

# FOOD, SACRIFICE, AND SAGEHOOD IN EARLY CHINA



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## FOOD, SACRIFICE, AND SAGEHOOD IN EARLY CHINA

In ancient China, the preparation of food and the offering up of food as a religious sacrifice were intimately connected with models of sagehood and ideas of self-cultivation and morality. Drawing on received and newly excavated written sources, Roel Sterckx's book explores how this vibrant culture influenced the ways in which the early Chinese explained the workings of the human senses, and the role of sensory experience in communicating with the spirit world. The book, which begins with a survey of dietary culture from the Zhou to the Han, offers intriguing insights into the ritual preparation of food – some butchers and cooks were highly regarded and would rise to positions of influence as a result of their culinary skills – and the sacrificial ceremony itself. As a major contribution to the study of early China and to the development of philosophical thought, the book will be essential reading for students of the period, and for anyone interested in ritual and religion in the ancient world.

Roel Sterckx is Joseph Needham Professor of Chinese History, Science, and Civilization at the University of Cambridge and Fellow of Clare College. His publications include *Of Tripod and Palate: Food, Politics and Religion in Traditional China* (2005) and *The Animal and the Daemon in Early China* (2002).



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in Early China

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## Introduction

Attitudes toward food, thinking about food, and the offering up of food in sacrifice were formative elements in the conception of models of sagehood in early China. To the ancient Chinese, consuming, exchanging, and offering up food were often seen as acts of self-cultivation that could impart physical, moral, and political benefits on individuals, society, and its rulers. A cursory glance at the hoards of bronze vessels unearthed from Shang and Zhou sites, or the large array of stone and clay artifacts and lacquerware recovered from Warring States and Han tombs, suffices to illustrate that a vibrant culture surrounded the preparation, consumption, and ritual presentation of food. This rich world of food inspired an equally fascinating world of ideas.

This book seeks to shed light on the intricate world of ideas that surrounded sacrificial food culture in early China. It explores how the culture of sacrificial religion, its underlying philosophies, and the ritual practices associated with it helped shape the background against which the early Chinese conceived ideals of sagehood. In addition, this study examines how sacrificial religion influenced the ways in which the early Chinese explained the workings of the human senses and the role of sensory experience in communicating with the spirit world. In essence, I will argue that early Chinese ritual and religious practice was based on the premise that what was spiritual was “sensible,” and this book identifies sacrificial procedure as the core practice through which this becomes evident.

Early Chinese texts are replete with moral debates on food and the offering of sacrifice. One striking aspect of these debates is that discussions on how to nourish the human world were never far removed from concerns with feeding the spirits. Just as food fostered physical and moral well-being among humans, the offering of food and its associated crafts of cooking and butchering were also seen as instrumental in forging communication with the spirit

world. The early Chinese only rarely distinguished the ritual or religious manipulation of food from its secular role in society.

The fact that early Chinese food culture was deeply implicated in ritual, religious, and philosophical paradigms led to the development of numerous conceptual parallels along which ideas about cooking, flavor, sacrifice, and self-cultivation developed in Warring States and Han China. My analysis suggests that the ritual world where “table” and sacrificial altar met was a world marked by contending views on the ways in which the sage ruler should sense the world. Rather than seeking to distinguish secular or profane food culture from the world of ritual sacrifice, and rather than identifying a transcendent spirit realm divorced from the physical concerns of human society, early China’s ritualists and masters of philosophy saw in sacrifice a practice that confronted humans with a fundamental paradox between moral and material values. At the heart of the issue was the question how humans could engage with an ephemeral spirit world or pursue higher forms of self-cultivation through physical means, either through nutrition and other forms of bodily comfort, or through the presentation of ritualized offerings for the spirits. How could ritual participants and adepts generate forms of intangible spirit power internally within the self, or communicate externally with a spirit world that lies beyond normal channels of sensory contact, while being physically anchored in and dependent on a material and physical world that constantly tempts their sensory desires? Or, put differently, how to distance oneself from indulging in the physical delights of commensality and conviviality while acknowledging that both processes are necessary conduits to generate higher forms of authority both in the human world and in one’s contact with higher powers?

Sacrificial religion, and the social and economic environment in which it was embedded, brought these questions into focus because, unlike prayer or liturgy, the consumption and presentation of offerings was essentially a highly material process aimed at achieving the largely immaterial goal of influencing a world of ephemeral spirits. A preoccupation with food, foodways, and sacrificial offering challenges the human agent in two intrinsically opposed ways: On the one hand, it ties the subject to a world of physical appreciation, aesthetic pleasure, and gustatory or sensory delight; yet on the other hand, a banquet or sacrificial feast harbored within itself the potential to cloud or obstruct a genuine or higher form of engagement with a world that transcends our immediate sensory stimuli and physical comforts.

Philosophers, ritualists, and men of authority in Warring States and Han China were acutely aware of this tension and, although no one consciously sought to resolve it, many narratives on food and sacrifice attempted to

reconcile or explain the challenges posed by these sensory opposites. Ritual codes highlighted the various forms in which this tension manifested itself. When should one fast and when should one feast, eat or feed, and should one do so for pleasure or for sustenance? Should one nourish the body or nurture the spirit, engage in covert forms of spirit worship or overt ones? Should one be ostentatious and publicly generous in ceremony and sacrificial display or prudent and modest? Should one invariably expose humans and spirits to the rich amalgam of flavors and fragrances on display in sacrifice or instead shield them from such stimuli? How effective are the material paraphernalia used in sacrifice in securing a response from the spirit world, and at what point does economic expenditure on sacrificial cult become a sign of excess that repels rather than attracts the spirits?

These and similar questions were by no means limited to early China's ritual canon. They occurred across a wide variety of texts that, each in their own language, proposed strategies on how a ruler of virtue, an accomplished gentleman, or the sage was to address them. Furthermore, a tension of a similar kind to the one that faced the ritualist in sacrifice characterized Warring States and Han portrayals of the sage ruler: On the one hand, the bodies and senses of rulers and superiors were to be catered for in luxury and comfort, yet on the other hand, their sagacity and knack for governing were often thought to derive from their ability to dispense with the trappings of the material world. An accomplished ruler in early China could demonstrate his power by externalizing his virtue and piety through banquets, feasts, and sacrificial displays, yet he could also choose to display his advanced comprehension of the world by turning inward and nourishing the self through a regime of self-cultivation. On the one hand, virtue could be grounded in a physical and material basis and mediated through objects and materiality, yet on the other hand, the sage or virtuous ruler was to avoid being overly dependent on the material accouterments that expressed his authority to the outside world.<sup>1</sup> His body and mind were to be maintained in sensory comfort while at the same time he was to be sheltered from overexposure to the immediate physical world that sustained him in order to be able to comprehend the deeper patterns of society and the cosmos at large.

The following pages therefore do not offer a study of nutrition, or gastronomy, or the history and science of food production in China – topics that have

<sup>1</sup> On virtues in terms of their material, or quasi-material, properties in texts from the 4th through 2nd centuries BCE, see Csikszentmihalyi (2004). Csikszentmihalyi shows how the “Wu xing” 五行 texts from Mawangdui and Guodian have moral properties correspond to bodily states, and how ritual therefore can be conceived of as exerting a significant influence on the body itself. Acts of self-cultivation here are anchored in a physical substrate.

already inspired an extensive scholarly literature.<sup>2</sup> It is also not my ambition to offer a comprehensive survey of sacrificial cult in ancient China or to reexamine the social and political significance of the institution of sacrifice itself as it is reflected in early China's textual and archaeological landscape. Several studies have addressed the role of sacrificial cult in the creation of political authority during the period under discussion, when China transformed from a feudal constituency of contending states into the unified empires of Qin and Han (221 BCE–220 CE).<sup>3</sup>

Instead, the following chapters take the culture of food and sacrifice as a point of departure to help us understand Chinese attitudes to human virtue, personal salvation, self-cultivation, and conceptions of moral government. Through exploring dietary culture and sacrificial religion, this study is as much a reflection on ideals of human sagehood in early China as it is an account of religion in practice. Indeed the rich gustatory semantics on display in Warring States and Han texts do not fall short of Carolyn Korsmeyer's elegant assessment of the role of taste in literary narrative:

Eating can signal gross indulgence and moral laxity or lusty participation in life's offerings. Attention to taste may indicate refinement of perception or silly preoccupation with superficial pleasures. Ascetic refusal can betoken lofty moral ideas and fine character, timid withdrawal and aversion to bodily needs, or religious extremism. The preparation and offering of food in gestures of hospitality may be manipulative, reluctant, generous, careless, or dangerous. Narratives may detail how food nourishes, heals, and comforts or how it dupes, poisons and addicts. Food can be an offering to friends and an invitation to conviviality and conversation; or ... food and drink may be those elements that must be withheld from the body to keep the mind in higher tune.<sup>4</sup>

This book begins with a discussion of food as a physical entity, proceeds to cooking and eating as a symbolical craft, and then onto the feeding of the spirit world. It then pauses with the economics surrounding sacrificial culture and concludes with a chapter on the senses of sages. To set the scene, [Chapter 1](#) starts with a survey of Chinese dietary culture and its logistics as reflected

<sup>2</sup> For a bibliographical survey, see Sterckx (2006b), notes 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6; see also Sterckx (2005), 1–8.

<sup>3</sup> For a survey of official cults and the spirit world addressed therein from Western Zhou through Han, see Bilsky (1975) and Loewe (1986), 661–8. The best study of state-sanctioned festivals in the Han remains Bodde (1975). On the suburban sacrifice to Heaven, ritual music, and liturgies associated with state sacrifices, see Bujard (2000) and Kern (1997). Imperial tours of empire and their accompanying sacrificial rituals are discussed in He Pingli (2003), 118–254; Kern (2000a); and Lewis (1999b).

<sup>4</sup> Korsmeyer (1999), 185.



in textual sources from Zhou through Han. It identifies attested food taboos, discusses how diet was associated with human character, and examines the moral politics of food consumption. To do so, it focuses on the role of meat in sociopolitical life, ideas on abstinence from meat and other foodstuffs, and the intricate world of banqueting in early China. The chapter closes with a discussion of the ways in which early Chinese texts portray the Confucius figure in relation to dining and the food sacrifice.

Chapter 2 shows how the language of food and cooking was one of the main vehicles by means of which the early Chinese expressed sociopolitical values and ideas about virtue and human morality. Its title echoes Charles Malamoud's study of the concept of *lokapakti* in Vedic texts, yet any comparison should stop there, since a very distinctive concept of "cooking the world" emerges in early Chinese sources, namely the idea that butchering, cooking, and dining were forms of self-cultivation.<sup>5</sup> The act of cooking itself often served to symbolize the broader ideal of social and cosmic harmony. The chapter starts with an analysis of narratives on butchering and cooking, showing how stewards and cooks emerged as sage-advisers to rulers in literary and historical narratives. Many of these ideas converge in Warring States and Han narratives on Yi Yin 伊尹, the legendary cook-advisor who was alleged to have gained political office by impressing the founding king of Shang with his cooking skills. The chapter concludes with a discussion of exemplary dining codes for rulers and their courts.

From feeding humans, we proceed to feeding the spirits in Chapter 3. Ritual texts show that food offerings were one of the main sensory conduits to the spirit world. The choice of offerings in sacrifice was guided by taxonomies of flavor. Central ingredients in the sacrificial cuisine of the time were the stew and alcoholic ale, and both sparked a great deal of debate. Whereas the tasteless stew was seen as a refined medium to influence the spirits, overindulgence in ale both at and away from the sacrificial altar became a stock image for political depravity and moral decay. The sacrificial procedure itself was a multimedia event that challenged ritual participants to search out their surroundings for spirit presence and forced them to find a moral mean between ostentation and restraint in ceremonial display. Sacrificial ceremony and commensality could offer its participants the comforts of collective commemoration and social togetherness, but it could also prove to be a highly alienating procedure when the search for a spirit response was not reciprocated.

The religious economy on which the performance of sacrifice and the availability of sacrificial offerings and ritual personnel depended is the subject

<sup>5</sup> Malamoud (1996), esp. chapter 2.

of [Chapter 4](#). Sustaining sacrificial cult was a complex process that required careful planning and complex logistics. Sacrificial demands also impinged significantly on the economics of everyday life. Calendars, legal texts, and ritual codices offered detailed guidelines on how to sustain a vibrant culture of sacrificial offering and ritual gift exchange. Most Warring States philosophers shared views on the generation and distribution of resources for the purpose of cult. Several commentators raised concerns about the often conflicting demands posed by sacrificial obligation and the need to sustain the economic welfare of society. Although few sought to articulate the demands of ritual as radically distinct from secular life, the question of how and when to invest material resources for spiritual ends runs as a leitmotiv through narratives on sacrifice in Warring States and Han China.

[Chapter 5](#) returns to the world of flavor, fragrance, and scent and its association with the spirit world, and shows that the sensory world expressed in narratives on cooking and sacrifice was echoed in descriptions of sages as agents possessing extraordinary faculties of sensation. Just as olfaction was a standard medium to communicate with higher powers through ritual or sacrifice, so scent was associated with moral judgment and sagehood. Likewise, just as many of the spirits addressed in sacrifice, or indeed the spiritual energies sought through regimens of self-cultivation and diet, responded to superior forms of sensation, so the sage ruler was advised to secure advanced forms of aural acuity and vision. Whereas ritualists debated the virtues of under- or overexposing the spirit world to sacrificial display, Warring States thinkers explored to what extent rulers and sages were to expose their senses to the stimuli produced by the world that surrounded them. Several sages and cultural heroes were portrayed as possessing extraordinary sense organs. At the same time, several texts insisted that to achieve a superior degree of insight into the workings of society and the cosmos at large, a ruler's senses were to be protected from the distractions generated by sensory desire. This model, according to which political knack and virtue resulted from the inversion of ordinary human sensation, was symbolized in ritual paraphernalia and clothing, and in personnel such as the blind musician who, like the cook-advisor, operated as counsel and confidant to rulers and men in power.

The subjects of food and sacrifice – as ideological or theological concepts, as tropes in literature or myth, or as historical or living practices – are vast, and my own reading of Chinese dietary and sacrificial culture is only one among many other fruitful approaches that could be taken. The initial impetus that prompted me to put this narrative together was twofold. On the one hand, it struck me that, for all its sophistication and detail, much of the

sinological scholarship on Chinese food culture remained mostly descriptive and only rarely sought to link dietary and sacrificial practice to the world of ideas. On the other hand, there has been no shortage of anthropological and historical theory on sacrifice since the nineteenth century. Yet this scholarship draws mostly on Greco-Roman antiquity, the Bible, the Vedic tradition, or on anthropological fieldwork. Even though theory has inspired the analysis of some sinologists, only rarely have data from early China been drawn on in earnest by theorists. Sacrifice has been explained within the paradigm of the gift, with sacrificial offerings conferring on the devotee controlling powers over the spirits.<sup>6</sup> Some have stressed the idea of communion and see in the sacrificial meal, and in the shared consumption of a (totemic) animal victim, a mechanism to forge a bond between humans and the spirit world. Here the consumption of tabooed offerings generates expiatory or propitiatory powers over the spirits.<sup>7</sup> One influential theory, proposed by Hubert and Mauss, conceived of sacrifice as a graded process of communication between two, purportedly separate, realms: that of the sacred and that of the secular or profane. In this model, sacrificial offerings and ritual participants are transformed through a process of sacralization and desacralization. At the heart of sacrifice, then, lies the destruction or consumption of the medium of communication with the divine – the offering itself.<sup>8</sup> The sacrificial offering has also been seen as substitutory or redemptory in that it replaces the sacrificer or ritual agent, or serves as an expiatory killing.<sup>9</sup> Historians have interpreted sacrifice as an extension of the primitive hunt that foments a community against outsiders, or have analyzed sacrificial killing as a mimetic enactment of violence.<sup>10</sup> Structuralists, for their part, have focused on nonviolence and see in meat eating, ritualized banqueting, and sacrificial conviviality a way to deny or cope with guilt through killing.<sup>11</sup>

To be sure, one could creatively subject data from early China to several of these theories, and my own analysis is bound to show traces of this rich

<sup>6</sup> The main proponent of the gift theory was Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917) in his *Primitive Culture* (1871). Van Baal (1976) takes a more performative view of sacrificial gifts as ritualized coded messages.

<sup>7</sup> The main advocate of the concept of the communal sacrifice was William Robertson Smith (1864–1894) in his *The Religion of the Semites* (1889).

<sup>8</sup> The classic text is Henri Hubert (1872–1927) and Marcel Mauss (1872–1950), “Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice” (*L’Année Sociologique*, 1899).

<sup>9</sup> Edward E. Evans-Pritchard (1902–1973), *Nuer Religion* (1956).

<sup>10</sup> For the former, the locus classicus is Walter Burkert’s *Homo Necans* (1972); for the latter, René Girard’s *La violence et le sacré* (1972). See also Maurice Bloch, *Prey into Hunter* (1992). Lewis (1990) applies these concepts of sanctioned violence to early China.

<sup>11</sup> The key essays appear in Detienne and Vernant (eds.) (1979; tr. 1989); see also Detienne (1977) and Durand (1986).

body of historical and anthropological scholarship. Yet my conversation in this book takes a different tack. Rather than seeking to deconstruct existing cross-cultural theories on sacrifice by inputting Chinese data (or indeed propose yet another theoretical or essentialist model), my ambition here is more modest. I try to present a picture of Chinese sacrificial religion “from within” by describing the mechanics that surrounded sacrificial procedure and by identifying the conceptual schemes on which the selection, presentation, and consumption of food and food offerings were based. In doing so, I hope to show first and foremost that portrayals of cooking and food preparation, or discussions on who eats what with whom, or who feeds what to whom and when, are a useful platform to help us understand early Chinese ideas about the senses and sagehood.

My reading of sacrificial food culture also touches on a larger question in scholarship on early Chinese thought. It has become a truism in most scholarly treatments of Chinese thought that the masters of philosophy in Warring States China do not make rigid distinctions between the sacred and the profane, or between categories such as the transcendent and the immanent. Few scholars have sought to break down claims to continuity between the human and the divine in early China. In a stimulating study, Michael Puett has brought out the pivotal importance of nuance.<sup>12</sup> A dialectical juxtaposition of sources allows Puett to construct a linear narrative that incisively questions attempts by previous scholars to gloss over the human-spirit divide in early Chinese textual sources. This book does not set out to formulate a new hypothesis on the large and broadly theoretical question of human-divine continuity in early China, but some of its data are directly relevant to it. It is my contention that we are as yet unable to dismiss the notion that the early Chinese conceived of significant continuities between the human world and the realm of the spirits. This is evident within the limited remit of textual sources available, even if one concentrates mainly on discursive or philosophical texts. Some continuities, as Michael Puett’s analysis shows, were clearly put to the test. Yet in my view, the nature of our sources, as well as their complexity, does not allow us to adequately test many of the theoretical and rhetorical claims made in the philosophical literature of the time until we gain a better understanding of how ideas relate to religious, economic, and social practice. The selection of sources I have brought to bear in this exercise lead me to believe that the permeability of the human and the spiritual is abundantly manifest in early Chinese texts.

<sup>12</sup> Puett (2002), 5–26, surveys the main loci in Western secondary scholarship where these models of continuity are highlighted.

Naturally, my own reading of sacrificial culture likewise remains, by definition, partial because I draw mostly on textual sources. A few preliminary remarks on the sources that inform this study and the time period it covers are therefore in order. The majority of the sources I draw on are written records, including both transmitted and archaeologically recovered texts. It goes without saying that a thorough examination of material culture and the archaeological record would complement some of the themes and questions raised in this book, and might well produce different or more nuanced interpretations. Such an exercise, however, would require one or more separate studies, and it is a task best left to experts in material culture. If my reading of the textual record succeeds in inspiring others to (re)interrogate the material record, or indeed, if it encourages archaeologists and art historians to question my own conclusions, it will have served its purpose.

A great deal of information on food and sacrifice is preserved in early China's ritual canon. One major caveat that should be noted upfront is that the ritual canon is highly prescriptive, as are indeed most Warring States and Han narratives on sacrifice. These texts systematize, idealize, and imagine what might have been in times long past and, in their elaboration, provide an implicit commentary on practices and ideas that often predate them by centuries. Even liturgy and descriptions of performance that, *prima facie*, appear anecdotal or historically bound can, to some extent, be read as idealized constructs. As Martin Kern points out, sacrificial hymns, such as those preserved in the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Odes), should be considered as "aesthetic objects, elaborate and complex in terms both linguistic and material, where aesthetic form and propositional meaning cannot be imagined separate from each other."<sup>13</sup> Historians seeking to understand early Chinese ritual practice through layers of highly complex transmitted and archaeologically recovered sources should probably acknowledge that, inevitably, this requires some degree of cut-and-paste, or at least a redaction of more or less implicit or explicit ideas. In this, however, the contemporary scholar is not original because most of the texts she or he deals with engage in the dynamics of inter- and intratextual quotation, borrowing, and paraphrasis. Furthermore, as both archaeologists and textual scholars are continuously discovering in China today, the transmission of early Chinese texts also depends significantly on material conditions and the texts themselves were often subject to philological experimentation by scribes and commentators. This is not unimportant when we are dealing with technical vocabulary or ritual nomenclature, the origins and context of which sometimes escape us.

<sup>13</sup> Kern (2009), 145, 150, 155 (quote).

However, to avoid presenting a picture that is solely based on prescriptive sources, I have tried to draw on as wide a variety of textual genres available for the period under discussion as possible, keeping in mind that a historical analysis of structures suffers from the same constraints as a structural analysis of history. We must acknowledge that the ideas and ideologies contained in our texts are not easily linked to actual behavior, let alone to practices that can be dated to particular times and places. Warring States and Han texts may not enable us to trace each and every constituent event that make up the practices and ideas described here, but I hope that, by drawing on at times fragmentary narratives or by juxtaposing information preserved across a wide range of texts beyond the ritual canon, the reader will be able to reconstruct elements of process and gain a better insight into the conceptual world that inspired it.

For many of the same reasons spelled out previously, the following pages do not offer a strictly linear or chronological treatment of the subject. I draw on texts stretching from the Spring and Autumn period (8th–5th centuries BCE) through Eastern Han (2nd century CE), supplemented occasionally with references to earlier and later materials. Even though it is possible, as Lester Bilsky has shown in a study in the 1970s, to chart some religious changes based on textual references to sacrifice and evolving terminology, such attempts remain highly speculative, and the statistics underlying them become more tenuous when new text discoveries continuously redefine our corpus.<sup>14</sup> Sacrifice as a political institution might lend itself well to a tighter chronological approach, but the mechanics of sacrifice in practice, or the picture of food culture “from within” and the metaphors it supplies, appear more continuous and are hard to date consistently to time and place.

Indeed one might argue that many of the practices described in the following pages survive in China today in the form of sacrificial devotion, a language peppered with references to dietary culture, and the complex etiquette and rituals that surround banqueting and hosting. Whereas we must assume that different actors across different locations in Warring States and Han China at times had different views on what would please the palate of humans and spirits, the oxen slaughtered with tinkling bell-knives in the Book of Odes would have found little solace in the prospect that a few centuries later they could have been butchered by Zhuangzi’s enlightened Cook Ding.

<sup>14</sup> Bilsky (1975), 23–29.





## Customs and Cuisine

To argue that food constitutes a central fiber in Chinese culture, past and present, would be a truism at best. Lin Yutang 林語堂 (1895–1976) once eloquently summed it up when he wrote that “it is a pretty crazy life when one eats in order to work and does not work in order to eat.”<sup>1</sup> Yet over and above the pervasive presence of food culture in the Chinese tradition, interactions with food provided a platform for the creation of meaning. Whereas to ordinary peasant households, food most likely signified little more than survival, among the elites of Warring States and early imperial China, as elsewhere, a preoccupation with food and food consumption transcended the everyday requirements for nutritional or economic welfare. Food culture was deeply implicated in many aspects of early Chinese social, political, intellectual, and religious life. It offered an important lens through which human identities were shaped and it was an important medium through which people interacted both with each other and with the spirit world. Early Chinese texts are replete with references showing that attitudes toward food drew on an amalgam of influences including physical, economic, religious, and ritual interactions as well as artistic and philosophical reflection. It is difficult therefore to study the role of food for human consumption separately from its use as nourishment for the spirits, its influence on ideas of human self-cultivation, or its role as a metaphor in the world of ideas.

Various dimensions and value systems emerge in early Chinese texts against which interactions with food were interpreted. Often sources do not refrain from spelling out the inherent tensions such multiple value systems generate. Take, for instance, the following anecdote in the *Han Feizi* 韓非子:

Confucius was sitting next in attendance to Duke Ai 哀 of Lu 魯 (r. 494–477 BCE). The duke offered him a peach with some millet and said, “Please help

<sup>1</sup> Lin Yutang (1937), 249.

yourself.” Confucius first ate the millet and afterwards took a bite from the peach. Those who witnessed the scene broke out in laughter, their hands covering their mouth. Duke Ai spoke: “The millet is not for eating but should be used to clean the (skin of the) peach!” Confucius replied: “Of course, I know that much. But millet is the most noble among the five grains and in sacrifices to the ancestors it is an offering of supreme standing. Among the six kinds of fruits however, the peach is the lowest sacrificial offering. During ancestral sacrifices it is not even good enough to gain access to the temple. I have heard that a gentleman uses what is base to clean what is noble but I have not heard of using what is noble to clean what is base. So to use the most valuable among the five grains to clean the lowest of fruits would amount to availing oneself of what is superior to clean what is inferior. I take this to be a case of obstructing righteousness and therefore dare not allow the peach to be ranked in preference over the most precious offering in the ancestral temple.”<sup>2</sup>

In this story, Duke Ai bases his assessment of the relative worth of his peach and millet on perceptions of value in the context of a gift exchange and within the conventions of hospitality that were current at the court. Confucius, in contrast, overrules this predominantly secular food exchange and chooses to have his pattern of consumption dictated by the ritual imperatives of the ancestral sacrifice.<sup>3</sup> For Confucius, millet should not primarily derive its status from utilitarian functions such as nutritional, economic, or aesthetic value. Instead he holds millet in respect because it ranks among the grains that fill sacrificial vessels. It belongs, first and foremost, to the provisions also known as *zi cheng* 粢盛, “vessels with millet,” a generic term denoting sacrificial grains that were harvested from special sacred fields ritually plowed by the ruler.<sup>4</sup> The story illustrates how attitudes toward food consumption and food taxonomies were steeped in a complex culture of ritual conventions and socioreligious practices. Much of our information on food culture in early China indeed merits study beyond the narrative of its material or technological history.

<sup>2</sup> *Han Feizi jishi*, 12.689–690 (“Wai chu shuo zuo, xia” 外儲說左下). Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>3</sup> Confucius’ reversal of the order of these two dishes is singled out by Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca. 100 CE) for comment. Not only does Wang approve of his decision, but he goes on to compare himself (and his writings) to Confucius by stating that he is someone who departs from conventional wisdom represented by the giggling bystanders in the story. He equates the latter to “vulgar people” (*su ren* 俗人). See *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 30.1197 (“Zi ji” 自紀).

<sup>4</sup> For *zi cheng* as a generic term for sacrificial grains, see e.g. *Mozi jiangou*, 2.50 (“Shang xian, zhong” 尚賢中), 8.231, 8.237 (“Ming gui, xia” 明鬼下); *Fengsu tongyi*, 8.353 (“Si dian” 祀典); *Hanshu*, 4.125; *Shangshu da zhuan*, 6.63.



Social, religious, and ideological factors were as instrumental in shaping the significance of food as were the physical realities associated with certain foodstuffs and nutritional practices.

As is shown in the preceding anecdote, sacrificial criteria constituted one significant marker against which edibles, either those intended for humans or the spirit world, were classified. In addition, assessments of food habits could be inspired by many other factors, including historical precedent, their occurrence in the written canon, transmitted local knowledge and folklore, or their association with certain historical or mythological figures. For instance, in one court memorial, Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 179–ca.104 BCE) argued that the sages of antiquity ranked *he* 禾 millet and *mai* 麥 wheat as the most valuable among the five grains – a conclusion he arrives at on the basis that the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals), in his reading, does not record shortages or bad harvests involving other species.<sup>5</sup> Here textual precedent seems to inspire Dong's conception of food hierarchies.

From Shennong 神農, the Divine Farmer, who selflessly tasted fruits and plants to separate the poisonous from the edible,<sup>6</sup> to an eponymous Confucius figure who asserts in a Han lexicon that *shu* 黍 “glutinous millet” can be used to make ale, it will become clear throughout this book that the real protagonists in discussions of food culture in Warring States and Han texts were not its farmers or producers.<sup>7</sup> Instead much of the discourse concentrates on sage rulers and moral exemplars, who stood at the junction of political power and a world infused by ritual codes. They appear in different guises in the literature: as cooks and tasters, as repositories of technical knowledge on ritual and secular food preparation, as enlightened consumers, as social critics of the dietary habits of the poor and powerful, and so on.

Naturally, imagery and metaphors associated with food and cooking in ritual and philosophical discourse were rooted in the actual cuisine of the time. So before we embark in greater detail on the question of how physical cuisine, sacrificial practices, and philosophical appropriations of food culture related to each other in early China, a survey of food habits as documented in Warring States and early imperial texts is in order.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Hanshu*, 24A.1137.

<sup>6</sup> *Huainanzi*, 19.629 (“Xiu wu” 修務); *Xinyu jiaozhu*, 1.10 (“Dao ji” 道基).

<sup>7</sup> *Shuowen jiezi*, 7A.56b.

<sup>8</sup> For alternative accounts of Zhou and Han cuisine, see Hsu Cho-yun (1980), 5, 68–70, 81–91; Yü Ying-shih, “Han,” in Chang Kwang-chih (1977), 55–83; and Knechtges (2002). Segments of this and the following chapter draw on Sterckx (2005), (2006b), with permission of Palgrave MacMillan and *Monumenta Serica*.

## DIETS AND FOOD LORE IN WARRING STATES AND HAN CHINA

Warring States and early imperial China was a geo-physically diverse region covering cold and arid steppe lands in the north, tropical and evergreen climes in the south, with mountainous plateaus in the west and alluvial floodplains in the east. Reconstructing a picture of the dietary habits of the time against the background of this complex geo-physical landscape, drawing on written sources that are heavily biased toward the central states and its elites, remains difficult. No doubt there existed regional food varieties and dietary customs that are overlooked in our transmitted texts. Despite momentous discoveries of new manuscript texts over the past decades, the available sources for the period remain disparate and the majority focuses on the life of elites who may have shared a higher degree of cultural uniformity than the lower strata in society. Despite these provisos, the information contained in the textual record is remarkably rich and enables us to gain an aggregate, though no doubt incomplete, picture of the main dietary trends and customs of the period.

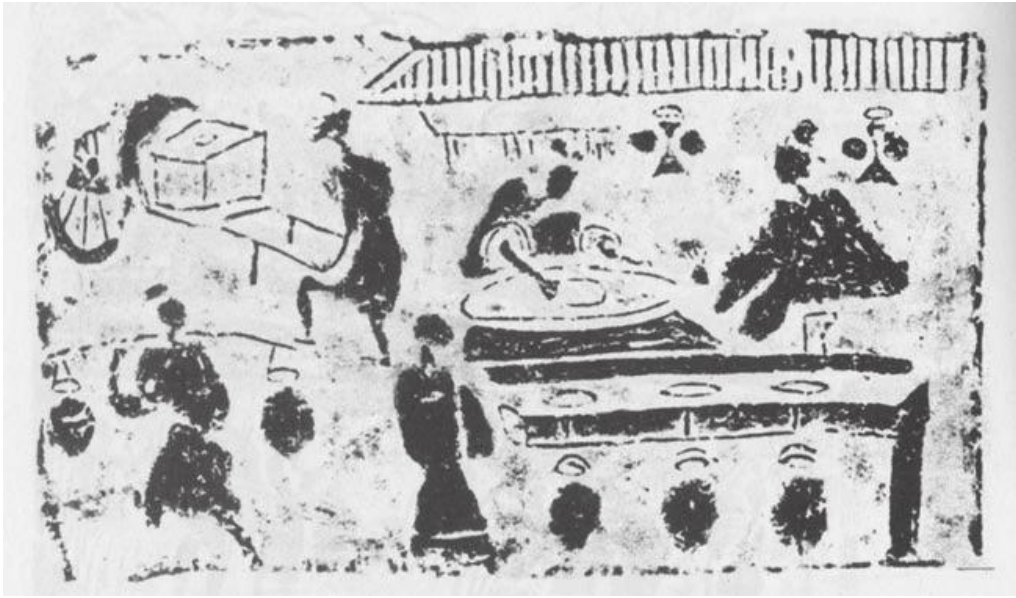
The most important staple in Zhou and Han China was grain. In early times, this consisted mostly of millets of various kinds. By the Warring States period, a greater variety had emerged, including wheat, hemp, barley, and rice. Millets provided the main staple in the north whereas rice was the main starch food in southern regions (corresponding roughly to present-day Sichuan, Hunan, and Hubei). *Jiu* 酒 “ale” (variously translated as “wine,” “liquor,” or “spirits”) occurs as the most frequently documented drink apart from water. Generally ales were produced from germinated grains mixed with steamed rice and water, and then left to ferment into an alcoholic brew. The most common method involved the use of molded grains.<sup>9</sup> Alcoholic ales of various types are a mainstay in ritual literature, where they are shown to have been indispensable in sacrificial procedures, feasts, and banquets. As will be discussed in [Chapter 3](#), alcohol consumption and the abuse of alcoholic beverages in a ritual context formed a subject of historical commentary for as long as written records go back.<sup>10</sup>

Dough made out of wheat flower appeared in the late Warring States period. By Han times, a generic term, *bing* 餅, was used to refer to all kinds of doughy products such as flat bread, buns, dumplings, baked cakes, and noodles.<sup>11</sup> Such products, according to a gloss by one lexicographer active in

<sup>9</sup> Wang Hengyu (1993); Poo (1999), 132–4; Li Hu (1997), 110–12.

<sup>10</sup> No doubt other natural substances, fluid and solid, were known to have an intoxicating effect comparable to *jiu* “ale.” The Mao commentary to a *Shijing* ode speaks of doves getting drunk on mulberries. See *Mao shi zhengyi*, 3C.3b (“Mang” 氓; Mao 58).

<sup>11</sup> Xu Shen 許慎 (30–124 CE) glosses *bing* as *mian ci* 麪飧 “flour cakes.” See *Shuowen jiezi*, 5B.8a; see also *Si min yue ling jiaozhu*, 44 (“Wu yue”); and Li Hu (1997), 70–7. A later medieval



1.1. Ale distillation. Rubbing of a Han mural (28.4 X 49.5 cm); Xindu county, Sichuan. Source: Li Song (2001), 270.

the late Eastern Han, were obtained by “soaking flower so that it can be made to stick together (*he bing* 合并).”<sup>12</sup>

The grain staple was complemented with vegetables and fruits. Beans, notably the soybean, were the main vegetable supplement. Other popular vegetables included various kinds of *Brassica*, radish, and the shoots, leaves, and stems of the mallow. Common fruits included the plum, chestnut, apricot, persimmon, jujube, and peach. Vegetables were consumed separately or in soupy stews or broths (*cai geng* 菜羹). Several types of broths are attested in the literature. According to Qin legal documents, the vegetable broth among the food rations distributed to royal secretaries and messengers included leeks and onions.<sup>13</sup> Another type of vegetable broth, often invoked to typify a pauper’s diet, was a soup mixed with pigweed (the so-called *li geng* 藜羹 “chenopod broth”). A taste for vegetable broth is regularly associated with the virtue of frugality. Several texts praise sages, worthies, and virtuous officials for their willingness to find peace with a coarse diet of vegetable broths or stews without condiments.<sup>14</sup> Confucius famously was forced to have

work mentions the consumption of “bing cakes to ward off evil” (*bi’e bing* 辟惡餅). See *Jing Chu sui shi ji*, 2.186.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Liu Xi 劉熙 (fl. ca. 200 CE) in *Shi ming*, 4.135 (no. 12).

<sup>13</sup> *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 60 (slip 180); cf. Hulsewé (1985), 84–5 (A92, A93, A94). For the use of scallions as a common ingredient in a meat broth, see *Hou Hanshu*, 81.2683.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* (*Zuozhuan* hereafter), 86 (Lord Huan, year 2); *Mozi jiangou*, 6.165 (“Jie yong, zhong” 節用中); *Han Feizi jishi*, 12.703 (*Wai chu shuo zuo, xia*); *Shizi*, 2.68

“chenopod broth,” without rice, during his troubled passage between Chen 陳 and Cai 蔡.<sup>15</sup> One of Confucius’ disciples allegedly divorced his wife because she failed to cook his chenopod broth properly.<sup>16</sup> The *Han Feizi* likewise lauds a worthy minister’s frugality by stating that he would not hesitate to include vegetable broth in his diet.<sup>17</sup>

Generally the stew or *geng* 羹 appears as a highly valued dish, and, as we will see, both seasoned and unseasoned stews occupied an important place among the sacrificial cuisine of early China. *Geng* of various compositions were eaten by most social strata, from noblemen to commoners.<sup>18</sup> They could consist of meat, fish, vegetables, cereals, or a mixture of these.<sup>19</sup> Western Han manuscripts recovered at Mawangdui (Hunan, 1973) suggest ingredients as rich as ox, sheep, deer, pig, carp, sturgeon, wild duck, and pheasant. Other sources speak of stews that include turtle, dog, rabbit, and quail.<sup>20</sup> In addition to roasting and frying, boiling and stewing were widespread methods for meat preparation. Another attested technique to bake meats consisted of wrapping up whole animals in clay without removing fur or feathers.<sup>21</sup> Fragments of a Han gastronomic treatise recovered in 1999 from the tomb of Wu Yang 吳陽 (d. 162 BCE) (Huxishan 虎溪扇; Yuanling 沅陵, Hunan) include recipes for boiled deer, boiled lamb, and boiled horse.<sup>22</sup> References to the eating

(no. 59). For *li geng* as a pauper’s dish, see also *Shuoyuan*, 4.77 (“Li jie” 立節), 17.422 (“Za yan” 雜言); *Huainanzi*, 18.611 (“Ren jian” 人間). Vegetable broth is contrasted with meat dishes in *Liji jijie*, 29.782 (“Yu zao” 玉藻), which states that a ruler eats only glutinous rice and vegetable broth on *si* 巳 and *mao* 卯 days. Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 CE) argues that this was inspired by a taboo on killing rather than a showing of frugality. In a gloss on *li*, Luo Yuan 羅願 (1136–1184 CE) emphasizes that “sages and worthies often ate it.” See *Erya yi*, 6.72. For an animated discussion on how a *geng* “broth” may be, or may not be, distinguished from a *tang* 湯 “soup,” see Huang Jingui (2005); Huang Jingui and Hu Lizhen (2005).

<sup>15</sup> *Zhuangzi jishi*, 28.981 (“Rang wang” 讓王); *Mozi jiangou*, 9.303 (“Fei Ru, xia” 非儒下); *Han shi waizhuan*, 7.244 (7.6); *Kongzi jiayu*, 5.5b (“Zai e” 在厄); *Fengsu tongyi*, 7.315 (“Qiong tong” 窮通); *Xinyu jiaozhu*, 10.142 (“Ben xing” 本行) (here simply as *cai geng*).

<sup>16</sup> *Bohutong shu zheng*, 5.242 (“Jian zheng” 諫諍).

<sup>17</sup> *Han Feizi jishi*, 12.703 (“Wai chu shuo zuo, xia”).

<sup>18</sup> *Liji jijie*, 27.752 (“Nei ze” 內則).

<sup>19</sup> The *Shuowen* includes a technical term, *san* 糝 (\*sʰəmʔ), to denote blending a stew using rice. See *Shuowen jiezi*, 7A.61a. For reconstructions of Old Chinese, I follow the OCM (“Minimal Old Chinese”) reconstructions in Schuessler (2009).

<sup>20</sup> Hunan nongxueyuan (1978), 42–83; Wang Zijin (2007), 177–82; *Jiao Shi Yilin*, 16.75 (line 2); *Huainanzi*, 10.335 (“Zhu shu” 主術), 19.654 (“Xiu wu” 修務); *Liji jijie*, 27.744, 27.748 (“Nei ze”). See further Wang Xuetai (2006), 60–4, and Xu Hairong (1999), vol. 2, 489–92. Ru Shun 如淳 (3rd century CE) mentions the distribution of a gruel of owl meat to officials on the fifth day of the fifth month to ward off inauspicious influences. See *Hanshu*, 25A.1219n.4. See also *Huainanzi*, 17.562 (“Shui lin”).

<sup>21</sup> Known as *bao* 炮 in *Shuowen jiezi*, 10A.45a. See also *Zhouli zhengyi*, 22.895 (“Feng ren” 封人).

<sup>22</sup> Harper (2004); Lo (2005), 171.

of horsemeat occur less frequently, no doubt partly because horses were a valuable commodity in transport and for military purposes.<sup>23</sup>

Soups that included fish, turtles, and shellfish were prevalent in the diet of the southern regions of Chu, Wu, and Yue.<sup>24</sup> During a court debate in 81 BCE, one literatus described the more carnivorous inclinations of northerners versus the piscivorous south as follows: “Yue folk take oysters to be a delicacy, yet they treat a *tailao* 太牢 (ox, pig, sheep) with disdain.... Thus someone who is ignorant of flavors considers fragrant aromas to be foul just like someone who is ignorant of the Dao would believe that beautiful words spoil the ears.”<sup>25</sup> Southerners are also recorded to appreciate the taste of snake meat and, according to one source, sweet-and-sour cuisine.<sup>26</sup> Fermented sauces made from soy, meats, fish, and shrimp could accompany these main dishes.<sup>27</sup>

The evidence recovered from sites such as Mawangdui suggests that some of the elaborate lists of foodstuffs and cooking procedures preserved in the ritual canon were not necessarily always fictitious or idealized prescriptions.<sup>28</sup> Among the most detailed recipes preserved in ritual texts is a set known as “eight delicacies” (*ba zhen* 八珍) that were to be served to the elderly. It includes instructions on how to fry, grill, and bake meats, how to make soup balls, cook liver and fat, and includes ingredients as diverse as deer, dog’s liver, and wolf’s breast.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Horse meat consumption is attested (e.g., *Hanshu*, 51.2345), but evidence does not corroborate Yü Ying-shih’s claim, in Chang (1977), 58, that it was a favorite dish in Han China. The fact that tutelary horse spirits were worshiped reflects their special status. See Sterckx (1996). One source notable for identifying “meat horses for consumption” (*shi ma* 食馬) as a generic term is the *Mu Tianzi zhuan*. There, however, King Mu receives these from the tribes he visits, which may suggest that eating horse meat was a predominantly foreign custom. See *Mu Tianzi zhuan*, 2.1b, 3.2b, 4.3b; and Frühauf (2004), 186, 197. Administrative records from a Western Han postal station near Dunhuang show that the death and disease of transport horses, camels and donkeys was meticulously recorded and reported. Pelt, teeth, ears, and other body parts were to be sent to the prefectural treasury as proof of death, and moneys changing hands to purchase the carcass and meat of dead horses were tightly monitored. See Zhang Junmin (2008), 292–8.

