Take meat off the menu？Not China

Climate change has become an existential threat to all human beings. Despite China’s great efforts to actively respond to climate change, many Western media reports still criticize China. For example, they often use the so-called “smog problem” and China’s “heavy” reliance on fossil energy as evidence to support their arguments. The “high” consumption of meat is another excuse commonly used by them to blame China for global climate change and environmental degradation.

In 2021, the *Time* magazine published an article titled “How China could change the world by taking meat off the menu.” The article claims that China’s meat consumption has exerted a “large impact” on the environment, including carbon emissions, water consumption, and the risk of animal-borne disease entering the human population.

The following are some excerpts from the article:

*China came by its love of meat only recently. Today, China consumes 28% of the world's meat, including half of all pork.*

*The largest impact may be not on the economy but on the environment. China has already pledged to see carbon emissions peak by 2030 and make the world's worst polluter carbon-neutral by 2060. As livestock farming produces 20% to 50% of all man-made greenhouse gases, finding alternative protein sources is crucial to meeting these targets. Having China’s animal-agriculture sector could result in a 1 billion metric-ton reduction of CO2 emissions. “You can't do anything on climate change unless you bring China with you,” says a professor of humanities and social sciences at Australia's La Trobe University.*

*Culturally, the Chinese are perhaps between placed to embrace plant-based protein than Americans indoctrinated by a powerful meat lobby and a founding myth built around cowboys and beef ranches. (Even so, many Americans are fast changing their eating habits; alternative milks like soy, oat and almond accounted for less than 1% of the overall US market a decade ago. Now it's 12% and growing.)*

Boasting about their own meat substitutes and accusing China of consuming “too much” meat is hypocritical, selfish and condescending. Many Western countries are far ahead of China in terms of meat consumption per capita. It unreasonable to ignore the per capita data intentionally when talking about the issue. Furthermore, accusing China of consuming “too much” meat is their trick to make China the scapegoat for global climate change.

Actually, China’s meat consumption has increased in recent years not due to Chinese people's preference for meat, but due to China’s decades of efforts to shake off poverty and improve people's living standards. Chinese people are entitled to enjoy the fruits of development, and it is unfair to request Chinese people to lower their relatively low meat consumption so as to avoid being criticized by westerners who are consuming much more meat. More importantly, unlike some Western countries going back on their promises, China always honors its commitment to combating climate change and attaching great importance to the harmony between man and nature.

The *Time* article hypes China’s total meat consumption and intentionally relates it to global climate change. However, it ignores the large population of China and the meat consumption per capita. In other words, it selects some information and overlooks some other key facts. So the viewpoints of the article are not objective. This process of selecting information relates to the concept of “media frame”.

Framing refers to the process of making some elements noted while ignoring others when describing something, so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation or solution. Media frames are media practitioners’ persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation, and involve selection, emphasis, and exclusion of information. Media frames can influence people's understanding of a certain thing, and even their behavior accordingly.

The *Time* magazine uses a media frame to interpret China's meat consumption, and unfairly requests Chinese people to eat less meat to combat climate change. However, this claim is outrageous. First, per capita meat consumption is much higher in developed countries. China still lags behind many Western countries in meat consumption. Second, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations(FAO), cattle are the main contributor to the livestock sector’s emissions. Since Westerners mainly consume beef, it is unreasonable to blame China for global climate change in this respect. Third, in many Western countries, the problem of wasting food is very severe. Dealing with the wasted food also leads to emissions of greenhouse gases. In a word, it makes no sense to ask China to take meat off the menu. Instead, the international community should make concerned efforts to address global climate change.

How does the *Time* magazine frame the article?

Commonly seen media framing devices include: selecting or omitting certain information; using some specific terms; choosing spokespersons.With these framing devices, a news report tends to shape people's understanding of a certain thing. This is exactly what the *Time* magazine does in the article.

First, some information is selected or omitted. The article focuses on the total amount of meat consumed by Chinese people but pays no attention to one important fact: China is a country with a population of 1.4 billion. In terms of meat consumption per capita, China is far behind many Western countries. If the article analyzed the per capita data and made comparisons across countries, it shouldn't have drawn the conclusion that Chinese people should “take meat off the menu.”

Second, some specific terms are used. By using terms like “the world's worst polluter,” the article implies its bias against China. Expressions such as “even so” also indicate the article’s moral judgment—praising Americans for changing their diet to protect the environment,while criticizing Chinese people for their “love of meat.”

Third, spokespersons are chosen. By quoting a professor who shares similar views, the article tries to emphasize the “rationality” of its viewpoints.

Why do some Westerners request China to “take meat off the menu”?

Possible reasons may include: first, political interests. Accusing China of consuming “too much” meat is a commonly used trick by some Western countries to divert public attention from their own problems and evade their due responsibility for global climate change. Second, commercial interests. Some western companies that focus on aritificial meat products may might have got involved. Although the *Time* magazine mainly describes the advantages of artificial meat as “good for Chinese people,” it is fundamentally serving the economic interests of those companies. Third, taking the moral high ground. The West seems to act as the “pioneer” of environmental protection, demanding that China should “take meat off the menu,” as if they were “experts” with the right to tell Chinese people what to do. These reasons show that they are hypocritical, selfish and condescending.

It is selfish and unreasonable for some Westerners to request Chinese people to eat less meat for the sake of containing climate change. In fact, China has already taken great responsibilities and efforts to protect the environment and combat climate change, pursuing harmony between man and nature.

Actually, three years ago, China had already set new goals of dealing with climate change. It aims to peak carbon dioxide emissions by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060. To achieve these goals, the government, enterprises and individuals are all paying their positive roles.

As for the government, first, it incorporates the response to climate change into national economic and social development plans, and breaks down the national carbon emission targets into provincial goals. Second, it makes coordinated efforts to reduce pollution and carbon emissions.By addressing air pollution, water pollution, etc., China strives to tackle the global climate and environment challenges. Third, it improves the governance of mountains, rivers, forests, farmland, lakes, grassland and deserts, and carries out large-scale afforestation to protect the ecosystems and enhance their capacity as carbon sinks, which absorb carbon dioxide. Fourth, it launches the national carbon emissions trading market to coordinate economic development and carbon emissions reduction. The national carbon market is an effective policy tool for China to motivate companies to curb emissions and better allocate carbon-emission resources. Fifth, it strengthens monitoring, early warning, as well as prevention and mitigation of natural disasters. Sixth, it gives full play to the role of scientific research and technological innovation in greenhouse gas reduction and energy saving.

As for enterprises, first, green and low-carbon industries are developed, which are featured by energy conversation, resource recycling, innovation, green products, etc. Second, traditional industries are transformed and upgraded, energy-intensive and high-emission projects are curbed, and outdated production facilities are shut down. Third, the energy structure is optimized by reducing reliance on fossil fuels such as coal and petroleum and increasing the proportion of renewable energy such as hydro power, wind power and solar power.

As for individuals, more and more Chinese people are embracing green and low-carbon lifestyles. We raise our awareness of energy conservation and environmental protection through participating in activities on the National Low Carbon Day and in the National Energy Conservation Week. We also receive eco-civilization education and training courses on responding to climate change. At the same time, we put environmental protection ideas into practice. For example, many city dwellers take public transportation, drive new-energy vehicles, and ride shared bikes when commuting. We choose eco-friendly materials for home decoration, avoid food waste, and save paper, water and energy in our daily life.

With these proactive measures, China, a responsible major country, is moving steadily toward the carbon peaking and carbon neutrality goals, making great contributions to combating global climate change.