families in China. The global dog and cat pet population in 2018 showed the number of pets at 471 million pet dogs and 373 million pet cats (Bedford, 2020). These numbers suggest that pets have become a big part of this world. The population of pets has become a big part of China as well, expanding from 97 million in 2010 to 168 million in 2017 and is expected to surpass 175 million in 2018 (CY331, 2019). According to Goumin.com, a Chinese social network for pet owners, China is on track to spend 202 billion yuan ($28.6 billion) on pets this year, 19% more than 2018, despite a slowdown in the retail sector. By 2024, China is expected to have 248 million pet dogs and cats compared to 172 million in the US, underscoring the gargantuan potential it holds for both the pet industry and the cloning business (Bloomberg, 2019). Hence, this study will take a special look at China where recent controversies surrounding cloning have emerged.

1.1 Cloning Technology

The USFDA defines cloning as "*a complex process that lets one exactly copy the genetic, or inherited, traits of an animal (the donor)*". According to the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI), there are three different types of artificial cloning: "*Gene cloning produces copies of genes or segments of DNA. Reproductive cloning produces copies of whole animals. Therapeutic cloning produces embryonic stem cells for experiments aimed at creating tissues to replace injured or diseased tissues…In reproductive cloning, researchers remove a mature* somatic cell*, such as a skin cell, from an animal that they wish to copy. They then transfer the DNA of the donor animal's somatic cell into an egg cell, or oocyte, that has had its own DNA-containing nucleus removed*" (see Figure 1). Scientists call it the process of artificial genetic manipulation of animal reproduction cloning (Williams et al, 2011). The pet cloning business is one where people transfer the cloning technology from the research area into the business area (Camenzind, 2015).