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., *Shiji*, 129.3270; *Wu Yue chunqiu*, 3.29 (abalone broth); *Shuoyuan*, 6.141 (“Fu en” 復恩). For a survey of the Chu diet, see Wu Ruishu (2000) and Wang Xuetai (2006), 66–70.

<sup>25</sup> *Yantie lun jiaozhu*, 9.556 (“Lun zai” 論菹).

<sup>26</sup> *Huainanzi*, 8.264 (“Ben jing” 本經). See also *Yi Zhoushu*, 7.891 (“Wang hui” 王會). For Yue people’s fondness of snake, see *Huainanzi*, 7.242 (“Jing shen” 精神).

<sup>27</sup> Hsu Cho-yun (1980), 217 (A11), 220 (D1), 222 (E7).

<sup>28</sup> The source for comparison that springs to mind first here is the detailed procedures and recipes set out in the “Nei ze” 內則 (Internal [Household] regulations) chapter of the *Liji*.

<sup>29</sup> *Liji jijie*, 28.755–9 (“Nei ze”). The *Zhouli* mentions eight *zhen* on the king’s menu which are based on the “Nei ze” list. See *Zhouli zhengyi*, 7.236 (“Shan fu” 膳夫), 9.318–22 (“Shi yi” 食醫); and the discussion in Qian Xuan (1996), 135–7.



The most common generic reference to flavor and fragrance in ritual texts is covered by the term *wu wei* 五味 “the five flavors”: pungent, bitter, sweet, sour, and salty. The term also more generally refers to the worldly delights associated with food.<sup>30</sup> Each of the five flavors and the foodstuffs associated with them resonate, in the model of the Five Phases (*wu xing* 五行), with a corresponding season and generate nutritional and health benefits accordingly. So, according to the “monthly ordinances” (*yue ling* 月令), the Son of Heaven was to eat millet and mutton in spring, beans and fowl in summer, sorghum and dog in autumn, and millet and pork in winter. To temper ingredients, sour was to predominate in the spring, bitter in the summer, acrid in the autumn, and salt in the winter.<sup>31</sup> As will be discussed in the next chapter, over and above their culinary value, the prescriptive diets in the ritual canon and the way they were theorized were highly symbolical. A balanced, all-inclusive, and perfectly timed diet symbolized the idea that, by partaking of all ingredients in his realm following a cyclical pattern, a ruler symbolically tasted the cosmos itself and thereby helped ensure the harmonious passage of time and season.

Foodstuffs were conserved and preserved by various methods including drying, salting, and the use of ice.<sup>32</sup> According to the *Zuozhuan* 左傳, ice was used for the entertainment of guests, to accompany the use of food, and in burials (to keep the corpses fresh) and sacrifices.<sup>33</sup> Natural ice was collected at set intervals in the calendar year. An ode in the *Shijing* contains an early reference to the cutting, collection, and storage of ice in the winter months.<sup>34</sup> The transportation and storage of ice, often undertaken by designated officials, was accompanied by sacrificial rituals and exorcisms to appease the patron

<sup>30</sup> Sterckx (2003), (2005).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. the twelve *ji* 紀 sections in the *Lüshi chunqiu* and later versions of the *yue ling* preserved in the *Huainanzi*, *Liji*, and *Yi Zhoushu*. See also *Shangshu da zhuan*, 2.78–81 (“Hongfan wuxing zhuan” 洪範五行傳). For similar lists that link meats to vegetables, see *Zhouli zhengyi*, 9.321 (“Shi yi”). The Dunhuang Xuanquan *yue ling* 敦煌懸泉月令, an abbreviated calendar promulgated and posted on a stone slab by Wang Mang 王莽 in 5 CE (excavated between 1990 and 1992), omits most references to seasonal dietary regulations.

<sup>32</sup> On the technology of ice collection and storage see Huang Tsing-tung (2000), 429–36; Wei Si (1986); Chen Hong (1987); Wang Saishi (1983); Dan Xianjin (1989); Guo Bonan (1989); and Xing Xiangchen (1989).

<sup>33</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 1248–50 (Lord Zhao, year 4). For the use of ice in funerals, see *Zhouli zhengyi*, 10.372–8; *Mozhi jiangou*, 6.172 (“Jie zang, xia” 節葬下). Bronze ice boxes (*jian* 鑑) from the kingdom of Qin dating to the late *Chunqiu* period have been recovered from tombs. Remains of ice houses and ice storage wells have been excavated in the capitals of several of the main warring states. See Huang Tsing-tung (2000), 430–3.

<sup>34</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi*, 8A.21b (Mao 154; “Qi yue” 七月). The second and third months referred to in the poem would correspond to the twelfth (in the Xia calendar) and first respectively, roughly mid-January to mid-February.

spirit of the cold and expel calamitous influences during the operation. Once collected from glaciers, officials would prepare the ice to preserve meats, ales, sauces, and other ingredients in cooled vessels, including ice vessels for sacrifices.<sup>35</sup> By the third century BCE, offerings of lamb to the spirit of the cold prior to opening up the ice chambers and ice pits were incorporated in the ritual calendar.<sup>36</sup> Thanksgiving sacrifices for the freezing and thawing of rivers were conducted periodically by the state as well as the localities.<sup>37</sup>

The human and material resources dedicated to culinary logistics were wide-ranging and highly organized. At the courts, special officials were responsible for the kitchens and the ruler's diet. These included wine makers, spice officers, handlers of food baskets, salt stewards, and so forth.<sup>38</sup> Some officials oversaw the provision of individual ingredients, others dealt with specific cooking procedures and catering for designated occasions. As we will see in [Chapter 4](#), most of these designated officials concurrently supplied sacrificial offerings. In Han times, offices designated to manage the imperial table were staffed with more than six thousand personnel.<sup>39</sup> The detailed attention to food logistics stretched beyond the confines of the courts and dining quarters of feudal lords, kings, or emperors. Meticulously accounted supply systems provisioned officials on missions and armies posted across the land. New evidence documenting such operations is recovered regularly. For instance, a large cache of bamboo slips and wooden plaques found near a postal station near Dunhuang in the early 1990s contains a register recording the import and export of chickens (for the twelfth month of the year 62 BCE), as well as their distribution to officials who worked in or were passing through the district that year.<sup>40</sup>

These and similar operations were carefully policed and regulated. Administrative records from Qin confirm that thorough records were kept of food supplies distributed among officials in localities far removed from the capital. Qin law also includes punishments for prefectures that confiscated or embezzled supplies of dried meat destined for army conscripts on route and

<sup>35</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 1248–50 (Lord Zhao, year 4); Ying Shao 應劭 (ca. 140–204 CE) revisits this information in an entry on the use of peach wood. See *Fengsu tongyi*, 8.367 (“Si dian”). For task descriptions of officials dealing with ice, see *Zhouli zhengyi*, 10.372–8 (“ling ren” 凌人), and Liu Xingjun (2001), 116–17.

<sup>36</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 2.64 (“Zhong chun ji”); *Liji jijie*, 17.501 (“Yue ling”).

<sup>37</sup> *Shiji*, 28.1371; *Fengsu tongyi*, 10.447 (“Shan ze” 山澤).

<sup>38</sup> Chang Kwang-chih counts no less than 2,271 people (nearly 60 percent of the royal household staff!) handling food and wine in the *Zhouli*. See Chang (1977), 11. See also Shinoda (1978), 50–8.

<sup>39</sup> For details, see Bielenstein (1980), 51.

<sup>40</sup> Zhang Defang and Hu Pingsheng (2001), 77–8; and Wang Zijin (2003).

precise stipulations were in place on the number of cooks (*yang* 養 “feeders”) that were to be assigned to officials.<sup>41</sup> Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE) gives a sense of the complexity of these operations. When the Han dispatched its troops to the far western region of Dayuan 大宛 in 104 BCE, he noted, “all men in the empire who belonged to the seven classes of reprobates were called out and sent to transport supplies of dried boiled rice to the general and his forces.” He further wrote that “the lines of transport wagons and marching men stretched uninterruptedly all the way west to Dunhuang.”<sup>42</sup>

It is in regions such as far western Dunhuang that troops and travelers were likely to be confronted with foreign diets. Early Chinese texts are no exception to the tendency across cultures to highlight food habits as markers of cultural otherness. Such judgments were based on the types of products deemed edible as well as prevailing etiquette and cooking customs, and they were mostly conceived along two polarities: geographical space and historical time. The former meant that distinctions were made between food cultures of a civilized heartland versus those of a foreign or barbarian periphery. The latter meant that moral judgment of food habits were often inspired by an idealized dichotomy that set apart an archaic age of simplicity, sobriety, and purity from a present troubled by decadence, overindulgence, and inappropriate dietary habits.

Some food taboos and cooking techniques are singled out as identifying features of barbarism. In the *Zuozhuan*, a nobleman belonging to the Rong 戎 insists that his drink, food, and clothes are all different from those in the Chinese (Hua 華) states.<sup>43</sup> Yet more often comments on the different food habits of barbarians are voiced through persona representing the court or the Central States. Humans may well be equal in their cravings to satisfy their desires, the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 notes, but barbarians nevertheless have different preferences for sound, color, and flavor.<sup>44</sup> In the *Guoyu* 國語, the Rong and Di 狄 are described as resembling animals whose “blood and *qi*” cannot be controlled and who fail to appreciate nice fragrances and flavors

<sup>41</sup> *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 81 (strip 8); I follow the emendation 傳 (\**pah*) > 脯 > 膊 (\**pâk*) in Hulsewé (1985), C5, p.106, n. 9. On the cooks, see *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 37 (strips 72–75); Hulsewé (1985), 47 (A37). Their status appears rather low as can be seen in the following article: “When bond servants are clever and could be made artisans, they must not be made servants or cooks of other people.” See *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 46 (strip 113); cf. Hulsewé (1985), 62 (A62).

<sup>42</sup> *Shiji*, 123.3176.

<sup>43</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 1007 (Lord Xiang, year 14). The cultural distance expressed here need not necessarily imply political distance. The Rong played an integral part in Zhou politics and even provided additional farmers and soldiers to the state of Jin. See Di Cosmo (2002), 123.

<sup>44</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 19.1294 (“Wei yu” 為欲). For similar statements, see *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 24.1584 (“Bu gou” 不苟), and *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 25.1053 (“Si yi” 祀義).



on offer during tribute missions.<sup>45</sup> Other texts identify foreigners on the basis that they eat raw food while the civilized heartlands cook theirs, or because they taboo ingredients central to the “Chinese” diet: the Eastern Yi 夷 “eat their food without it being cooked with fire,” and so do the southern Man 蠻, whereas the western Rong and northern Di abstain from cereals.<sup>46</sup> The *Da Dai Liji* 大戴禮記 notes that whereas the barbarians in the four directions do not take their food cooked, “the people from the Central States . . . blend their flavors (*he/huo wei* 和味).”<sup>47</sup> I will return to the potent meaning of this expression in the next chapter. Thus the barbarian distinguished himself from those who resided in the civilized heartland, whose mythology associated the origins of civilization with the invention of cooking, the use of culinary implements, and the preference for cooked over raw meat, and whose cultural heroes protected them from dietary calamity and poisoning by the invention of fire and cooking.<sup>48</sup>

Succumbing to the temptation of cooked rice, roast meat, the *geng* stew or wine was tantamount to submitting to “Chinese” rule. Some even exploited the temptations of cuisine for political ends. Duke Mu of Qin 秦穆公 (r. 659–621 BCE) allegedly presented female musicians and cooks to the king of the Rong. “Not acquainted with the five tones and five flavors,” these gifts tricked the king into endless parties and made him lose political control.<sup>49</sup> Jia Yi 賈誼 (201–169 BCE) went as far as to propose that broiled or roasted meats in eating houses on the borders of the Han empire would attract the Xiongnu 匈奴 into submission.<sup>50</sup> A similar sense of alienation enveloped those who were forced to live on barbarian fare, a sentiment shared in the following lines composed by a desperate Han princess who was married off to a Wusun 烏孫 chieftain: “A domed hut is my dwelling place, with walls made of felt; meat is my food, fermented milk my sauce. I live with constant thoughts of home, my heart is in pain. How I wish I could turn into a golden swan and return to my home village.”<sup>51</sup>

<sup>45</sup> *Guoyu*, 2.62 (“Zhou yu, zhong”).

<sup>46</sup> *Liji jijie*, 13.359 (“Wang zhi” 王制). See also *Huainanzi*, 1.18–19 (“Yuan dao” 原道), where Gao You 高誘 (ca. 168–212 CE) comments that abstaining from grain implies having a diet solely consisting of meat and fermented milk. For a similar description of the Hu 胡 diet, see *Hanshu*, 49.2285. For the “Chinese” as a “grain-eating people” (*li shi zhi min* 粒食之民), see *Da Dai Liji*, 11.216–221 (“Xiao xian” 小閒). Consuming food raw is compared to wild animal behavior in *Shizi*, 2.65 (no. 51).

<sup>47</sup> *Da Dai Liji*, 9.162 (“Qian sheng” 千乘).

<sup>48</sup> *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 24.1507 (“Qing zhong, wu” 輕重戊).

<sup>49</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 23.1568–9 (“Yong sai” 壅塞), 24.1584 (“Bu gou”).

<sup>50</sup> *Xinshu jiaozhu*, 4.135–7 (“Xiongnu”).

<sup>51</sup> *Hanshu*, 96B.3903; the unfortunate princess in question was Liu Xijun 劉細君 (fl.ca. 110–105 BCE).

Just as the provision and consumption of certain foodstuffs was thought to ensure good personal and communal welfare, some culinary practices were subject to prohibitions or surrounded by magico-religious beliefs and taboos. Food could cause illness. It could be a medium for demonic agents that transmitted illness onto the consumer. The Shuihudi 睡虎地 corpus (Yunmeng, Hubei, burial dated ca. 217 BCE) contains disease prognostications that identify pork, red meat, dog, several types of dried meat, fish, eggs, and liquor as transmitters of disease.<sup>52</sup> In a more theoretical model of systematic correspondence, dietary causes of illness were explained as an imbalance among or disproportioning of the five flavors previously mentioned.<sup>53</sup> The kitchen space itself – more specifically the stove, home to the stove god – formed a locus of ritual activity.<sup>54</sup> The same Shuihudi materials include a recipe to purge the stove: “When without cause the stove cannot cook food – a Yang Demon has taken hold of its *qi*. Burn pig faeces inside the house, then it will stop.”<sup>55</sup> Several food taboos have been preserved in the literature: A cook should avoid preparing soya sauce or bean sauce during a thunder storm because this could cause people to have a rumbling stomach;<sup>56</sup> or drinking near the time of a solar or lunar eclipse could result in “wearing away the mouth” (*shi kou* 蝕口).<sup>57</sup> One frequently documented belief is that horse liver was deadly poisonous, presumably since the liver concentrates toxins.<sup>58</sup> Han Emperor Jing 漢景帝 once remarked that “no one accuses a man of not knowing flavors because he eats other meats, but refrains from eating horse liver.”<sup>59</sup> Shao Weng 少翁, a recipe gentleman (*fangshi* 方士) at Han Wudi’s 漢武帝 court, allegedly died because he had eaten horse liver.<sup>60</sup> A frequently suggested remedy to avoid such poisoning is to digest horse liver together with wine.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>52</sup> *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 245–6. See also Harper (2001), 110–12; and Poo (1998), 75–6.

<sup>53</sup> *Huangdi neijing suwen*, 21–2 (“Sheng qi tong tian lun” 生氣通天論).

<sup>54</sup> *Fengsu tongyi*, 8.360–1. The stove god is variously described as a turtle, frog, or toad. See Guoyu, 15.505. For a study of the cult, see Chard (1990). Liu Xi distinguishes *zao* 竈 (\**tsùkh*) “stove” as the place where one *zao* 造 (\**dzú?*) “prepares” food from the *cuan* 爨 “cooking-stove” as the place where one measures out sweet and bitter to blend it. See *Shi ming*, 5.192 (nos. 65, 66).

<sup>55</sup> *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 212 (slip 55 verso).

<sup>56</sup> *Fengsu tongyi*, 563 (“Yi wen”); *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 23.979 (“Si hui” 四諱).

<sup>57</sup> *Fengsu tongyi*, 563 (“Yi wen”).

<sup>58</sup> I am unaware of any physiological explanation for horse liver poisoning. Horse liver may not have been the only type presumed poisonous. Wang Chong notes that the liver of the fresh-water porpoise (*gui* 鯢) can be deadly. See *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 23.955 (“Yan du” 言毒). Yet the *Lüshi chunqiu* notes that the liver of a white mule has a strong healing power. See *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 8.459 (“Ai shi” 愛士).

<sup>59</sup> *Shiji*, 121.3123.

<sup>60</sup> *Shiji*, 28.1390.

<sup>61</sup> *Shiji*, 5.189, 12.462, 105.2809–10; *Huainanzi*, 13.454, 20.668; *Han shi waizhuan*, 10.351 (10.12); and *Shuoyuan*, 6.125 (“Fu en” 復恩). In the *Lüshi chunqiu*, Duke Mu 繆 of Qin offers wine to

Other food taboos were inspired by religious precept or dietary codes. The origins and exact rationale behind these prohibitions are not always clear. Generally food avoidances were aimed at enhancing bodily hygiene, promoting longevity, or preparing for ritual and sacrificial activities. Several sacrificial rituals required priests and other officiants to subject themselves to varying periods of ritual purification that involved fasting and ritual washing. With the exception of dietary rules prescribed during mourning (discussed later), religiously sanctioned dietary codes akin to those emerging in medieval Daoism and Buddhism are unattested for Zhou and Han China. Yet it is clear that some early medieval practices had precursors in earlier times. To name one, the abstention from cereals among early medieval Daoists tallies with macrobiotic practices such as those illustrated in a text on grain abstinence recovered at Mawangdui.<sup>62</sup> Some dietary practices and food lore derived its meaning from symbolisms and properties associated with certain food-stuffs. The lunar New Year festival, for instance, was accompanied by its own culinary creeds such as, Ying Shao 應劭 (ca. 140–204 CE) explains, the belief that eating rabbit's knee-cap allows one to escape the mutilating punishment of having one's knee-cap cut off:

Some say that if, on the La 臘 or New Year's Day, you get the knee-cap of a rabbit in your food, this is called good luck and for this one is congratulated with cold wine. This lucky occurrence is a good omen which will cause people to enjoy good fortune and prosperity. Some say that the eating of a rabbit's knee-cap will cause people to escape [the punishment of] having the knee-cap cut away so as to expose their evil. So if now one has the experience of getting it in one's food, one is congratulated that it is not one's own affliction.<sup>63</sup>

Another transmitted custom was a five-day abstention from hot food during the winter months in honor of the legendary hero and paragon of loyalty Jie Zitui 介子推 (6th century BCE). During the Han, a cult developed around him in the region of Taiyuan 太原 (Shanxi), which would evolve into the Cold Food Festival (*han shi* 寒食) of the medieval period.<sup>64</sup> It is possible that rituals and prayers to aid the quelling of hunger and thirst, or suppress

some rustics who were eating the flesh of a piebald horse out of fear that they would become unwell otherwise. See *Lüshi chungiu jiaoshi*, 8.459 ("Ai shi").

<sup>62</sup> Harper (1998), 305–9. On Daoist and Buddhist dietary practices in the early medieval period, see Campany (2005a)(2005b) and Kieschnick (2005).

<sup>63</sup> *Fengsu tongyi*, 602–3; *Yiwen leiju*, 5.93; tr. Bodde (1975), 65–6 (modified).

<sup>64</sup> *Xinlun*, 16. For Jie Zitui see *Zuozhuan*, 417–18 (Lord Xi, year 24); *Lüshi chungiu jiaoshi*, 12.627–8 ("Jie li"). For a study of the medieval festival, see Holzman (1986), 51–79. See also Eberhard (1942), 36–51; Qiu Xigui (1990); Li Daohe (2002); and Yao Weijun (1999), 122–5.

the effects of overindulgence, may have accompanied banquets, fasts, or periods of famine.<sup>65</sup>

According to ritual texts, strict guidelines should govern the cooking and dining conventions within the walls of the household. The aforementioned “*Nei ze*” not only has detailed lists of foods and dishes to be prepared by sons and daughters in the service of the elderly and parents-in-law, but it also prescribes utmost dedication to meal times, eating, and feeding habits.<sup>66</sup> All activity is focused on ensuring that parents and the elderly are nourished in utmost comfort. Sons and daughters are told to desist from eating with their parents and should make it a habit to feed on the leftovers of their elders and arrange their daily schedule accordingly. Young children are fed according to their whims, with no fixed time for their meals.<sup>67</sup> The “*Nei ze*” lists of recommended foodstuffs to be used to feed one’s elders and ancestors cover staple grains, meats, beverages, dried cakes and rice-flour, relishes, condiments, fruits, and vegetables. They also identify ingredients that should be prohibited:

Things not eaten include hatching turtles; wolf’s guts are to be removed; so are dogs’ kidneys, the straight spine of the raccoon; the rump of the hare; the head of the fox; the brains of the sucking-pig; the *yi*-like bowels of fish, and the perforated openings of the turtle. . . . A pullet whose tail was not full enough to be grasped by the hand, was not eaten, nor the rump of a goose, nor the ribs of a swan or owl, nor the rump of a tame duck, nor the liver of a fowl, nor the kidneys of a wild goose, nor the gizzard of a bustard, nor the stomach of the deer.<sup>68</sup>

Commentaries on these taboos range from general observations that eating particular anatomical parts could damage one’s general health to concrete suggestions such as the belief that eating pig brains blurs a person’s mental powers.

For cooks, kitchen staff, and servants, cooking and preparing the appropriate dish could be a matter of life and death. Duke Ling 靈 of Jin 晉 (r. 620–607 BCE) executes his cook for serving uncooked bear paws.<sup>69</sup> The *Han Feizi* reports a case in which a cook is reprimanded for leaving a slice

<sup>65</sup> See, e.g., *Shuowen jiezi*, 9A.37b, in the gloss for (a variant of) the graph *jiu* 饈 (\**kuh*).

<sup>66</sup> The tedious detail of these precepts did not impress James Legge. In the introduction to his translation of this section, he comments that these rules are “interesting, but go(es), as the thing itself did, too much into details. What is it to us at the present time how they made the fry, the bake, the delicacy, and the other dishes to tempt the palate and maintain the strength?” See Legge (rpt. 1967), vol. 1, 27.

<sup>67</sup> *Liji jijie*, 27.731 (“*Nei ze*”).

<sup>68</sup> *Liji jijie*, 27.749–51 (“*Nei ze*”); tr. Legge (rpt. 1967), vol. 1, 462–3 (modified).

<sup>69</sup> *Zuo zhuan*, 655 (Lord Xuan, year 2); *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 23.1559 (“*Guo li*” 過理).



1.2. Kitchen scene. Rubbing of a Han mural; Jiexiang county, Shandong.  
Source: Li Song (2001), 121.

of raw liver in his master's soup. Other cases are reported where cooks and members of the kitchen staff are reprimanded or executed for serving a dish that contains a hair or knives that are soiled with sand.<sup>70</sup> Western Han judicial records excavated at Zhangjiashan 張家山 (dated ca. 196–189 BCE; Jiangling, Hubei, excavated 1983–84) contain a case of a couple wishing to impeach a maid servant for dropping a hair in a serving of broiled meat and a piece of grass in their rice. The investigation, however, concluded that neither the person chopping nor the person broiling the meat was guilty of a crime; the hair was blown into the food by a fan, and the so-called grass turned out to be a fiber from the maid's worn-out shirt. Instead of executing the maid, the magistrate orders the plaintiff to buy her a new shirt.<sup>71</sup> The Zhangjiashan materials also include a statute dealing with food poisoning.<sup>72</sup> This case appears not to be the only occasion when an incident involving food hygiene sparked off moralizing debates on crime and punishment. There is the story of King Hui 惠 of Chu (fl. 487–430 BCE) who, instead of punishing his cooks with death as required by law, chose to swallow a leech found in his salad and suffered a stomach ailment as a result. Wang Chong takes issue with the king's charitable attitude:

Suppose we had a case of a cook or butler who, in preparing a dish, lost the right balance between sweet or sour, or had a piece of dust no bigger than a louse drop into a salad, hardly perceptible or visible to the eye. If in such a case, in fixing a penalty, one takes into consideration the mind of the offender, and abstains from highlighting his fault, this may well said to be a case of compassion. However, now a leech is one tenth of an inch or more broad and about an inch long. In a cold salad, even a one-eyed person

<sup>70</sup> *Han Feizi jishi*, 10.574, 10.595–6 (“*Nei chu shuo, xia*”); *Fengsu tongyi*, 597 (“*Yi wen*”).

<sup>71</sup> *Zhangjiashan Han mu zhujian*, 225–6 (“*Zouyan shu*” 奏讞書, case 19).

<sup>72</sup> *Zhangjiashan Han mu zhujian*, 136–7 (slip 20) (“*Er nian lü ling*” 二年律令). For further references to food poisoning, see Wang Zijin (2006b).



should see it. The servants of the king showed a lack of respect, and took no care when washing the salad. Theirs therefore was a most serious offence.<sup>73</sup>

Wang Chong here blames King Hui for not enforcing the rule of law and failing to respect the rules of hierarchy, which, in this case, should have ruled out clemency. As we will see in [Chapter 4](#), similar legal rules and moral debates surrounded the preparation and offering of food for the spirits.

### MEAT AND MORALS

Among all foodstuffs available to Warring States and Han elites, not one is subject to more debate than meat. Even though meat constituted a relatively minor share in the daily diet of the time, its nutritional value and its central role in sacrifice meant that meat consumption and the distribution of meat provisions sparked much discussion. Generally meat consumption was a privilege for the rich and noble who could complement their livestock income with meats obtained from hunting. The archaeological record indicates that aristocrats consumed the meats of a wide variety of hunted animals. These included, among others, wild rabbits and sika deer, pheasants, cranes, turtledoves, wild geese, partridges, magpies, and ringed pheasants.<sup>74</sup> Some of the more extravagant meats – often cited by the masters of philosophy in criticisms against overindulgence – included leopard fetus, yak tail, and bear paws.<sup>75</sup>

In contrast, the lower strata of Warring States and Han society were mostly deprived of the luxuries of meat, except the occasional chicken or fowl during special occasions or when guests were to be entertained. The cost of meat can be gleaned from a Han mathematical treatise that contains average prices of 5,454 cash for a horse, 1,200 to 3,750 for an ox, 300 to 900 for a pig, 150 to 500 for a sheep, 100 for a dog, 70 for a chicken, and 29 for a rabbit. This may have been within reach of the budget of a noble of a small estate of 1,000 households, who could expect to extract an annual income of 200,000 cash, but

<sup>73</sup> *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 6.261–5 (“Fu xu” 福虛); versions of the story are preserved in *Xinshu jiaozhu*, 6.246 (“Chunqiu” 春秋); and *Xinxu jiaoshi*, 4.559–62 (“Za shi” 雜事).

<sup>74</sup> Sterckx (2002), 28–9.

<sup>75</sup> *Han Feizi jishi*, 7.400 (“Yu Lao” 喻老), 7.438 (“Shui lin” 說林); *Shuoyuan*, 8.190, 10.264. For bear paws as a delicacy, see *Zuozhuan*, 515 (Lord Wen, year 1; where King Cheng, in vain, begs to be granted a portion of bear paws before he dies), 655 (Lord Xuan, year 2; where Duke Ling 靈 of Jin 晉 [r. 620–607 BCE] executes his cook for serving bear paws that were not thoroughly cooked). See also *Guoyu*, 18.575 (“Chu yu, xia”); *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 23.1559 (“Guo li”); and *Shiji*, 39.1673. For bear paws and leopard fetus (*bao tai* 豹胎), see also Xu Gan’s 徐幹 (171–218 CE) “Qi yu” 七喻 and Wang Can’s (177–217 CE) 王粲 “Qi shi” 七釋 in *Quan Han fu*, 632, 689.

for the peasant farmer who lived on the margins of subsistence, these were unaffordable luxuries.<sup>76</sup>

The nutritional and recreational benefits gained from the privilege of being able to consume meat together with wine are often cast in the context of discussions on the moral and ritual propriety of eating meat. The health benefits of meat and wine consumption and the social status associated with it could be tempered by the possibility that both can easily lead to overindulgence. The very same ingredients that symbolized social prestige were at the same time luxury goods that, when consumed in excess, could testify to questionable moral conduct or impede self-cultivation. This fine line between nutritional virtue and consumer excess is illustrated in a statement in the *Lüshi chunqiu*: “Fat meat and rich wine – people are devoted to them because it gives them strength, yet they should be called ‘foods that putrefy the intestines.’”<sup>77</sup>

The ritual status associated with meat can be traced back to the role of the sacrificial meat exchange as a political institution in Zhou China. In *Chunqiu* and Warring States times, overlords would seal political bonds with their feudal lords by distributing gifts of sacrificial meat. The same gift system trickled down the social hierarchy: Underlords presented a share of their sacrificial meats to their respective subjects and, in turn, received meat offerings from their followers. Hence the cascading order in which leftovers were distributed after sacrifice determined the rank and mutual hierarchy among donors and recipients of meat.<sup>78</sup> “By means of the sacrificial meat exchange,” the *Zhouli* 周禮 states, “friendly relations are established between states belonging to the brothers of the sovereign.”<sup>79</sup> Sacrificial meats were also distributed prior to military campaigns.<sup>80</sup> Such was the symbolical significance of meat that there existed different technical terms for sacrificial meats exchanged as tokens of investiture depending on whether they were raw or cooked or whether they were presented at the altar of the soil or in the ancestral temple.<sup>81</sup> Members

<sup>76</sup> *Jiu zhang suan shu jiaozheng*, 8.425–9, 436 (“Fang cheng” 方程); and Okamura (2005), 51–5. The range of these prices is confirmed in excavated records from Dunhuang, Juyan, and elsewhere. See Liu Jinhua (2008) and Ding Bangyou (2009), 108–17, 236–49.

<sup>77</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 1.21 (“Ben sheng” 本生). Alcohol consumption is discussed at length in Chapter 3.

<sup>78</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 271 (Lord Min, year 2), 326 (Lord Xi, year 9), 427 (Lord Xi, year 24), 1378 (Lord Zhao, year 16); *Chunqiu zhu*, 1593 (Lord Ding, year 14); *Guoyu*, 11.402 (“Jin yu 5”); *Zhouli zhengyi*, 60.2515 (“Ji pu” 祭僕); *Shiji*, 5.203, 5.205. On the model of cascading meat remainders, see Levi (2009), 648–64.

<sup>79</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 34.1363 (“Da zong bo” 大宗伯). For another passage stating that a sovereign’s return of meat to feudal lords serves to link their blessings to his, see *Zhouli zhengyi*, 71.2949 (“Da xing ren” 大行人).

<sup>80</sup> Lewis (1990), 29–30.

<sup>81</sup> Sterckx (2006b), 11n.39; Chavannes (1910b), 518–19.

of Warring States society referred to by the term “meat eaters” (*rou shi zhe* 肉食者), then, comprised members of the nobility and officials who enjoyed high rank and salary.<sup>82</sup> Although it is impossible to quantify consumption for lower elites and commoners, one must assume that public sacrifices or ritual exchanges of meat may have been one of few occasions during the year when they had access to it.<sup>83</sup>

The sacrificial meat exchange is one of the clearest manifestations of how the ritualized food exchange in early China operated at the heart of social and political relationships. The acceptance or refusal to accept sacrificial meats functioned as a symbolical reaffirmation or rejection of interpersonal and interstate allegiances. In the ritual gift economy of early China, the symbolical stature of meat superseded its relative economic value. To no great surprise, several Confucius narratives situate the Master at the heart of controversies involving the exchange of meat. Mencius, for instance, notes that when Confucius parted services with the state of Lu:

[H]e participated in a sacrifice, but afterwards, was not given a share of the meat of the sacrificial animal. He then left the state without waiting to take off his ceremonial cap. Those who did not understand him assumed he acted in this way because of the meat, but those who understood him realized that he left because Lu failed to observe the proper rites.<sup>84</sup>

In essence, Confucius parts with his patron here because the latter failed to distribute the remainders of the meat sacrifice among his officials to forge allegiance. Versions of this anecdote are quoted in Han sources. Sima Qian's biography of Confucius has the Master spell out the rationale behind his choice to leave his home state: “Today Lu is about to proceed to offer the suburban sacrifice; if Lu sends its remainders of the sacrificial meats to the grand officers I will be able to stay on.”<sup>85</sup> Another passage, preserved in the *Lunyu*, suggests that sacrificial meat was the only gift from friends Confucius would receive with a bow: “When receiving a gift from a friend, even if it

<sup>82</sup> See, e.g., *Zuozhuan*, 182 (Lord Zhuang, year 10), 1249 (Lord Ai, year 4), 1677 (Lord Ai, year 13). Social status is associated in *Zuozhuan*, 1249 (Duke Zhao, year 4), with a “meat-eating salary” (*shi rou zhi lu* 食肉之祿). *Shuoyuan*, 11.271 (“Shan shui” 善說) distinguishes upper-class meat eaters from commoners known as “bean leaf eaters” (*huo shi zhe* 藿食者). For “bean leaf eaters,” see also *Hou Hanshu*, 47.1655.

<sup>83</sup> To put a comparative figure on this, according to Vincent Rosivach, a typical fourth-century Athenian had access to meat distributed after public sacrifices on up to forty-five occasions during the year (that is, on average, every eight or nine days). See Rosivach (1994), 64–7. On meat sharing at such festivals, see Parke (1977), 46–9. Jameson (1988) doubts that these meats significantly augmented overall protein and calorie intake.

<sup>84</sup> *Mengzi zhengyi*, 24.834 (6B.6). See also *Shuoyuan*, 17.415 (“Za yan”).

<sup>85</sup> *Shiji*, 47.1918. See also *Shuoyuan*, 17.415 (“Za yan”).



was a carriage or horses, he did not bow unless it was a gift of sacrificial meat.”<sup>86</sup> Although these stories no doubt idealize the importance of meat in the repertoire of the ritual gift economy, it is clear that the role of shared meat consumption as a marker of kin and social hierarchy survived into early imperial times. Qin law, for instance, stipulated that a wife and children “eating meat” with a guilty husband would automatically be subjected to the same punishment.<sup>87</sup>

The moral requisites of good government required that the infirm and elderly were to be provisioned with meat and wine. Many idealized descriptions of virtuous rule allude to such charitable meat distributions, which sometimes took the shape of a ritual ceremony. According to the *Guanzi* 管子, meat and wine was to be allocated on a monthly basis to people older than eighty and on a daily basis to nonagenarians.<sup>88</sup> Mencius confirms that facilitating meat consumption for people older than seventy reflected good government.<sup>89</sup> Reserving meats for the elderly in life and the ancestors in sacrifice was also explained as a gesture of filial obligation (*xiao* 孝), a term that, in Western Zhou times and prior to the advent of the household and bureaucratic state, referred primarily to ancestral food offerings.<sup>90</sup> The *Liji*’s “Rules of the Interior Household” regulate meat privileges for the elderly in detail:

Those who were fifty were given especially fine grain. For those of sixty, meat was kept in store. Those of seventy enjoyed an extra portion of savory meat and octogenarians were supplied regularly with delicacies. For those of ninety food and drink was not to leave their chambers and it was deemed permissible that savory meats and drink should follow them wherever they went.<sup>91</sup>

To be sure, it is doubtful that such normative guidelines and idealized charitable schemes are a reflection of reality. Nevertheless evidence suggests that some practices did become institutionalized. In Han times, charitable food distributions were incorporated in the state’s calendar, and one ceremony, reportedly going back to Zhou times, was known as “Entertaining the Aged” (*yang lao* 養老). On this occasion, in the tenth month in winter, senior citizens were treated to a banquet in the capital or a wine-drinking

<sup>86</sup> *Lunyu yi zhu*, 107 (10.23).

<sup>87</sup> *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 97–98 (strips 17–18); Hulsewé (1985), 125 (D15, D16).

<sup>88</sup> *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 18.1033 (“Ru guo” 入國).

<sup>89</sup> *Mengzi zhengyi*, 2.53–4 (1A.3), 3.95 (1A.7), 27.911 (7A.22); see also Huang Junjie (2004).

<sup>90</sup> Knapp (1995).

<sup>91</sup> *Liji jijie*, 28.754 (“Nei ze”).

ceremony in their district.<sup>92</sup> Another ritual traced back to the idealized Zhou state was an annual spring ceremony during which the elderly were treated to a porridge containing dove meat – a ritual that, commentators claim, served to reinvigorate their vital energies following the winter months.<sup>93</sup> During banquets for the elderly, the emperor would personally bare his arms, cut up the meats, and serve condiments as a public demonstration of respect.<sup>94</sup> Sumptuary codes describing local village rituals in the Han confirm that meat played an equally important role in demarcating the status of the elderly in the local social hierarchy:

During the Village Drinking Ceremony, the elderly were to have a separate meal as a means to comfort men from sixty to the over-eighties, and to demonstrate clearly that the elders should be nourished. Thus an elderly person was not supposed to be satisfied without meat, nor was he to be made warm without silk, or to walk without the support of a stick.<sup>95</sup>

With meat and wine so potent as symbols of abundance in the nourishment of humans as well as the sacrificial sustenance of the spirits, it is no great surprise that both meat and wine were singled out as primary objects for abstinence during rituals that required fasting and purification. Meat abstinence reflected ritual purity and moral sincerity and, as such, the intake of meat was to be minimized in preparation for many rituals, during fasts, and – most importantly – during the traditional mourning period that could extend into three years.<sup>96</sup> “A gentleman in mourning,” argues Confucius in the *Lunyu*, “finds no relish in fine food, no joy in listening to music and no comforts in his own home.”<sup>97</sup> Descriptions of fasting methods are diverse depending on the source and the ritual occasion they are associated with. According to the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, fasting prior to a sacrifice requires abstaining from wine, meat, and strong-tasting vegetables such as onions, garlic, and leek.<sup>98</sup> Exposure to

<sup>92</sup> For a study, see Bodde (1975), 361–72. For its purported association with Zhou and further references, see *Zhouli zhengyi*, 8.278 (“Wai yong” 外饗), 10.362 (“Jiu zheng” 酒正), 31.1242 (“Gao ren” 槁人).

<sup>93</sup> *Hou Hanshu*, 3.157; Bodde (1975), 344–9. On the life-giving symbolism associated with pigeons and doves, see Sterckx (2002), 174. Chen Xuguo (rpt. 2002), vol. 2, 248–60, includes a discussion of the pigeon staffs distributed at these occasions, and the wooden documents related to these ceremonies found in Han tombs 13 and 18 in Mozuizi 磨咀子 (Gansu). For an example on a Western Han mural, see Hu Xinli (2008), 15 (plate 20).

<sup>94</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 58.2450; *Hanshu*, 51.2330.

<sup>95</sup> *Yantie lun jiaozhu*, 15.192 (“Wei tong” 未通). On the village drinking ceremony, see Yao Weijun (1999), 78–95.

<sup>96</sup> The exact length of the so-called three-year mourning period (usually understood as a period stretching into the third year rather than thirty-six months) was subject to debate throughout the Warring States and early Han period. See Lai Guolong (2003), 79–91.

<sup>97</sup> *Lunyu yi zhu*, 188 (17.21).

<sup>98</sup> *Zhuangzi jishi*, 4.146 (“Ren jian shi” 人間世).



1.3. Feeding the elderly. Rubbing of a mural; Eastern Han, Zengjiabao, Chengdu, Sichuan.

Source: Li Song (2001), 265.

blood, either that of killed or wounded animals and humans or indeed menstruating women or women giving birth, during a purification period preceding ancestral sacrifices is deemed polluting in several sources.<sup>99</sup> The *Zhouli* insists that a king during a fast should ingest pulverized jade. According to Zheng Xuan, this purest form of *yang* essence would suppress an excess of

<sup>99</sup> *Shuowen jiezi*, 12B.28b–29a (under the graph *ban* 𡗗); *Liji jijie*, 28.761 (“*Nei ze*”); *Hanshu*, 71.3047. Wang Chong speaks of a taboo on contact with blood in the context of sacrifice. See *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 23.969 (“*Si hui*”).

“water vapor,” which, as well as tallying with five-phase thought, could possibly refer to the predominantly fluid-based diet during a fast.<sup>100</sup> A passage in the *Lunyu* describes Confucius’ fasting habit broadly as a period in which he “altered his diet” (*bian shi* 變食) and changed the place where he usually sat when at leisure.<sup>101</sup> Xunzi 荀子 (ca. 335–238) formulates the choice of diet, among other measures, as a direct expression of one’s emotions:

Grain- and grass-fed animals, rice and millet, distilled and sweet spirits, meat and fish or, alternatively, thick and thin congee, beans and young bean leaves, water and rice water appear in one’s food and drink as expressions of sorrow and happiness and as reactions to auspicious and inauspicious events.<sup>102</sup>

The mourning regulations preserved in the *Liji* subject the mourner to staged periods of abstention as the mourning period progresses: “At the end of the heaviest mourning period [after nine months], one may eat vegetables and fruits, and drink water and broth, using no salt or vinegar. If one is unable to eat dry cereals, one may use salt and vinegar with them.”<sup>103</sup> At the burial of a minister or grandee, a ruler was expected not to eat meat nor listen to music after the prescribed session of wailing.<sup>104</sup> According to another passage, fasting during mourning included a three-day period of total abstention that was gradually alleviated by the intake of gruel, following which the mourner reverted to solid foods. A chief mourner was to live on coarse rice and water. Fruits and vegetables were only to be eaten a year into the mourning period, whereas the intake of meat was deferred by another year.<sup>105</sup> Two recently excavated text fragments suggest a belief that wailing near the grave was to be restrained lest one scares away the ghosts of the departed and prevents them from eating the offerings set before them.<sup>106</sup> Mourners progressively returned to a full diet, via a vegetarian stage, as they gradually distanced themselves from the deceased to re-enter the world of the living and re-engage with familiar worldly flavors and sensations.

<sup>100</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 12.456–7 (“Yu fu” 玉府). I remain unsure about Zheng Xuan’s explanation. Other commentators explain jade ingestion as a form of purification prior to establishing contact with the spirit world or link it to later immortality practices.

<sup>101</sup> *Lunyu yi zhu*, 101 (10.7).

<sup>102</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 19.364 (“Li lun” 禮論); tr. Knoblock, vol. 3, 66.

<sup>103</sup> *Liji jijie*, 41.1101 (“Za ji, xia”).

<sup>104</sup> *Liji jijie*, 42.1111 (“Za ji, xia”).

<sup>105</sup> *Liji jijie*, 43.1155–56 (“Sang da ji” 喪大記). See also *Bohutong shu zheng*, 11.516–17 (“Sang fu” 喪服). For the idea that during mourning, nothing but rice gruel (*zhou* 粥) should be eaten, see *Mengzi zhengyi*, 10.323 (3A.2) and *Liji jijie*, 10.266 (“Tan gong” 檀弓).

<sup>106</sup> This belief is attested in a return-to-life story discovered in a tomb at Fangmatan 放馬灘 (Tianshui 天水, Gansu; burial dated ca. 230–220 BCE), and on a fragmentary slip (late Western Han) recovered at a site ca. 60 miles west of Dunhuang. See Li Xueqin (2001), 167–75, and Zhang Defang and Hu Pingsheng eds. (2001), 183, no. 268.



The ritual codes allow for exceptions to the rules governing periodical fasts: Gruel can be substituted by a vegetable broth, the ill and infirm are allowed to eat meat and drink wine during mourning, age can be grounds for being excused from some observances, and there are occasions when wine need not accompany the intake of meat.<sup>107</sup> The sumptuary mourning codes also include regulations on bodily hygiene to treat exhaustion or prevent illness during a fast: Ulcers on the body of the mourner should be cleansed and wounds on the head washed. Emaciating the body to the point of illness should be prevented.<sup>108</sup> Dying from emaciation is condemned as a failure of a son's filial duties. The *Bohutong* 白虎通 emphasizes that mourners suffering illness should be permitted to drink wine and eat meat because both ingredients are the means by which "one supports one's life's strength, and thereby honors the limbs and body his ancestors have left to him."<sup>109</sup> Maintaining a balance between regulated fasting while ensuring that the senses are not damaged to the point that would prevent a gradual return to normal life appears to be the underlying idea. The codes indeed acknowledge the impact of grief and mourning on the mental and physical health of immediate relatives:

In the bitterness of (a son's) grief (over his father's death), and the distress and pain of his thoughts, his kidneys were injured, his liver dried up, and his lungs scorched, while water or broth would not enter his mouth. For three days the cooking fire was not kindled. And therefore neighbours would prepare gruel and rice-water to feed him. Thus when there was internal sorrow and grief, this would produce a change in his outward appearance. As severe hurt and pain would take hold of his heart, his mouth could not relish any sweet flavors, nor could his body find ease in anything comfortable.<sup>110</sup>

The text continues by stipulating the process of re-entry into the world of normal flavors once the official mourning period is over: At first the mourner takes coarse rice and water, next vegetables and fruits are eaten again, then pickles and sauces reappear on the menu, and finally sweet wine, ale, and dried meat are consumed again.<sup>111</sup> And so the mourner gradually rejoins the sensory world of the living: from a temporary world devoid of flavor, passing through the consumption of water, hash, sauce, dried meat, and finally to the reinvigorating delights of fresh meat and wine.

<sup>107</sup> *Liji jijie*, 43.1158 ("Sang da ji"); *Xunzi jijie*, 19.495 ("Da lue"). Elsewhere it is stated that the ill mourner should spice up the wine and meats he is allowed to eat with the flavors of herbs and grasses, ginger and cinnamon in particular. See *Liji jijie*, 8.191 ("Tan gong").

<sup>108</sup> *Liji jijie*, 41.1101 ("Za ji, xia"); *Bohutong shu zheng*, 11.520 ("Sang fu").

<sup>109</sup> *Bohutong shu zheng*, 11.519 ("Sang fu").

<sup>110</sup> *Liji jijie*, 54.1349–50 ("Wen sang" 問喪).

<sup>111</sup> *Liji jijie*, 55.1366 ("Jian zhuan" 問傳).

To what extent these prescribed fasts were upheld in reality remains, of course, hard to corroborate. That some were more careless than others in sticking to the codes is clear from anecdotal evidence. The notorious case of Liu He 劉賀, King of Changyi 昌邑, provides a fitting example. When summoned to Chang'an to take care of funeral proceedings following the death of Emperor Zhao 漢昭帝 (in 74 BCE) – a charge that implied that he would be heir to the throne – Liu disregarded all rules of behavior befitting a nobleman in mourning. On his journey to the capital, he failed to eat “simple fare” (*su shi* 素食). Once in the capital, he secretly dispatched men to purchase fowl and pork for his meals. To make things worse, he organized meat sacrifices and a banquet in the Shanglin 上林 park while the emperor was still lying in state. Disgraced in a memorial to the Empress Dowager for his unruly conduct, he was deposed from the throne in 73 BCE by Marshal of State Huo Guang 霍光 after just twenty-seven days in office.<sup>112</sup>

### BANQUETS

Whereas fasting on the occasion of funerals and sacrificial rituals constituted one conduit for the public display of moral conduct, banquets and feasts provided another venue for the judgment of human character and the display of social skill and political dexterity. The ancients, the *Zuozhuan* notes, laid on entertainments and feasts to observe the demeanor of their guests and examine their pending bad or good fortune:<sup>113</sup>

In the administration of the world, feudal lords pay court to one another in the leisure left after their duties to the Son of Heaven. For this purpose they have ritual banquets and feasts. With banquets they inculcate reverence and frugality; with feasting they demonstrate kindness and generosity.<sup>114</sup>

Sacrificial banquets and feasts were among those public instruments of ostentation that allowed one to “demonstrate one’s virtue (*zhao de* 昭德),” in the words attributed to Confucius.<sup>115</sup> Or as a passage in the *Guoyu* states:

When kings, dukes and feudal lords set up a banquet it was in order to discuss affairs (of state) and perfect their eminence (*cheng zhang* 成章).<sup>116</sup> It was

<sup>112</sup> *Hanshu*, 68.2764, 68.2940–4. See also Brown (2007), 21.

<sup>113</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 869 (Lord Cheng, year 15).

<sup>114</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 857–8 (Lord Cheng, year 12); tr. Schaberg (2001), 244. For a similar passage describing banqueting as the pinnacle of ritual, see *Zuozhuan*, 1267–8 (Lord Zhao, year 5).

<sup>115</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 1579 (Lord Ding, year 10).

<sup>116</sup> My translation here follows Martin Powers who argues that, generally speaking, *zhang* denotes any “insignia of social station.” See Powers (2006), 72–4.

to establish great virtue and to display grand ritual vessels (*wu* 物). In this way they set up and completed their sacrificial offerings. They banqueted to display their ritual vessels and feasted in order to promote harmony and friendship.<sup>117</sup>

Banquets were thus a catalyst for social conduct, and, as such, they were rule-infested gatherings. Knowing how to decline the honor of being entreated with a banquet or refraining from partaking in a banquet deemed too sumptuous for one's social station could reflect a nobleman's personal and diplomatic integrity. Thus Ji Sunsu 季孫宿 (d. 535 BCE) initially refused to accept a banquet offered by the Marquis of Jin because it contained more than the acceptable number of dishes worthy of an envoy of a small state such as Lu. Only when the surplus dishes were removed did the party continue.<sup>118</sup> The elaborate requirements of etiquette and ritual propriety solicited praise from some literati but provoked the scorn of others. As an example of the former, take the following endorsement of the ritual imperatives that underlie banqueting, quoted from an imperial edict in 56 BCE: "Gatherings for eating and drinking provide the means whereby the rules of ritual propriety and music are put into practice."<sup>119</sup> The same edict continues by criticizing local officials for arbitrarily prohibiting people from organizing celebratory feasts to accompany marriages. That some ritualists preferred to see the food taken out of banquets to be left only with etiquette may be reflected in the following remarks by Wang Chong:

Therefore literati embody ritual propriety and righteousness; those who live of the plough and warfare embody drinking and eating. To value agriculture and welfare while despising literati equals rejecting ritual propriety and righteousness to seek drinking and eating.<sup>120</sup>

Some criticized the overregulated etiquette required during banquets. A passage in the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, for instance, argues that just as an overload of military commands would plunge an army into chaos, excessive rules during drinking parties will lead to disputes:

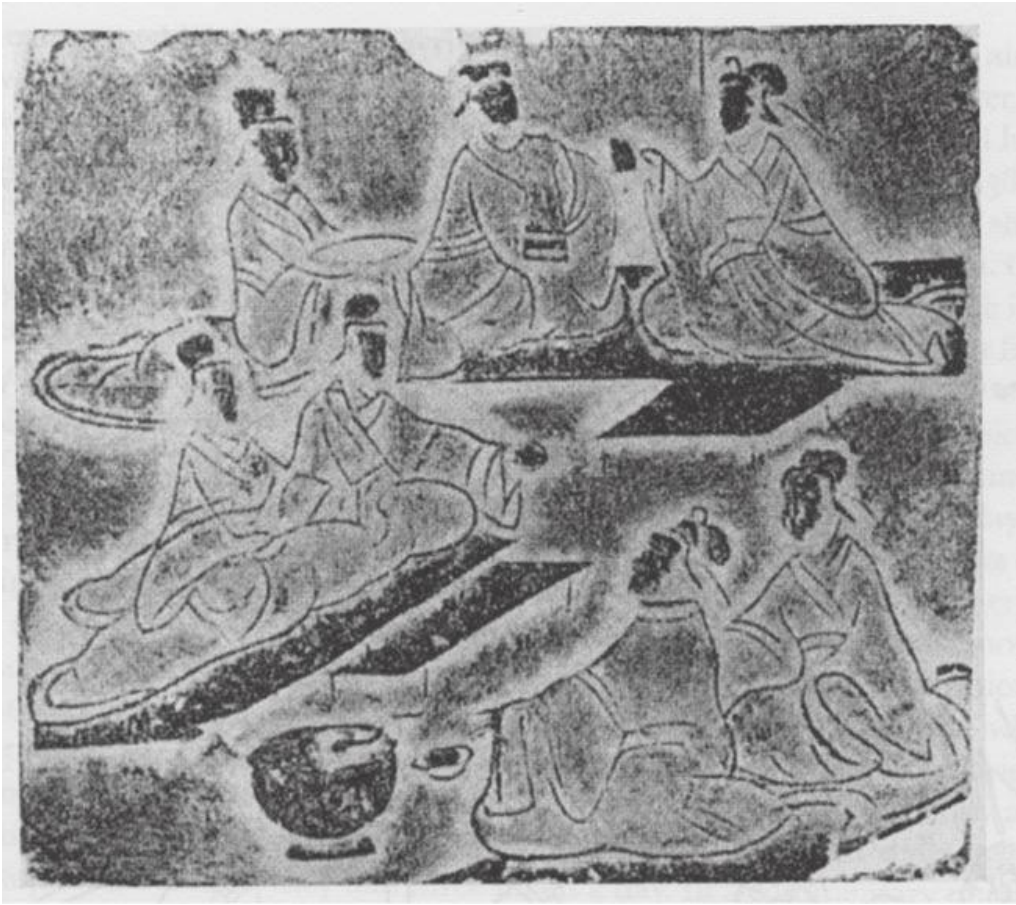
Today when there are delicious liquors and fine meats with which one feasts one another, people receive each other with humbly polite postures and words of pleasantry as they desire to bring into harmony their feelings of pleasure. Yet when instead one starts to strive among each other to fill the

<sup>117</sup> *Guoyu*, 2.64 ("Zhou yu, zhong"); Wei Zhao 韋昭 (d.273 CE) identifies *wu* as ceremonial vessels.

<sup>118</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 1277 (Lord Zhao, year 7).

<sup>119</sup> *Hanshu*, 8.265.

<sup>120</sup> *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 10.432 ("Fei Han" 非韓).



1.4. Banqueting scene; Eastern Han. Chengdu, Sichuan.  
Source: Fairbank (1972), 180.

cups fighting erupts and during these fights people get hurt. Even among the three familial relationships feelings of disgust and hatred are fostered. All of this is damage caused by a drinking party.<sup>121</sup>

The underlying moral message here is the Daoist advocacy to minimize rules and regulations in favor of spontaneity and natural harmony.

The guidelines on banqueting etiquette in the ritual canon – a topic that merits a separate study – are extensive and can be supplemented by information scattered across other, less systemizing texts. They range from basic table etiquette to the welcoming of visitors and guests, the spatial distribution of dishes, the order and sequence in which dishes were to be served and eaten, to close-up descriptions of drinking, toasting, and even methods of chewing. The *Zuozhuan* notes that according to ancient rules of propriety, one was not

<sup>121</sup> *Huainanzi*, 14.484–5 (“Quan yan” 詮言).



to lean over when seated on the mats on which the dishes were served. When the cups were filled, guests were expected to refrain from drinking until the right moment for toasting had arrived.<sup>122</sup> Beakers with ale were not to be moved around randomly while sitting.<sup>123</sup> The sheer detail of some guidelines suggests that table manners and the ritual and social hierarchies they instilled were at least as important as the actual menu itself. An example:

In all cases the rules for bringing in the dishes (for an entertainment) are the following: The meat cooked on the bone is set on the left, and the sliced meat on the right;<sup>124</sup> the rice is placed on the left of the parties on the mat, and the stew on their right; the minced and roasted meat[s] are put on the outside and the pickles and sauces on the inside; the onions and steamed onions at the end, and the wines and broths are placed to the right. When slices of dried and spiced meat are put down, where they are folded is turned to the left with the ends put to the right. If a guest is of lower rank (than the host), he should take up the rice, rise and decline (the honor he is receiving). The host then rises and objects to the guest's (request to retire). After this the guest resumes his seat. When the host leads the guests to present an offering, they offer rice followed by the dishes that were first brought in. Going on from the meat cooked on the bone, they present offerings of all the other dishes. After they have eaten rice three times, the host will invite the guests to partake of the sliced meat, from which they will go on to all the other meats. When the host has not yet gone over all the dishes, a guest should not rinse his mouth with wine.<sup>125</sup>

Incidents involving bad table manners abound in the literature. One story tells of a rustic who stumbled on a meat sauce he was very fond of. Disliking the idea of having to share it, he spat into it. This angered his dining companions so much that they blew their noses into his sauce and left.<sup>126</sup> In another story, one of Confucius' disciples reprimands someone for being overly concerned with cleanness and in the habit of removing the top layer of a dish before eating: "You should not do this. It gives the impression that you have some ulterior motive. In the old days, when the superior men were given grants of wine and food they were duty-bound to taste it. They shunned throwing

<sup>122</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 1267 (Lord Zhao, year 5). On observing rules of propriety in drinking, see also *Zuozhuan*, 221 (Lord Zhuang, year 22).

<sup>123</sup> *Fengsu tongyi*, 564 ("Yi wen").

<sup>124</sup> According to Zheng Xuan, meat on the bone represents *yang* (left) and cut meat represents *yin* (right), the staple of rice is *yang* (left) whereas the stew is *yin* (right). Peng Meiling (1997), 101–18, argues that in the *Zhouli*, *Liji*, and *Yili*, dishes and offerings placed to the right are deemed more valuable.

<sup>125</sup> *Liji jijie*, 3.51–6 ("Qu li" 曲禮).

<sup>126</sup> *Xinlun*, 22a.

away food. If the food was suitable for eating there was no reason to choose between the upper and the lower layers. If the food was thought unclean, the lower portion of it was regarded as more so.”<sup>127</sup> Even the body language during a meal attracted comments from ritualists:

Do not roll rice into a ball; do not bolt down the various dishes; do not swill down (the soup). Do not make a noise in eating; do not crunch the bones with the teeth; do not put back fish you have been eating; do not throw bones to the dogs; do not snatch (at what you want). Do not spread out the rice; do not use chopsticks in eating millet. Do not gulp down broth, nor add condiments to it; do not keep picking the teeth, nor gulp down sauces. If a guest adds condiments, the host should apologize for not having had the soup better prepared. If he swills down the sauces, the host will apologize for his poverty. Soft and juicy meat may be split with the teeth, but dried flesh may not....<sup>128</sup>

In some texts, the teaching of good table manners is presented as a method to foster filial piety and respect for the elderly: Parents are to be encouraged at all times to eat to the full whereas sons and daughters-in-law must be content with the leftovers.<sup>129</sup>

Just as judgments about loyalty, propriety, and moral integrity were condensed into the codes of behavior that surrounded the meal, banquets were also venues where matters of political and military honor were settled. “The way of eating,” as Yü Ying-shih once pointed out, “could also become a subtle political art.”<sup>130</sup> On occasions, a banquet offered a platform for self-criticism or a scene where the conduct of a ruler or superior could be evaluated. Duke Wen of Wei 魏 (r. 445–396 BCE), for instance, organized a feast at which he ordered all his great officers to offer assessments (*lun* 論) of him and allowed a guest who had made a candid criticism of him to rejoin the party.<sup>131</sup> A more common theme in the literature, however, is the use of the banquet or drinking party as a ploy to trick, humiliate, or eliminate political opponents. Such plots of the palate include attempted assassinations or the detention of one or more guests, deliberate food poisoning, and ritualized character competitions to provoke the wrath or vengeance of one or several of the dining partners.<sup>132</sup> On one occasion (in the year corresponding to 514 BCE), a king

<sup>127</sup> *Kong Congzi*, 13.90–1 (“Ru fu” 儒服).

<sup>128</sup> *Liji jijie*, 3.57–9 (“Qu li”); tr. Chang Kwang-chih (1977), 38–9.

<sup>129</sup> *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 24.1529 (“Qing zhong, ji” 輕重己); *Liji jijie*, 27.728, 734 (“Nei ze”).

<sup>130</sup> “Han,” in Chang Kwang-chih (1977), 66.

<sup>131</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 24.1601 (“Zi zhi” 自知).

<sup>132</sup> For examples, see *Zuozhuan*, 152 (Lord Huan, year 18), 659 (Lord Xuan, year 2), 677–8 (Lord Xuan, year 4), 1145–6 (Lord Xiang, year 28), 1724 (Lord Ai, year 25); *Guoyu*, 1.28–9 (“Zhou yu, shang”); *Zhanguo ce*, 29.1050; *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 14.791–2 (“Zhang gong” 長攻), 15.893

is stabbed during a banquet with a dagger hidden inside a fish.<sup>133</sup> During the famous banquet at Hongmen 鴻門 (206 BCE), the Han founder Liu Bang 劉邦 narrowly escaped an assassination attempt while being hosted in Xiang Yu's 項羽 encampment.<sup>134</sup> Poisoning opponents was another recurrent ploy as is suggested by records of unfortunate servants dropping dead after tasting food and drink destined for their masters.<sup>135</sup>

The coded environment of a banquet or a drinking pledge also affirmed respective hierarchies among participants. These could be expressed in the seating arrangements, in the number of allocated dishes, in the sequence in which guests toasted their host or vice versa, and in the utensils and food vessels and cups used during a banquet.<sup>136</sup> All these rules translated into a complex code that could test a gentleman or warrior's proper grasp of the rules of chivalry and ritual propriety.<sup>137</sup> Protocol could differ depending on the gravitas of the occasion or whether or not the rules of the court or those of the military applied. The latter is poignantly illustrated in an incident in which Liu Zhang 劉章, grandson of Han Gaozu 高祖, offered his services as Master of Wine at a palace banquet organized by the Empress Dowager Lü 呂. As the son of a general, he requested permission to observe military protocol when passing the wine. In an exchange of songs that accompanied the banquet, Liu hints at the parasitic usurpation of power by the Lü clan. When one member of Lü clan feels the heat and sets off to flee from the venue, Liu hacks him down promptly on the pretext that military protocol requires that guests fleeing a feast should be executed. Empress Lü, who had effectively granted permission for the banquet to be run according to military protocol, was in no position to charge him with a crime.<sup>138</sup> Little is known about the exact military protocol that inspired the plot in this particular incident, but it is clear from the military classics that banquets and feasts were used to reward

(“Bao geng” 報更); *Hanshu*, 96B.3906. For a failed assassination attempt during a banquet at the court of the Southern Yue, see *Shiji*, 113.2972–3. For poisoning through administering medicine, see *Zuozhuan*, 1402 (Lord Zhao, year 19). For a plot (in 80 BCE) to assassinate Huo Guang during a drinking party, see *Hanshu*, 7.226–7.

<sup>133</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 1484 (Lord Zhao, year 27).

<sup>134</sup> The banquet is described in full in Yü Ying-shih, “Han China,” in Chang Kwang-chih (1977), 63–5. Yu questions the identification of a mural discovered at Luoyang (dated between 48 and 7 BCE) with the actual banquet reported by Sima Qian. For an excerpt from the mural, see Huang Hsing-tung (2000), 102–3.

<sup>135</sup> See, e.g., *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 19.1256 (“Shang de” 上德). For an attempt to murder through poisoning sacrificial meats, see *Zuozhuan*, 297 (Lord Xi, year 4).

<sup>136</sup> The place of honor at a banquet was a seat that allowed the guest to face east. See e.g., *Shiji*, 107.2844, where Han chancellor Tian Fen 田蚡 dismisses his elder brother to a seat facing south to honor himself by facing east. See also *Ri zhi lu*, 29.820–1.

<sup>137</sup> See, e.g., *Zuozhuan*, 1078–9 (Lord Xiang, year 23).

<sup>138</sup> *Shiji*, 52.2001; *Fengsu tongyi*, 9.394 (“Guai shen” 怪神); *Hanshu*, 38.1992.

military merit and symbolically confirm rank and file among the troops. The Warring States strategist Wu Qi 吳起 (440–381 BCE), for instance, argued that to encourage one's officers, men of accomplishment should be honored with a grand feast. Such occasions would also encourage those who failed to accomplish anything notable. Taking his advice on board, Wu Qi's lord then spread out sitting mats in the ancestral temple hall, arrayed in three rows, and organized a feast for his officers. His most distinguished guests were seated in the front row and entertained with the most exquisite foods served on the finest of platters. Those ranking next in accomplishment sat in the middle row and were served fine food on less lavish vessels. Underachieving officers were seated in the last row and were feasted with food served on ordinary utensils.<sup>139</sup>

As the *Huainanzi* passage quoted above already indicated, the unpleasant side-effects of intemperate drinking during banquets did not escape the attention of critics and advisors. Yanzi 晏子 encourages his patron Duke Jing 景 of Qi (r. 553–548 BCE) to moderate his drinking by reminding him that in antiquity guests toasting more than five rounds would be executed.<sup>140</sup> Zhuangzi naturally appears more of a skeptic when he states that “those who drink following etiquette start off in an orderly fashion but invariably end up in unruliness.”<sup>141</sup> Another saying held that wine goblets were not to be moved during banquets to avoid the banqueters from starting a brawl.<sup>142</sup> Feigning drunkenness to leave a banquet could save one's life. When Emperor Hui 惠帝 (r. 195–188 BCE) hosted his older brother, the King of Qi, by seating him on the seat of honor following customary courtesy among members of the same family, Empress Lü put two goblets with poison before the king and demanded that he propose a toast. As she saw the emperor intending to join in the toast, she quickly overturned his goblet, thereby arousing suspicion with the King of Qi, who pretended to be drunk and left the scene.<sup>143</sup> Some used wine to cloud the senses of their advisors. Cao Shen 曹參 (d. 190 BCE), chancellor of state under Emperor Hui, spent his days and

<sup>139</sup> *Wuzi*, 6.10 (“Li shi” 勵士).

<sup>140</sup> *Yanzi chunqiu jishi*, 1.9–10 (“Nei pian, jian shang” 內篇, 諫上). The *Yanzi chunqiu* contains several other stories that admonish against drinking.

<sup>141</sup> *Zhuangzi jishi*, 4.158 (“Ren jian shi”). For other examples of arguments on etiquette clouded by alcohol and inappropriate ways of toasting, see *Shiji*, 107.2846, 107.2849.

<sup>142</sup> *Fengsu tongyi*, 564 (“Yi wen”).

<sup>143</sup> *Shiji*, 9.398. Another well-documented tactic of self-preservation was feigning madness or illness. On madness, see Schwermann (2007); for feigned illness, see *Guoyu*, 8.288 (“Jin yu, er”); *Zuozhuan*, 44 (Duke Yin, year 4), 153 (Lord Huan, year 18), 1097 (Lord Xiang, year 25); *Shiji*, 10.413; *Shuoyuan*, 6.134, 6.137 (“Fu en”); *Shiji*, 102.2756; *Hanshu*, 51.2338; *Hou Hanshu*, 72A.2707.

nights drinking strong ale. Anyone who approached him to remind him of his duties was immediately poured a succession of drinks, so that in the end, each visitor would go away drunk without having been able to offer his advice to the prime minister. The prime minister's clerks hung around their dormitory in a state of perpetual intoxication, while Cao Shen would sing and shout back and forth to them.<sup>144</sup> This wide array of anecdotes shows that intoxication among elites and officials was no rarity and that historiographers did not refrain from including a predilection for drink in their character assessments of officials.<sup>145</sup>

As much as overindulgence is the subject of running commentaries, a lack of generosity during a banquet on the part of the host could have equally dire political consequences. Take the case of Qing Feng 慶封 (d. 538 BCE) of Qi, a notorious drinker who would not hesitate to exchange his wives and concubines with his favorite guests. He was in the habit of providing two chickens daily during public meals at his court.<sup>146</sup> One day his cook secretly substituted ducks for chickens and offered soup instead of meat in the court meals served to two retainers from Qi. They condemned the serving as an insult and their fury sparked conspiracies that led to the exile of the powerful usurping minister.<sup>147</sup> In another incident a duke's refusal to allow one of his guests to feast on a turtle dish after he had dipped his finger in it set off a vengeance that eventually led to an assassination.<sup>148</sup> In these stories, Li Wai-yee remarks, "access to and denial of food emerge as defining moments for the station and dignity of a person."<sup>149</sup> Indeed on occasions public humiliations during banquets were taken to the extreme. Let us conclude with one case, that of Fan Ju 范且 (Fan Sui 睢, ca. 280–265 BCE), the once prime minister of the state of Qin, whose story is also depicted on the south wall of stone chamber no. 3 in the Wu Liang 武梁 shrine complex (2nd century CE; Jinxiang county, Shandong). He went through great effort to humiliate an envoy of

<sup>144</sup> *Shiji* 54.2029–30. On Cao Shen's drinking habits and his reputation for laissez-faire, see further *Yantie lun jiaozhu*, 10.130 ("Ci fu" 刺復), and *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 18.777 ("Zi ran" 自然).

<sup>145</sup> See, e.g., *Hanshu*, 92.3709–10, depicting the wandering knight Chen Zun 陳遵 as a notorious drunkard inebriated even on the day he was murdered.

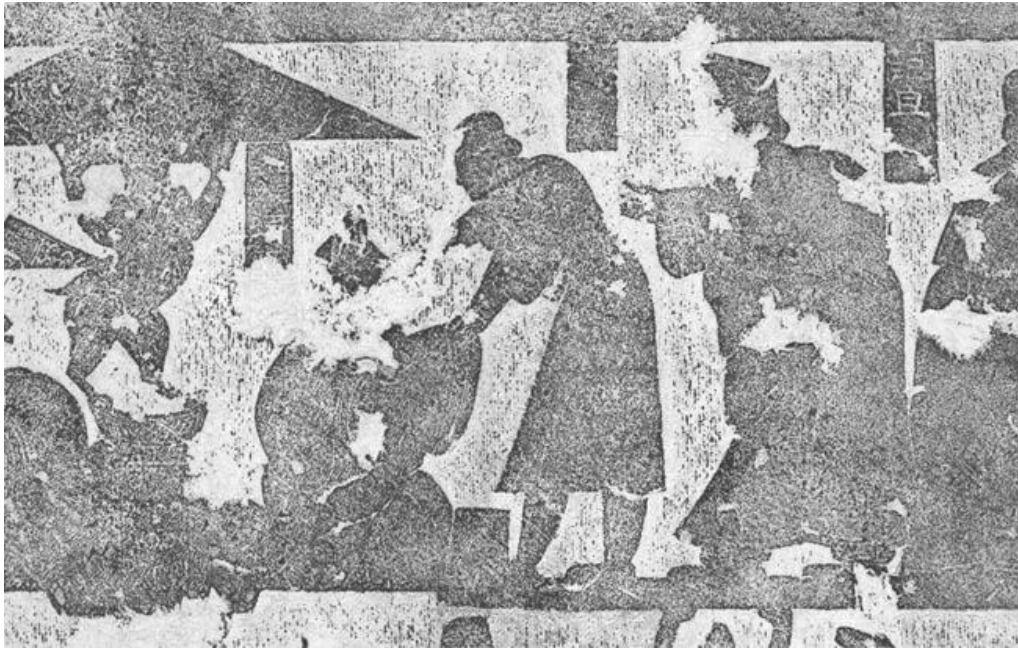
<sup>146</sup> *Gong shan* 公膳 ("public meals") is a received term for meals offered during public meetings at court. According to Yang Bojun, these occasions were known as *ke shi* 客食 "retainer meals" during the Six Dynasties period, and as *tang xuan* 堂饌 "palace dinners" during the Tang.

<sup>147</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 1145–6 (Lord Xiang, year 28); *Guoyu*, 3.109 ("Zhou yu, xia"); *Shiji*, 42.1767; *Zhong lun*, p.25.

<sup>148</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 677–8 (Lord Xuan, year 4); *Guoyu*, 5.202–3 ("Lu yu, xia"); *Han Feizi jishi*, 16.878 ("Nan si" 難四). In another incident, a king's daughter commits suicide after being insulted when her father offers her the leftovers of a fish. See *Wu Yue chunqiu*, 4.53.

<sup>149</sup> Li Wai-yee (2007), 103.





1.5. Rubbing of a mural depicting Fan Sui “horse-feeding” the envoy from Wei. Wu Liang shrines, 2nd century CE; Jinxiang county, Shandong.

Source: Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

the state of Wei. Having prepared a lavish banquet, he invited all the envoys of the other feudal lords to sit with him in the upper part of the hall, where vast quantities of food and drink were served. In contrast the Wei envoy was seated in the lower part of the hall with chopped hay and beans placed before him. To add to the insult, he was guarded by two tattooed criminals on either side who forced him “to feed like a horse.”<sup>150</sup>

#### CENAT CONFUCIUS

No paragon of virtue in early China was said to be farther removed from the excesses and improprieties described above than the figure of Confucius. We already encountered several anecdotes about the meat exchange in which the persona of Confucius figured prominently. Several other stories associated with the historical or eponymous Confucius treat his attitude toward the secular and ritual consumption of food as a mark of virtue. In the *Lunyu* Confucius claims that a gentleman should not crave a full stomach.<sup>151</sup> He is described as someone who could find pleasure in coarse food and plain water,

<sup>150</sup> *Shiji*, 79.2414. The scene in the Wu Liang shrine shows a criminal forcing food into the envoy’s mouth from a bucket. See also Liu, Nylan and Barbieri-Low, eds. (2005), 173–5.

<sup>151</sup> *Lunyu yi zhu*, 189 (17.22).

did not speak during his meal, and would not eat to the full in the presence of someone in mourning. On repeated occasions, Confucius lauds the sages of antiquity and virtuous individuals for having adopted a coarse diet.<sup>152</sup> During periods of fasting he would never fail to alter his diet, would not keep or eat sacrificial meats two or three days after a sacrifice, and would always make an offering even if he only had the most simple of meals.<sup>153</sup> Not once does the Master fail to demonstrate propriety in receiving food and tasting it:

When his lord made a gift of raw meat, [Confucius] would invariably cook it and offer some of it up to his ancestors. When his lord made a gift of live-stock, he would rear it. In attendance of his lord during dinner and when his lord was offering sacrifice, he would begin from the rice.<sup>154</sup>

During periods of intensive sacrificial activity such as funerals, Confucius would avoid being overcome by drink, and when attending a sumptuous feast he would invariably take on a formal appearance and rise to his feet.<sup>155</sup>

In addition to praising Confucius' sense of propriety and occasion when dealing with food, the *Lunyu* also portrays him as someone with a sensitive palate, who insists on the nutritional value of his diet, hygiene, due care in the serving of food, and a correct proportioning of sauces or condiments. Yet behind this image of Confucius as a distinguished gourmet, it is a sense for balance and proportion that appears to motivate his actions: Cooking, serving, and partaking of a meal in essence represent the art of proportioning and self-cultivation. As we will see in the next chapter, this philosophy of combining foodstuffs in proper measure and balancing one's intake forms a recurring theme in Warring States and Han texts. In the *Lunyu*, we are told, that Confucius:

[D]id not object to having his grain finely cleaned, nor to having his minced meat cut up fine. He did not eat grain that had been injured by heat or damp and turned sour, nor fish or flesh that was gone. He would eat nothing that was discolored or smelled strange, nor anything that was not properly cooked or out of season. He did not eat meat that was not cut properly, nor what was served without its proper sauce. Even when there was meat in abundance he would not eat it in disproportionate amount over grain foods. Only in his wine he knew no measure although he never got drunk (disorderly).<sup>156</sup> He did not partake of wine and dried meat purchased from

<sup>152</sup> *Lunyu yi zhu*, 37, 59, 68, 70, 84, 104, 188 (An. 4.9, 6.11, 7.9, 7.16, 8.21, 10.10, and 17.21).

<sup>153</sup> *Lunyu yi zhu*, 101, 103, 104 (An. 10.7, 10.9, and 10.13); *Shiji*, 47.1940.

<sup>154</sup> *Lunyu yi zhu*, 105 (An. 10.18).

<sup>155</sup> *Lunyu yi zhu*, 92, 107 (An. 9.16 and 10.25).

<sup>156</sup> Confucius' reputation as someone who could drink without having to limit his intake did not escape the scorn of Wang Chong: "King Wen drank 1000 *zhong* of wine and Confucius



the market. Although he would not clear the ginger dish from the table, he would not eat it in excess.<sup>157</sup>

Abundant indirect testimony of Confucius' attitude toward food occurs in sources beyond the Analects. A passage in the *Lüshi chunqiu* depicts him prepared to set aside his gastronomic dislikes in respect of the ancients: "King Wen enjoyed pickled calamus. When Confucius learned about this, he wrinkled his nose and tried them. It took him three years to be able to endure them."<sup>158</sup> In the *Liji*, he uses the ritual causeries that surround a banquet to share his judgments about others. When dining as guest of the Ji 季 clan, he does not decline any of the dishes, but refuses to eat meat and finishes his meal with the rice and liquid.<sup>159</sup> The Master's refusal to eat meat was a way to express his dissatisfaction with the ritual propriety shown by his host. On another occasion, Confucius praises the deference of his host by eating to the full:

When I dined as guest of the Shaoshi 少施 clan, I ate to the full since they fed me with ritual propriety. When I was about to offer some food in sacrifice, my host got up and said, 'My food is only coarse and insufficient to be offered in sacrifice.' When I was about to take the concluding portions, he got up saying, 'My provisions are only poor and I would not dare to injure you with them.'<sup>160</sup>

Some anecdotes cast his disciples as protagonists. The following story rehearses the tension between the symbolic and material value of food, a theme reminiscent of the story of the peach and millet that opened this chapter:

While Zisi dwelt in poverty, a friend gave him a present of millet from which he accepted two cartloads. Yet when someone else presented him a jar of wine and ten pieces of dried meat he considered it unacceptable. That man

a hundred *gu* .... These are alcohol addicts, they are not sages. There is a method to the drinking of alcohol since the size of the chest and belly is almost equal among men ...." See *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 7.346 ("Yu zeng" 語增). For a proverb rehearsing the same image, see Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin shi*, 7.82, quoting Kong Congzi, 2.87 ("Ru fu"), where Zi Gao argues that the sages became superior to others through virtue rather than through food and drink. According to the Mawangdui *Jing fa* 經法 ("Liu fen" 六分), a true king "may drink and eat and enjoy music. Yet he will not go so far as to be dissipated in drink and reckless in his pleasure." See *Jing fa*, 18; cf. Yates (1997b), 71.

<sup>157</sup> *Lunyu yi zhu*, 102–3 (An. 10.8). This passage has not escaped the attention of commentators and scholars who have difficulty interpreting it against the numerous other passages in the Analects in which Confucius advocates frugality or culinary restraint. Yet many concur with Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) and argue that the text serves to illustrate Confucius' sense for food hygiene, hence his refusal to consume goods purchased at public markets and the like. See *Si shu zhangju ji zhu*, 5.119–20.

<sup>158</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 14.816 ("Yu he" 遇合).

<sup>159</sup> *Liji jijie*, 30.826 ("Yu zao").

<sup>160</sup> *Liji jijie*, 42.1125 ("Za ji"). See also *Fengsu tongyi*, 3.153 ("Qian li" 慇禮).

said: “You accepted your friend’s millet and declined my wine and meat. That is, you declined the lesser quantity and took the greater. This is entirely contrary to righteousness, and what you took to be your due indicates a failure to be satisfied. What was the basis for your action?” Zisi replied: “This is true, but I was unfortunate that my poverty reached the point that my property was nearly destroyed and I was afraid I might have to cut off the sacrifices to my forefathers. Accepting the millet meant alleviating the situation. Wine and preserved meat provide the means for feasting. As for my present lack of food, feasting would be contrary to righteousness. How could I have been thinking of the matter in terms of portions? My action was based on righteousness.” The man put his wine and meat on his shoulders and left.<sup>161</sup>

In accepting plain millet and rejecting meat and wine, Confucius’ disciple here takes the moral high ground: Food, especially when received as a gift, should never solely serve the purpose of sustaining oneself. The intake of food is by definition a communal endeavor: It includes both the living and the dead who should be allocated a portion of the meal in sacrifice. This idea that meals ought to be preceded by a sacrificial offering is by no means limited to sources that bear a classicist signature, as the following quote from the *Huainanzi* confirms: “It is permissible to sacrifice first and hold a banquet afterwards. Yet banqueting first and sacrificing afterwards is not permissible.”<sup>162</sup> For Zisi in the previous story, a duty-bound gentleman should act out of a sense of righteousness and propriety first before succumbing to his instinctive desire to fill the belly. This insistence on the obligation to share a portion of a meal, however small, in sacrifice also appears in Confucius’ biographical moment of crisis between Chen and Cai when he was forced to live off vegetable broth without rice for several days. According to one version of the story, where the incident is turned into a didactic tale about the limitations of relying on others, Confucius’ starvation forced him to lie down during daylight:

Yan Hui 顏回 searched for some rice, obtained some, and cooked it. When it was almost ready, Confucius saw from a distance that Yan Hui reached for something inside the pot and ate it. He pretended that he had not seen it. When after a while the food was cooked, Yan Hui announced it to Confucius and presented the food. Confucius rose and said: “Just now I dreamed of our late lord. Since this food is pure, I will offer some to him.” Yan Hui replied, “That would not be acceptable. A while ago some charcoal ash fell into the pot. Since it is inauspicious to throw away food, I took it out of the pot and ate it. Confucius sighed and said: “What I believed was my eyes, but it

<sup>161</sup> Kong Congzi, 1.53 (“Gong Yi” 公儀). A version of the story also occurs in *Shuoyuan*, 20.528–9 (“Fan zhi” 反質).

<sup>162</sup> *Huainanzi*, 16.551 (“Shui shan”).

appears that my eyes should not be trusted; what I relied on was my heart-mind, but it appears that it is insufficient to be depended on. Disciples, take note of this: knowing other people is assuredly not easy.”<sup>163</sup>

The figure of Confucius accepting food gifts as a moral gesture over and above the intrinsic culinary value of the goods or his insistence on presenting offerings despite the questionable condition of the ingredients reappears in several apocryphal tales. The *Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語 records the following:

In Lu there was a prudent man, who once cooked food in an earthen boiler. Having eaten from it he told himself he found it tasty. He filled an earthen dish with it and brought it to Confucius. Confucius accepted it and was filled with joy as if he had received a food-gift of a *tai lao* set of sacrificial animals. Zilu said: “An earthen platter is a rustic vessel, and the cooked food in it was of poor quality. Master, why then are you so glad with it?” The Master said: “Now he who loves to remonstrate thinks of his ruler, and he who eats good food remembers his parents. I am so glad not because I consider the ingredients and implements lavish, but because, when this man considers his food lavish, it is me he thinks of.”<sup>164</sup>

In another story in the same text, Confucius is presented with a rotten fish from a fisherman, which he accepts with reverence intending to perform a sacrifice with it. When one of his disciples objects to the idea of performing a sacrifice with a discarded fish, Confucius replied: “I have heard that someone who, thinking it a pity that food would otherwise be rotten and superfluous, wishes to apply himself to giving it away, is the counterpart of a benevolent man. How could there be one who, when receiving a food-gift from a benevolent man, would not perform a sacrifice with it?”<sup>165</sup>

These Confucius stories centering on the theme that the moral intention behind a food gift and the integrity of the giver should prevail at all cost over the material value of the gift were criticized in counternarratives. One such tale is preserved in the later *Liezi* 列子. There a man who lies starving on the road accepts water and food from a criminal. Once recovered and recognizing that he had eaten food given to him by a person of dubious moral character, he tries to vomit it up. Yet the food gets stuck in his throat and as a

<sup>163</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 17.1066 (“Ren shu” 任數); tr. Knoblock and Riegel (2000), 418 (modified). Ge Hong 葛洪 (ca. 280–342 CE) questions Confucius’ sincerity behind this act: “Suspecting that Yan Hui had stolen food, Confucius pretended that he wished to sacrifice it to his ancestors . . .”. See *Bao Puzi nei pian jiaoshi*, 12.228 (“Bian wen” 辨問).

<sup>164</sup> *Kongzi jiayu*, 2.1b; tr. Kramers (1950), 231 (modified). See also *Shuoyuan*, 20.528–9 (“Fan zhi” 反質).

<sup>165</sup> *Kongzi jiayu*, 2.1b–2a; tr. Kramers (1950), 231–2 (modified). See also *Shuoyuan*, 5.107 (“Gui de” 貴德).

result he drops dead. The story concludes: “To call food criminal and refuse to eat it because the person who offers it is a thief, is to confuse name with reality.”<sup>166</sup> Perhaps the most vociferous criticism is found in the *Mozi* 墨子, where Confucius is taken to task for being inconsistent and morally dubious in his attitudes toward food:

Once, when Confucius was in trouble between Cai and Chen, he lived for ten days on a vegetable broth made of greens without any rice mixed in it. Zilu boiled a pig for him and, without asking where it had come from, Confucius ate the meat. Zilu also robbed someone of his robe to exchange it for wine, and Confucius drank the wine without asking where it came from. Yet when Duke Ai of Lu received Confucius, he refused to sit down unless his mat was straight, and refused to eat unless the food was properly cut. Zilu stepped forward and asked: “Why do you do the opposite of what you did when we were between Chen and Cai?” Confucius replied: “Come and I will tell you. At that particular time it was our ambition to stay alive but now it is our ambition to act righteously.” Thus when Confucius was starving and in trouble, he did not hesitate to grab at anything at all to keep himself alive, but when he was satiated he behaved hypocritically in order to appear refined. What greater vileness and hypocrisy could there be?<sup>167</sup>

Mozi was not alone among the masters of philosophy to turn the acceptance of food gifts into a moral quandary. Mencius tells the story of Chen Zhongzi 陳仲子, who spat out the goose stew his mother had given him because he thought it was ill-gotten. He ate what his wife cooked for him but refused to accept food from his mother.<sup>168</sup> Mencius also condemns the neglect of sacrificial duties and the use of animal victims destined for sacrifice as normal foodstuffs.<sup>169</sup>

In sum, despite the diverse contexts in which these narratives situate the Confucius figure, his disciples and other men of virtue, one underlying theme ties them together: Attitudes toward food are said to reflect an accomplished gentleman's sense for hierarchy, ritual propriety, altruism, and, above all, his moral integrity. Although falling short of advocating persistent fasting or deliberate starvation to achieve moral or spiritual goals, in taking or exchanging food, a respect for the social context and role of the parties involved is made to prevail over the physical imperative to feed the body. The stories and scenes surveyed in this chapter indicate that modalities of feeding the body

<sup>166</sup> *Liezi jishi*, 8.263–4 (“Shuo fu” 說符).

<sup>167</sup> *Mozi jiangou*, 39.303–4 (“Fei Ru, xia”); tr. adapted from Watson (1967), 134–5.

<sup>168</sup> *Mengzi zhengyi*, 13.469 (3B.10). See also *Fengsu tongyi*, 3.153 (“Qian li”); *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 10.463–7 (“Ci meng” 刺孟).

<sup>169</sup> *Mengzi zhengyi*, 12.431 (3B.5).

served as a form of moral nourishment. They show how interacting with food emerged as a template for moral self-cultivation. Yet as the next chapter will show, these moral and philosophical appropriations of food culture were not limited to the ritual meat exchange, the formal banquet, or idealized portrayals of early China's most prominent sage. They pervaded the language of Warring States and Han thinkers who drew on imagery and techniques in culinary culture as a vehicle for the formulation of ideas.



## Cooking the World

The creation of a great work of music is not the product of just one note, and the harmonious blend of a fine dish is not the product of just one flavor. Similarly, a sage's virtue does not just draw on one way.<sup>1</sup>

Xu Gan 徐幹 (170–217 CE)

Concerns with food, dining, food sacrifice, and the ritualized food exchange were prominent topoi in stories involving the figure of Confucius, but Confucius was not unique in linking food culture to a conceptual vocabulary that transcended the business of dining and conviviality. Debates on the preparation, consumption, and offering of food provided a wealth of imagery and metaphors for political and philosophical discourse in early China. Cooking, eating, feeding, dining, and banqueting were a recurrent craft analogy for adept government and moral action. Cooks, butchers, and stewards exemplified some of the worldly skills on which the art of rulership could be modeled. Food metaphors also supplied an assortment of images on which masters of philosophy, literati, officials, pundits, and poets could draw to explore the workings of the human senses, construct their ideals of sagehood, devise ways to communicate with the spirit world, and formulate regimens for human self-cultivation.

### THE BUTCHER AND THE COOK

No discussion of culinary craft in early China can overlook the famous tale of Cook Ding 庖丁 in what is one of the most widely quoted passages from the *Zhuangzi*. The passage occurs in a chapter entitled “Yang sheng” 養生 (Nourishing Life) and takes the form of a dialogue that seamlessly inverts

<sup>1</sup> *Zhong lun*, p. 9.

received conventions of social hierarchy: a nobleman, Duke Wenhui 文惠 of Wei (r. 369–319 BCE), receives an indirect tutorial on self-cultivation from his cook, who patiently describes the effortless knack and efficiency of his butchering techniques:

Cook Ding was carving an ox for Lord Wenhui. As his hand slapped, shoulder lunged, foot stamped, knee crooked, with a hiss! with a thud! the brandished blade as it sliced never missed the rhythm, now in time with the Mulberry Forest dance, now with a troupe playing the Jingshou.

“Oh, excellent!” said Lord Wenhui, “that skill should attain such heights!”

Cook Ding put down his cleaver and replied: “What your servant cares about is the Way, which goes beyond mere skill. When I first began to carve oxen, I saw nothing but oxen wherever I looked. Three years more and I never saw an ox as a whole. Nowadays, I am in touch through the spirit in me, and do not look with the eye. My senses now know where to stop, and my spirit runs its course as it pleases. I rely on Heaven’s structuring, slice along the main seams, let myself be guided by the main cavities, go by what is inherently so. My cleaver never meets with the slightest obstacle even where the ligaments and tendons come together, not to mention when it encounters a solid bone. A good cook changes his cleaver once a year, because he hacks. An ordinary cook changes it once a month, because he smashes. Now I have had this cleaver for nineteen years, and have dissected several thousand oxen, but the edge is as though it were fresh from the grindstone. Between joints there are spaces, and a cleaver’s edge has no thickness. So if you insert what has no thickness where there is a space, then, what more could you ask, of course there is ample room to move the edge about. That’s why after nineteen years the edge of my cleaver is as though it were fresh from the grindstone. However, whenever I come to something intricate, I see where it will be hard to handle and cautiously prepare myself, my gaze settles on it, action slows down for it, you scarcely see the flick of the cleaver – and at one stroke the meat has been separated, crumbling down to the ground as a clod. I stand cleaver in hand, look proudly round at everyone, dawdle to enjoy the triumph until I’m quite satisfied, then clean the cleaver and put it away.”

“Excellent!” said Lord Wenhui. “Listening to the words of Cook Ding I have learned from them how to nourish life.”<sup>2</sup>

Most scholars discussing this story focus on the creative imagery and rhetoric Zhuangzi deploys here to unveil his core advocacy of efficient nonaction and

<sup>2</sup> *Zhuangzi jishi*, 3.117–24 (“Yang sheng”); tr. adapted from Graham (2001), 63–4. See also *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 9.507, where it is quoted in a chapter entitled “Jing tong” 精通 “Communication through spirit essence.”



natural spontaneity. These are themes that commonly apply to other craft analogies throughout the *Zhuangzi*, and similar ideas are echoed elsewhere. To mention just one, the *Laozi* 老子 compares natural governance to the delicate skill required to cook a small fish: Too much intervention by a ruler amounts to overcooking and will spoil a small fish that hardly needs a cook to make it palatable.<sup>3</sup> Yet over and above the wit and ingenuity with which Zhuangzi promotes a lesson on how to nurture life (*yang sheng*) by means of a tale that follows a butcher's blade wading through a carcass of dead meat, the story gains even more significance in its sociological context. In a world in which meat consumption, the offering of meat sacrifices, and ritual banquets were vehicles of social status and conduits that provided symbolic access to power and to the spirit world, the resonance of Cook Ding's story may have been particularly poignant.

Indeed several alternative readings of Zhuangzi's Cook Ding are possible. These would place this story in conversation with some well-attested themes in Warring States and Han texts that will be examined in greater detail in this chapter: the role of cooks and butchers as sage-advisors, the image of cooking and butchering as a craft for government, and the idea of cooking as an act of self-cultivation. First, if we take the ox butchered in the *Zhuangzi* story as intended to allude to the highly prized sacrificial ox used to lure ancestors and spirits to the aid of praying supplicants, then Cook Ding may be advocating here that there is an alternative way to access the spirit world, namely by cultivating one's spirit "from within."<sup>4</sup> Second, if Cook Ding's seemingly humble status is meant to forge a contrast with the refined depth of his teachings, it could be the case that Zhuangzi seeks to reinvent his own model of the persona of the cook-advisor or steward, who is so prominent across Warring States texts. Finally if Cook Ding's flawless cleaving and chopping was meant to suggest that such skills can lead to a higher form of self-realization than that which can be achieved through mere craft, the entire episode could be read as Zhuangzi's sardonic response to a widespread metaphor that equated butchering and cooking with moral accomplishment and sagehood.

Let us turn to butchers first. In several stories, the ability to cut and slice meat in proportionate measures is said to reveal a sense of measure and impartiality that could herald success in an official career. This image of the butcher-turned-minister further personifies the rise from poverty to high office, and several incidents are recorded in which butchers and cooks appear

<sup>3</sup> *Laozi jiaoshi*, 244 (*Daodejing*, chapter 60). See also *Wenzi shu yi*, 5.251 ("Dao de") and *Huainanzi*, 11.365 ("Qi su"); *Han Feizi jishi*, 6.355 ("Jie Lao" 解老).

<sup>4</sup> For a recent analysis of the philosophical message behind this story against the background of the meat sacrifice, see Graziani (2005) and (2006), 39–81.

as budding officials and sages. In these edifying comparisons, butchers are portrayed as low-class members of society yet credited with hidden wisdom. Sheep butcher Yue 說 (“Happy”), to stick with the *Zhuangzi*, renounces worldly riches and emoluments offered by King Zhao 昭 of Chu (r. 515–489 BCE) in reward for his loyalty:

When our great king lost his kingdom, I lost my sheep butchery. When he returned to his kingdom, I likewise returned to my sheep butchery. His servant’s titles and emoluments have already been restored, so why should he reward me any further? ... I know that the position of “three banners” is more honorable than a sheep butcher’s abattoir ... and that a salary of ten thousand bushels would make me wealthier than the profits from my sheep butchery. Yet how could I, out of greed for titles and emoluments, give my ruler a reputation for reckless generosity. I am not worthy of receiving them and would rather return to the stall of my sheep butchery.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to offering a stock image for the idea that turning down office (“dragging one’s tail through the mud”) ensures greater happiness, *Zhuangzi* here plays on a theme of the time, namely the expectation that a worldly skill such as butchering can eventually lead to high office.<sup>6</sup> Several texts quote examples from distant antiquity to reinforce the rhetorical power of this image. As we will see later, there is, most famously, Yi Yin 伊尹, who was employed by the founder of the Shang 商 on account of his cooking skills. Lü Wang 呂望 (Taigong Wang 太公望), minister under King Wen of Zhou, allegedly caught his master’s eye with his skills as a dog butcher.<sup>7</sup> He is praised in the “Li sao” 離騷 (On Encountering Trouble) with the following lines: “Lü Wang wielded the butcher’s knife [in the Shang capital], but King Wen met him and raised him up on high.”<sup>8</sup> The art of cleaving and cutting meat serves to illustrate the art of government – an image that is prominent in both classicist and proto-Daoist texts. And so the *Huainanzi* states that “a sage adjudicates and regulates all things like a carpenter cuts, chops and pierces a wooden handle or a cook cuts, scrapes and divides the pieces. Carefully he obtains what is appropriate without breaking or harming things.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Zhuangzi jishi*, 28.974–5 (“Rang wang” 讓王); cf. Mair (1994), 289–90.

<sup>6</sup> Mozi may be drawing on a similar set of images, though inverting them. He states that if a gentleman were to be employed as dog or sheep butcher, he would refuse on the grounds that he is incapable, whereas if offered a job as prime minister, he would happily accept, even when incapable of doing the job. See *Mozi jiangsu*, 47.443 (“Gui yi”).

<sup>7</sup> *Huainanzi*, 13.450 (“Fan lun” 汎論), 19.633 (“Xiu wu”).

<sup>8</sup> *Chuci jin zhu*, 25; tr. Hawkes (1985), 76 (lines 293–94).

<sup>9</sup> *Huainanzi*, 11.358 (“Qi su”). For butchering as a craft analogy, see also *Huainanzi*, 9.300 (“Zhu shu”). Another story illustrating a butcher’s sage insight occurs in *Han shi waizhuan*, 9.332–3 (9.28), where a butcher refuses a bride and a large dowry based on the same type of judgment

The image of Cook Ding is reincarnated frequently. The *Huainanzi* speaks of Tuniu Tu 屠牛吐, a butcher from Qi, who is mentioned on a par with Cook Ding, and praised for being able to cut up nine oxen in the morning while keeping his knife sufficiently sharp to shave off the hair on the pelt.<sup>10</sup> The *Guanzi* 管子 mentions Butcher Tan 坦 who, after carving up nine oxen in one morning, still managed to use his knife to engrave iron because it had merely “roamed between the joints.”<sup>11</sup> The crafts of the same butcher figure in Jia Yi’s 賈誼 (201–169 BCE) exhortation to the Han emperor, where he advises him to crack down on rebels using hatchets and axes rather than the subtle blade:

Ox butcher Tan could carve up twelve oxen in one morning, yet his pointed blade never became dull: the reason was that wherever he thrust and hacked, skinned and sliced, it was always along the various natural lines and joints. But when it came to the thigh bones and buttocks, if he didn’t use a hatchet, then he would use an axe. Benevolence, charity, grace and generosity are the pointed blades of the ruler of men; authority, power, laws and regulations are the hatchets and axes of the ruler of men. Now the feudal lords and kings are all thigh bones and buttocks. If you dispatch with the use of hatchet and axe, and instead desire to apply the pointed blade to them, I believe that if you do not nick the blade, you will break it.<sup>12</sup>

A passage attributed to Huan Tan 桓譚 (ca. 43 BCE.–28 CE) stages Confucius comparing butchery to a sage’s skill to focus on the center:

Confucius asked a butcher who was about to slaughter a cow if there was a particular method for slaughtering? The answer was, “A cut must be exactly in the middle in order to open up (the carcass) and butcher it. An examination of the sinews must be arranged in the middle. Only then is the final conclusion taken before the cow is struck.”<sup>13</sup>

It is hard not to see an indirect allusion in this passage to the idea that the sage concentrates on the “center” or mean, and carefully weighs all sides of an argument before getting his point across. This association of cutting meat with a sense for balance and proportion returns in another case. Chen Ping 陳平 (d.178 BCE), a competent prime minister with a poor pedigree in the service of Han Gaozu, acted as steward (*zai* 宰) for the altar to the soil in his village.

he applies to selling meat. For butchers possessing the talent to discriminate (*bian* 辨), see *Shizi*, 2.110 (no. 168).

<sup>10</sup> *Huainanzi*, 11.363–4 (“Qi su”).

<sup>11</sup> *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 10.541 (“Zhi fen” 制分).

<sup>12</sup> *Hanshu*, 48.2236; tr. Knechtges (1986), 52–3.

<sup>13</sup> *Taiping yulan*, 763.7b (quoting Huan Tan, “Shang shi” 上事); cf. Pokora (1975), 242.



2.1. Kitchen scene with butchers. Rubbing of a mural. Wu Liang shrines, 2nd century CE; Jinxiang county, Shandong.

Source: Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

When his village elders praised him for the equitable way in which he shared out the meats, Chen replied: “Alas, if only I were the Steward for all under Heaven, I would be (as equitable) as I have been in (distributing) this meat.”<sup>14</sup> Chen remained a supporter of Liu Bang during most of his career. He ended up serving as sole chancellor and died in 178 BCE. Wang Chong comments:

Before Chen Ping became an official he cut meat in a village, and he divided the pieces so equally that his qualifications for the post of prime minister became apparent. Indeed the cutting of meat and the cutting of words are one and the same thing.<sup>15</sup>

Chen’s reputation was such that, in medieval times, people continued to offer sacrifices to an altar dedicated to him in his home town.<sup>16</sup> Righteousness in cutting and distributing meat around the altar of his local community had made him fit to “steward” the empire at large.

The repeated appearance of semilegendary and historical cooks-turned-officials in these stories suggests that these craft analogies drew, at least in part, on a historical reality. In Warring States and Han society, officials charged with managing a ruler’s kitchen and sacrificial supplies wielded significant political power. Evidence of this can be traced back to Western Zhou times. Officials charged with feeding their superiors and preparing sacrificial offerings for the spirits belonged to the core entourage of the feudal lord or king. In early Zhou times, this type of stewardship was a hereditary office. Bronze inscriptions and poems preserved in the *Shijing* place the royal steward or “chief cook” (*shanfu* 膳夫) on a par with the office of the chief-minister. The steward acts as the official who transmits his king’s orders and he is ranked together with other officials of high rank such as generals, superintendents,

<sup>14</sup> *Shiji*, 56.2052.

<sup>15</sup> *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 27.1122 (“Ding xian” 定賢).

<sup>16</sup> *Shuijing zhu*, 7.127.

and senior advisors.<sup>17</sup> The model bureaucracy preserved in the *Zhouli* ranks the royal steward sixth among the officers of Heaven. Stewards and overseers of the kitchen belonged to a generic group of *gong* 工 “craft officers” who, as Martin Powers has argued, operated in an environment that stood above the world of mere hard labor and physical maintenance while falling short of fully acclaiming noble status:

These craft officers, as members of the ruling elite, would naturally be concerned with the proper maintenance of the ceremonial grading system/*li* [禮]. Since they were situated between the working craftsmen and the court hierarchy, they were in a position to contribute to the articulation of aristocratic ideology. To do this to the satisfaction of the royal house, they would need to be sensitive to the ideological needs of the latter. This required some degree of breeding, but it also required close knowledge of the craft.<sup>18</sup>

In early imperial sources, the steward is not infrequently associated with the office of the *zaixiang* 宰相 “grand councilor,” which literally translates “steward and minister.”<sup>19</sup> During feasts and banquets, stewards could act as masters of ceremony, effectively exercising the ritual privilege to preside over proceedings.<sup>20</sup> Whereas this exercise of ceremonial duty appears to be accepted on the occasion of banquets and diplomatic feasts, more stringent rules separated cooks and stewards from other ritual specialists during ancestral sacrifices. Even an iconoclast such as Zhuangzi visits the issue when arguing that humans ought to stick to their natural duties rather than strive to extend their ambitions beyond these: “Even if a cook (*pao ren* 庖人) is not attending to his kitchen, the impersonator of the dead does not leap over the pots and pans to replace him.”<sup>21</sup> The *Huainanzi* also insists on this clearly defined hierarchy of tasks in the successive procedures of an ancestral sacrifice:

Today in sacrifices the one who slaughters, cuts, boils and kills, splits dogs and roasts pigs and harmonizes the five flavors is the cook. The one who lays out the square and round sacrificial vases, sets out the wine jars and sacrificial stands and sets up the baskets and cups, is the priest (*zhu* 祝). The one

<sup>17</sup> The “Da Ke ding” 大克鼎 (early 9th century BCE) is a good example. See Qin Yonglong (1992), 136–46 (善夫); Zuo Yandong (1994), 71 (no. 21), 123 (no. 6); Zhang Yanping (2004), 28–30. For the steward in the Odes, see “Shi yue zhi jiao” 十月之交 (Mao 193) and “Yun Han” 雲漢 (Mao 258); on his status in other late Western Zhou inscriptions, see Li Feng (2008), 91–2.

<sup>18</sup> Powers (2006), 97–8.

<sup>19</sup> The evolving role of this official is discussed in Shen Xian (2001).

<sup>20</sup> *Liji jijie*, 20.570 (“Wen Wang shi zi” 文王世子).

<sup>21</sup> *Zhuangzi jishi*, 1.24 (“Xiao yao you” 逍遙遊).



who fasts and purifies himself, dons himself in full outfit, keeps a profound silence and does not speak, and acts as the one on whom the spirits rely, is the representative of the dead (*shi* 尸). Even when a cook or priest would be incapacitated, the representative of the dead would never replace them in arranging the wine pots and sacrificial stands.”<sup>22</sup>

If some fluidity was accepted in the ritual duties and authority exercised by food officers on certain occasions, the association of cooks and butchers with killing and death also excluded them from being present at others or restricted their movements during certain rituals. For instance, “skinners” (*pao ren* 胞人), the *Liji* notes, ranked among the lowest of the “meat officers” (*rou li* 肉吏), but they could still be presented with a share of the offerings by the representative of the dead at the very end of proceedings.<sup>23</sup> And although butchering is hailed as a noble craft in the stories discussed earlier in this chapter, and blood and meat sacrifices were often given pride of place, several texts caution that the morally accomplished gentleman should keep away from the place where animals are slaughtered.<sup>24</sup>

These at times contradictory statements are a reminder that normative ritual precepts in early China were not necessarily always put into practice or upheld stringently across time and place. Even the emergence of a ritual canon in early imperial times did not remedy variations in actual practice. It may be appropriate, therefore, to keep a flexible notion of ritual in mind when approaching our sources. As Lothar von Falkenhausen, commenting on Zhou ritual, recently reiterated: “We should think of ancient Chinese ritual as a set of tools for regularizing the infinite variety of daily social reality; how these were applied quite probably depended in large measure on ad hoc decisions and very crucially on individual social skills. Power lay not only in the possession of ritual privilege, but perhaps even more in the ability to manipulate the rules and accommodate them to actual situations.”<sup>25</sup>

If cooks and stewards operated in close proximity to figures of authority in this life, archaeological evidence suggests that, for elites at least, their presence may also have been desirable in the hereafter. Artifacts unearthed from Warring States and Han tombs include entire cooking facilities replicated for the use of the dead. Among the best known examples are food remains,

<sup>22</sup> *Huainanzi*, 20.678 (“Tai zu” 泰族). Likewise the “Shui lin” chapter concludes: “The person presenting the offerings is the priest, the person preparing the sacrifice is the cook.” See *Huainanzi*, 17.585.

<sup>23</sup> *Liji jijie*, 47.1248 (“Ji tong” 祭統).

<sup>24</sup> Sterckx (2002), 77. Butchers, especially those slaughtering oxen, were considered an underclass in late imperial China. See Goossaert (2005), chapter 5.

<sup>25</sup> Falkenhausen (2006), 126.

vessels, and tomb inventory slips exhumed from tomb no. 1 at Mawangdui.<sup>26</sup> A Han king of the southern Chu region, buried at Shizishan 師子山 in Xuzhou 徐州, was interred together with his cook, and seals of catering officials have been recovered from the mausoleum of Han Jingdi.<sup>27</sup> The register of grave goods recovered from tomb no. 2 at Baoshan 包山 (Jingmen, Hubei; burial dated ca. 316 BCE) refers to the compartment east of the burial chamber containing the coffin as the “food chamber” (*si/shi shi* 飮/食室). It may have served as a post mortem dining room for the deceased or, alternatively, a place where the departed would continue in turn to feed their respective ancestors and offer sacrifice in the afterlife.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, ritual prescriptions to plug the oral cavity of the corpse with uncooked grains, shells, or a jade pearl possibly expressed the desire to perpetuate feeding one’s superior or soon-to-be ancestor beyond the point of this life. While commentators vary widely in their explanations of this custom, most converge around the idea that the living feed the corpse symbolically either to ensure continuity beyond death or to placate the dead and avoid the wrath of unhappy ancestors. “Since a person has eaten as a living being,” the *Bohutong* notes, “now that he is dead, one does not wish to leave his mouth empty, and therefore it is filled.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Pirazolli-t’Serstevens (1991). For depictions of cooks and kitchen scenes on murals, see Wang Renxiang (1995), 125–63.

<sup>27</sup> Zhongguo guojia bowuguan and Xuzhou bowuguan (eds.) (2005), 52, 70; and Rawson (1999), 10. Bronze seals inscribed with the titles *shi guan jian* 食官監 (Inspector of Food Officers) and *Chu shi guan* 楚食官 (Food Official from Chu) were found in the tomb. For evidence from the Yangling tomb complex, see Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiuyuan (2008), 27–8 (pits 15 and 16).

<sup>28</sup> *Baoshan Chu jian*, 37 (slip 251). Lai Guolong argues that the Baoshan “food chamber” was an imagined sacrificial hall on a par with the *ji shi* 祭室 or *ci shi* 祠室 mentioned in the hemerological manuals excavated at Jiudian 九店 and Shuihudi. The dual transitive and intransitive use of *shi* 食, meaning “eating” and “feeding” and the complementary nature of banqueting and sacrifice make such conjecture plausible. See Lai (2002), 49–50, quoting Qiu Xigui.

<sup>29</sup> *Bohutong shu zheng*, 11.548 (“Beng hong” 崩薨). Xunzi notes: “When a person has just died, his hair is washed, his body bathed, his hair is tied in a knot, his nails are trimmed and food is put in his mouth, imitating what one did for him when he was still alive.” See *Xunzi jijie*, 13.366–7 (“Li lun”); tr. Knoblock, vol. 3, 67. For the filling of the mouth of the corpse see *Zuozhuan*, 10.46 (Lord Xiang, year 19); *Liji jijie*, 8.203 (“Tan gong”); and *Shi ming*, 8.132, 133–4. For the use of jades and pearls in the case of high-ranking nobles or kings, see *Zhouli zhengyi*, 4.151 (“Da zai”), 5.184 (“Xiao zai”), 12.457 (“Yu fu”), 39.1597, 1602 (“Dian rui” 典瑞); *Liji jijie*, 40.1074 (“Za ji”). The *Liji* at one point insists that the practice should not be seen as a case of feeding: “One fills the mouth with rice and shells because one cannot bear the idea that it is empty. It is not that one uses the way of feeding but merely that one wishes to use precious items for the deceased.” See *Liji jijie*, 10.253 (“Tan gong”). References to the plugging of the oral cavity with rice or jade including a list of archaeologically recovered evidence are listed in Li Rusen (2003), 4–7. Modern anthropology has documented that as recent as the early 1980s, mourners in Taiwan put food in the mouth of the deceased or used chopsticks to present items of food that are touched to the lips of the deceased. See Thompson (1988), 83.



The ritual and political status attributed to food officers such as cooks or stewards did not only derive from their physical proximity at the court. Some texts argue that the act of feeding one's superior, or catering for the ruler's body, was a task that transcended the imperatives of biological nourishment. According to this philosophy, feeding one's superior was a means to influence the moral character of a ruler, and hence, his power to govern. Some cooking techniques and ways in which dishes were prepared and served derived their rationale from the belief that care for culinary detail had an impact on the development of human character. For instance, the influence of diet on a newborn or unborn person's moral development was widely recognized by the late Warring States and forms part of hagiographic childhood accounts of virtuous kings and sages.<sup>30</sup> According to one account, Mencius' mother was so meticulous in her prenatal care that she instructed the future sage *in utero* by sitting only on a straight mat and refusing to eat meat that was not cut properly during pregnancy.<sup>31</sup> A similar story is associated with the mother of King Wen.<sup>32</sup> Wang Chong notes that "When a child is in the womb, if the mat is not properly placed, the mother does not sit on it. If the food is not cut correctly, she does not eat from it. Her eyes should not behold colors that are not proper, and her ears should not listen to improper sounds."<sup>33</sup> In a text entitled "Grand Mentor" ("Bao fu" 保傅), the link between a young prince's character and his diet is reinforced by a linguistic pun that links dried meat to the office of steward. The text describes how the steward should supervise the moral education of a young prince. Whenever a prince misbehaves, the text admonishes, his meats (*\*dans* 膳) ought to be removed from him so as to foster a sense of "goodness" (*\*dan?* 善) in the young man.<sup>34</sup> The same text insists that during the final months of pregnancy, a mother bearing the future heir to the throne should be stopped from craving and eating irregular flavors (*fei zheng wei* 非正味), that is, products that are out of season or foodstuffs

<sup>30</sup> In addition to the moral nourishment of the fetus, diet was also thought to influence the sex and physical constitution of the unborn baby. The Mawangdui "Tai chan shu" 胎產書 (Book on the Generation of the Fetus) contains several examples. See Harper (1998), 378–84. Certain foodstuffs were tabooed because they were thought to cause deformities in the child. For references, see Sterckx (2006b), 20, n. 83.

<sup>31</sup> *Han shi waizhuan*, 19.306 (9.1).

<sup>32</sup> *Lienü zhuan*, 1.4a–b ("Zhou shi san mu" 周室三母).

<sup>33</sup> *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 2.54 ("Ming yi" 命義).

<sup>34</sup> *Da Dai Liji*, 3.52. The same chapter is preserved in Jia Yi's *Xinshu*. The variant *shan(fu)* 善(夫) for *shan* 膳(夫) goes back to Western Zhou inscriptions. This homophonic gloss also occurs in Zheng Xuan's commentary to *Zhouli zhengyi*, 1.25 ("Xu guan"). The idea that good behavior (*shan* 善) may be enhanced by eating tasty meats (*shan* 膳) that can also be aesthetically pleasing (*mei* 美) may be reflected in the etymology of these graphs that all share a 羊 "sheep" signific. See *Shuowen jiezi*, 4A.35b. See further Yu Min (1990), 116–28; and Qi Zhixiang (2002), 53–4.

presented in an irregular order.<sup>35</sup> Another Han text highlights the regulatory duties of the steward by glossing the graph *zai* 宰 “steward” as *zhi* 制 “to control, regulate.” The text continues by explaining that a steward diminishes a king’s dishes whenever *yin* and *yang* are not in harmony or when the five grains have not ripened.<sup>36</sup>

In short, food was thought to contribute to the moral substrate of a person. Or in the words of Mencius, who extends the analogy to the environmental transformation of human character: “A man’s surroundings transform his air just as the food he eats changes his body.”<sup>37</sup> The equation of meat with morality puts the steward at the heart of his ruler’s power base: Nourishing the body of the ruler becomes an act of moral sustenance, a means for indirect instruction or reprimand, a latent pedagogic gateway through man’s most basic need for nourishment. Only if the ruler’s senses were exposed to the proper impulses induced by food would he be able to exert the moral power to govern. As we will see in [Chapter 3](#), a similar logic lay behind the feeding of spirits, who could be equally capricious in their response to defunct or unsatisfactory offerings. Commentators also inferred moral correspondences from the victim animals and products used in sacrificial banquets, in shooting and drinking rituals, or in diplomatic missions. Thus the *Liji*, for instance, maintains that when the Son of Heaven visits his feudal lords, he is to be presented with the meat of a calf instead of that of a full-grown animal. According to Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648 CE), the choice of a calf – a creature “that does not yet have the inclinations of male or female” – symbolized purity of intent and sincerity in the exchange. For the same reasons pregnant animals were not to be eaten at such occasions.<sup>38</sup> Just as the butcher, steward, or cook safeguarded the character development of his superior through diet, so ritual officiants patrolled the mood of the spirits by supervising the choice of offerings.

### COOKING AND HARMONY

Let us now turn to the process of cooking itself. With butchers, cooks, and stewards cast as crafty advisors within the close entourage of their superiors, the act of cooking itself, also known as the art of “harmonizing flavors”

<sup>35</sup> *Da Dai Liji*, 3.60 (“Bao fu”); cf. *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 2.54 (“Ming yi”).

<sup>36</sup> *Bohutong shu zheng*, 5.238 (“Jian zheng” 諫諍).

<sup>37</sup> *Mengzi zhengyi*, 27.933 (7A.36); tr. Lau (1970), 109. For an argument that environment and exemplary models influence human nature in the same way as the human body adapts to a new diet, see also *Xunzi jijie*, 2.64–5 (“Rong ru” 榮辱).

<sup>38</sup> *Liji jijie*, 25.670 (“Jiao te sheng” 郊特牲). To symbolize sincerity of intent, calves were also used in the suburban sacrifice. See *Liji jijie*, 25.689 (“Jiao te sheng”).

(*he/huo wei* 和味), was regularly linked to ministerial talent.<sup>39</sup> Ministers, the *Han Feizi* notes, can be compared to cooks “blending the five flavors” to serve to their lord.<sup>40</sup> Wang Fu 王符 (90–165 CE) compares someone who “nourishes the people under Heaven” to a good craftsman preparing fermented ingredients and broth in the right dosage and with the proper timing.<sup>41</sup> Chopping and cutting ingredients and transforming individual flavors into a blend that transcended the power of its individual components was a technique that not only offered a potential for political metaphor, but also provided a template for physical and moral self-cultivation. The cook did to ingredients what a ruler did to his populace: He manipulated individual flavors and ingredients for the benefit of a harmonious mixture, guiding individual parts into a harmonious whole. The cook’s mastery of flavor and his direct influence on the sensory world of his superior provided a source of psychosomatic nourishment that could help advance a ruler’s moral potency for government.

Although the image that compares ministerial skill with the blending of a stew cannot be traced with certainty to sources prior to the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, these sources do not hesitate to project the metaphor back to high antiquity. In the Old Text “Yue ming” 說命 (Charge to Yue) chapter of the *Shangshu* 尚書, King Wu Ding 武丁 (?–1189 BCE) invites instruction from his minister in the following terms: “Do teach me what should be my intentions. Be to me as the yeast and the malt in making sweet spirits; as the salt and the prunes in making a harmonious stew.”<sup>42</sup> It is not impossible that the rhetorical strategy deployed here by the Wu Ding persona is meant to invoke his predecessor who, as we will see shortly, employed the illustrious cook Yi Yin as his sage advisor. It is the *Zuozhuan* that preserves a classic passage equating the art of cooking with government. In it, Yanzi 晏子 (Yan Ying 晏嬰, ca. 580–510 BCE), the sage counselor of Qi, compares the relationship between a ruler and his vassal with the mixing and seasoning of a stew:

When Duke Jing of Qi returned from the hunt, Yanzi was attending him at the Chuan Terrace when a certain Zi You 子猶 (style of Liangqiu Ju 梁丘據) rushed up to join them. The Duke announced: “It is only you, Ju, who is in harmony with me.” To which Yanzi replied: “Ju is merely agreeing with you, how can he be considered to be in harmony with you?” The Duke asked: “Is there a difference between harmony and agreement/assent?” Yanzi

<sup>39</sup> Note that Xu Shen also glosses a homophonic variant *he* (\*wâi) 盪 as *diao wei* 調味 “balancing flavors”. See *Shuowen jiezi*, 5A.48b.

<sup>40</sup> *Han Feizi jishi*, 15.825 (“Nan er”).

<sup>41</sup> *Qianfu lun*, 8.444–445 (“De hua” 德化).

<sup>42</sup> *Shangshu zhengyi*, 10.7a; cf. Legge (rpt. 1992), 260.

replied: “There is. Harmony (*he* 和) may be compared to a stew. You have water, fire, vinegar, mince meat, salt and plums, with which to cook the fish and the meat. It is brought to the boil by means of firewood. Next the cook blends (*he/huo*) the ingredients, equalizing the stew by means of seasonings, adding whatever is deficient and carrying off whatever is in excess. Then his Lord eats it and thus brings his heart at ease.<sup>43</sup>

To placate the temper and emotions of the ruler, Yanzi advises that he should be nourished with a harmonious mixture of ingredients. The rhetorical power of the cooking analogy in this passage has not escaped the attention of *Zuozhuan* scholars. As David Schaberg notes, cooking here points beyond the sensory experience to an idealized image of interpersonal or interstate relationships.<sup>44</sup> Li Wai-yee draws the analogy closer to the context of the food sacrifice:

The orchestration of tastes and sounds are not merely analogies – consuming foods and listening to music that harmonize differences have a direct, immediate impact on the ruler’s state of mind. [...] The blending of flavors is placed in the most exalted context: since food is prepared for sacrifices and imbibed by ancestral spirits, it becomes the crucial regulatory factor in the ritual relations between the human and numinous realms.<sup>45</sup>

It is clear that in the passage, a sense of moral and psychological balance is inferred from a well-tempered and balanced diet. Following an explanation applying the concept of harmony to the relationship between ruler and minister (a vassal’s disagreement with his ruler serves to produce a better policy “blend”), the *Zuozhuan* passage then goes on to quote four lines from a Shang hymn in the *Shijing* (Mao 302) where well-tempered and balanced soups are presented as the most efficacious ancestral offerings:

The stew is well seasoned/harmonious (和),  
We are careful and composed.  
In silence we preside over the sacrifice,  
during this time all quarrels are set aside.<sup>46</sup>

The well-balanced sacrificial stew here reflects a degree of harmony among those who offer it up. Perfect offerings orchestrated in a flawless sequence not only soothe the spirits but dispel discord among the ritual participants who

<sup>43</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 1419–20 (Lord Zhao, year 20). See also *Yanzi chunqiu jishi*, 7.442–3.

<sup>44</sup> Schaberg (2001), 230–2.

<sup>45</sup> Li Wai-yee (2007), 119–21.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Mao shi zhengyi*, 20C.9b (“Lie zu” 烈祖, Mao 302). Xu Shen gives a variant for the *geng* graph quoting the first line of this stanza. See *Shuowen jiezi*, 3B.12a.

fall silent and are all ears for the response of the spirits. A Zhou temple hymn (Mao 292) rehearses a similar theme:

In brown caps closely sewn,  
From the hall we go to the stair-foot,  
From the sheep to the bulls,  
With big cauldrons and little.  
Long-curving the drinking horn;  
The good wine so soft.  
No noise, no jostling;  
And the blessed ancestors will send a boon.<sup>47</sup>

Similar scenes reverberate in “Chu ci” 楚茨 (Thorny Caltrop; Mao 209), a poem where the celebration of abundance is reinforced by a sense of harmony and satisfaction secured through the presentation of fragrant offerings to the spirits and concluded with a communion of food between the ritual participants.<sup>48</sup>

Thus a complete and neatly balanced array of vessels and victims together with the harmoniously mixed stews in the cauldrons conspire to make up the perfect sacrificial scene at which to declare political concord and harmony with the spirit world. This idea was further reflected in the characterization of sacrifice as a ritual in which supplicants “declare a state of harmony” (*gao he* 告和) to the ancestors or former kings. Commentators give various explanations to the types of harmony wished for in these declarations: the undisturbed transitions of the seasons, concordance between a ruler and his people, between Heaven and Earth, between far and distant, high and low, between *yin* and *yang*, and so forth.<sup>49</sup> To no great surprise, we find the previously mentioned stanza in Mao 302 frequently quoted in later texts to illustrate the idea of harmonizing diverse elements into one. The *Zhongyong* 中庸, for instance, quotes its final two lines to characterize a gentleman as someone who receives respect without “lifting a hand,” trusted by the people without having to speak a word.<sup>50</sup> In similar vein, Xun Yue 荀悅 (148–209 CE)

<sup>47</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi*, 19D.13a–14b (“Si yi” 絲衣, Mao 292); tr. Waley (1996), 305.

<sup>48</sup> Kern (2000b).

<sup>49</sup> For the expression *gao he*, see *Yi Zhoushu*, 5.482 (“Shang shi jie” 商誓解). The expression is also used to announce that ritual bells are tuned in harmony. See *Guoyu*, 3.130 (“Zhou yu, xia”). The idea that a sacrifice entails an announcement is also reflected in the graph *gao* 禘 glossed by Xu Shen as *gao ji* 告祭 “to announce a sacrifice.” See *Shuowen jiezi*, 1A.8a. The principle that ritual generally should serve the purpose of bringing about harmony (*he* 和) is prevalent across the sources and is attributed to Confucius in *Lunyu yi zhu*, 8 (1.12). On the notion of harmony in the *Zuozhuan*, see Zhang Gaoping (1994), 3–8.

<sup>50</sup> *Liji zhushu*, 53.14b (“Zhongyong”).

concludes a lengthy passage describing the sage's preference for harmonious sounds, flavors, and advice with a quote from this ode.<sup>51</sup>

The *Zuozhuan* narrative continues by emphasizing that flavor and sound have a common origin: "The former kings adjusted the five flavors and harmonized the five sounds to calm their hearts and perfect their government. . . ." This is followed by an enumeration of the various components for music. The point made is that harmony, either in the guise of flavor or sound, consists of blending complementary opposites. Likewise unopposed agreement or assent with one's superior is portrayed as an inferior form of communal relationship because it entails bowing to whatever option is being presented. "If you were to use water to flavor water, who would be able to drink it?"

How the manipulation of flavors and a command over a ruler's sensory apparatus can ultimately influence his political judgment is the subject of a second episode in the *Zuozhuan*:

Xun Ying 荀盈 (Zhi Daozi 知悼子) of Jin went to Qi to meet his bride. On his return, in the sixth month (in 533 BCE), he died in Xiyang 戲陽. He was encoffined in Jiang 絳 but had yet not been buried. All the while the Duke of Jin was drinking and enjoying himself when his cook Tu Kuai 屠蒯 rushed in and requested to assist his lord in pouring the cups [as he would do normally during ritual banquets and feasts]. He was granted permission and proceeded to fill a cup which he presented to the music master saying: "You are the ruler's ears and you ought to be in charge of his hearing (*si cong* 司聰). When the day falls on (*jia*)zi or (*yi*)mao it is an ill-fated day. A ruler should desist from feasting and music and apprentices should abandon their study (of music) because this is an ill-fated day. A ruler's ministers and assistants are his limbs, if one of the limbs gets lost what grief could resemble this? You have not heard about this, yet you are performing music, this shows that you are not perceptive (*bu cong* 不聰)." He then presented a cup to Official Shu (Bi Shu 嬖叔)<sup>52</sup> saying: "You are the ruler's eyes, you ought to be in charge of his clear vision (*si ming* 司明). A dress is meant to illustrate ritual propriety, one uses the rites to conduct affairs, affairs are managed according to their circumstance and each circumstance requires its appearance. Today the ruler's appearance is not in accordance with the circumstance [i.e., the duke is feasting rather than wearing a mourning gown and grieving over the loss of one of his officials], and you fail to see this. This means that you are not of clear vision (*bu ming* 不明)." He then also poured a cup for

<sup>51</sup> *Shen jian*, 5.23 ("Za yan, xia" 雜言下).

<sup>52</sup> A later and slightly different version of this story preserved in the *Liji* identifies the music master as the famous Shi Kuang 師曠 and the official as Li Diao 李調. The name of the cook in the *Liji* reads Du Kuai 杜蕢. See *Liji jijie*, 10.274–5 ("Tan gong") and commentaries to *Zhouli zhengyi*, 32.1270 ("Xu guan").



himself saying: “Flavor serves to enhance the circulation of *qi* 氣. *Qi* serves to give fullness to the mind, the mind is used to fix words and words are used to issue commands.<sup>53</sup> I am responsible for overseeing flavors (*si wei* 司味). Since the two of you here in attendance have failed in your duties without our lord having given orders (to condemn you for this), I am guilty of a crime.” Duke Jin was delighted and had the wines removed.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to offering a physiological theory that connects flavor via the medium of *qi* to mental capacity and speech, this passage also provides an early example of the image of a body simile that conceives of the ruler-subject relationship as being interdependent like head and limbs or bodily organs.<sup>55</sup> In the story it is the Duke of Jin’s cook, as overseer of flavor, who reprimands two other officials supervising the sensory organs of vision and hearing for failing to guide their ruler to proper conduct according to circumstance. Not only does it present ministers as mediums who cater for the ruler’s senses by acting as extended organs (*guan* 官) to his body; note also that it is the cook who claims authority as the official who prevents the ruler’s other two “limbs” from straying and takes overall responsibility for their shortcomings. In the explanation of his own duties, the cook indirectly claims authority over music masters and ritual officers by linking diet directly to political command: The intake of flavor through the medium of *qi* induces clarity of mind that will enable one to govern.<sup>56</sup> Nourishment is said to have a direct impact on the mind – an idea Mencius concurs with when drawing yet another analogy between nourishment and the heart-mind: “How could it be that only the mouth and stomach are open to interference by hunger and thirst. The human heart too, is open to the same interference.”<sup>57</sup>

The image of cooking a stew, and variations on the theme of blending and overseeing flavors, is the most prominent culinary analogy used to describe

<sup>53</sup> A virtually identical statement occurs in *Da Dai Liji*, 9.171 (“Si dai” 四代): “Food provides flavor, flavor provides *qi*, *qi* gives rise to one’s intentions, when intentions are exteriorised they form speech, when speech is uttered it fixes names, etc...”

<sup>54</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 1311–12 (Lord Zhao, year 9).

<sup>55</sup> Analogies between the physical body and the body politic are well established by late Warring States times and become increasingly widespread with the ascendancy of correlative thought. For examples see *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 17.1029 (“Shen fen” 審分), 20.1373 (“Da yu” 達鬱); *Han shi waizhuan*, 3.91–2 (3.9); *Chunqiu fanlu yi zheng*, 17.460–1 (“Tian di zhi xing” 天地之行).

<sup>56</sup> The “Tan gong” version of the story omits any reference to these three characters as overseers of Duke Ping’s senses. Likewise the cook in that version does not describe his own duties in terms of maintaining the ruler’s physical and mental sharpness, but simply refers to himself as someone who supplies knives and spoons. See *Liji jijie*, 10.275. It may be significant that the cook in the *Liji* version is a much less authoritative persona than the figure in the *Zuozhuan*. Perhaps this suggests that their status by Han times had declined and that the image was already rhetorically less powerful than as opposed to Eastern Zhou times.

<sup>57</sup> *Mengzi zhengyi*, 27.920 (7A.27).

government or virtuous human conduct. Yet several other images occur. Philosophers and rhetoricians drew on food metaphors whenever such imagery served a purpose of argument. For instance, the following passage compares the measuring out of salt to the use of severity:

This situation can be compared to using salt to enhance flavor. Generally speaking when you use salt, you add it to some other ingredients. If the amount you use is not suitable, you ruin the other ingredients and the result is inedible. It is the same with severity. You can only use it when there are other things to which you add it.<sup>58</sup>

To discredit the validity of sophist arguments, another chapter in the same text warns that the shape of a cooking pot can hide its true contents:

When you use a tripod from (the town of) Shiqiu to cook a chicken, if you stew the chicken too long it will be flavorless and inedible, and if you simmer the chicken too short a time, it will be cooked but not well done. This is so, and yet when one looks at the vessel, it appears skillfully and finely made – even if useless. Master Hui Shi's 惠施 doctrines bear a resemblance to this tripod.<sup>59</sup>

Elsewhere rulers who are impartial in issuing punishments are compared to a cook whose dedication to the dish does not depend on whether or not he will personally taste it:

That a cook adjusts and blends dishes not presuming to partake of them himself is the reason why he may properly be considered a cook. Were a cook to adjust and blend the dishes and then partake of them himself, it would not be proper to consider him a real cook.<sup>60</sup>

#### YI YIN AND FUNDAMENTAL TASTES

Whereas in the *Zuozhuan* story mentioned earlier in the chapter, the link between physical nourishment and political command is exteriorized to a relationship between cook and ruler, the act of cooking and the relationship between a minister-cook and ruler also provided a vocabulary to describe models of internal self-cultivation. Here ruling the world and tasting it are extensions of the same process, and understanding the mysterious inner workings of the cosmos amounts to a process of tasting and sampling the multiple

<sup>58</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 19.1271 (“Yong min” 用民); tr. Knoblock and Riegel (2000), 492 (modified). The *Huainanzi* quotes a village saying: “Boiling an ox without salting it means spoiling what one is doing.” See *Huainanzi*, 16.546 (“Shui shan”).

<sup>59</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 18.1210 (“Ying yan” 應言); tr. Knoblock and Riegel (2000), 465.

<sup>60</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 1.56 (“Qu si” 去私); tr. Knoblock and Riegel (2000), 75.



2.2. Portrait of Yi Yin.

Source: Wang Qi (fl. 1565) *San cai tu hui* (facsimile reprint, originally published in 1607).

forms in which it manifests itself. The most powerful narrative linking the ruler's palate with political authority can be found in accounts of the career of Yi Yin and, more specifically, in his portrayal as archetypal cook-advisor in a chapter in the *Lüshi chunqiu* entitled “Ben wei” 本味 (Fundamental Tastes).

The pseudobiographical narrative of Yi Yin appears in snippets across several Warring States and Han texts. As semilegendary minister of the Xia, he is employed by the founder of the Shang after impressing his king with his cooking skills. Although neither oracle bone inscriptions nor existing fragments of writings dateable to the late Shang or early Western Zhou comment on Yi Yin's career as a cook, legends about his rise to the top appear widely in texts of later date. In their search for rhetorical fodder to praise the virtues of governmental skill exemplified by heroes of the past, Warring States and Han writers repeatedly highlight that Yi Yin succeeded in gaining office by pleasing King Tang's 湯 palate.<sup>61</sup> A passage in Lu Jia's 陸賈 (ca. 228–ca.140 BCE)

<sup>61</sup> For references to Yi Yin in oracle bone inscriptions, see Marubio (2000), 45–55; and Chen Xuguo (rpt. 2002), vol.1, 162–3, 232–3. David Keightley notes that Yi Yin was a historical, nondynastic figure whose importance only started with the reign of the Shang founder. See Keightley, “The Shang,” in Loewe and Shaughnessy (1999), 254, n. 42. Nivison (2002), 290–3,

*Xinyu* 新語 combines the core elements associated with the Yi Yin figure as they circulated in early Han times:

If one wishes to establish great merit under Heaven, one must first cultivate oneself within the gates of one's private residence. If one wishes to pass down great renown across a myriad generations one must first put it into practice in subtle and small things. This is why Yi Yin was shouldering a tripod and lived in hardship in the wilds of Youxin 有莘, cultivating the Way and virtue in a thatched hut. While personally taking charge of the toils of the farming folk, in his mind he cherished the Way of emperors and kings. Within the confines of his humble residence, his ambitions were set on planning the layout of the eight extremities [i.e. governing the world]. Therefore he abandoned his ambitions in the kitchen to become an advisor for the Son of Heaven and (helped) destroy the Xia and establish the Shang. He punished rebels and suppressed the violent; he eliminated the calamities under Heaven and put to death brutality, robbery and the like. After this, all within the seas was governed and the hundred surnames were in peace.<sup>62</sup>

Most elements of this cook-to-minister account of Yi Yin are already attested in parts in pre-Han texts. Whereas sources invoke the figure of Yi Yin for different purposes, references to the effect that Yi Yin “carried the tripods and sacrificial stands” (*zhi/fu ding zu* 執/負鼎俎) to join the Shang royal court are most prevalent in late Warring States texts. In the *Han Feizi*, the story is quoted to argue against the use of argumentation and verbal skill and in favor of indirect persuasion: Yi Yin, failing to obtain an audience after seventy requests, succeeds in convincing King Tang without words or theories, but instead by his skills as a cook.<sup>63</sup> This characterization of Yi Yin as a

claims that Yi Yin was killed by King Tang's grandson, Tai Jia 太甲, in 1536 BCE. On the relationship between Tai Jia and Yi Yin in the face of rule through heredity, see Allan (1981), 91–101, and Eno (2009), 60–1.

<sup>62</sup> *Xinyu jiaozhu*, 6.89 (“Shen wei” 慎微).

<sup>63</sup> *Han Feizi jishi*, 1.49 (“Nan yu” 難語). See also *Han Feizi jishi*, 4.222 (“Shui nan” 說難). For Yi Yin carrying a chopping block and tripods, see further *Shiji*, 3.94; *Shuoyuan*, 17.423 (“Za yan”), 8.173, 177 (“Zun xian” 尊賢); *Wenzi shu yi*, 8.372; Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–92 CE), “Shi hui” 事誨, in *Quan Han fu*, 599; *Huainanzi*, 13.450 (“Fan lun”), 19.633 (“Xiu wu”); *Zuozhuan*, 10.60 (Lord Xiang, year 21); *Guoyu*, 7.255 (“Jin yu, xia”); *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 23.1352 (“Di shu” 地數), 23.1389 (“Qing zhong, jia” 輕重甲); *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 18.1225 (“Ju bei” 具備), 19.1234 (“Li su” 離俗), 24.1592 (“Zan neng” 贊能); *Mozi jiangou*, 2.47 (“Shang xian”; noting that Tang appointed Yi Yin to his kitchen) and 2.58 (where he is referred to by his other name Yi Zhi 伊摯); *Huainanzi*, 9.278 (“Zhu shu”); *Qianfu lun*, 30.416 (“Jiao ji” 交際); *Fengsu tongyi*, 7.323 (“Qiong tong” 窮通); *Han shi waizhuan*, 3.80–1 (3.2), where he gives King Tang advice on how to respond to omens; *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 22.1514 (“Qiu ren” 求人; simply stating that Yi Yin was a servant in the kitchen); *Zhuangzi jishi*, 23.814 (“Gengsang Chu”); *Shizi*, 1.34 (“Ren yi” 仁意); *Yantie lun jiaozhu*, 2.28 (“Li geng” 力耕), 11.150–1 (“Lun Ru”; noting that “Yi Yin served Tang with his chopping and boiling”).

minister-cook espousing political craftsmanship through pleasing the senses of his ruler draws on a number of recognizable themes associated with political authority. First, there is the previously discussed analogy of social harmony with the blending of flavors.<sup>64</sup> Second, the association of political legitimacy with the transfer or exchange of bronze tripods or ritual vessels likewise carried wide historical resonance. Both themes are perhaps best reflected in Xu Shen's gloss for the graph *ding* 鼎 (\*tênʔ), which links the tripod explicitly with the mixing of flavors: "A *ding* is a precious vessel with three feet and two ears used to blend the five flavors."<sup>65</sup> These elements are further reinforced by the increasingly fashionable late Warring States and early imperial ideal according to which people of humble origin such as cooks, menials, cowherds, and peasants (*pace* the founders of Han) could rise up to positions of political power through sheer skill and astuteness.<sup>66</sup>

The fact that a figure such as Mencius takes exception to the standard narrative of Yi Yin testifies to its popularity. Mencius vehemently denies that Yi Yin's place at the court should be attributed to his culinary skills (*ge peng* 割烹 "cutting and cooking"). Instead he argues that Yi Yin had offered his services because he "delighted in the way of Yao and Shun" and wished to be of benefit to the people.<sup>67</sup> In his view, an inborn sense for virtue was at the heart of Yi Yin's success. Mencius further insists that Yi Yin's original occupation was not cooking but instead plowing the fields (*geng* 耕). As such, he attributes Yi Yin's success in government to his devotion to the primary occupation of agriculture and his skill of putting wastelands to good use – a theme highlighted also in Lu Jia's previously mentioned account. Yi Yin's association with the plough can also be seen in a Han agricultural treatise that credits

Yi Yin's steadfastness inspired the clan name for his descendants: "A Shi 阿氏 and A Heng 阿衡 are styles for Yi Yin. These (names) suggest that one could rely on him like a balance, thus his descendants chose their clan name on the basis of this." See *Fengsu tongyi*, "yi wen," 518. See also *Fengsu tongyi*, "yi wen," 523, where a *Shi zhuan* 詩傳 is quoted as the source for this information. For Yi Yin's alternative name, A Heng, which, according to some, was also the name of an office, see *Shuowen jiezi*, 8A.5b, where Xu Shen glosses Yi 伊 as "A Heng, the sage from Yin 殷."

<sup>64</sup> For explicit reference to Yi Yin "blending the five flavors" (*diao wu wei* 調五味), see *Han shi waizhuan*, 7.244 (7.6); and *Huainanzi*, 20.683 ("Tai zu"). The latter infers a relationship between the "five" flavors and the fact that Yi Yin approaches Jie and Tang five times respectively and states that Yi Yin turned what was murky (*zhuo* 濁) into what is clear (*qing* 清) and peril (*wei* 危) into peace (*ning* 寧).

<sup>65</sup> *Shuowen jiezi*, 7A.35a.

<sup>66</sup> For a summary of this meritocratic ideal, see *Han Feizi jishi*, 17.924–5 ("Shuo yi" 說疑).

<sup>67</sup> *Mengzi zhengyi*, 19.652–3 (5A.7). E. Bruce and A. Taeko Brooks note that, throughout the Mencius, there are inconsistencies in the emblematic representation of Yi Yin. See Brooks (2002), 243–4. It is clear from other Warring States and Han texts, however, that despite such inconsistencies, his rise to power from a subordinate position had become a leitmotiv.



him with inventing a method in which plants are cultivated in shallow pits to ensure optimal water conservation.<sup>68</sup> Although there is no doubt that the cook-to-minister incarnation of Yi Yin gained most prevalence, attempts to associate him with agriculture are not surprising given that most Warring States thinkers confess that a dedication to the primary occupation of tilling the land should take precedence over distractions caused by the desires of the palate and other sensory delights. To quote the *Lüshi chunqiu*: “One who makes much of flavors is shallow in virtue.”<sup>69</sup>

By casting Yi Yin’s shouldering of a cauldron as a prelude to statesmanship, the Yi Yin biography also provides the archetypal model for the idea that a ruler’s political legitimacy derives from his skills to judge talent by means of his senses. A corollary of this ideal, already shown in some examples mentioned previously, was the notion that ministers could act as extended sense organs of their masters and cultivate their ruler’s skills and sense of judgment through nurturing his sense organs – a theme to which we will return in [Chapter 5](#). In the case of Yi Yin, this role of archetypal cook-advisor is elaborated in great detail in the *Lüshi chunqiu*’s “Ben wei” chapter.

“Ben wei” is revealing not only for its rhapsodic lists of culinary delights, but, more importantly, for its portrayal of the act of cooking itself and for its advocacy of a program of self-cultivation through tasting the world.<sup>70</sup> The text narrates how, after having been discovered by a messenger of King Tang, Yi Yin gains employment at the royal court. Prior to his first audience with King Tang, he undergoes a rite of purgation in the ancestral temple where he is cleansed of baleful influences in a fumigation ritual and smeared with the blood of a sacrificial pig.<sup>71</sup> These preparatory rites symbolically separate him from his past in the wilds and form an overture to his transformation into a minister-advisor. Next, in his first court audience, Yi Yin divulges how “perfect tastes” (*zhi wei* 至味) can be obtained through harmonizing individual flavors – a process that in turn requires political self-cultivation. “Perfect tastes,” the text suggests, can only be obtained when a sage ruler possesses the necessary material conditions to please his palate, namely a territory of cosmic proportions that is vast enough to provide the ruler with all ingredients under Heaven. The political analogy inferred here is that a king – the body politic – ought to draw on as wide a pool of human talent as possible in the same way as the physical body should avail itself of essential and all-encompassing

<sup>68</sup> *Fan Shengzhi shu*, 7.1 (p.29).

<sup>69</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 20.1374 (“Da yu”). For a similar statement, see *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 8.383 (“Zhong kuang” 中匡).

<sup>70</sup> Wang Qicai (2007), 176 ff, largely fails to go beyond a literalist reading of the passage.

<sup>71</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 14.740; for his blood purgation, see also *Shuowen jiezi*, 10A.53b.



nourishment. In this process, Yi Yin presents water as the root of all flavor, the primal ingredient that enables multiple other transformations:

You must ensure that, while [odors] are overcome you do not lose the inherent principles of the flavors. In the task of harmonizing and blending one must use the sweet, sour, bitter, pungent and salty. The balancing of what should be added first or last, in higher or lower quantities is very delicate as each (flavor) has its own effect. *The transformations within the cauldron are quintessential, marvelous, refined and delicate (ding zhong zhi bian, jingmiao weixian 鼎中之變, 精妙微纖)*. The mouth cannot express this in words, the mind cannot illustrate it by analogy...<sup>72</sup>

The analogies inferred here are clear: Rulers, like cooks, ought to strive for balance, guard what is essential, and take heed not to neglect the inner qualities of things at the expense of overindulging in outwardly apparent pleasures. The ultimate combination of flavors is beyond the realm of language, beyond the comprehension of the mind, beyond analogy. The perfect sensation is sense-less in that it no longer can be analyzed into its components. The cook strives to attain the ultimate essence of flavor through a progressive sequence of “transformations.” Carefully cultivating ingredients inside the cauldron and preserving their purity forms the foundation for their efficiency when sampled. This attention to cultivating the inner (*nei* 內) as a precondition to command the outside world (*wai* 外) also concludes Lu Jia’s account of Yi Yin in the *Xinyu* where, not without coincidence, it is included in a chapter entitled “Shen wei” 慎微 (Devoting Care to the Minute). There Lu Jia depicts both Confucius’ disciple Zengzi 曾子, paragon of filiality, and Yi Yin as exemplars who “cultivate things on the inside and then make them manifest on the outside” (*xiu zhi yu nei, zhu zhi yu wai* 修之於內, 著之於外), and who start with practicing the small before distinguishing themselves in great affairs.<sup>73</sup> Indeed the ideal of cultivating the self in order to control the world at large is associated with Yi Yin in another *Lüshi chunqiu* chapter entitled “Xian ji” 先己 (Placing the Self First):

Tang asked Yi Yin: “I wish to seize control of All under Heaven. How shall I proceed?” Yi Yin replied: “Though you may desire to seize control of All under Heaven, All under Heaven cannot be taken. Before it can be taken, you must first gain control over your own person/body (*shen* 身).”

Though the text makes no explicit reference to Yi Yin’s role as a cook here, it continues by phrasing King Tang’s regimen for self-cultivation in terms of

<sup>72</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 14.740–1; tr. modified from Harper (1984); cf. Knoblock and Riegel (2000), 309.

<sup>73</sup> *Xinyu jiaozhu*, 6.89 (“Shen wei”).

facilitating the flow of quintessential *qi*, and couches it in a language very similar to that of the cooking analogy in “Ben wei”:

Use the new and expel the stale and the circulation within your veins remains free-flowing as a result. Then vital energy will be renewed each day, and harmful vapors will be completely expelled, and you will reach your natural lifespan. (If you attain this), you will be called a true man (*zhen ren* 真人).<sup>74</sup>

Prominent as a catalyst in Yi Yin’s proposed cooking method – alias self-cultivation program – is water. Water is the ultimate ingredient to flavor the Dao; its power lies in its neutrality.<sup>75</sup> It is tasteless, insipid, yet contains the potency to modify all other flavors into a harmonious blend. The ultimate flavor, to paraphrase *Laozi* 35 and 63, is flavorless. As we will see in [Chapter 3](#), it may not be a coincidence that water acquired a similar primal status as an offering in sacrifice. The idea that “perfect flavors” distinguish themselves from ordinary flavors by their blandness is mirrored in the figure of the sage: He does not sense the world through individual ingredients; rather his sensory organs focus on the balance of the whole over its parts. And so, Zhuangzi notes, “The relationships of the gentleman are as insipid as water, those of the petty man as sweet as sweet wine. Yet the flavorless of the gentleman enables him to have close relationships whereas the sweetness of the petty man leads to disaffection.”<sup>76</sup> The sage’s potential to be receptive to new sensations is predicated by the degree to which he is able to block out the particular. His perspicacity is anchored in his capability to sense what is quintessential amid the endless gamut of sensory impulses the world lays out before him. He is able to process through his sensory organs what to others remains sensation-less; he tastes what is tasteless.

In “Ben wei” then, Yi Yin’s act of cooking takes on the form of a quasi-shamanic quest for quintessential substances, an act of physical self-cultivation. He advises King Tang that the enlightened ruler should cultivate himself, stick to essentials, and grasp the Dao, as a result of which exotic flavors would reach his real and spiritual palate spontaneously. To sense the world implies setting out the physical conditions that enable sensation, preparing the body

<sup>74</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 3.144; tr. Knoblock and Riegel (2000), 102 (modified).

<sup>75</sup> An idea described in the *Guanzi* as follows: “The water level is the ancestor of the five measures. A neutral color forms the basis for the five colors. An insipid flavor is at the center of the five flavors. Therefore water is the level for all the ten thousand beings...” See *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 14.814 (“Shui di” 水地). Allan (1997) surveys the image of water as “root metaphor” in philosophical texts.

<sup>76</sup> *Zhuangzi jishi*, 20.685 (“Shan mu” 山木). For a statement that the gentleman is able to differentiate flavors in his mouth before even having tasted the five flavors, see *Deng Xizi*, 42 (“Wu hou” 無厚). On the notion of the “insipid” as a creative force in Chinese thought generally, see Jullien (1985), 127, and Jullien (1991), 35–9.

as one prepares the cauldron. Therefore, the power to appreciate flavor does not originate from the intrinsic characteristics of individual elements; rather it starts with the art of proportioning and combination and depends on the state of the inner self of the subject. Like an archer seeking out his target or a horseman mastering the movements of his animal, the cook's seasonally timed and perfectly balanced menu draws on quintessential energies derived from all produce in the world. And so "Ben wei" turns into a rhapsodic list of every possible exotic ingredient in the universe, products from a distance that can be brought near to the ruler who cultivates himself:

Among the finest of the meats are the lips of the human-faced ape; the feet of the *huanhuan* 獼猴 bird; the fleshy tail of the *junyan* 雉 bird; the paws of the *shudang* 樹蕩; the short tail of the *maoxiang* 麋象. West of the Flowing Sands and south of Cinnabar Peak there are phoenix eggs eaten by the Wo people.

Among the finest of fish there is the perch of Lake Dongting and fish spawn from the Eastern Sea; a fish in the Li River called Pearl Turtle, which has six feet, pearl-like nodules, and is jade-colored; and a fish in the Guan River called the "flying fish", which is shaped like a carp with wings and usually flies nightly from the Western Sea to the Eastern Sea.

The finest among the edible plants are the cress of Kunlun and the flower of the Longevity Tree. East of Zhigu in the state of Zhongrong there are the leaves of the Vermilion Tree and the Black Tree. South of Yumao, on a cliff at the edge of the Southern Limit there is an edible plant, called the "lucky tree", and it is colored like green jade. Then there is the fragrant cress of Yanghua; the celery of Yunmeng; the kale of Juqu; and a herb of Jinyuan called "flower of the soil".

The finest of the seasoning agents (和) are the ginger from Yangpu; the cinnamon from Zhaoyao; the bamboo shoots from Yueluo; vinegar made from sturgeon; salt from Daxia; dewy waters from Zaijie, which have the color of jade; and the eggs from Changze.

The finest of the grains are the millet from Dark Mountain; the foxtail millet of Mount Buzhou; the panicked millet of Bright Mountain; and the black glutinous millet of the Southern Sea.

The finest of the waters are the dew waters of Sanwei peak; the well water of Kunlun; the spring named Jade Pond, located on a hillock by the Zhu River; the stream at White Mountain; the bubbling spring on top of the Mountain of Lofty Spring; and the source in Jizhou.

The finest of the fruits are those of the Shatang tree; the hundred fruits eaten by all the Sovereigns (帝), which grow north of Mount Chang, atop the Tou Gorge; the sweet berries found east of Mount Ji, in the nesting place of the

Azure Bird; the tangerines from the banks of the Yangzi; the pomelos of Yunmeng; and the stone ears from the banks of Han River...<sup>77</sup>

These then constitute the “perfect flavors” that can be drawn to the center from every corner of the known world, presented in a style reminiscent of the “summons” (*zhao* 招) in the *Chuci* 楚辭, where the souls of the departed are urged on to return to the world of the living with a spread of exotic foods.<sup>78</sup> For King Tang, then, gathering ingredients and subsequently transforming them into quintessential nourishment is recommended as a stratagem to master the world at large.

Yi Yin’s image of a cook “transforming” ingredients into a “quintessential, miraculous, subtle and delicate” substance utilizes a language that resonates with physical cultivation literature. The cauldron or vessel mirrors the human body: Just as the cauldron provides the receptacle in which ingredients are mixed into a harmonious stew, so the body acts as a vessel in which nutritional provisions are transformed into vital energy. The cauldron does to flavor what the body does to all sensory impressions. A text known as the “Shi wen” 十問 (Ten Questions) among the Mawangdui corpus makes a similar parallel: First the body is prepared, next “firm, sturdy and undying; drink and food enter the body as guests. This is called the ‘double marvelous recipe to penetrate spirit illumination.’” The whole technique is then described as “The way of the Heavenly Teacher to eat spirit vapor.”<sup>79</sup> So just as the sacrificial cauldron offers an external way to communicate with the spirits, the body offers an internal conduit to invite the spirits. Yet both cauldron and body are merely potential foundries: They require the guidance of a skilled cook or a sage able to channel the ingredients into a superior blend and distil and retain their essence. To quote another Han text, the sage stores the Dao in his heart once he has heard of it, whereas the petty man lets it enter his ears and then ejects it through the mouth like a person who eats to repletion and then vomits: “Not only is that of no benefit to the tendons and stomach, it also impairs the mind.”<sup>80</sup> The ultimate message in “Ben wei” then is the notion that, ultimately, the art of cooking symbolizes the multiple transformations of the Dao. To paraphrase the image with a passage from the *Huainanzi*,

<sup>77</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 14.741; cf. Knoblock and Riegel (2000), 310–11 (modified). Note that Xu Shen quotes Yi Yin through “Ben wei” in *Shuowen jiezi*, 6A.32a, 7A.43b.

<sup>78</sup> Both the “Zhao hun” 招魂 and “Da zhao” 大招 contain parts that, as David Knechtges argues, rank among the earliest examples of *fu* 賦 “rhapsodies” on food. The rhapsody lends itself well as literary vehicle to evoke the sumptuous edibles in the world. See Knechtges (1986), 54–7.

<sup>79</sup> *Mawangdui Han mu boshu*, vol. 4, 145; tr. Harper (1998), 387–8.

<sup>80</sup> *Han shi waizhuan*, 9.319 (9.14).

our sensory repertoire of flavors ultimately springs from one and the same source – the One, the Dao – to which they ultimately all revert:

At present when we cut up an ox and boil its meat, some will have it with a vinaigrette sauce, others will take it with a sweet sauce. We can deep-fry it, roast it, grill it or smoke it to differentiate the taste with a myriad of recipes. Yet its origins are the carcass of one single ox.<sup>81</sup>

The association of the Yi Yin figure with physical self-cultivation and the quest for longevity survives in apocryphal narratives and into early medieval and later periods. Both King Tang and Yi Yin appear in a dream to Duke Jing of Qi in the *Lunheng*, where they are mistakenly identified as spirits of Mount Tai.<sup>82</sup> Another tradition holds that Yi Yin offered his king a stew of crane meat, a bird symbolizing immortality. Remains of crane bones as well as wooden plaques marked “boiled crane basket” have been found in Mawangdui tombs no. 1 and no. 3. Whether or not they were intentionally linked to the after-life remains uncertain, but the birds were clearly consumed.<sup>83</sup> Yi Yin’s skills to decoct the most quintessential elements from diverse ingredients also inspired his later image of a worthy medicine man in the lineage of Shennong and advanced his reputation as the purported author of a work on drugs prepared through boiling.<sup>84</sup>

Whereas Yi Yin represents the archetypal cook-turned-counsel, it is the figure of Yi Ya 易牙 who emerges as the paragon of good taste. Most sources place Yi Ya in the service of Duke Huan 桓 of Qi (685–643 BCE).<sup>85</sup> Like Yi Yin, the Warring States masters of philosophy adopt him regularly in their arguments. Mencius, admitting that nothing tastes more delicious than bear paws, parades the palate of Yi Ya to argue that, like taste, the human heart-mind universally esteems reason and righteousness.<sup>86</sup> Xunzi praises him as the epitome of good taste by stating that “Yi Ya’s harmonious blend” (*Yi Ya zhi he* 易牙之和) transcended all individual flavors.<sup>87</sup> Another narrative claims that Yi Ya was capable of distinguishing the waters of two joining rivers by

<sup>81</sup> *Huainanzi*, 11.362–3 (“Qi su”).

<sup>82</sup> *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 31.902 (“Si wei”). See also *Bowuzhi*, 8.2b.

<sup>83</sup> *Tian zhong ji*, 58.15b (p.1905). Another apocryphal tradition associating the consumption of crane meat with longevity is linked to King Mu of Zhou who during his tour of the realm was offered white crane blood to drink. See *Taiping yulan*, 372.8b, 916.5b. On the practice of boiling crane, see also Wang Zijin (2006a).

<sup>84</sup> The work is known as the *Tang ye lun* 湯液論 and is mentioned several times in prefaces to Yuan and Ming pharmacopeia. See Unschuld (1986), 109, 132.

<sup>85</sup> *Huainanzi*, 13.452 (“Fan lun”); *Xinshu jiaozhu*, 5.199 (“Lian yu” 連語). See further *Mozi jiangsu*, 1.19 (“Suo ran” 所染); *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 1194 (“Zi ji”); and *Shuoyuan*, 8.180, 183 (“Zun xian” 尊賢).

<sup>86</sup> *Mengzi zhengyi*, 22.674 (6A.7).

<sup>87</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 27.518 (“Da lue”).

tasting them.<sup>88</sup> Wang Chong presents him as a master chef on a par with Yi Yin in an analogy on meting out rewards and punishments:

When Di 狄 [Yi] Ya was blending his flavors, he poured water over it when it was too sour, and, when it was tasteless, he added salt. With water and fire mutually changing and transforming one another, his food became neither too salty, nor too bland. Now the act of rewarding or punishing loses its substance if one does not add a different type of vapor [to the mixture] in order to correct one's mistake, but instead continues to add cold to cold, and hot to hot. This would be the same as disliking a food for being too sour yet adding salt to it, or thinking it too insipid, yet pouring water in.<sup>89</sup>

This positive portrayal of Yi Ya, however, also had a counternarrative in a story that associates him with cannibalism. Once called on by his lord, Yi Ya was so determined to gain his confidence that he fed him a broth made with the head of his firstborn son, which led to his master unknowingly eating human flesh.<sup>90</sup> Some texts invoke the image of sacrificing one's own flesh to illustrate the ideal of absolute loyalty and servitude over the attachment to one's own kin. Cannibalism as an extreme show of duty also occurs in the story of Yue Yang 樂陽, a general in the service of Marquis Wen 文 of Wei 魏 (424–387 BCE), who, when presented by his enemies with a tripod containing a stew of his own captured son, knelt and took three sips of the broth. The act impressed his opponent so much that he surrendered to the general.<sup>91</sup> Other commentators condemn Yi Ya's actions as a sign of perverse loyalty or a travesty of fatherly duty.<sup>92</sup> Yet in all these interpretations, it is the moral inversion of the powerful art of cooking that functions as the underlying motif for its moral message. Just as cooking and the art of manipulating flavors were associated with the politically astute and morally virtuous, so the process itself contained, from its origins, the potential for culinary and moral perversion. The erratic boundaries between measure and excess, or between

<sup>88</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 18.1168 (“Jing yu” 精諭). See also *Huainanzi*, 12.379 (“Dao ying” 道應), and *Liezi jishi*, 8.250 (“Shuo fu” 說符).

<sup>89</sup> *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 14.644 (“Qian gao” 讞告).

<sup>90</sup> The story occurs in several sources. See *Han Feizi jishi*, 2.112 (“Er bing” 二柄), 3.194–5 (“Shi guo” 十過); *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 11.608 (“Xiao cheng” 小稱); *Huainanzi*, 7.242 (“Jing shen”), 9.300 (“Zhu shu”); *Shiji*, 32.1492; *Shuoyuan*, 13.320 (“Quan mou” 權謀). Reference to Yi Ya's cannibalism also appears on slips nos. 5 and 6 of the “Bao Shuya yu Xi Ming zhi jian” 鮑叔牙與隰明之諫 among the Shanghai Museum manuscripts. See *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu*, vol. 5, 186–7.

<sup>91</sup> *Huainanzi*, 18.594 (“Ren jian”), 20.676 (“Tai zu”); *Zhanguo ce*, 22.777.

<sup>92</sup> See, e.g., *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 10.527 (“Jie” 戒). An echo of this can also be found in the story of Confucius covering his jars of mincemeat when an order went out to execute his disciple Zilu by turning him into pickled mincemeat. See *Liji jijie*, 7.169 (“Tan gong”).



the use and misuse of skill, are carefully imprinted beneath the surface of most stories on eating and feeding, dining and sacrifice. Nevertheless, despite the political overtones behind much of the lore that surrounds the figures of Yi Yin and Yi Ya, they continued to be paraded as paragons of gourmandise in the literature. And so, in his “Qi fa” 七發 (Seven Stimuli), the Han poet Mei Sheng 枚乘 (d. 140 BCE) has both figures join up to fry, boil, season, and blend dishes for a fictional feast.<sup>93</sup>

### COSMIC DINING

Theories that conceived of cooking and dining as acts of self-cultivation that transcended the basic demands for physical nutrition were embedded in schedules that prescribed how rulers, sages, and figures of political authority were to organize their daily dining habits. Although most of these ritual guidelines were idealized constructs, some evidence suggests that, at times, these normative guidelines may have been put into practice. One prominent theme is the recommendation that the ruler or sage ought to adapt his diet to changing political and cosmic circumstances. In a speech preserved in the *Zuozhuan*, this logic is linked to rewards and punishments:

In antiquity those who ruled the people encouraged themselves in rewarding and stood in awe of punishing; their compassion for the people was untiring. Rewards were made in spring and summer and punishments carried out in autumn and winter. Therefore when they were going to reward, they increased the number of meat dishes, and in doing so they gave abundantly (to their ministers) to demonstrate how much they rejoiced in rewarding. But when they were about to mete out punishments, they would not take a full meal and while not taking a full meal they also abolished the performance of music. This is how they showed how much they stood in awe of punishing.<sup>94</sup>

Thus the virtuous ruler adapts his diet according to the nature of his actions and the logic of the seasons: During periods of growth and abundance, he partakes more generously of his meals and shares this generosity with his subjects; in times of austerity and crisis, he substitutes feasting with symbolical acts of abstention.

Calamities and natural disasters, therefore, should prompt a change in the ruler's diet to help restore the cosmic balance. One such admonition is preserved in the *Zuozhuan* where Duke Jing 景 of Jin (r. 599–581 BCE) is

<sup>93</sup> *Quan Han fu*, 17.

<sup>94</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 1120 (Lord Xiang, year 26).

advised to simplify his diet in response to the collapse of a mountain within his domain:

Mountains and rivers are the mainstay of a state. Thus when mountains collapse and rivers run dry, the ruler abstains from having a full meal, reduces the majesty of his attire, rides carriages without decoration, dispenses with music, and leaves his usual residence. Priests display sacrificial gifts and scribes read out ritually coded words. And that is all.<sup>95</sup>

The same text states that a Son of Heaven does not have a full spread of dishes during a solar eclipse.<sup>96</sup> In a commentary to a *Chunqiu* record of a great famine in the year corresponding to 548 BCE, the *Guliang* 穀梁 commentary notes that a ruler's response ought to include a refusal "to combine flavors" (*jian wei* 兼味; i.e., to have two or more dishes at once). Likewise in such circumstances, economies should apply to feeding the spirits in sacrifice: they are to be offered prayers (*dao* 禱) but no sacrificial offerings (*si* 祀).<sup>97</sup> The *Liji* stipulates that in times of poor harvest, a ruler does not offer lungs. This prohibition draws on the idea that, in Zhou times, lungs were organs highly valued in sacrifice. Not to offer them was a metonym for not killing animals and eating meat.<sup>98</sup> Likewise, a ruler is not to eat meat when no rain has fallen by the eighth month of the year, nor should music be played during meals in such a period.<sup>99</sup> Stewards should not prepare a full meal for their superior that includes meat at the occasion of a large funeral or in the event of epidemics or natural disasters.<sup>100</sup>

Throughout the Mencius, overindulgence in food and fully stocked granaries at the court during periods of hardship and famine are taken as signs of moral decay and incompetent government.<sup>101</sup> Likewise Mozi insists that when affected by a famine, a ruler should, among other measures, reduce the number of items offered in sacrifice and entertain foreign dignitaries with

<sup>95</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 823 (Lord Cheng, year 5).

<sup>96</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 1384 (Lord Zhao, year 17).

<sup>97</sup> *Chunqiu Guliang zhuan zhushu*, 16.7a (Lord Xiang, year 24). For prayers (禱) substituting sacrifices (祭) in times of disaster or famine, see also *Yi Zhoushu*, 1.84, 2.171 ("Di kuang" 糴匡).

<sup>98</sup> *Liji jijie*, 5.123 ("Qu li"). See also Zheng Xuan's commentary to *Zhouli zhengyi*, 34.1346 ("Da zongbo"). Such was the status of lungs that, among nine types of sacrifices that accompany meals listed in the *Zhouli*, several are identified according to the technique used to separate lungs from the carcass. Zheng Sinong 鄭司農 (Eastern Han) speaks of one technique (*liao ji* 繚祭) in which one handles the lungs sliding over them from their root to the end and then severs them, whereas in another technique (*jue ji* 絕祭), one does not follow the lung to its root but cuts straight into it. See *Zhouli zhengyi*, 49.1998 ("Da zhu").

<sup>99</sup> *Liji jijie*, 29.779, 784 ("Yu zao").

<sup>100</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 7.248–9 ("Shan fu").

<sup>101</sup> See *Mengzi zhengyi*, 2.51–2 (1A.3), 2.62 (1A.4), 5.158 (1B.12), and 13.448 (3B.9).

modest portions of food.<sup>102</sup> Mozi laments that this natural sense of proportion displayed by the ancients had turned into greed and overindulgence in the rulers of his time:

With today's rulers things are no longer the same. They heavily tax the people in order to enjoy fine dining on different meats and steamed and smoked fish and turtle. In a large state a hundred vessels are served, in a small state, tens of courses, all laid out before them in a space of ten square feet. The eyes cannot see all the dishes, the hands cannot handle them all, and the mouth cannot taste them all."<sup>103</sup>

To no great surprise, balance and measure are central principles in descriptions of diets that ensure good health and, concomitantly, cosmic security in the world at large. Controlling the self through a dietary regime that steers between the extremes of excess and starvation and ensures a proper circulation of *qi* through the organs is a precondition to controlling the world:

In general, do not consume rich and fatty foods, nor very spicy flavors, nor strong wines. These are said to cause the onset of illness. When one can eat at timely intervals, the body is certain not to suffer calamitous influences. In general the way of eating entails neither going hungry nor engaging in gluttony. This is called "comforting the five viscera." The mouth must find the taste sweet. Keep the vital essence in harmony and the demeanor correct. Guide them with spirit vapor (*shen qi* 神氣). Make the hundred joints of the body relaxed and comfortable, so that they can all receive the nourishment of the ethers. When drinking, be certain to take small swallows; hold yourself upright and avoid abrupt movements.<sup>104</sup>

Mozi describes the dietary methods of his sage kings of antiquity in a similar vein: "Stop when you have replenished the void left by hunger, when your breathing becomes regular again, your limbs are strengthened and ears and eyes become sharp." He further recommends that combining the five flavors should not be taken to extremes, nor should the blending of different fragrances. Finally no efforts should be made to procure exotic and rare delicacies from far countries because these can lead to extravagance and overindulgence.<sup>105</sup> So, unlike "Ben wei," where digesting all products of the world serves as a symbolical act of power similar to the ideal of having exotic tributary goods flow to the ruler, Mozi warns that the very same forces capable of nourishing life contain within them the potential for excess. Mozi, therefore,

<sup>102</sup> *Mozi jiangou*, 5.26–7 ("Qi huan" 七患).

<sup>103</sup> *Mozi jiangou*, 1.35 ("Ci guo" 辭過).

<sup>104</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 3.137 ("Jin shu" 盡數); cf. Knoblock and Riegel (2000), 101 (modified).

<sup>105</sup> *Mozi jiangou*, 6.164 ("Jie yong, zhong" 節用中).

praises Yao who, while stretching his rule to all cardinal points of the world, remained content with an austere diet.<sup>106</sup> When Yao's successor, Shun, did away with such sobriety by having new vessels and lacquered plates cut for his table ware, the *Han Feizi* concurs, the other feudal lords considered him extravagant and many refused to pay him allegiance any longer.<sup>107</sup>

The timing of one's meals was equally essential. In the cosmological scheme of the "monthly ordinances," a ruler's dining schedule is regulated to ensure the proper passage of the seasons. Similar ideas are preserved in other texts. According to the *Bohutong*, a king was to take four meals a day symbolizing that he had at his disposal the products of the four quarters and four seasons. The same numerology of four was used to explain other eating habits: "If the four quarters are not in peace, and the four seasons are out of order, then he applies the rule of 'clearing away the meats' by which is meant that the Most Honored has proclaimed the prescribed fast."<sup>108</sup> The ingestion or abstention of food thus becomes part of the ritual maintenance of the cosmos at large:

In tranquillity, the king occupies the centre and controls the four quarters. At dawn he takes a meal: it is the inception of the lesser *yang*. At noon he takes his meal: it is the inception of the greater *yang*. In the afternoon he takes his meal: it is the inception of the lesser *yin*. In the evening he takes his meal: this is the inception of the greater *yin*. . . .<sup>109</sup>

Similar correlative taxonomies were applied to ritual food consumption. The *Liji* notes that all acts of drinking are meant to nourish *yang* energy while eating serves to nourish *yin* energy:

Therefore in the spring one offered a *di* 禘 sacrifice [centered on libations?] and the autumn sacrifice was the *chang* 嘗 [centered on solid food offerings?]. In the spring one feasts the young orphans while in autumn one feeds the elderly. The underlying principle is the same. But during acts of feeding and at the autumnal sacrifice there was no music. Since drinking serves to nourish the *yang* energy it is accompanied with music. Since eating serves to nourish the *yin* energy it is not accompanied with sounds. All sounds are a form of *yang* energy.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>106</sup> *Shiji*, 6.271, 87.2553. Confucius notes that sages ought to consume simple fare in *Da Dai Liji*, 41.12 ("Ai Gong wen yu Kongzi"). For the ideal that accomplished Ru should shun extravagance and refuse to have their meals richly seasoned, see also *Kongzi jiayu*, 1.8a ("Ru xing" 儒行). For other appraisals of the sages' culinary frugality, see *Zhuangzi jishi*, 6.228 ("Da zong shi"); *Huainanzi*, 7.232 ("Jing shen"); *Shiji*, 87.2560. Several anecdotes describe Yanzi's modest diet. See *Yanzi chunqiu jishi*, 6.413, 6.423 ("Nei pian, za xia").

<sup>107</sup> *Han Feizi jishi*, 3.186–7 ("Shi guo" 十過).

<sup>108</sup> *Bohutong shu zheng*, 3.118 ("Li yue").

<sup>109</sup> *Bohutong shu zheng*, *ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Liji jijie*, 25.671 ("Jiao te sheng").

As this passage suggests, sound could complement flavor to enhance the ruler's sensorium, and therefore meals were to be accompanied by music and decorum. Ideally the stages of the royal meals were punctuated by the performance of music. When feeding a king, the ritual codes stipulate, the royal steward should be invited to perform music to help stimulate the act of eating.<sup>111</sup> The performance of music during meals, according to the *Bohutong*, revealed that the ruler was duly enjoying peace and abundance in his realm. Accordingly a virtuous ruler was not to take food when he had not accomplished his tasks, nor would he eat to repletion when his spiritual power had not manifested itself to the full.<sup>112</sup> So the sage kings of antiquity regarded their meals as a complete sensory experience in which feeding was accompanied by music to nourish their hearing and concluded with a thanksgiving sacrifice to the spirits. This regimen, *Huainanzi* notes, came naturally to them without the intermediary of ritual specialists:

Yao, Shun, Tang, Wen and Wu all ruled with an easy mind and faced south. At this time, at the sound of the bells they would begin eating, at the sound of the *yong* 雍 air they would clear the food from the table, and after eating the rice they would sacrifice to the stove. They acted without the use of shamans or invocators and yet the ghosts and spirits did not venture to inflict misfortune onto them, and mountains and rivers did not dare to cause calamities.<sup>113</sup>

In this utopian world, the spiritual forces that underpin the welfare of the state – the ancestors and the spirits of mountains and waters – are appeased by means of the ritualized powers of the meal.

To what extent rulers and other figures of authority heeded the call to link the dietary sustenance of their own bodies with the welfare of the state is uncertain. Historiographers suggest that some at least did so on one or more occasions. Sima Qian notes that Han Wudi's Chancellor Gongsun Hong 公孫弘 used coarse bedding and unflavored food to set an example for the empire.<sup>114</sup> Then there was Han Xuandi 宣帝 who, in response to a poor harvest, issued an edict in 70 BCE with orders to economize on the number of dishes served at the imperial tables and to reduce the number of butchers in the service of the court.<sup>115</sup> Yuandi 元帝 ordered similar cost-saving measures

<sup>111</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 7.244 ("Shan fu"). See also *Liji jijie*, 29.777 ("Yu zao"), and *Da Dai Liji*, 3.54, 3.58 ("Bao fu"), which states that a Son of Heaven has his food served according to the rites and accompanied by music.

<sup>112</sup> *Bohutong shu zheng*, 3.118 ("Li yue"). See also *Xinshu jiaozhu*, 6.216 ("Li").

<sup>113</sup> *Huainanzi*, 9.311 ("Zhu shu").

<sup>114</sup> *Shiji*, 30.1424. He is praised for the same reasons in *Yantie lun jiaozhu*, 10.131 ("Ci fu").

<sup>115</sup> *Hanshu*, 8.245.

to the imperial menu in 48 BCE and again four years later.<sup>116</sup> In 2 CE, Wang Mang 王莽 encouraged the Empress Dowager to reduce the scale of her meals considerably to demonstrate her economical spirit to the empire. Later on that year, when rains had restored a good harvest, she was allowed to “revert to the regulated cuisine of the Grand Provisioner” (*fu taiguan zhi fa shan* 復太官之法膳).<sup>117</sup> The *Hanshu* further notes that every time a drought or flood occurred, Wang Mang would at once switch over his diet to plain food (*su shi* 素食), a term that some commentators take to mean vegetarian fare, and that, according to the *Zhouli*, was to be accompanied by wearing plain clothes (*su fu* 素服) and suspending ritual music.<sup>118</sup> Wang Mang’s exemplary behavior caused the Empress Dowager to respond in an edict:

I have heard that you, Lord, have been eating only vegetables. Your consideration for the people runs deep indeed. This autumn fortunately has brought a good harvest and you, Lord, have been diligent in your duties. It is time now for you to eat meat and take care of your body when running the state (*ai shen wei guo* 愛身爲國).<sup>119</sup>

This last sentence aptly reiterates the parallel between the ruler’s body and the state. In another memorial, Wang Mang’s alleged frugality is lauded in the same terms:

He has denied his own person and restrained himself in frugality, buying food only to the point of what was necessary. For all articles he has depended upon the market-place [rather than having goods personally supplied], daily finishing his supplies and keeping no food in store.<sup>120</sup>

Politically considered frugality runs as a moral thread through Ban Gu’s 班固 account of Wang Mang. In 16 CE, Wang announces: “If by good fortune there have been no disasters or calamities in the empire, the Grand Provisioner shall provide the complete number of imperial dishes. But as soon as there have been visitations and disasters, the revenue (for nobles) shall be calculated in percentages and the dishes at the imperial table shall be reduced.”<sup>121</sup> Wang also instructed officials in the capital and imperial retinue to take the amount of permitted imperial dishes provided by the Grand Provisioner as

<sup>116</sup> *Hanshu*, 9.280, 9.285. In the second case, the text simply states that the Grand Provisioner should stop butchering animals on a daily basis, which presumably refers to meats for consumption and sacrifices.

<sup>117</sup> *Hanshu*, 99A.4050.

<sup>118</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 40.1658 (“Si fu” 司服), 43.1786 (“Da siyue” 大司樂).

<sup>119</sup> *Hanshu*, 99A.4050.

<sup>120</sup> *Hanshu*, 99A.4058.

<sup>121</sup> *Hanshu*, 99B.4142.



the measure for their own salaries.<sup>122</sup> Economies in the imperial menu continue to be recorded periodically. In 106 CE, for instance, Empress Dowager Deng 鄧 ordered savings to be made for the imperial table as well as for sacrifices.<sup>123</sup>

It is noticeable that in these edicts, as indeed in many of the other narratives encountered in this chapter, food for human consumption and the feeding of spirits in sacrifice are mentioned in tandem. It is to the culture of feeding the spirits that we turn next, because the cuisine offered up in sacrifice to the spirit world was as much subject to rules, prohibitions, and regulations as was the diet of sages and kings.

<sup>122</sup> *Hanshu*, 99B.4243.

<sup>123</sup> *Hou Hanshu*, 10A.422.

## 3



## Sacrifice and Sense

Just as ritual texts contained dietary codes and strategies for nourishing humans and managing the consumption of food in a social setting, so the canon contained elaborate regulations on how to feed the spirit world through ritual sacrifice. We already touched on several areas where the feeding of spirits in sacrifice emerged as a preamble to or extension of cooking and dining procedures among humans. The complementary nature of both activities revealed itself in varying degrees of abstraction. At the level of the collective, there was the ritual feast or banquet that included thanksgiving offerings to ancestral and other spirits. At the level of the individual, ideas about nourishing life and cultivating the body drew on the assumption that diet could induce spirit powers to lodge themselves within the body of the adept. The parallels between human cuisine and the nourishment of the spirit world extended further. They applied to classifications of sacrificial foodstuffs, ideas about flavor and fragrance, the mechanics of preparing and presenting offerings – in short, the sensory stimulation of both humans and spirits.

Food was one among several sensory tools that offered a conduit for communication with the spirit realm. In the same way as a banquet or royal meal was to be accompanied by music and entertainment, food offerings to the spirits were rarely presented in isolation. The potency of a food offering originated not only from its intrinsic qualities, but also depended on the ways in which such offerings contributed to the general synaesthesia of flavor, color, and sound that made up the spectacle of sacrifice. Sacrificial rituals in early China were multimedia events that offered multiple routes of access to the spirit world. The sacrificial procedure involved all human senses in an amalgam of music, dance, fragrance, and visual spectacle. The sacrificial space represented a symbolical arena to which spirits were to be lured by sensory means: The priest and participants entered the sacrificial space, where, in full ostentation, offerings of flesh, blood, vegetable, and boiled offerings

were presented. Food offerings were seen as sanctified not so much because they were processed, slaughtered, and prepared according to ritual precept but because, when presented correctly, they would be consumed. Only the consummate offering, the offering that established sensory contact with the spirits, could claim the status of a numinous gift.

In its descriptions of the mechanics of sacrifice and the role of food and flavor therein, ritual literature reveals some remarkable conceptual parallels between the sacrificial feeding of spirits and portrayals of human self-cultivation through diet. Food hierarchies as well as characteristics of flavor identified in philosophical and self-cultivation literature also appear in the taxonomy of sacrificial offerings destined for consumption by the spirits. Whereas the masters of philosophy conceived of sages as agents who, like a Yi Yin or Yi Ya, could blend and neutralize flavors into a harmonious mixture, so sacrificial literature emphasized that the more refined an offering was conceived of, the higher the category of spirits that could be reached. And just as the minister-cook sought harmony, balance, and proportion in both the physical body and the body politic, sacrificial taxonomies valued certain offerings or combinations over others as a more efficient means to arouse a spirit response.

Spirits, however, ate and drank in a way different from ordinary humans. And although a sacrifice necessarily had to rely on assorted offerings that drew on human cuisine, the efficacy of these food offerings was thought to derive ultimately from criteria that transcended the human palate. Flavors destined for the spirits, the *Liji* notes, were different from those used in ordinary domestic cuisine. Communication with the spirit world was not achieved by means of the ordinary “art of consuming flavors” (*shi wei zhi dao* 食味之道).<sup>1</sup> The sensory apparatus of the spirits, even though feeding on offerings that originated in the human kitchen, differed from that of ordinary mortals. This not only entailed that due care was to be taken in gathering and preparing sacrificial offerings, but more importantly, in the ways they were offered up.

#### OFFERING THE TASTELESS

A central theme in ritual prescriptions is the idea that whereas the senses of ordinary humans dwell in a world of tangible flavor (*wei* 味), sages and spirits instead operate at a higher level and are capable of distilling the vital energies hidden within the offerings, which they consume in the form of *qi* 氣. When

<sup>1</sup> *Liji jijie*, 26.700 (“Li qi”).

spirits “appreciate” (*xin* 歆) offerings, Xu Shen notes, they do so because essentially they “eat vapor” (*shen shi qi* 神食气).<sup>2</sup> Living ritual participants and immediate ancestors may appreciate the flavor conveyed by a particular food offering, but distant ancestors and spirits prefer ethereal ingredients above individual physical foodstuffs. Spirits operate in a world beyond taste, a world in which sensory memory is increasingly detached from human sensation and worldly flavors. The “Jiao te sheng” 郊特牲 states:

At the suburban sacrifices there is blood, at the great ancestral offering/ banquet there is raw meat, at the “three offerings” there is broiled meat, at the “one offering” there is thoroughly cooked meat. The most reverent force (Heaven) does not appreciate (offerings) for their taste (*bu xiang wei* 不饗味) but rather because of the odor of its *qi* (*gui qi chou* 貴氣臭).<sup>3</sup>

Quintessential offerings here are those that belong to the realm of fragrance or *qi* and not that of the palate. The offering of blood – tasteless, bland, uncooked, and pure – is highly valued because it is replete with *qi*.<sup>4</sup> Fragrance and smell belong to a sacrificial paradigm that appears to take precedence over taste. The raw and uncooked reach the distant and impersonal spirits. The more elevated the recipient of a sacrifice, the more vapor is to be conveyed through the offerings.<sup>5</sup> Whereas immediate ancestors and local spirits can be propitiated with tasty food offerings, the distant and higher-rank spirits respond to the stimuli of *qi*, smell, fragrance. The dichotomy between taste (*wei*) and vapor (*qi*) sets apart human participants from spirits, as one passage in the “Wu xing” 五行 chapter in the *Guanzi* states:

On the *gengzi* day – i.e., the 217th day in a sacrificial cycle – the phase of metal takes control. The Son of Heaven issues orders and commands the priest in charge of sacrifices to select suitable animals and birds from their sacrificial pens and suitable offerings of early ripening grains to present in ancestral temples and the five household sacrifices. Ghosts and spirits will absorb the *qi* contained in them, whereas gentlemen will enjoy their taste (*wei*).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Shuowen jiezi*, 8B.26a.

<sup>3</sup> *Liji jijie*, 25.671 (“Jiao te sheng”). Commentaries propose the following gradations of these sacrifices: The suburban sacrifice addresses Heaven, the “great banquet” is either a sacrifice to distant ancestors or a banquet offered by a lord to his feudatories when they come to court, the “three offerings” (*san xian* 三獻) are addressed to the spirits of the soil and the grain, and the “one offering” is addressed to immediate ancestors. *Yan* 燔 “broiled” is explained by Zheng Xuan as dipping meat in a soup. See *Liji jijie*, 24.654.

<sup>4</sup> For blood as the ideal conduit of *qi*, see also *Liji jijie*, 26.711, 26.717.

<sup>5</sup> Boileau (1998–99), 96, tabulates the distinction as follows: distant-smelly-ancient/ close-tasty-recent.

<sup>6</sup> *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 14.876 (“Wu xing”). This chapter likely dates to the late Warring States or early Han.

What offerings were deemed most expedient to arouse the spirits? In the previous chapter, we saw how the stew (*geng* 羹) and the mixing and blending of stews were a potent image associated with the figure of the sage or cook-advisor, and noted how the stew functioned as a metaphorical double for the idea of social and political harmony. Similarly it was the stew – sometimes referred to as the “great stew” (*da geng*) – that took precedence among sacrificial offerings. The stew symbolized the ultimate offering that encompassed all ingredients in one. Bland and with no individual ingredients overpowering the whole, the unseasoned stew was a central sacrificial vehicle to reach the most exalted and distant spirits. A belief that neutral sacrificial ingredients were most efficacious because of their potential to modify or blend in with all other flavors tallied with claims that saw flavor merely as an external aspect of the sacrifice. The *Lüshi chunqiu* states:

In the ceremonies of the Grand Sacrifice, the “dark liquid” (*xuan zun* 玄尊; i.e. water) is offered up in the goblet, raw fish is placed on the offering table, and the great stew is not seasoned (*da geng bu huo* 大羹不和), because the significance of the sacrifice transcends the flavors (*you yi hu wei zhe ye* 有遺乎味者也).<sup>7</sup>

The most efficient offering here is one that divorces the notion of individualized flavor from the act of sacrifice. An insipid stew, neutral in sensory terms, offers greater potential in penetrating the spirit realm. Efficient communication with the spirit world transcends the limited remit of ordinary flavors and operates via a more refined and subtle “taste beyond taste,” an “inexhaustible flavor” that can no longer be identified by the human sensorium. Offerings at the height of sacrificial occasion consist of water, raw fish, and an unseasoned stew. The great stew is valued because of its “simplicity” (*zhi* 質) and, as we will see later in this chapter, the same applies to sacrificial water.<sup>8</sup> The Tang commentator Kong Yingda explains that the naturalness and simplicity of tasteless, raw, and unseasoned offerings puts those offerings beyond the desires of ordinary men.<sup>9</sup> What is offered up here are ingredients in their natural state, as yet untouched by a hand that transforms them into worldly dishes that connect with the palate of ordinary mortals. The *Lüshi chunqiu* passage concludes:

Thus when the former kings established ritual and music, it was not the case that they solely sought to satisfy the desires of the ears, mouth and stomach.

<sup>7</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 5.273 (“Shi yin” 適音); tr. Knoblock and Riegel (2000), 145 (modified). Similar passages occur in *Shiji*, 24.1184–5, and *Liji jijie*, 37.982 (“Yue ji” 樂記).

<sup>8</sup> *Liji jijie*, 26.700 (“Jiao te sheng”).

<sup>9</sup> *Liji jijie*, 37.983 (“Yue ji”).

They intended to use it to teach the people how to regulate their likes and dislikes and how to conduct themselves within reason and righteousness.<sup>10</sup>

It is significant that the preceding passage is included in a chapter entitled “Shi yin” 適音 (Agreeable tones) that essentially deals with the moral influence of music on human character and the cosmos at large. Here as in a variant in the “Yue ji” 樂記 (Treatise on Music), the workings of music are closely linked with perceptions of olfaction, flavor, and the setting of the ritual banquet. Recall also that in his speech on the harmonious stew discussed in the previous chapter, Yanzi notes that “sounds are just like flavors” (*sheng yi ru wei* 聲亦如味).<sup>11</sup> Music, dance, dining, and sacrifice are interwoven in one synaesthetic experience. By the same logic, the “Yue ji” insists, what appears sensorily most agreeable in these performances is not necessarily most efficient in gaining the blessing of the spirit world. For the ancient kings dances with shields and axes did not constitute the most accomplished form of music, nor did sacrifices with cooked flesh mark the most penetrating form of ritual.<sup>12</sup>

The offering of untarnished, insipid, and intact offerings also symbolically guided ritual participants back in time to an idealized age of purity and simplicity. In his chapter on ritual, Xunzi inscribes this temporal sequence on sacrificial procedures with insipid ingredients taking precedence at each stage:

At the Grand Sacrifice [to the former kings], the goblet holding the “dark liquid” (water) is offered up, raw food is placed on the offering stands, and the grand stew is served first to honor the root of food and drink (*shi yin zhi ben* 食飲之本). At the seasonal sacrifice, the goblet holding the “dark liquid” is offered first and then distilled and sweet spirits are served; glutinous and setaria millet are given priority, and (only) then rice and sorghum are offered. At the monthly sacrifices, [the representative of the dead] lifts the grand stew to his lips and then ample tasty viands are offered. Each of these practices pays honor to the root yet does so by using familiar foods. “Honoring the root” is called “cultured pattern” (*wen* 文); “using familiar foods” is called “appropriate principle” (*li* 理). When these two are conjoined with perfect good form, everything is restored to the conditions

<sup>10</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 5.273; cf. *Liji jijie*, 37.982–3 (“Yue ji”).

<sup>11</sup> With vapor, fragrance, and sound serving as primary sensory media to connect with the spirit world, it is no surprise to find conflation of fragrance and sound. The graph *xing*/*\*hên* 馨 “fragrance” combines the sound and fragrance significs, and is glossed by Xu Shen as “the distant echo/perception/smell of fragrance” (香之遠聞也). See *Shuowen jiezi*, 7A.58a. The graph goes back to Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, see Wu Zhenwu (2006); it also occurs regularly in the binome *xingxiang* 馨香. See, e.g., *Fengsu tongyi*, 566 (“Yi wen”).

<sup>12</sup> *Liji jijie*, 37.991 (“Yue ji”).



of Primordial Unity (*Da yi* 大一), this is what should be called the Great Exaltation (*Da long* 大隆).<sup>13</sup>

By progressively giving precedence to tasteless offerings and by drawing on the essence of familiar offerings in a way that transcends their surface appeal for the human senses, sacrifice brings the community back to the “root,” the distant and primordial past, an era preceding the time when humans sought to comfort their sensory desires by acts of civilization. The sacrificial procedure here symbolically enacts the history of civilization defined through the workings of the human senses. Sacrifice does to the collective of ritual participants what a program of physical and dietary self-cultivation can do to the individual: It offers a strategy to return to the root, hold on to the One, and seek out modes of unison with primordial forces. The *Huainanzi* presents the sequence of sacrificial offerings following the same root-and-branch logic:

What is put forward among the sacrificial mats are those made of simple reeds, in the wine vessels first “dark liquid” is poured, on the sacrificial stands first raw fish is offered, in the sacrificial pots first unseasoned stew (*tai geng* 泰羹) is offered. None of all this delights the ears or eyes or pleases the mouth and the stomach, yet the former kings valued it highly because they gave precedence to the root over the branches (*xian ben er hou mo* 先本而後末).<sup>14</sup>

For the same reasons, the sacrificial stew may be eaten (*shi* 食) but cannot be relished or savored (*shi* 嗜). It is a medium beyond the realm of individuated flavor and transcends the world of human impulse and desire. The tasteless and soundless are foundries for the permutations of all flavor and music:

Therefore what is soundless regulates what is audible; what is tasteless regulates what has sufficient flavor. That lascivious sounds will sound clear to the ears, and combined flavors will delight the palate is not due to their being of any intrinsic substance.<sup>15</sup>

“To be insipid yet not lack taste” (*dan er you wei* 啖而有味) is the true working of the Dao.<sup>16</sup> The Dao is hard to fathom just as it is hard for the mouth to process what is flavorless or for the mind to perceive what is formless.<sup>17</sup> And so the unseasoned great stew embodies the root of all flavored sacrificial

<sup>13</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 19.351–2 (“Li lun”); tr. Knoblock, vol. 3, 59 (modified). See also *Da Dai Liji*, 42.18 (“Li san ben”).

<sup>14</sup> *Huainanzi*, 14.485–6 (“Quan yan”).

<sup>15</sup> *Huainanzi*, 20.693 (“Tai zu”).

<sup>16</sup> *Huainanzi* 10.327 (“Miu cheng” 繆稱); again paraphrasing Laozi 35.

<sup>17</sup> *Huainanzi*, 17.582 (“Shui lin”). For a similar image, see also *Huainanzi*, 17.578 (“Shui lin”).

offerings because it is bland yet contains the potential to combine with or transform itself into a variety of individuated offerings when condiments and ingredients are added.

The “great stew” receives pride of place in sacrificial literature, but other offerings too are singled out as particularly potent to feed the spirits. We already mentioned organs that were well saturated with blood. Another broth mentioned in tandem with the great stew is the *xing geng* 鉶羹 “caldron stew.” Commentators set this stew apart from the unseasoned great stew as a broth that does include vegetables and salt, and hence is down a level on the taxonomical ladder of ritual gravitas.<sup>18</sup> Other well-defined sacrificial meat offerings include the *tai lao* 太牢 “greater lot” (bull, ram, and boar), *shao lao* 少牢 “lesser lot” (ram and boar), and *te niu* 特牛 “single bullock.”<sup>19</sup> Newly excavated manuscripts constantly add to our knowledge of the nomenclature of sacrificial offerings. For instance, the mid-Warring States divination slips recently recovered at Geling 葛陵 (Xincai county, Henan) speak of the *xing lao* 鉶牢 “caldron lot,” possibly referring to salted and seasoned *lao* meat (ox, pork, or sheep) offered in a caldron.<sup>20</sup>

Ritual taxonomies also applied to sacrificial ales. The *Zhouli* distinguishes sacrificial ales (*ji* 齊) for consumption by the spirits from *jiu* 酒 ales to be consumed by humans. Commentaries specify that the former are relatively bland whereas the latter are more aromatic, and they reiterate the principle that the spirit world does not value flavor.<sup>21</sup> Several passages quoted earlier mention “dark liquid” (*xuan jiu* 玄酒), an appellation for sacrificial water, together with the unseasoned stew. With water accorded status as the primordial medium of all flavors, in sacrificial taxonomies, “dark liquid” ranked above fermented liquor.<sup>22</sup> Whether or not the much appropriated metaphor of water as a “primordial/mysterious” (*xuan*) source of the Dao should be linked directly to the appearance of “dark liquid” as a technical term for sacrificial water remains uncertain. Regardless, the identification of both as insipid, tasteless, and close to the “root” of all things is striking. In the Mawangdui

<sup>18</sup> See Zheng Xuan’s commentary in *Yili zhushu*, 45.5a (“Te sheng kui shi li” 特牲饋食禮), and *Zhouli zhengyi*, 8.283 (“Peng ren” 亨人).

<sup>19</sup> On the selection and preparation of victim animals, see Sterckx (2002), 58–61. For *te* as a generic counter for “one” victim animal, see *Guoyu*, 2.286 note 2, where Wei Zhao 韋昭 (d. 273 CE) adds that two victims make a *lao*. See also *Shiji*, 12.469.

<sup>20</sup> *Xincai Geling Chu mu*, 188 (“Jia” 2:38–39), 196 (“Jia” 3:243), 202 (“Yi” 1:11), 208 (“Yi” 4:96). I follow Yang Hua (2006), 206–8.

<sup>21</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 9.336–47, 354 (“Jiu zheng”). See also Cook (2005), 19.

<sup>22</sup> Zhou Qingquan argues that *xuan jiu* originally denoted sacrificial wine not destined for actual consumption and that it was therefore gradually replaced by water. In his view Han and Tang commentators are mistaken in equating *xuan jiu* as a substance with water. See Zhou Qingquan (2003), vol. 1, 192–4, 599.

“Shi wen” 十問 (Ten Questions), the term *xuan zun* 玄尊 “dark winepot” occurs as a term for saliva and refers to a purified form of inhaled vapor produced inside the mouth. Donald Harper notes the parallel there between *qi* inhalation and saliva formation on the one hand and religious worship on the other: “The religious interaction between human and spirit worlds has become in macrobiotic hygiene an individualized internal transformation.”<sup>23</sup> An endorsement of water as a medium more refined and potent than fermented liquor can also be found in a precept on banqueting. According to the *Liji*, during entertainments of guests, the vases containing “dark liquid” were considered more honorable. Only a gentleman ruler was allowed to sit facing them. Fermented liquors instead were offered, without water, when entertaining “wild people,” in other words, commoners. In his explanation of the rationale behind this, Kong Yingda again plays on the image of pure water as a more expedient sensory conduit to antiquity: “Uncultivated people are of low status and are unable to seek out the roots of antiquity, moreover they have no virtue and thus it is only expected that they would crave for flavors. Therefore they only drink wine and do not take water.”<sup>24</sup>

To be sure, Kong Yingda was active several centuries after the Han, and scholastic commentaries on the ritual canon cannot be taken at face value to reflect actual practice of the time. Yet it is clear that the classic image of the unseasoned sacrificial stew, of sages offering up perfect sacrificial offerings or tasting the tasteless as a sensory homage to the ancients remained powerful beyond the Warring States and Han periods. It survived as a metaphor in literary criticism, as an image for judging human character, and also reverberated through early medieval ritual hymns and poems.

Wang Chong already invokes the adage that “fine stews must be insipid” in an argument against the use of florid language and belletrist.<sup>25</sup> Lu Ji’s 陸機 (3rd century CE) famous “Wen fu” 文賦 (Rhapsody on Literature) similarly refers to the ignored flavor (*yi wei* 遺味) of the great stew:

Sometimes writing is bland and empty, gentle and restrained,  
With all complexity excised, superfluidity removed.  
It lacks even the “discarded taste” of the grand broth,  
And is the same as the pure simplicity of vermillion strings.  
Although one sings and three sigh in response,  
It may be dignified, but lacks beauty.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Harper (1998), 386–7, n. 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Liji jijie*, 29.793 (“Yu zao”).

<sup>25</sup> *Lunheng*, 30.1200 (“Zi ji”).

<sup>26</sup> *Wenxuan*, 17.770; tr. Knechtges (1996), vol. 3, 227.

Knowledge of sacrificial offerings as an image for advanced talent also occurs in Xiao Yi's 蕭繹 (508–555 CE) *Jinlouzi* 金樓子 (The Master of the Golden Tower), where the author highlights his own individual hand in the composition of his work, because “those who eat boiled greens and wheat porridge do not know enough to talk about the taste of sacrificial meats.”<sup>27</sup> The equation of *wei* 味 “taste” with human ability and the fostering of human talent as a process akin to the harmonizing of different flavors occurs in works on human character judgment such as Liu Shao's 劉邵 (3rd century CE) *Ren wu zhi* 人物志 (A Treatise on Human Abilities).<sup>28</sup> Both the great stew and sacrificial water are evoked in later poetry to express the idea that the sublime and refined consist of the simple, or to intimate that advanced achievements can be accomplished through modesty and moderation.<sup>29</sup> Their appraisal as exponents of purity and an idealized antiquity can be seen in pieces such as a “Rhapsody on Clear Water” (“Ming shui fu” 明水賦), of which several were composed during the Tang, including one by Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824 CE), or a “Rhapsody on the Great Stew” (“Da geng fu” 大羹賦) by Shi Jianwu 施肩吾 (9th century CE).<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps nowhere do we find these themes converge better than in a medieval ritual hymn entitled “Fan ben” 反本 (Reverting to the Root), written by Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513 CE). The hymn is part of a series of songs entitled “Quan ya” 雉雅 (Whole Victim Songs):

To revert to the root (*fan ben* 反本) arouses respect,  
 To return to antiquity (*fu gu* 復古) shows sincerity.  
 The content of the rites was set up long ago;  
 “The sacrificial service is magnificently brilliant.”  
 Flowery meat stands now await presentation;  
 To a tall stone pillar we have tied the victims.  
 Oh, how perfect are their [horns], “cocoon-sized yet [long enough] to grasp;”  
 How solemn are the pins and tassels [of the celebrants]!  
 [The victims'] fat is already displayed;  
 Our stemmed *dou*-vessels, too, are filled [with blood].

<sup>27</sup> *Jinlouzi jiaozhu*, 9.157 (“Li yan” 立言).

<sup>28</sup> *Ren wu zhi*, 1.1 (“Jiu zheng” 九徵) states: “The essence of harmony without excess is that it is by necessity balanced and tasteless, therefore it can harmonize to form the five talents and be transformed in accordance with time.” For a statement that compares the government of a state to “harmonizing the five flavors by means of the flavorless,” see *Ren wu zhi*, 5.19 (“Cai neng” 材能).

<sup>29</sup> For a good example, see Liu Zongyuan's 劉宗元 (773–819 CE) “Du Han Yu suo zhu ‘Mao Ying zhuan’ hou ti” 讀韓愈所著毛穎傳後題 (Postface upon Reading the Biography of Furpoint by Han Yu), in *Liu Hedong ji*, 21.366–7.

<sup>30</sup> See *Yuding lidai fu hui*, 50.10b–17b; *Wenyuan yinghua*, 57.1a–7a.

Cook Ding [has plied] his “roving blade;”  
 [The steel from Mt.] Gelu 葛盧 proves its reputation.  
 Here, where many blessings have been gathered,  
 Bright felicity will also come to join them.<sup>31</sup>

Here a virtual return to antiquity is enacted in song through a mimesis of the ancient sacrificial rites. Ritual memory is traced back to an idealized past when immaculate victims and blood offerings were laid out for the spirits amid an air of dignified solemnity, a time when offerings were butchered and skillfully dissected by officiants as talented as Zhuangzi’s Cook Ding.

Shen Yue’s poem does not stand alone as an occasion where ritual sacrifice provides a topos that helps reenact antiquity or reconceive of the past. Ritualists in the Han already inscribed sensory histories into their accounts of the origins of sacrifice, ritual, and civilization at large. These narratives claimed that over the course of time, different legendary and historical epochs adopted different sensory preferences, which in turn dictated the use of different sacrificial offerings. Accounts of the history of sacrifice portray civilization as a process of increasing sensory desire: The further back in time, the less the senses of human beings and spirits were subject to impulses of flavor, color, and sound. The “Li yun” 禮運 chapter in the *Liji* sketches the progression of civilization through its changes in sacrificial foodstuffs: from raw to cooked, from tasteless to spicy, from uncut to sliced, from whole to minced; from sacrificial simplicity, rawness, and tastelessness in the past to a later stage marked by the use of fire, boiling and roasting, the use of spices and condiments to increase the flavors of the offerings; from the use of clear water in ritual oblations to the use of fermented liquor. Yet during this age of simplicity, prior to the invention of elaborate sacrificial implements and cuisine, Zheng Xuan notes, the spirits were not less responsive because, after all, they “appreciated virtue (*de* 德) and did not appreciate taste (*wei*).”<sup>32</sup> This progressive history of flavor and sound in sacrificial procedure is also central to the historiography of sacrifice recorded in the “Jiao te sheng,” which depicts a progression from *qi* “vapor” to *sheng* 聲 “sound” to *chou* 臭 “odor”:

When at the time of Lord Yu sacrifices were offered, offerings whose *qi* could be used were valued most. There were sacrifices of blood, of raw flesh,

<sup>31</sup> *Suishu*, 13.296; tr. Mather (2003), 283 (modified). The poem borrows themes and quotes from *Shijing*, Mao 210. The god of war Chiyu 蚩尤 allegedly forged weapons out of the steel of Gelu.

<sup>32</sup> *Liji jijie*, 21.586–94 (“Li yun”); the historical progression of sacrificial beverages is also noted in *Liji jijie*, 31.856 (“Ming tang wei” 明堂位), where the Xia is associated with bright or pure water, the Yin with unfermented ale, and the Zhou with fermented liquor.

and of sodden flesh – all these were used because of their *qi*. The people of Yin thought sound to be most important. Before any scent or flavor was produced, they would spread around clear musical sounds. Only after there had been three performances of it did they go out to welcome the victim. The noise of the music was a means whereby they summoned all between heaven and earth. The people of Zhou valued pungent odor. In libations they used the scent of millet-spirits in which fragrant herbs had been mixed. This fragrance, allying itself with *yin* forces, penetrated to the deep springs below. Libations were poured from cups with handles of jade as if to employ also the *qi* of jade. As soon as libations were poured, they welcomed in the victim, having made arrive the *yin* ethers. Then artemisia was mixed with millet and grain. Its scent, allying with the *yang* forces, would penetrate through the entire building. And thus, once the sacrificial cup had been put down, they burnt the fat and suet of the victim together with the southern-wood and mixture of grain.<sup>33</sup>

The neatly systematized structure of this narrative, colored with *yin* and *yang* dualism, reveals the scholastic design of such accounts. The ritual canon is not an observatory of ethnographic practice but rather an ideological template that serves to lend authority to or reexamine existing practices. But through this web of irretrievable material detail historicized in the canon emerges the construct of sensory memory, like an umbilical cord linking the present to practices of the past. Here the predilections of the palate, both that of humans and spirits, offer a leitmotiv that runs through the history of ritual. The establishment of sensory contact with the spirit world through various media, then, underlies the choice of sacrificial offerings in the canon. And just as the sage cook seeks out refined and essential cuisine to help nourish his ruler's senses, so the spirits are entreated to a refined menu of sacrificial offerings that operate at a level that transcends that of ordinary human sensation:

The pickled vegetables among the ordinary dishes were the (products of) the harmonious *qi* (*he qi* 和氣) of the water plants. The pickled meats (used with them) were the products of the *land*. The additional platters contained products of the land, the brine used with them was a product of the *waters*. The baskets and platters that were used to present offerings were a product from both water and land. One did not dare to use flavors from ordinary domestic use but a variety in products was valued. This was the way in which one established contact with the righteousness of spiritual luminescence. Such contact (with the spirits) was not established by means of (ordinary) food flavors.

<sup>33</sup> *Liji jijie*, 26.711–14 (“Jiao te sheng”); tr. Legge (1967 rpt), vol. 1, 443 (modified).



The offerings presented to the former kings could be eaten but were not to be relished. Robe and cap and the great carriage were permitted to be displayed but one could not be fond of them. The Martial dance could display gravity but was not to awake feelings of delight. The ancestral temple produced the impression of majesty but did not dispose one to rest in it. Its sacrificial vessels were there to be used but could not conveniently be used for other purposes. The means whereby one established contact with the illumined spirits could not be identical to the ways in which one created rest and pleasure.

For all the beauty of ale and sweet wine, the value attached to the “dark liquid” and “bright water” honored the root of the five flavors. For all the beauty of elegant and embroidered robes, it was the value attached to plain and coarse cloth that went back (*fan* 反) to the beginning of women’s work. For all the rest invited by mats of fine rushes and bamboos, preference was given to the coarse ones of reeds and straw to illustrate the (same principle). The great stew was unseasoned in order to honor its simplicity. The great jades are not engraved in admiration of their simplicity. . . .<sup>34</sup>

In all of this, it is the simplicity of the unadorned that facilitates communication with the spirit world. While the worldly qualities of the products one draws on are duly acknowledged, it is in denying the value of the sensory impulses one normally associates with them that the highest form of reverence can be found. The paradox of sacrifice consists herein: to pledge thanksgiving for the munificence of the spirits who look over the harvests and produce that sustain humans and enable them to appreciate the world, the supplicant needs to detach himself from their sensory qualities.

Just as diet influenced human character, sacrificial offerings could convey up to the spirit world judgment of the moral integrity of the ritual participants. In reply to a question by King Hui 惠 of Zhou (in 661 BCE) whether spirits can be induced to come on a visitation to the human world, Censor Guo 過 argues that a flourishing state would have a ruler whose virtue is sufficient to radiate upward his pleasant fragrance. A state bound to perish, on the contrary, has a government that is “putrid and rotten” and fragrances that fail to reach the spirits.<sup>35</sup> A Han version of the story reads:

When a state is about to rise, its ruler makes appropriate and refined sacrificial offerings and is considerably moderate and kind in his regulations. His virtue suffices for a pleasing fragrance to make itself manifest and his

<sup>34</sup> *Liji jijie*, 26.700–2; tr. Legge, vol. 1, 434–7 (modified).

<sup>35</sup> *Guoyu*, 1.30. The *Zuozhuan* account of this particular dialogue does not include the sensory metaphors but elsewhere it takes a pleasant fragrance arising during sacrifice as a lack of wickedness. See *Zuozhuan*, 112 (Lord Huan, year 6), 251–53 (Lord Zhuang, year 32).

kindness is sufficient to unify his people. The spirits enjoy his sacrifices and the people listen to him. Neither people nor spirits harbor resentments against him. Therefore the enlightened spirits descend there, observe the virtue of his government, and distribute good fortune there in an equal manner. When a country is about to fall, its ruler is greedy and self-indulgent, decadent and lazy, unjust and cruel. His government smells rotten and putrid, and no pleasant fragrance rises up. His punishments are deceptive and his people are rebellious.<sup>36</sup>

If overindulgence at a banquet or an unbalanced diet could cause illness to the human body, so political and moral decay would reveal itself in the stench of the sacrificial offerings that could repel the spirit world.<sup>37</sup> The moral integrity that accompanies the presentation of an offering thus supersedes the materiality of the offering itself. This is a sentiment expressed in a much quoted saying claiming that “[i]t is not the millet and grain that produce the piercing fragrance, only bright virtue produces such fragrance (*shuji fei xing, mingde wei xing* 黍稷非馨，明德惟馨).”<sup>38</sup> As we will see in [Chapter 4](#), the same types of arguments were made in discussions of the merits of copious versus moderate sacrificial offerings. By lifting spiritual agency away from the physical offering and by lodging the efficacy of communication with the spirit world firmly with the conduct of the supplicant, a need for lavish offerings could be preempted.

#### SPIRIT AND SPIRITS

Whereas insipid and bland offerings such as the stew or “dark liquid” were granted high status as offerings in theoretical models of sacrifice, another substance that received a great deal of comment in accounts of sacrifice was alcohol in the form of fermented grain liquors. In [Chapter 1](#), we already encountered the village drinking ceremony and highlighted several narratives that deal with overindulgence in alcohol during banquets. The ritual efficacy of alcohol is acknowledged very early on in Chinese writings. Zhou bronze inscriptions and sacrificial hymns preserved in the *Shijing* are replete with references to fragrant ales that are offered up to the spirits and consumed

<sup>36</sup> *Shuoyuan*, 18.458 (“Bian wu” 辨物).

<sup>37</sup> Xu Gan writes: “A bad ruler is crude, debauched, violent, and cruel, and the fragrance of the sacrificial offerings does not rise up to the spirits.” See *Zhong lun*, 261.

<sup>38</sup> *Shangshu zhengyi*, 18.11a (“Jun Chen” 君陳); *Zuozhuan*, 309 (Lord Xi, year 5); *Jiu Tangshu*, 25.970; this phrase is also quoted on Han stelae. See, e.g., See Gao Wen (1997), 271 (“Hua shan bei” 華山碑). Another variant on this theme is the *Zhouyi* statement (hexagram 63) that “the (sumptuous) ox offered by the Eastern neighbor is no match for the (modest) spring sacrifice offered by the Western neighbor.” See *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 6.22b; see also *Fengsu tongyi*, 8.350.

by ritual participants. At the same time, these texts also acknowledge the at times orgiastic atmosphere in which some sacrificial events took place. The dangers and temptations of overindulging in the very same substance that could enchant the spirits gave rise to comments on the moral character of individual rulers, their government, and the epoch they represented.

The association of alcohol with the moral decay of society lies at the heart of the narrative on the demise of China's first historical dynasty, the Shang. An inscription cast on the famous "Da Yu ding" 大盂鼎, which records King Kang's 康 (r. 1005/3–978 BCE) appointment of a minister named Yu (in 981 BCE), hails King Wu's success in overthrowing the Shang and praises the Zhou for their sobriety during ritual sacrifices:

As to those serving in his administration, in serving wine they would not dare to get drunk, when assisting at the *chai* 柴 and *zheng* 烝 sacrifices, they would not dare to make merry ... We know that Yin [Shang] lost its Mandate because the feudatories of Yin and Yin's senior officers and princes all became lax through wine-drinking.<sup>39</sup>

Another admonition against overindulgence in drink occurs in the "Mao Gong ding" 毛公鼎, a late Western Zhou vessel recording instructions given by King Xuan 宣 (r. 827/25–782 BCE) to his minister Mao Gong Cuo 毛公厝.<sup>40</sup> For a more elaborate moral condemnation of alcohol abuse, we need to turn to the "Jiu gao" 酒誥 (Pronouncement on Alcohol), one of twelve royal speeches preserved in the *Shangshu*. The text, generally accepted as dating to the Western Zhou,<sup>41</sup> contains what may be the oldest sustained exhortation against the use of alcohol in Chinese history.<sup>42</sup> The Pronouncement takes the form of a speech by King Cheng 成王 (r. 1042/35–1006 BCE), or possibly the

<sup>39</sup> For the inscription, see Qin Yonglong (1992), 27–39; tr. Dobson (1962), 221–6. For a photograph of the vessel and a discussion of the royal gift it records, see Loewe and Shaughnessy eds. (1999), 321; and Li Feng (2006), 127–8. The *chai* is a burnt offering that has also been linked to mountain sacrifices. See *Shangshu zhengyi*, 3.9a ("Shun dian"); *Liji jijie*, 34.904 ("Da zhuan"); Gao Wen (1997), 269 ("Hua shan bei"). The *zheng* is a grain sacrifice and one of four seasonal sacrifices offered in winter. See *Guoyu*, 3.153, 4.173, 5.208; *Zhouli zhengyi*, 3.1330; *Liji jijie*, 47.1249 ("Ji tong"). See further Bilsky (1975), vol. 1, 32–40.

<sup>40</sup> Dobson (1962), 219. Alcohol abuse is also recorded in the "Tian wang gui" 天亡簋 and the "Xiao yu ding" 小盂鼎 (early W. Zhou), which describes King Kang's campaign against the Guifang 鬼方.

<sup>41</sup> Shaughnessy, "Western Zhou History," in Loewe and Shaughnessy eds. (1999), 294; and Poo (1999), 129 (quoting Guo Moruo). An early Western Zhou date for the royal speeches has been challenged recently. See Kern (2009), 183–8, who dates them to the mid- to late Western Zhou and argues that they are commemorative in nature.

<sup>42</sup> In histories of drinking in China, the "Jiu gao" is usually presented as the locus classicus linking the regulation of alcohol consumption to apt government. See, e.g., Zhu Zizhen and Shen Han (1995), 216–19. See also Wan Weicheng (2001), 35–6.

Duke of Zhou (r. 1115–1108 BCE), to the king's younger brother and describes how the Shang perished when its last rulers succumbed to drink.<sup>43</sup> The first half of the speech sets out the permissible uses of alcohol: It should be used for important sacrificial offerings only (*wei yuan si* 惟元祀);<sup>44</sup> Heaven invariably punishes those who indulge in alcohol; people should drink only if they are presenting sacrifice (*yin wei si* 飲惟祀); virtue lies in sobriety. Furthermore the celebratory consumption of alcohol is to be permitted only after one's service and duties to the elderly and the sovereign have been fulfilled. In the second part of the address, the founding kings of Shang are praised for their virtues whereas Zhou 紂, the last descendent of the once virtuous kings, is denounced for his excesses: "Wasted and inebriated, unwilling to stop and becoming ever more excessive, he took leave of his senses, not even death frightened him." As a result, Zhou fails to offer "fragrant sacrifices whose scent of virtue might ascend to Heaven." Note again how scent is presented in the Pronouncement as a conduit for *de* 德 virtue: "[the Shang] people flocked together in drunkenness, and their stench was smelled on high." In short, the house of Shang perished by the scourge of alcohol. Its indulgence in wine, a later chapter in the *Shangshu* notes, had destroyed the virtue of its founders, Heaven had sent down its wrath, and the people of Yin committed the ultimate insult of eating the animal victims destined for the spirits.<sup>45</sup> The Pronouncement concludes with a pledge that Zhou would monitor the intake of alcohol, arrest groups gathering to drink, and give counsel to Shang ministers and officials who were addicted to alcohol.

To what extent the condemnation of alcohol in the Pronouncement should be taken as a reflection of Shang ritual practice or as a moralizing verdict of later historiography remains uncertain. The fact that the speech was composed could suggest that it was responding to genuine circumstances. On the other hand, the Shang demise due to alcohol features so prominently as a stock image of moral and political decline in later sources that it might equally well have been infused with assessments written after the facts. The reference to sacrificial wine offerings as a sensory conduit of flavor and fragrance with the spirit world is plausible. Shang religion did include the offering of alcoholic beverages, and a ritual feast or banquet offered to the spirits, known as *xiang* 饗, is documented in the oracle bones.<sup>46</sup> Archaeologists have also concluded

<sup>43</sup> *Shangshu zhengyi*, 14.14a–24a; *Jinwen Shangshu kaozheng*, 15.321–7.

<sup>44</sup> Yang Jian 楊簡 (1141–1226 CE) comments that in antiquity, wine was not used in small sacrifices. See *Wu gao jie*, 2.26.

<sup>45</sup> *Shangshu zhengyi*, 10.14b–16b ("Weizi" 微子); *Jinwen Shangshu kaozheng*, 9.227–9. See also *Shangshu da zhuan*, 4.25 ("Yin zhuan" 殷傳). The "Weizi" chapter could be as late as the Warring States period.

<sup>46</sup> Keightley, "The Shang," in Loewe and Shaughnessy eds. (1999), 258–9.

that wine vessels take up a larger share among Shang ritual bronzes, and some have argued that changes in bronze vessel culture should be seen to reflect changing attitudes toward ritualized alcohol consumption. Among the ritual reforms that took place in the early 9th century BCE, Jessica Rawson has identified a shift in emphasis from Shang-style wine drinking vessels in favor of a new emphasis on food vessels, which grew larger in form and in numbers.<sup>47</sup> Whether or not such a shift in the use of ritual vessels can be linked directly to the textual narratives in which Zhou condemns Shang's use of alcohol remains speculative. Yet the condemnation of Shang and early Zhou ritual in texts as being overly bibulous and orgiastic, together with a progressive solemnity in vessel culture, represent a plausible sign of changing attitudes toward the ritual use of food and drink from the mid-Western Zhou period onward. New rituals, centered on the offering of food rather than drink, Lothar von Falkenhausen argues, could indicate a greater emphasis on ritual formality, ritual purity, and an increasing desire to demarcate the sphere of ritual from daily life. Alcohol certainly continued to be consumed in a ritual setting, but by late Western Zhou times, it may have been less significant as a sacrificial offering for the ancestors. Possibly the drunken séance as a way to communicate with spirits may also have diminished in importance over time.<sup>48</sup> The fact that Zhou textual evidence remains replete with indications of alcohol consumption could further suggest that the ritual reforms identified in material culture applied first and foremost to the domain of religious sacrifice, whereas other forms of ritual conviviality may have continued away from the locus where the offerings were laid out.

By insisting that alcohol was to be consumed primarily in the context of sacrifice, however, the Pronouncement relegates the use of alcohol outside sacrifice to the realm of prohibition and taboo. It may be the first narrative that separates secular alcohol consumption from the sacrificial use of alcohol, condemning the former. Securing a balance between the entertainment of spirits with food and drink and the desire for convivial celebration by ritual participants is a theme that pervades discussions of sacrifice in Warring States and Han texts. Whereas the ingestion, libation, and offering of alcoholic beverages were generally valued as a potent medium to penetrate the spirit world, sumptuous intake of alcohol beyond the call of ritual duty is firmly condemned as a sign of moral decay and political decline throughout

<sup>47</sup> On the ritual reforms in the mid-Western Zhou and the shift away from the use of drinking vessels, see Rawson (1990), vol. 1, 102–10; Rawson, “Western Zhou Archaeology” in Loewe and Shaughnessy eds. (1999), 360, 435; Poo (1999), 129–30; Cook (2005), 21–2. A useful survey of wine vessels is Du Jingpeng, Jiao Tianlong, and Yang Zhefang (1995).

<sup>48</sup> Falkenhausen (1999), 152–153; and Falkenhausen (2006), 49.



the sources.<sup>49</sup> Narratives pitching the virtuous and sober Zhou against the inebriated last rulers of Shang intimate that the progression of history and civilization was tantamount to distancing oneself from the powers of ale. The charge against alcohol forms part of the story of Zhou's emergence in the "Greater elegantiae" cycle in the *Shijing*, where the fifth stanza in "Tang" 蕩 ("Mighty"; Mao 255) reads:

King Wen, said "Come!  
Come, you Yin and Shang!  
Heaven did not flush you with wine.  
Not good are the ways you follow;  
Most disorderly are your manners.  
Not heeding whether it is dawn or dusk  
You shout and scream,  
Turning day into night."<sup>50</sup>

The last Shang king, Zhou Xin 紂辛, and his mirror persona, Jie Gui 桀癸, who caused the downfall of the preceding Xia, turn into archetypes of bad last rulers draped in imagery of extravagance and debauchery. They hold court near a lake filled with wine, raise a mound from liquor dregs, dangle rashers of meat from poles and have naked boys and girls chase each other through it as if it were a forest.<sup>51</sup> Mozi has spirits appearing in a dream to King Wu encouraging him to attack Shang "now that we have submerged King Zhou of Yin into the power of alcohol."<sup>52</sup> Han Feizi comments: "If the Son of Heaven becomes a habitual drinker, he will lose the empire; if an ordinary person gets hooked on ale, he will lose his body/self."<sup>53</sup>

<sup>49</sup> The *Zuozhuan* and *Guoyu* are rich with examples. See e.g. *Zuozhuan*, 809 (Lord Cheng, year 2), 1311 (Lord Zhao, year 9); and the banqueting stories discussed in [Chapter 1](#). See also Schaberg (2001), 228–229, who reiterates that drinking "is rich in symbolical and theatrical possibilities." Xu Shen links drinking to human nature in a paronomastic gloss for *jiu*/\**tsiu*? 酒 as 就 \**dziu*: "It is the means whereby one accomplishes one's human nature as good or bad (所以就人性之善惡)." See *Shuowen jiezi*, 14B.33b. Images used to describe excessive drinking are as colorful in early China as elsewhere, and include the expression "drinking like a calf." See *Fengsu tongyi*, 602 ("Yi wen"). Some slang of a distinct regional flavor has been preserved. The *Shuowen* gloss for *lou*/\**ro* 漚, in addition to being a descriptive for incessant rain, notes a subsidiary meaning: "Drinking wine and repeatedly practicing it until one no longer gets drunk is called *lou* by the people in Runan 汝南." See *Shuowen jiezi*, 11A.25b.

<sup>50</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi*, 18A.5a; tr. Waley (1996), 262.

<sup>51</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 23.1559 ("Guo li"); *Shiji*, 3.105, 38.1607; *Huainanzi*, 8.256 ("Ben jing"); *Chunqiu fanlu*, 4.106 ("Wang dao"); *Han Shi waizhuan*, 2.57 (II.2), 4.130 (IV.2); *Xinxu jiaoshi*, 6.180 ("Ci che" 刺奢); *Shuoyuan*, 10.257 ("Jing shen" 敬慎); *Da Dai Liji*, 11.218 ("Shao xian"); *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 7.341–2, 349–50 ("Yu zeng" 語增).

<sup>52</sup> *Mozi jiangou*, 5.152 ("Fei gong, xia" 非攻下). For further reference to the demise of Shang due to alcohol, see *Shangshu zhengyi*, 16.14b ("Wu yi" 無遺).

<sup>53</sup> *Han Feizi jishi*, 7.430 ("Shui lin, shang").



With incompetent last rulers having their senses clouded by alcohol and physical pleasures, it is up to the founding kings of Shang and Zhou, assisted by their cooks-turned-ministers such as Yi Yin and Lü Wang, to cleanse the royal house of stupefaction and purify the sovereign's senses again. Thus, Xunzi writes, Kings Tang and Wen received tributes of the rarest goods from the most faraway regions, "their eyes beheld every kind of color, their ears listened to every kind of sound, their mouths tasted every conceivable flavor, their bodies rested in the most perfect of palaces, and their names received every title of honor."<sup>54</sup> So the omnipresent theme of the sage advisor dissuading his lord from having his judgments clouded by alcohol was grafted on the precedent of dynastic succession in the earliest of times.<sup>55</sup> The sages were said to distinguish themselves through the art of moderation that enabled them to get through frequent and lengthy programs of ritual drinking without succumbing to excess.<sup>56</sup> When Yi Di 義 (儀) 狄, the legendary inventor of ale, created his brew, the *Huainanzi* states, Yu the Great drank from it with appreciation but next removed his minister and issued a prohibition on alcohol to prevent excess.<sup>57</sup>

If the Pronouncement offered a straight moral condemnation of alcohol abuse and linked it to dynastic decline, the fragile boundaries between drinking according to ritual rule on the one hand and the dangers of excess on the other are the subject of several poems in the *Shijing*. "Chu ci" 楚茨 (Thorny Caltrop; Mao 209), a poem belonging to the "Minor elegantiae," presents an ideal scenario. It describes the preparation and offering of sacrificial foodstuffs followed by a banqueting scene performed during an ancestral ritual. After the completion of the offerings, an invocator announces that the spirits are satiated – "The spirits are all drunk" (*shen ju zui zhi* 神具醉止). Then the ritual participants go on to feast.<sup>58</sup>

The reverence that should accompany the use of alcohol in ritual and its potential abuse are juxtaposed in "Bin zhi chu yan" 賓之初筵 ("When the guests first take to their seating mats"; Mao 220). The poem, which the Mao preface places at the time of Duke Wu 武 of Wei 衛 (r. 812–758 BCE),

<sup>54</sup> Xunzi jijie, 15.389 ("Jie bi" 解蔽); cf. Knoblock (1988–94), vol. 3, 101.

<sup>55</sup> Yanzi is another good example of a counselor warning his lord against the abuse of alcohol. Cf. the stories in *Yanzi chunqiu jishi*, 1.9–23.

<sup>56</sup> *Shuoyuan*, 19.507–8 ("Xiu wen").

<sup>57</sup> *Huainanzi*, 20.694 ("Tai zu"). For Yi Di as inventor of ale, see *Huainanzi*, 19.646 ("Xiu wu"); *Shuowen jiezi*, 14B.34a; and *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 30.1194 ("Zi ji").

<sup>58</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi*, 13B.4a–16a. Kern (2000b), (2009), 173–9, analyzes the performative structure of the poem. Similar reference to spirits being drunk from sacrifice occurs in one of the songs in the cycle of hymns for the suburban sacrifices of Han Wudi. See *Hanshu*, 25.1069; *Yuefu shi ji*, 1.9.

illustrates the various modalities in which ritual occasion and alcohol abuse could coincide. It starts with two stanzas describing the well-governed and temperate use of drink during an archery ceremony and a concluding sacrifice. Order prevails when the archers are invited to take their seats and when host and guests toast each other in ritual earnestness:

...  
 The food-baskets and platters are arranged in rows,  
 With sauces and kernels displayed.  
 The ale is soft and good,  
 And they drink very peaceably.

Such orchestrated orderliness, the poem continues, befits the occasion of sacrifice, when, entertained by ceremonies of music and dance, the ancestors bestow their blessings on the descendants:

When the guests first take their seats,  
 How decorous they are, how reverent!  
 While they are still sober  
 Their deportment is dignified and correct.

This picture of ritual perfection then takes a turn and is followed by three stanzas that describe the intoxicated chaos that could ensue when rules and decorum are abandoned: The guests start rioting, howling and brawling as the feast goes on and the ale keeps flowing. Those who fail to leave the scene when inebriated, the poem insists, are harming the “virtue” (*fa de* 伐德) that the proceedings are meant to instill: “Drinking ale is an occasion of great worth, only when a sense of deportment is preserved.”<sup>59</sup> The final stanza then contains moralizing observations on the damage to ritual occasion when drunkenness takes over and ritual specialists are called on to supervise proceedings:

Whenever at these occasions ale is drunk;  
 Some are tipsy, some are not.  
 So we appoint a master of ceremonies,  
 Sometimes assisted by a recorder.  
 “That drunk man is not behaving nicely;  
 He is making the sober feel uncomfortable.  
 Pray do not mention at random,

<sup>59</sup> The link between alcohol and *de* 德 “virtue, power” is also made in the opening stanza of “Ji zui” 既醉 (Mao 247). See *Mao shi zhengyi*, 17B.8b; Mencius 6A.17 comments that virtue should supersede cravings for meat and grain. The link between satiation and good fortune is made in “Zhi jing” 執競 (Mao 274). See *Mao shi zhengyi*, 19B.10a.

Things that do not belong together, that are quite silly.  
 What are not real words, do not say;  
 What leads nowhere, do not speak of,  
 Led on by drunkenness in your talk,  
 Bringing out “rams” (cups) and “hornless” (cups) side by side.  
 After three cups you don’t know what you are saying;  
 What will become of you if you insist on taking more.<sup>60</sup>

Several other poems in the *Shijing* describe the presentation of wine offerings or contain criticisms of drinking and the ritual abuse of alcohol. They suggest that among the Zhou nobility, ale remained a powerful medium, despite the charge that it may have precipitated the demise of those that had ruled before them.<sup>61</sup>

The tension between reverence and pleasure in ritual drinking appears in several other stories. In [Chapter 1](#) we already mentioned Yanzi’s “five toasts rule” attributed to the ancients. Other anecdotes are set more specifically in the context of ritual feasts and sacrifices. One example is an exchange between Zigong 子貢 and Confucius in the *Liji*. Having returned from observing the New Year festival, Confucius asks Zigong whether he had derived any pleasure from the event. Zigong replied: “The people of the entire state behaved as if they were mad, I don’t know yet wherein I should find pleasure.” To which Confucius rebutted: “For the labor of an agricultural cycle lasting a hundred days, they enjoy one day of plenty, this is what you do not understand. Even Wen and Wu could not permanently stretch a bow or relax it and vice versa. To keep it now strung and now unstrung was the way of Wen and Wu.”<sup>62</sup> In his commentary, Zheng Xuan concurs that during these New Year celebrations people were invariably drunk and behaved as mad. Nevertheless Confucius here seems to think it appropriate to treat people to such a feast as a reward for a good year’s harvest.

Confucius was probably mistaken in believing that people indulged in one day’s feasting for a hundred days’ work. For some, sacrificial rituals and, indeed, funerals were an opportunity to indulge in a free flow of food and alcohol. Mozi castigates the vulgar Ru as opportunistic beggars who “stuff

<sup>60</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi*, 14C.1b–15b; tr. Waley (1996), 207–9 (modified).

<sup>61</sup> For criticisms of drinking, see, e.g., “Yi” 抑 (Mao 256; stanza 3). Other poems describing wine libations and offerings include “Xin nan shan” 信南山 (Mao 210), “Feng nian” 豐年 (Mao 279), “Zai shan” 載芟 (Mao 290), “Wen Wang” 文王 (Mao 235), “Han lu” 漢麓 (Mao 239), “Bi gong” 閟宮 (Mao 300), and “Lie zu” 列祖 (Mao 302).

<sup>62</sup> *Liji jijie*, 42.1115 (“Za ji”). According to the *Zhouli*, the control on the sale and use of wine consumed during festivals fell within the province of the *pingshi* 萍氏 “river patroller.” See *Zhouli zhengyi*, 70.2905–2907. For the *la* festival as a bibulous break from a season of hard labor, see also *Hanshu*, 66.2896.

food away like hamsters,” dashing from funeral to funeral with their extended family to fill up with drink and food:

As soon as the Five Grains have been gathered (i.e. during autumn and winter) they drag themselves along to large funerals and take their sons and grandsons with them so that they can get stuffed on drink and food. In the end they only need to be in charge of a number of funerals to have enough for their needs. They depend on other households for their wealth and the dignity they enjoy depends on the fields of others. When there is a funeral in a rich family they are overwhelmed with great joy saying: “This is our opportunity for clothing and food!”<sup>63</sup>

Similar criticisms reverberate elsewhere. During the economic debates of 81 BCE reported in the *Yantie lun*, a text that no doubt suffers from a degree of rhetorical exaggeration, Confucius’ frugality in the presence of mourners was invoked to condemn people’s use of funerals as an occasion to stock up on meat and wine. The ancients are described as duty-bound members of a utopian society where wine and meat would only be consumed in the context of sacrificial gatherings.<sup>64</sup> This same idealized picture survives in narratives on the origins of ritual. Ritual and music, the “Yue ji” contends, were in fact aimed at curtailing the excessive use of alcohol:

The rearing of pigs (to feast on grain-fed animals) and the making of wine (with the adjunct of drinking) were not intended to cause disaster. Yet when criminal charges and litigations grew increasingly in number, it was the result of excessive wine drinking. Therefore the kings of ancient times instituted rituals for wine drinking. With one toast, the host and the guests are obliged to salute each other numerous times. Thus one can drink for the whole day without becoming drunk. This is how the ancients prevented disasters caused by wine drinking. As such wine and food became a means whereby people were brought together in pleasure.<sup>65</sup>

It is of course unlikely that such idealized narratives were a reflection of reality. A report among the Qin legal documents found at Shuihudi confirms that drinking and conviviality were an identifying feature of sacrificial rituals. In this particular case, a villager is accused for uttering “poisonous words,” a form of witchcraft in which one harms others by emitting poisonous saliva through speech.<sup>66</sup> The accusers report their refusal to share food and drink

<sup>63</sup> *Mozi jiangou*, 9.291–3 (“Fei Ru, xia” 非儒下).

<sup>64</sup> *Yantie lun jiaozhu*, 6.351, 6.353 (“San bu zu”).

<sup>65</sup> *Liji jijie*, 37.997 (“Yue ji”). See also *Shiji*, 24.1199.

<sup>66</sup> *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 23.949–50 (“Yan du” 言毒).

with the person in question out of fear of being contaminated. It is clear that the setting is that of the village sacrifice:

When in my [the accused's] household there are sacrifices, we invite [the plaintiff] and the others, but [the plaintiff] and the others are unwilling to come; they also never invite me [the accused] to drink. When there are sacrifices in the village, I [the accused] together with the villagers as well as [the plaintiff] meet to drink and eat, but nobody is willing to share a cup or dish (with me).<sup>67</sup>

The Pronouncement would not be the last prohibition on alcohol to be promulgated in early China, and there were reasons other than moral ethos that inspired such restrictions, including the prospect of lucrative revenues that came with a monopoly on the sale of alcohol.<sup>68</sup> Qin placed periodic restrictions on the production and consumption of alcohol, and similar measures were put in place during the Han. Qin statutes on agriculture state that it is a crime for commoners living on farms to sell wine.<sup>69</sup> Prohibitions to produce and consume alcohol could be alleviated with amnesties, as occurred in the late 180s BCE when Han Wendi granted permission to hold drinking gatherings (*pu* 酺) for five days. Normally such gatherings of three or more people joining to drink without a particular reason were subject to a fine, according to Han law.<sup>70</sup> In 98 BCE, fermented liquors were regulated under a state monopoly that was abolished again shortly afterward, following the court debates of 81 BCE.<sup>71</sup> Even Wang Chong puts his brush to a memorial dubbed a “Prohibition on Alcohol” (“Jin jiu” 禁酒), addressed to a local governor in Henan, in which he advises to curb alcohol use to stop rampant crime in the area.<sup>72</sup> These alcohol prohibitions in antiquity continued to furnish a subject for comment among literati centuries later.<sup>73</sup>

Perhaps the best rhetorical example of how the past was invoked to promote the idea of establishing a monopoly on the production and distribution

<sup>67</sup> *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 162–3 (strips 92–93); Hulsewé (1985), 206 (E24).

<sup>68</sup> Note, for instance, that Shang Yang 商鞅 (d. 338 BCE) already proposes to bump up the prices of meat and wine through heavy taxation in order to prevent the rise of merchants and force people to uphold a frugal life style. See *Shang jun shu zhuizhi*, 1.12–13 (“Ken ling” 墾令).

<sup>69</sup> *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 22 (strip 12); Hulsewé (1985), 25 (A6).

<sup>70</sup> *Shiji*, 10.417. Wen Ying 文穎 (fl. 196–220 CE) comments that fines could run up to four ounces of gold. See further *Hanshu* 6.204 n. 1; and *Fengsu tongyi*, 4.169 n. 4 (“Guo yu” 過譽). For other five-day drinking amnesties, see *Hanshu*, 6.200, 7.229, 8.267.

<sup>71</sup> *Hanshu*, 6.204.

<sup>72</sup> *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 29.1182 (“Dui zuo” 對作).

<sup>73</sup> For instance, in his *Ri zhi lu* 日知錄, Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682) collates historical references to the banning of wine sales or wine consumption. For the early period, he singles out the “Jiu gao,” two decrees issued by Emperor Jing, and one by Emperor Xuan. See *Ri zhi lu*, 238 (“Jin jiu” 禁酒).

of alcohol occurs in a memorial submitted to the throne in 10 CE by Wang Mang's superintendent of agriculture Lu Kuang 魯匡. In his memorial, Lu first emphasizes the vital role of wine in sacrifice, as well as its medical benefits, and then sets out another version of how alcohol abuse had led to decadence in the past:

Wine is a beautiful gift of Heaven. It is the means whereby the rulers of old used to foster and nourish all under Heaven in sacrificial offerings and prayers for good fortune, and the means whereby they supported the physically weak and nourished the sick. Gatherings for the hundred rites would not take place without wine. Therefore the Odes say: "If we are without wine, we buy some." Yet the Analects claim that "Confucius did not partake of wine bought [on the market]." These two citations do not contradict each other. The Odes show evidence of an era of inherited peace, when the sale of wine was controlled by officials, when wine was mild and excellent, convenient for all, and could easily be presented before one another. The Confucius of the Analects was active in a period that saw decline and disorder befall the Zhou, when wine sales were controlled (privately) by the people, when the wine was poor, deficient, and adulterated; and therefore he mistrusted it and did not drink it.<sup>74</sup>

The purity and composition of the ale offered around the sacrificial altars and drunk at banquets, it is claimed here, reflects the moral caliber of the times in which one lives, an image reminiscent of the idea that refinement and purity in cuisine reflects a higher degree of spirit power. Similar imagery, David Knechtges has noted, survives in early medieval texts where, not infrequently, the consumption of different grades of ale is associated with different gradations in sagehood. And so a "Rhapsody on Ale" ("Jiu fu" 酒賦), attributed to the Western Han poet Zou Yang 鄒陽 (fl. ca. 154 BCE) but proven to be a Six Dynasties composition, opens:

The clear (*qing* 青) makes wine  
 The turbid (*zhuo* 濁) makes sweet brew  
 The clear is wise and enlightened,  
 The turbid is dull and stupid.<sup>75</sup>

In sum, both history and its human protagonists were said to swing through alternating phases that were clear or turbid, enlightened or troubled like fine or spoiled sacrificial ales. The search for contact with the spirit world was a

<sup>74</sup> *Hanshu*, 24B.1182. The quotes are from "Fa mu" 伐木 (Mao 165) and *Lunyu* 10.8.

<sup>75</sup> *Quan Han fu*, 37; *Xi jing za ji*, 4.181–7; tr. Knechtges (2002), 237. A similar link between morality and the purity and impurity of wine appears in Wang Can's 王粲 (fl.177–217 CE) "Jiu fu" 酒賦; cf. *Quan Han fu*, 670.



liminal and testing enterprise in which human nature was forced to oscillate between the obligation to be ritually adept in the consumption of alcohol and its compulsion to give in to the cravings of the senses. As participants navigated their senses through bibulous temptation, the ritualized drinking gathering offered a platform for self-examination, a test to connect with higher forces from the past and powers beyond this world. Such is the scene in a “Rhapsody on the Willow” (“Yang liu fu” 楊柳賦) preserved in the *Kong Congzi*, where amicable companions examine their character in a convivial gathering under a canopy of willows:

Friends and like-minded persons,  
 Arrange their ceremonial tables and mats there,  
 Discuss the Way while feasting.  
 Setting the goblets adrift in a flowing stream,  
 Like running streams their cups overflow without stop;  
 Viands and sweetmeats are mixed in great profusion.  
 Some write poems, while others cap verses from the Classics,  
 Each expounding his personal aspirations.  
 They examine each other in the light of the heritage of the Former Kings,  
 Rewarding the reverent,  
 Penalizing those found wanting a drink.  
 In accordance with the rules of this event,  
 Goblets are rinsed, wine cups refilled,  
 And the rhinoceros horn-goblets are raised in unison.  
 This drinking, however,  
 does not reach a state of drunkenness (*yin bu zhi zui* 飲不至醉);  
 The joy is not carried to wantonness;  
 Decorum is meticulously preserved;  
 Every movement is at one with the codes.<sup>76</sup>

#### SEARCHING FOR SPIRIT

The perils and tensions surrounding ritual drinking and the offering of alcohol in sacrifice were symptomatic of a wider atmosphere surrounding sacrificial procedures. The power generated by the performance of a sacrificial ritual originated from a sense of apprehension that any procedure, liturgy, song, dance, or sequence of offerings contained within itself the potential of failing to achieve its goal: establishing contact with the spirit world. Sacrificial rituals were organized on a principle of probability; that is, a sacrificial event usually consisted of an ensemble of ritual gestures, actions, and offerings presented

<sup>76</sup> *Kong Congzi*, 3.153; tr. Ariel (1996), 102–3.

in variable sequences and combinations. The aim then was to ensure that one or several moments among these orchestrated performances would be successful in influencing or appeasing the spirits. Thus the sense of reverence generated by a sacrificial performance was partly informed by the idea that the entire procedure could fail in achieving its most important aim of “causing the spirits to descend” (*jiang shen* 降神) or, alternatively, of keeping them at bay.<sup>77</sup>

Sacrificial rituals, therefore, were multimedia events that offered multiple avenues of sensory contact with the spirit world: olfaction, taste, sound, visual display, and movement. To promote the efficacy of the sacrifice, ritual officers test out several performances and offerings. No single procedure guarantees invariable success at every occasion or every juncture in the ritual cycle. Often the ritual codes insist that officiants should seek out the spirits “as if” they were present in the hope that one action in the sequence could prompt a verifiable spirit presence. The following passage in the “Li qi” 禮器 chapter of the *Liji* illustrates the procedure vividly:

Within the great ancestral temple reverence prevailed. The ruler personally led the victim forward while the grandees assisted and followed, carrying the offerings of silk. While the ruler personally took charge of the preliminary sacrificial preparations, his wife presented the dish in which [the offering] would be presented. The ruler personally cut up the victim, while his wife presented the sacrificial ale. The ministers and grandees followed the ruler and ordered their wives to follow the ruler’s wife. How grave and solemn was their reverence! How absorbing their serenity! *How intense was their desire that [the spirits] would accept the offerings!* The arrival of the victim was announced (*zhao* 詔) (to the spirits) in the courtyard; upon presentation of the blood and the flesh with the hair on it,<sup>78</sup> an announcement (*zhao*) was made (to the spirits) in the chamber; when the sacrificial stew was ready, it was announced (*zhao*) (to the spirits) in the hall. *Announcements were made thrice, each time in a different place; indicating how they were seeking for the spirits but had not yet found them.* Then the sacrifice was set forth in the hall, and was repeated outside the gate of the temple; and thus arose the saying, ‘Are they in there? Are they over here (*yu bi hu, yu ci hu* 於彼乎於此乎)?’<sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup> For the idea that sacrificial rituals and implements serve to cause ancestral and other spirits “to descend” (*jiang* 降), see *Liji jijie*, 21.588 (“Li yun”); *Si min yue ling jiaozhu*, 1 (“Zheng yue”), 74 (“Shi-er yue”). Other verbs expressing spirit contact include *tong* 通, *jiao* 交, etc. See *Liji jijie*, 26.700–1 (“Jiao te sheng”), 42.1123 (“Za ji”).

<sup>78</sup> The procedure referred to here is first described in *Shijing*, Mao 219, where the officiant “holds a bell-knife to lay open the hair, taking the blood and the fat.” See also *Yantie lun jiaozhu*, 18.231 (“Hui xue” 毀學).

<sup>79</sup> *Liji jijie*, 24.663–5 (“Li qi”) [my italics].

This scene underscores the fickle and erratic nature of establishing contact with the spirit world. The procedure takes place in an atmosphere of lingering uncertainty about a spirit response. Thus when the offerings are set forth, repeated announcements are made in different parts of the ancestral temple, each performed with reverence and care as if the ancestral spirits are spatially present. To announce the display of offerings to the spirits, several formulas recur in received and excavated texts. In the preceding passage, the officiants officially “announce” *zhao* 詔 their offerings; other liturgies use the formula *gan gao* 敢告 (“[the supplicant] ventures to declare”). The sense of deference implied in these expressions may suggest that, not infrequently, people viewed their relationship with the spirit world as one mirroring a relationship between subjects and superiors in real life. Other formulas used to declare incipient sacrificial procedures include “announcing” (*gao* 告) or “openly/clearly declaring” (*zhao gao* 昭告) one’s own presence and the display of offerings to the spirits, or announcing oneself in prayer following a divination (*ce gao* 冊告, *ce zhu* 筮祝).<sup>80</sup>

Serving the spirits as if they are physically present recalls a ritual predisposition associated with the figure of Confucius who, in a fragment preserved in the *Lunyu*, insists that spirits should be sacrificed to “as if they are present (*ji shen ru shen zai* 祭神如神在).”<sup>81</sup> Some commentators have read this passage as an admonition against the use of a proxy to officiate in important sacrifices. As such, the Confucian gentleman is understood to exert mental control over a whimsical spirit world by means of an empathic mimicry of ritual procedure and by enacting a degree of ritual gravitas.

Confucius’ axiom, however, could be equally meaningful if, as in the “*Li qi*” passage quoted earlier, the sacrificial procedure is conceived of first and foremost as a *search* for spirits rather than an offering to a preexisting pantheon. The sacrificial act in itself enables the worshipper to efface doubts about the existential efficacy of the spirits. To placate the spirits and find mental solace with them, the question of their very existence is to be left unanswered. The authority of the spirit world is reinforced by the ritualist’s self-acclaimed *aporia* about their existence or their presence near the venue where the spirits are invoked, appeased, or exorcised.<sup>82</sup>

Like any quest then, sacrifice becomes a process that is subject to mental obstacles, procedural hurdles, and the challenges of ritual protocol. Inducing

<sup>80</sup> For examples, see Yang Hua (2007), 364–70. On the use of *gao* (\**kúk*) as a mode of speech by a subordinate toward a superior in official communication, see Giele (2006), 238–9.

<sup>81</sup> *Lunyu yi zhu*, 27 (3.12).

<sup>82</sup> *Lunyu yi zhu*, 61 (6.22), 72 (7.21), 113 (11.12).

spirits to respond and share in the ritual space of the worshipper is not self-evident. Confucius' admonition "to sacrifice to the spirits as if they are present" could be seen as a version of what historians and anthropologists of religion have called the "silent trade" paradigm of gifts and ritual gestures; that is, to remedy the unfeasibility of having direct contact with spirits and passing on gifts directly to the spirit world, the supplicant leaves offerings in a dedicated space following a sequence of ritual gestures to induce the spirits to descend and collect their due and reciprocate. The intangibility of the spirit world necessitates the ritualist to construct or invent their presence either ideologically, in practice, or both. This is executed by means of formulas and procedures that, as Walter Burkert puts it, come close to tricking the spirits into showing themselves.<sup>83</sup>

In the ancestral hall sacrifice described earlier, a sequence of announcements is made while officiants lure the spirits – by means of blood, raw, and cooked offerings – to make themselves present. Just as adepts of self-cultivation claimed that spirit power could be invited and concentrated into the body and mind of the practicing individual through diet or progressive stages of mental exercise, so the ritual officiant prepares the physical settings of a sacrifice and its offerings for a search aimed at inducing the spirits to lodge themselves temporarily among the ritual participants. The ancestral sacrifice, therefore, at least in its prescriptive and systematized version in the ritual canon, could involve an "offering of search," by which is meant a procedure aimed at addressing spirits that have not (yet) been located:

One summoned the priest to the chamber, seated the impersonator of the dead in the hall, killed a sacrificial victim in the courtyard and offered up its head in the chamber. In the case of a regular (direct) sacrifice (*zhi ji* 直祭) the priest addressed himself to the spirit tablet (*zhu* 主) of the deceased. If it was an offering of search (*suo ji* 索祭), he would take his place at the gate outside the main temple (*beng* 祊).<sup>84</sup> Since one did not know where the *shen* were located – whether they were there or here (*yu bi hu, yu ci hu* 於彼乎於此乎), or far away from men – might it not be said that by offering at the *beng* one is (in fact) searching (for spirits) in a distant place (*qiu zhu yuan zhe* 求諸遠者)?<sup>85</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Burkert (1996), chapter 6 ("The Reciprocity of Giving"), esp. 139–41, 145–55.

<sup>84</sup> A *beng* ritual is attested as early as the Shang. See Yang Shuda (1954), 26–8. In the context of ancestral sacrifices, it denotes the gate to or gate area of the main temple hall or sanctuary where guests wait while a priest "searches" out the spirits to come to the ancestral hall. See *Liji jijie*, 25.684. See also *Shuowen jiezi*, 1A.8a; Wei Zhao's commentary to *Guoyu*, 2.57; and Zheng Xuan's commentary to Mao 209 ("Chu ci") in *Mao shi zhengyi*, 13B.7b. For a diagram see *Li shu*, 87.1b–2a.

<sup>85</sup> *Liji jijie*, 26.715 ("Jiao te sheng").

Spirits present themselves as nowhere and everywhere, not readily predestined and prepared for contact with human supplicants, but constantly taunting and testing the patience of the sacrificer. Sacrifices to spirits located and fixed in a spirit tablet are distinguished from offerings to itinerant and unidentified spirit forces that need to be ushered into the temple. Uncertainty about a favorable response surrounds the entire procedure. As the text continues later on, one may present the sacrificial meats raw and whole, or cooked and cut, but “how do we know what the spirits enjoy” (*qi zhi shen zhi suo xiang ye* 豈知神之所饗也)?<sup>86</sup>

Ritual participants, for their part, are required to engage in techniques in which they imagine and visualize ancestral and other spirits in virtual presence. By setting out food offerings, and through the performance of liturgy and music, they forge a sensory bond with the unseen. Offering sacrifices does not imply affirming one’s emotional or familial bond to a preexisting spirit landscape wherein ancestors and spirits occupy a fixed and predetermined place. Instead the sacrificial ritual itself is the performative tool that enables the worshiper to make the spirits manifest themselves in varying degrees of proximity. Such rites include remembrance through text, song, and dance, and require from the performer an attitude of utmost mental sincerity and ceremonial correctness in the execution of procedure. As the “Yu zao” 玉藻 (Jade-bead pendants) chapter states: “In all cases when sacrifices are offered, one’s countenance and facial expression ought to be such as if one sees those to whom one sacrifices.”<sup>87</sup> During the fast preceding sacrifices to one’s departed, the “Ji yi” 祭義 (Meaning of sacrifices) insists, the mourner should mentally recall (*si* 思) the place where his ancestors sat, how they smiled or spoke, what intentions and ideas they had, what they found pleasurable, and what they relished. On the day of sacrifice itself, a mourner should be under the impression of seeing the deceased in the place where his spirit tablet is located and appear to hear the ancestral spirit’s sounds and sighs.<sup>88</sup> A son should be hearing his parents when there is no sound of them and should be able to see them when they are not physically there.<sup>89</sup> Here, sensory memory, nourished and strengthened by a period of physical fast, serve as the fiber that binds descendants and ancestral spirits together. Or as

<sup>86</sup> *Liji jijie*, 26.719 (“Jiao te sheng”).

<sup>87</sup> *Liji jijie*, 30.835 (“Yu zao”): *fan ji rongmao yanse ru jian suo ji zhe* 凡祭容貌顏色如見所祭者.

<sup>88</sup> *Liji jijie*, 46.1208–9 (“Ji yi”). Later on in the text, the act of entreating ancestral spirits (*xiang*/*\*han* 饗) is defined with the homophonic gloss *xiang* 鄉 “to direct oneself to,” suggesting that only when the supplicant “directs” his mental and bodily gestures fully toward them will the spirits accept the sacrifices. See *Liji jijie*, 46.1210 (“Ji yi”).

<sup>89</sup> *Liji jijie*, 1.21 (“Qu li”).

Xunzi argues: “One picks up the offerings and presents them in sacrifice as though someone really were going to taste them.”<sup>90</sup>

Occasionally the terminology used for sacrificial offerings seems to distinguish between offerings aimed at luring spirits to descend upon the sacrificial locus versus offerings presented for actual consumption by spirits that have already been located. The *Zhouli*, for instance, speaks of a “consumed-ox-offering” (*xiang niu* 享牛) versus a “searching-ox-offering” (*qiu niu* 求牛). The former, according to commentators, is an offering to be appreciated by the spirits, the latter serves to invite spirits to make themselves manifest at the proper time for the sacrifice.<sup>91</sup> Other sacrificial offerings such as, for instance, aromatic black millet wine (*ju chang* 秬鬯), a ferment of black glutinous millet to which aromatic plants were added, are identified specifically as substances meant to draw spirits nearby or cause spirits to descend.<sup>92</sup> There were other aids to help “catch” spirits and expose them to offerings. For sacrifices to distant locations, bundles of woolly grass (*mao* 茅) could be used as a receptacle to summon distant spirits near the place of the supplicants.<sup>93</sup>

In both of the previously described passages we witness a theatrical enactment of a well-known adagio found in philosophical texts, namely the sentiment that the spirit world can be visible but not to the human eye, that spirits are audible but not to human ears, and that they are perceptible but not through normal human sensation. The human eye can look out for spirits but is unable to see them; the human ear may listen out for them without being able to hear them, and so forth. And just as the ritualist masters a technical arsenal that enables him to communicate with a spirit world that operates beyond normal human sensation, so sages are capable of “listening to what is soundless and observing what is shapeless.”<sup>94</sup> A passage in the *Huainanzi* confirms the rationale of sacrifice precisely in those terms: offerings, prayers,

<sup>90</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 13.377 (“Li lun”).

<sup>91</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 23.924–5 (“Niu ren”). Cai Yong provides another gloss on sacrifice as a request. He points out that in spring, the season of growth, no sacrificial victims should be offered on the principle that this is the time of year when one is praying to fructify life. Cai then defines *qi* 祈 as a “sacrifice of request” (*qiu zhi ji* 求之祭). See *Yueling da wen* 月令答問 in *Cai Zhonglang wen ji*, 10.60. See also *Zhou guan ji zhu*, 3.114.

<sup>92</sup> *Shuowen jiezi*, 5B.4a. See also Jia Kui’s 賈逵 (30–101 CE) commentary in *Shiji*, 39.1667n. 5; and Yan Shigu’s commentary to *Hanshu*, 8.263n.8, 21A.966n.3, 22.1047, 25A.1201n.2, 87A.3554n.10, where *chang* 鬯 is glossed as *chang* 暢 or *tong* 通 “to penetrate, to reach.” “Aromatic spirits of black millet” were also known as one of the so-called nine bestowals (*jiu xi* 九錫). These were gifts given to meritorious officials, first attested in 128 BCE and officially bestowed for the first time to Wang Mang in 5 CE. They are said to be served with a ladle with jade-tablet handle (*gui zan* 圭瓚). See Goodrich (1957), esp. chapters 1, 2 and 4; esp. 177–8 and 215–23.

<sup>93</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 50.2072 (“Nan wu” 男巫).

<sup>94</sup> As quoted in *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 18.1157 (“Zhong yan”). See also *Xunzi jijie*, 17.450 (“Junzi”).



and divinatory procedures substitute the normal human senses and might enable the ritualist to induce forces, otherwise absent to human sensation, to be ritually present:

Thus if one looks for ghosts and spirits, they have no shape. If one listens out for them they remain silent. Yet that being the case we (still) offer suburban sacrifices to Heaven, vista sacrifices to mountains and rivers, present supplication offers and prayers to seek for blessings, offer sacrifices to request rain, divine by shell and milfoil to decide on affairs. The Odes state: “A visit from the spirits can never be foreseen, the better reason for not ignoring them.”<sup>95</sup>

The use of divination techniques to ensure the fortuitous timing of a sacrifice or to select the best offerings is in essence an activity aimed at narrowing down the search for spirit and increasing the probability of establishing sensory contact with them. At best, therefore, sacrifice offers a tool or procedure to search for spirit presence. As such, it could be understood as an exteriorized version of regimens for the self-cultivation of the individual: The sacrificial locus and its activities are construed to attract a spirit presence in the same way as the body seeks to cultivate the presence of vital energies and spirit essence through fasting, diet, and exercise. This idea of sacrifice as a ritually enacted and performative search for spirit presence is manifest in several ways: in the vocabulary used for certain sacrificial procedures, in anecdotal stories describing quests to identify spirits, in the construction of altars and the use of spirit tablets and trees to induce spirits to converge near the sacrificer, and in the use of a proxy or representative of the dead who acts as a conduit for the offerings destined for the spirits.

Let us turn to terminology first. Commentators as early as the Han have explained technical terms for sacrificial procedures as activities aimed at “searching” or “seeking out” the world beyond the immediate reach of the human senses. For instance, in its chapter on the meaning of sacrifice (“Ji yi”), the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 glosses the verb *ji* 祭 (\**tsets*) “to offer sacrifice” as *cha* 察 (\**tshrêtR*!) “to search, to reach into”:

“To sacrifice” (*ji*) means “to reach into” (*cha*), which signifies that (the sacrificer) is able to establish contact with ghosts and spirits. If he is capable of achieving this he reaches into what cannot be heard or seen. That is why he is said to “reach into” ... The fact that “sacrifice” (*ji*) is also referred to as “entering into contact with” (*ji*/\**tsats* 際) means that following a sacrificial offering one is capable of making manifest what is invisible. When one is capable of observing the manifestation of what is invisible (*jian bu jian zhi*

<sup>95</sup> *Huainanzi*, 20.665 (“Tai zu”). The quote is from Mao 256; cf. Waley (1996), 264.

*xian zhe* 見不見之見者) one will understand the command of Heaven and the ghosts and spirits....<sup>96</sup>

Later on in the text, its purported author links this definition of sacrifice directly with Confucius' ambition to serve the spirits "as if they were present."

The identification of sacrificial procedure as a process of search also occurs in explanations of the annual winter sacrifice in Han times, the so-called *zha/la* 蜡 (臘/蠟) festival, when tutelary agricultural spirits were celebrated. The *Liji* glosses *la* as *suo*/\**srâk* 索 "to search out, select." Both text and commentaries explain that for this winter sacrifice one aims to "search out" the products of the harvest in order to identify suitable offerings among them.<sup>97</sup> Performed at the end of the agricultural year, the ceremony was an opportunity for the ruler to offer up samples of the agricultural produce of all quarters of his domain. Some commentators insist that the ritual mainly consisted of a search for the presence of eight spirits that required sacrificial offerings. Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192 CE) writes: "*La* means to search (*suo*), so on the day of sacrifice one searches for the eight spirits and offers sacrifice to them."<sup>98</sup> Zheng Xuan links the repetitive performance of different melodies to the search for different categories of spirits during the *la* festival.<sup>99</sup> Other sources concur that the presentation of sacrificial offerings should follow after a procedure during which ritual officiants conduct a preliminary "search" (*suo*) for spirit presence. For instance, the *Zhouli* notes:

When throughout the state ghost and spirits are searched out and presented with sacrificial offerings (*guo suo guishen er jisi* 國索鬼神而祭祀), the head of the ward uses rituals to assemble the people and organizes drinking ceremonies in the apartments (for the elderly) in order to rectify the ranks of seniority."<sup>100</sup>

Likewise, according to the same source, a ritual officer known as the exorcist, or *fang xiang shi* 方相氏, "searches" (*suo*) out the rooms for pestilence forces and then exorcises them.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>96</sup> *Chunqiu fanlu yi zheng*, 16.441–2. For a similar gloss for *ji*, see *Shangshu da zhuan*, 6.56. See also Hua Yougen (1998), 25.

<sup>97</sup> *Liji jijie*, 25.694 ("Jiao te sheng"). The festival is studied in detail in Bodde (1975). It predated Han (e.g., in Qin it was introduced first, in imitation of the Central States, in the 12th year of King Huiwen 惠文; cf. *Shiji*, 5.206). See also Xia Rixin (1995).

<sup>98</sup> *Du duan*, 1.12.

<sup>99</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 42.1753 ("Da siyue").

<sup>100</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 22.870 ("Dang zheng"). For another occurrence of the expression *suo guishen*, see *Zhouli zhengyi*, 19.741 ("Da situ"). Here one commentator suggests it means recultivating sacrifices to spirits that had been abandoned.

<sup>101</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 59.2493 ("Fang xiang shi").

The onus on humans to actively search out spirit presence prior to sacrifice is the subject of several anecdotes. One episode is set at the court of Han Wudi in the run-up to his performance of the *feng* 封 and *shan* 禪 sacrifices on Mount Tai in 110 BCE. Having been duped twice already by crank “masters of methods” (*fang shi*) who had promised him successful quests for spirits and immortals, Han Wudi turns skeptical when yet another counselor, Gongsun Qing 公孫卿, reported to have seen footprints of an immortal on top of a city wall. When the emperor asked him for assurances on a successful search for spirits this time round, his counselor replies:

It is not the case that immortals seek for the ruler of men, it is the ruler who must seek them. Unless one goes about one's methods with a liberal and open-minded attitude, the spirits will not appear. When people discuss spirit affairs, their words are apt to sound wild and irrational, but if these matters are pursued for a sustained number of years, spirits can eventually be persuaded to come forth!<sup>102</sup>

Two years later, the emperor orders the construction of a “Terrace that Reaches to Heaven” (“Tong tian tai” 通天臺) in Chang'an and has sacrificial implements displayed at its foot to summon spirits and immortals to descend upon it.<sup>103</sup>

In another apocryphal tale, Confucius emphasizes the central role of the sacrificial victim and he does so again by glossing the term for “sacrifice” (*ji*) with the graph for “searching” (*suo*).

Gongsuo Shi 公索氏 of Lu was about to perform a sacrifice but lost his sacrificial animal. Confucius heard about this and said: “Gongsuo Shi is certain to perish before three years have passed.” A year later he did in fact perish. A disciple asked (Confucius): “Formerly when Gongsuo Shi lost his sacrificial animal, you Master said that he would certainly perish before three years had passed. Now a year has gone by and he has perished. How did you know that he would perish?”

Confucius replied: “Sacrifice could be said to be a search (*ji zhi wei yan suo ye* 祭之爲言索也). Since searching (for spirits) means to exhaust (*jin* 盡) oneself this implies that (sacrifice) is the means whereby a filial son exhausts himself towards his kin. If one loses one's sacrificial animal at the point of sacrificing then the things one will lose besides this will be numerous. This is how I knew that he would perish.”<sup>104</sup>

<sup>102</sup> *Shiji*, 28.1396.

<sup>103</sup> *Shiji*, 28.1400.

<sup>104</sup> *Shuoyuan*, 13.318–319 (“Quan mou”). Another version of this story is preserved in *Kongzi jiayu*, 2.9a (“Hao sheng” 好生). Given the contents of the story, it is not implausible that there is a pun intended in the name Gongsuo.

With sacrificial procedure conceived of primarily as a quest for spirit presence rather than a straightforward entreaty of spirits in recompense for received blessings, the physical surroundings in which such procedures take place and the sacrificial offering itself become the most important media in establishing sensory contact with the spirit world. This no doubt partly explains why ritual literature comments in great detail on the materiality of offerings: its ingredients, the size, color, and fragrance of offerings, their manner of preparation, and the modalities in which they should be offered. Indeed the predominant share of theoretical debate on sacrifice in early China appears to amount to a theology of the sacrificial offering itself and of the material paraphernalia used to conduct sacrificial rituals.

Earlier in this chapter, we already encountered the ancestral hall or temple as a ritual space in which spirits were to be induced to make themselves present. The sacrificial altar – in the form of an elevated platform, a leveled space, or a pit structure – provided another space upon which spiritual forces could exert their energies. Unlike a temple or shrine, a sacrificial “platform” (*tan* 壇), “leveled space” (*shan* 壇) or “pit” (*kan* 坎) was not normally roofed or covered, leaving both the ritual participants and the offerings exposed to the elements.<sup>105</sup> In their most basic form, altars consisted of heaped up earth or a walled compound. Some altar structures had paths or spirit roads radiating from them to channel the spirit influences toward the sacrificial locus.<sup>106</sup> Sources also refer to a sacrificial plot or boundary (*zhao yu* 兆域), that is, a space that could be screened off from the natural elements.<sup>107</sup>

The *she* 社, a term referring both to the altar of the soil and the genius loci associated with it, accrued great importance as a physical arena for sacrificial

<sup>105</sup> On these altar structures, see Zhan Yinxin (1992), 186–7; and Li Ling (2000), 137–8. Interpretations of these terms vary. A passage in the “Jin teng” 金滕 chapter of the *Shangshu* states that the Duke of Zhou “set up three altars on the same cleared space” (*wei san tan tong shan* 為三壇同壇). Ma Rong 馬融 (79 – 166 CE) here comments that a *tan* is a “hall of earth” (*tu tang* 土堂). See *Shangshu jin gu wen zhushu*, 13.324–5; and *Zhouli zhengyi*, 11.426 (“Zhang she” 掌舍). In a commentary to *Shiji*, 32.1487, He Xiu 何休 (129–82 CE) notes that the soil base of a *tan* is three *chi* feet high and has three steps. Xu Shen defines *chang* 場 as the road on which one sacrifices to the spirits (*ji shen dao* 祭神道), with commentators suggesting that it is the surface area left behind by the heaping up of a *tan* platform. See *Shuowen jiezi*, 13B.38b.

<sup>106</sup> For instance, the altar to Taiyi 太一 “Grand Unity”, established by Han Wudi (ca 121 BCE), was constructed so that it “opened out onto spirit roads of the eight directions” (*kai ba tong zhi guidao* 開八通之鬼道). See *Shiji*, 28.1386. They were removed from a similar altar constructed in 113 BCE. See *Shiji*, 28.1394.

<sup>107</sup> *Guoyu*, 18.560 (“Chu yu, xia”); *Zhouli zhengyi*, 41.1694 (“Zhong ren” 冢人). The *Liji* notes that for the suburban sacrifice, a space was marked off (*zhao* 兆) and swept clean in the southern suburbs, a location where the solar energy is at its height. See *Liji jijie*, 25.689 (“Jiao te sheng”).

activity. In Zhou times, the altar of the soil, together with the *ji* 稷 “altar to the spirit of the grain,” functioned as the locus where blood sacrifices were pledged to legitimize political authority. The *Zhouli* mentions officials known as “boundary markers” who were in charge of establishing an earthen mound for soil and grain altars whenever a new state or dependency was enfeoffed.<sup>108</sup> By early imperial times, soil altars had become increasingly devolved and were set up at all levels, from the household to the commandery. According to the *Liji*, a *she* altar provides a space for congregation where, temporarily, the soil is empowered with spirit-like powers. By erecting a soil altar, officiants are said to pay “spiritual homage” (*shen*) to the Way of the earth (*she suoyi shen di zhi dao ye* 社所以神地之道也)<sup>109</sup>

*She* altars may have been as basic as a simple mound of stamped earth screened off by or covered with a tree or group of trees.<sup>110</sup> To represent the genie of the soil, the species of tree on the earth altar was to correspond to the local terrain. A tree could also lend its name to the altar.<sup>111</sup> Just as inside an ancestral temple or hall a wooden tablet provided a physical point of reference for spirit presence, trees on and near soil altars could function as a channel for the tutelary spirits of the region. The fact that these trees were also known as *tian zhu* 田主 “hosts of the field” suggests that spirit powers associated with the land were thought to be “channeled” (*zhu* 主/注) toward the altar through a tangible natural object represented by the tree. A Han source notes that a *she* altar was to remain unroofed to ensure that the tree planted on it would connect with the vapors (*qi* 氣) of heaven and earth. Another purpose of the tree was to make the location of the altar visible from a distance.<sup>112</sup> The spirit of the soil then was to be worshiped with sacrificial offerings that were interred or with libations of blood or wine. The welfare of a lineage, state, or region was expressed in variations on the stock-phrase

<sup>108</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 22.890 (“Feng ren”).

<sup>109</sup> *Liji jijie*, 25.686 (“Jiao te sheng”); also quoted in *Songshu*, 17.479.

<sup>110</sup> For an early occurrence of a *she* enclosed by a yard, see, e.g., the *she pu* 社圃 “*she* park” in the state of Lu in *Zuo zhuan*, 80 (Lord Yin, year 11); *Shiji*, 33.1529. The classic study on the *she* remains Chavannes (1910b). See further Müller (1979). On the planting of trees on *she* altars, see Ebner von Eschenbach (2002), 372–8; Zhang Hequan (1993), 98–9; and Ma Xin (1998).

<sup>111</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 18.692 (“Da situ”). See also *Shuowen jiezi*, 1A.15b. For examples of *she* carrying the name of their accompanying tree(s), see *Zhuangzi jishi*, 4.170 (“Ren jian shi”), and *Shiji*, 28.1378. *Hanshu*, 27B.1413, reports a miraculous reappearance overnight of a chopped-down locust tree on a *she*. Trees on or surrounding tombs and soil altars were not to be cut. See *Tai Gong liu tao jin zhu jinyi*, 4.165 (“Lüe di” 略地). In the *Lunyu*, Zai Wo 宰我 states that the Xia used pine, the Yin cedar, and the Zhou chestnut trees on their soil altars. See *Lunyu yi zhu*, 30 (3.21). See also *Huainanzi*, 11.357–8 (“Qi su”).

<sup>112</sup> *Bohutong shu zheng*, 3.89 (“She ji”). For a contemporary recollection of the use of trees as a marker for the soil altar, see Kleeman (2005), 145.

that its ancestral temples and altars to the soil and grain had been “fed with blood (*xue shi* 血食).” The inability to offer blood sacrifices could signify the pending demise of the polity in question.<sup>113</sup>

Over and above the physicality of the altar mound itself, sacrifices to the soil derived their power from the idea that these rituals brought together participants near a space susceptible to spirit influence. To quote the *Liji*, “the most reverent form of sacrifice does not require the heaping up of an altar, it only requires sweeping clean a spot of soil and setting out a sacrifice on it.”<sup>114</sup> Explanations of the role of the *she* focus on its function as a spirit receptacle by means of which spirits and cosmic elements can approve or reprimand the political and moral expediency of the communities that were linked to it through sacrificial obligation:

The great *she* altar of the Son of Heaven had to receive the frost, dew, wind, and rain in order to reach into the *qi* of heaven and earth. Therefore a *she* altar of a state that had perished was roofed in, so that it was not exposed to the *yang* (solar) energy from Heaven. The altar (of the Shang) at Bo 薄 had an opening in its northern wall to allow the *yin* (lunar) energy to shine into it.<sup>115</sup>

Walling off the *she* from four sides would undo its efficacy as a receptacle of spirit influences.<sup>116</sup> The Han critic Wang Chong notes that “when a state has ceased to exist, its altar of the soil is roofed above and fenced with wood below to indicate that its connection with Heaven and Earth has been cut off.”<sup>117</sup> The *Lüshi chunqiu* speaks of the earlier mentioned altar of Shang being covered by a Zhou enclosure and notes that whereas vessels of a conquered state may be displayed in public as an admonition, their soil altars should never again be exposed to the heavens.<sup>118</sup> The act of covering up the soil altars thus amounted to a symbolic funeral of a vanquished state or lineage. The ceremonial prayers and sacrifices accompanying the procedure itself were delivered by a funerary chanter (*sang zhu* 喪祝) whose normal remit was assisting at funerary rituals.<sup>119</sup> It may also have been viewed as a type of punishment for it was a chief justice (*shi shi* 士師) who was to take on the role as representative of the spirits associated with the altar in demise.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>113</sup> For examples, see *Zhouli zhengyi*, 33.1314 (“Da zong bo”); *Han Feizi jishi*, 3.200 (“Shi guo”); *Shiji*, 28.1380, 33.1515, 34.1562, 36.1586, 86.2536, 87.2549.

<sup>114</sup> *Liji jijie*, 23.639 (“Li qi”). I follow the reading suggested in Zhan Yinxin (2000), 186.

<sup>115</sup> *Liji jijie*, 25.685 (“Jiao te sheng”). See also *Bohutong shu zheng*, 3.86, 3.89 (“She ji”).

<sup>116</sup> See, e.g., *Hanshu*, 99B.4084.

<sup>117</sup> *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 13.594 (“Bie tong”). See also *Du duan*, 1.8–9.

<sup>118</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 23.1532 (“Gui zhi” 貴直).

<sup>119</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 50.2053 (“Sang zhu”).

<sup>120</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 67.2791 (“Shi shi”).



Hence an altar space did not present itself as a permanently fixed abode for the spirits but rather as a negotiated space that offered a potential conduit to the spirit world. As a locus, it was moveable and replaceable. As Mencius states: “When sacrificial animals are well fattened, sacrificial grains are clean, and the sacrifices are observed at due times, but, regardless, floods and droughts occur, then the altars should be replaced.”<sup>121</sup> A sense of apprehension at the idea that spirit appearances in response to sacrificial offerings remain unpredictable hovers over many accounts of sacrifice. A good example occurs in Sima Qian’s narrative on Duke Wen 文 of Qin (ca. 765–716 BCE), who allegedly established a shrine on the northern slopes of Mount Chencang 陳倉 to worship stone-like objects that had come into his possession:

Sometimes, the spirits of the objects would not appear for a whole year, while at other times they would come several times in the year. When they came it invariably happened at night, when they shed a glowing light like shooting stars, coming in from the southeast, and gathering on the wall around the shrine. They looked like roosters and made a screeching sound so that the fowl in the fields began to crow in response, although it was in the middle of the night. Duke Wen made an offering of one set of sacrificial animals and named the objects “The Treasures of Chen” (*Chen bao* 陳寶).<sup>122</sup>

When sensory contact is established during a successful sacrifice, the altar space could figure as a focal point where hitherto unseen spirit forces made themselves manifest, as the following report by Han Xuandi (dated 58 BCE) illustrates:

At sunset during our retreat and fast, a spirit luminescence (*shen guang* 神光) manifested itself. During the evening presentations of fragrant wine (*chang* 鬯), spirit luminescences criss-crossed each other. Some were descending from Heaven, some rising up from the Earth, others arriving from the four quarters to congregate at the altar. The Lord on High assented and appreciated (our offerings) and all within the seas received blessings.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>121</sup> *Mengzi zhengyi*, 28.974 (7B.14).

<sup>122</sup> *Shiji*, 28.1359. *Shiji*, 28.1374, notes that during Qin Shihuang’s reign, the Chen Bao spirit received sacrifices in the seasons it appeared, and at 28.1376, it is noted that these spirits were so remarkable because their glowing lights moved the people. For a study of the cult that developed around these spirits, see Bujard (1998).

<sup>123</sup> *Hanshu*, 8.263. The appearance of a spirit presence in the form of sky lights or glowing emanations in various shapes is reported frequently. When Han Wudi performed the suburban sacrifice to Great Unity at Yunyang 雲陽 (in 113 BCE), his officials reported lights appearing over the sacrificial offerings and “yellow vapors” rising from the altar and reaching Heaven. See *Shiji*, 28.1395. The appearance of spirit lights is also reported in response to suburban sacrifices and offerings to Houtu 后土 in the spring of 55 BCE. See *Hanshu*, 8.266.

Finally one other agent was central to help fix the spirits during a sacrificial procedure, more specifically during ancestral sacrifices and mourning rituals. This was the “corpse,” “personator,” or “representative of the dead” (*shi* 尸), a living descendant of the deceased who acted as a proxy of the ancestral spirits. The impersonator assisted in giving physical form to invisible yet omnipresent ancestral spirits during the sacrifice. He physically impersonates the spirits, tastes and drinks from the offerings, moves and speaks on their behalf, and toasts the living clan members during the banquet that follows the sacrifice.<sup>124</sup> Following the impersonator’s symbolic tasting of the offerings, the leftovers are consumed by the ritual participants in a cascading order according to status. The consumption of tangible sacrificial leftovers thus becomes a mechanism to establish sensory contact with a virtual spirit world through the medium of the impersonator:

Therefore, when the impersonator rises, the ruler together with his four ministers eat the leftovers (*jun* 餼). Next the ruler stands up, and the six grandees eat of the leftovers, the ministers eat the leftovers of the ruler. Then the grandees rise and the eight officers eat. Being inferior they consume the leftovers of the nobles. Then the officers rise, each takes his portion and goes out where they display the leftovers below the hall. Next the hundred officials enter and disperse (*san* 散) the leftovers, so inferiors eat the leftovers of their superiors. In general, the method for dispersing (the leftovers) is such that with each shift (in the cascade), more people are involved. This is the means whereby one distinguishes the ranks of noble and mean and promotes representations of bestowing and grace. Therefore by using four millet vessels one makes manifest one’s cultivation within the temple. The space within the temple is a representation of the entire world and sacrifice is the apex of grace.<sup>125</sup>

To sum up, the ritual space, temple, shrine and ancestral hall, screened-off altar mounds, trees, ritual officiants and proxy representatives of the spirits, sacrificial vessels and their food offerings, accompanied by music and dance,

<sup>124</sup> *Yili zhushu*, 42.8a–14a (“Shi yu li”); *Liji jijie*, 19.542 (“Zengzi wen”). This last passage stipulates that only in the case of the prematurely dead can funerary rites proceed without a “representative of the dead.” See also Ikeda Suetoshi (1981), 623–44. Given that the impersonator is essentially a human descendant, it is hard to distinguish him visually in Warring States or Han iconography. A well-preserved mid-Warring States bronze ladle discovered in 1998 in a private collection in Luoyang shows two human figures inside a temple, one seated on a stool. They are holding a goblet in their hand and are facing one empty and one full sacrificial vessel. Xu Chanfei and Yao Zhiyuan (2007) suggest these might represent the invocator and impersonator found in standard descriptions of ritual sacrifice. See further Sterckx (forthcoming).

<sup>125</sup> *Liji jijie*, 47.1242 (“Ji tong”).

all provided potential conduits to induce spirit presence. Ritual actors and their tools were the exteriorized equivalent of the physical body of the self-cultivation adept. Both sought to invite a spirit presence through progressive performances and techniques. Just as the individual was to subject himself to dietary programs and sensory discipline, so the efficiency to attract spirits to reside temporarily in the presence of the worshipper depended on how well the ritualist mastered the material repertoire of sacrificial procedure. The former nourished the spirit within one's self, whereas the latter nourished the spirits beyond the self. Body and diet offer a platform for self-cultivation to the former, whereas ritualized space and sacrificial apparatus offer a platform for the ritual cultivation of spirit powers. Without being lodged in an effigy or an object such as an ancestral tablet or altar, or without being channeled through media accessible to the human senses such as food sacrifices, music, or dance, spirits remain transient and invisible to the observer.<sup>126</sup> At the same time, these paraphernalia of ritual remain empty without an understanding of the underlying principles or ideas they represent.<sup>127</sup> Without a ritualized search guided by correct intentions (*yi* 義), spirits revert to being mere ephemeral influences, mysterious vapors traveling through ritual space but failing to be settled down or fixed by means of ritual sacrifice. As the "Zhong yong" reiterates:

The Master said: "When ghosts and spirits display their powers, how abundant they are! We look at them but do not see them; we listen to them but do not hear them, yet they enter into all things and nothing can be without them. They cause the people under heaven to fast, purify themselves, and put on fine clothing to carry out sacrifices to them. Like welling water it is as if they are above the head and to the left and right (of the worshipers). The Odes say:

"The descent of the spirits  
Cannot be fathomed –  
How much less can it be ignored.  
Such is the manifestness of what is minute, such is the impossibility of  
repressing the outgoings of sincerity."<sup>128</sup>

The social power and mystery of sacrifice in early Chinese religion was based on a sensory ambiguity: To attract a category of powers that escape the sensory

<sup>126</sup> Cf. *Liji jijie*, 37.988 ("Yue ji"): "In the visible sphere (*ming* 明) there is ritual and music, in the invisible (*you* 幽) there are ghosts and spirits."

<sup>127</sup> *Liji jijie*, 26.706 ("Jiao te sheng").

<sup>128</sup> *Liji zhushu*, 52.12a–b ("Zhong yong"). As in the *Huainanzi* passage quoted on page 112, this passage quotes the same lines from Mao 256, cf. note 95.

radars of ordinary mortals, the sacrificer can only find recourse in deploying a sophisticated set of olfactory, sonorous, and visual tools that originate in human sensation. Sensory austerity and sensory display generated a creative tension – a subject to which we will return in [Chapter 5](#). Yet like fasting and feasting, ritual simplicity and ceremonial ostentation were also complementary because the former could condition the potential for the latter and vice versa. Penetrating sacrificial fumes, savory offerings, alcohol, flashing colors, and enchanting dances and liturgy form a necessary functional repertoire at the disposal of the ritualist, yet at the same time they are nothing but conduits to a spirit world that essentially operates beyond human sensation.

Before we return to the implications of sacrificial discourse on early Chinese perceptions of the senses, however, we need to pause to deal in greater detail with the material aspects of sacrificial religion, because the provision and management of the goods and ritual paraphernalia required to facilitate sacrifice formed the basis of a complex religious economy.



## The Economics of Sacrifice

It is late autumn. The fields have been cleared of crops, the harvests stored in granaries, and among the herds that were carefully nourished and pastured over the spring and summer months, the best animals have been set apart as victims for sacrificial ceremonies that mark the coming ritual calendar. The Son of Heaven, so the “Monthly Ordinances” prescribe, assembles his feudal lords, issues the calendar for the coming year, and sets out the rules and quota for the taxes to be extracted from his people. The amount of goods to be levied as tribute is calculated and determined according to the geographical distance of his vassals to the court, the quality of their lands, and their obligatory contributions to state and ancestral sacrifices. In all of this, the ruler is advised to levy no more than the required amount from his people and encouraged to neglect his private needs.<sup>1</sup>

Like feeding one’s subjects or catering for the ruler’s kitchen, serving spirits through sacrificial ritual was both a costly and complex operation. The scenario described in the opening paragraph and variants of it across Warring States and Han texts unveil a world in which religious obligation and economic duty are deeply intertwined; a society where goods used in the service of the spirits are levied together with taxes to support the mundane organization of everyday life. It is a world where economics and religious obligation meet and do so, ideally, for the public good. In the idealized world of the ritual canon, the common good of society is served when a balance is maintained between ritual expenditure and economic welfare:

Therefore one must take the established revenues of a state as the main guideline for its ritual expenditure. An important principle for determining

<sup>1</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 9.468 (“Ji qiu ji” 季秋紀); *Liji jijie*, 17.479 (“Yue ling”); *Huainanzi*, 5.178 (“Shi ze xun” 時則訓). I am grateful to E.J. Brill for permission to draw on an earlier version of this chapter, cf. Sterckx (2009).

ritual expenditure is the size of its territory. Its amount should also depend on the good or bad nature of the annual harvest. In this way, though the harvest of a year may be very defective, the masses will not suffer anxiety, and the rituals instructed by superiors will be kept in pace (with economic circumstances).<sup>2</sup>

Sacrificial rituals were the cornerstone of everyday religious life in Warring States and Han China. The presentation of offerings, raw or cooked, animal or vegetable, was an activity that extended from the household to the local community, state, empire, and the cosmos at large. Obligations related to the sacrificial economy punctuated, in various ways, the public and private existence of people across most segments of society. Goods were levied depending on social station, the dictates of ritual time, the geographic distribution of human and material resources, and their relationship to the ruler, the capital, and the court.

Organizing the logistics to sustain a religious culture that essentially revolved around the exchange and offering up of goods was a formative part of the socioeconomic fabric of early Chinese society. Sacrifice, more than any other ritual, imposed itself on the everyday economy. The material demands posed by religious practice and the ways in which resources for such purposes could be extracted preoccupied most statesmen, philosophers, and policy makers of the period in one way or another. The ritual canon unveils a religious culture in which sacrificial goods are quantified in terms of tribute or conscript labor, a society where status was defined in terms of ritual expenditure, and where piety to the spirit world was translated into a detailed complex of material symbolism ranging from the measurement and value of ritual jades to the color and flavor associated with the cuisine offered up to the spirit world and shared in ritual banquets.

Economic transactions sometimes drew, either symbolically or in real terms, on notions of sacrificial obligation. Since the prerogative of gaining access to the spirit world was tied to a world of goods and hinged on the capacity to draw on material resources, edifying moral discourse in early China was regularly paired with astute economic thought. Proportions of agricultural produce and human labor were siphoned off for cultic purposes while sacrificial ceremonies in turn gave rise to a religious economy. Markets, workshops, and towns sprung up near centers of worship, and sacrificial goods were traded and subjected to quality control. Not infrequently, rulers and local magnates could extract income under the pretext that such revenues were meant to serve sacrifices. For some, sacrificial obligation ensured a minimal guarantee

<sup>2</sup> *Liji jijie*, 23.627 ("Li qi").



for the exchange of material and human resources, one that, at times, suffered less from the unpredictability of return one might secure in a commercial exchange. Since the sacrificial economy was, in principle, controllable and finite, largely public and visible in nature, and involving mostly groups rather than individuals, sacrificial religion served as an expedient template for ordering the world. As with most rituals, it ensured a sense of regularity, it was coded in time through calendrical cycles, and often fixed in space in the form of cults executed at predetermined locations or rituals dedicated to local spirits or natural landmarks.

#### SACRIFICIAL LEVIES

Although there is no shortage of reference to the material requirements for sacrificial cults, it remains difficult to gain a statistical sense of the scale of the sacrificial economy in Warring States and early imperial China. There are several reasons for this. Transmitted textual and archaeological sources remain of necessity patchy. Numerical values mentioned in prescriptive texts may not reflect actual practice at all times and in all places. Figures associated with transactions in the religious economy vary depending on occasion, the social status of the parties involved, location, and local circumstances. Furthermore numbers mentioned often suffer from rhetorical exaggeration either to inflate an individual's sense of importance and piety or to criticize one's lack thereof. Those standing accused of opulence in ceremonial expenditure may have had an interest in omitting or misrepresenting factual information.

Another complication is that administrative records, although often detailed in their calibration of taxable revenue, do not always specify the purpose for which taxes in kind and currency were used. Likewise, keeping detailed records of sacrificial supplies was a task that may have carried little prestige and was handled by lesser officials and minor clerks. If we are to believe Sima Qian, such bookkeeping did not figure highly on the agenda of official scribes or indeed the historiographer himself. In the conclusion to his chapter on the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, Sima Qian states that he had accompanied and assisted Han Wudi on many sacrificial tours giving him the opportunity to carefully observe the activities of the "masters of recipes" and the sacrificial officials involved. He notes that what inspired him to write the chapter was his desire to record for posterity the "ins and outs" (*biao li* 表裏) of how the spirits were served since antiquity. Yet in the end he concedes, "the details of the sacrificial dishes and platters, the types of jades and silks offered, or the precise ritual to be followed in presenting them, these

matters I have left to be handled and preserved (by others).”<sup>3</sup> So whereas a partial picture of the logistics behind official or state-sanctioned cults is transmitted in our sources, the religious economy away from the court, capital, and official sacred sites is far less circumscribed. Our analysis has to sail between idealized models portrayed in prescriptive texts and anecdotal evidence of local practices or particular incidents.

Concerns relating to the sacrificial economy were part of several areas of daily life. The levying of sacrificial goods and services was subsumed under various forms of regular taxation and corvée labor. It also formed the subject of administrative law. The ritual canon sanctions the use and requisition of nearly every type of household or agricultural commodity for sacrificial purposes, including grains, silks, pottery, baskets, plants, woods, vessels, jades, pearls, and animal victims. For those who did not enjoy noble station, ritual agency (that is, the right to participate in cults) was linked to the possession of land or economic productivity in general. In the model of the idealized royal state described in the *Zhouli*, this is stated explicitly:

Generally in the case of commoners, those who do not raise domestic animals should not be sacrificing animal victims; those who do not plough should not be using grains in sacrifice; those who do not plant trees should not have coffins; those who do not tend silkworms should not be dressed in silk; those who do not spin should not be wearing mourning garments.<sup>4</sup>

By emphasizing the primacy of agricultural productivity over other occupations, as so many texts of the period do, this passage insists that the production of goods for the spirits is an integral part of human economic activity. To be sure, exceptions to the rule prove that such idealized models were not necessarily a reflection of reality. Yet the link between human labor, agricultural productivity, and sacrificial duty runs as a thread through most models proposed in Warring States and Han texts.

According to the *Mengzi*, all officials in the feudal state, from ministers down, were to be granted fifty *mu* 畝 of land (ca. five acres) that was exempted from regular taxation and solely destined for sacrificial purposes.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Shiji*, 28.1404.

<sup>4</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 25.978 (“Lü shi” 閭師). For a similar idea, see *Bohutong shu zheng*, 3.83 (“She ji” 社稷). A passage in *Mengzi zhengyi*, 12.421–2 (3B.3) suggests that these ideas clearly pre-date the compilation of the received ritual canon in Han. The link between sacrifice and land can also be seen in statements claiming that spirits would only appreciate sacrificial victims that are native to their territory. See Sterckx (2002), 108–10.

<sup>5</sup> *Mengzi zhengyi*, 10.354 (3A.3). These sacrificial lands were also known as *guitian* 圭田 (“pure lands”) and were to be exempt from normal taxation. See *Liji jijie*, 13.356 (“Wang zhi”). For a diagram, see *Li shu*, 31.2a.

The possession of land here is again identified as the core asset for participation in rites that forge political authority. The “Wang zhi” 王制 (Royal Regulations) chapter preserved in the *Liji* gives an almost mathematically balanced description of the royal state, stipulating that around one-tenth of the state’s annual expenditure should be set aside for sacrifices:

A tenth of the (year’s) expenditure was used for sacrifices. During the three years of mourning, a king would not offer sacrifices (in person) except to heaven, earth and the spirits of the land and the grain; and when he went to transact any business, the ropes (for his chariot) were made of hemp. A tenth of three year’s expenditure was permitted for mourning rites. When there were insufficient means for sacrifices and mourning rites, it was said to be due to lavish waste; when there were more supplies than needed, the state was described as affluent. In sacrifices there should be no extravagance in good years, and no exaggerated thrift in bad.<sup>6</sup>

Although the exact dating of the “Royal Regulations” is subject to debate,<sup>7</sup> it is clear that sacrificial levies were seen as a normal part of the economic fabric of society. Ritual precept is uncompromising in its insistence on this basic idea. For the landed gentry, including those who were hard up, the maintenance of sacrificial provisions was to supersede other material demands for subsistence. Meals for the spirits were to have priority over food for mortals:

When a gentleman is about to engage in construction work, the ancestral temple should have priority, the stables and armory should come next, and the residential quarters last. Generally when a head of a household prepares things, the vessels of sacrifice should have priority, levies in the form of sacrificial animals should follow next, and implements for normal meals last. Those who have no revenue from land should not provide vessels for sacrifice. Those who have such revenue should make it a priority to prepare sacrificial robes. A gentleman, though impoverished, will not sell his sacrificial vessels; though suffering from cold, he will not wear his sacrificial robes; in building a house, he will not cut down the trees on grave-mounds.<sup>8</sup>

Sacrificial income was drawn from public lands and parks managed directly by the feudal lord or, later on, the imperial court. These public lands (*gong tian* 公田) included both arable land and natural landscapes such as

<sup>6</sup> *Liji jijie*, 13.337–8 (“Wang zhi”).

<sup>7</sup> Some scholars and commentators associate the “Royal Regulations” with the court of Han Wendi, others situate it in the late Warring States roughly contemporaneous with a chapter carrying the same title in the received *Xunzi*; some place it even earlier. See Pi Xirui, *Jing xue tonglun*, 3.65–70, and Liu Feng (2003), 202–3.

<sup>8</sup> *Liji jijie*, 5.116–117 (“Qu li” 曲禮).

forests, mountains, and rivers.<sup>9</sup> Domestic and wild animals associated with these lands were managed by special officials. The *Zhouli*, for instance, mentions the office of the cowherd (*niu ren* 牛人) in charge of public oxen (*gong niu* 公牛) that grazed on public pastures (*niu tian* 牛田).<sup>10</sup> Distinctive tasks for the provision of sacrificial animals were assigned to people living within the boundaries of the capital and center of the state and those living in the periphery beyond.<sup>11</sup> It is unlikely that small subsistence farmers were in any position to supply animal victims on a regular basis.

One special category of land was the so-called sacred fields (*ji tian* 藉田) set aside for ritual purposes and ploughed symbolically by the ruler to start the agricultural year. The ritual was replicated by feudal lords, princes, and high officials away from the capital.<sup>12</sup> The plowing ritual symbolized not only the procurement of grains to be offered up in sacrifice, but also served as a public reminder to officials of their duty to promote agricultural production. At the same time, it was a symbolic reaffirmation of their sense of duty to the ruler:

The Son of Heaven personally ploughs the ground for the grains with which to fill the vessels, and the black millet from which to distill the fragrant sacrificial wine for the services to Shangdi 上帝. For the same reason the feudal lords are diligent in order to discharge their services to the Son of Heaven.<sup>13</sup>

Commentators have given various interpretations to the ritual. Some rely on a homophonic pun – glossing the graph *ji*/\**dzak* 藉 and its variants with a near homophone *jie*/\**tsakh* 借 “to borrow” – to suggest that by plowing the sacred field, the ruler literally “borrows” human labor and land from his subjects to supply his ancestral temples. Others link the plowing ritual to the Mencian well-field model (*jing tian* 井田) in which one communal plot is maintained by borrowing labor from eight surrounding households.<sup>14</sup> Underlying these

<sup>9</sup> See Zhang Rongfang (1995), 28–40; Ma Xin (1997), 50–8; Fu Zhufu and Wang Yuhu (1982), 203–8. For an example of sourcing fish for sacrifice, see *Mao shi zhengyi*, 19C.7b–8b (“Qian” 潛; Mao 281). *Ke tian* 客田 “guest/retainer fields” is another term attested for the Han and occurs in the materials found at Juyan. These were either fields set apart for ceremonial rituals or possibly public land lent for cultivation to people outside the registered village community. See Wang Zijin (2005).

<sup>10</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 23.923 (“Niu ren”), 24.938 (“Zai shi” 載師).

<sup>11</sup> Zhang Hequan (1993), 195–7.

<sup>12</sup> *Liji jijie*, 46.1222 (“Ji yi”). Unlike in ancient Greece, where land could be owned by a god and animals become sacred merely by grazing on them, these *ji tian* appear to be the property of the nobility in charge of sacrifices. Cf. Isager (1992).

<sup>13</sup> *Liji jijie*, 51.1306 (“Biao ji” 表記).

<sup>14</sup> See *Fengsu tongyi*, 8.353 (“Si dian”); Zheng Xuan and Kong Yingda’s commentaries to *Liji jijie*, 13.355 (“Wang zhi”); and Wei Zhao’s commentary to *Shiji*, 10.423n. 1. See further Li Zeming (2004), 168–9, and Qian Xuan (1996), 363–77.

explanations is the idea of shared duties in the service of the spirit world and, by implication, loyalty to one's superiors. By the Western Han, the plowing ceremony was firmly adopted to the official ritual calendar.<sup>15</sup> Imperial sacred fields were set aside south of the capital Chang'an at the Gucheng 顧城 temple. Sacred fields were also located in the Shanglin 上林 park south of the river Wei 渭. They were overseen by an official known as the Prefect of the Sacred Field (*ji tian ling* 藉田令) and his assistants.<sup>16</sup>

#### MONTHLY ORDINANCES

The "Monthly Ordinances" offer a detailed blueprint of the organization of the sacrificial economy over the course of the annual cycle. To be sure, it presents an idealized picture, as is corroborated by Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192 CE), who is alleged to have associated authorship of the *yue ling* with the Duke of Zhou.<sup>17</sup> References to different types of seasonal rules (*ling* 令) in received and excavated texts suggest that a variety of calendars were in circulation. Some were implemented only partially; others were adapted to local circumstances.<sup>18</sup> A recent example is a calendar issued by Wang Mang in 5 CE, recovered in the early 1990s on the remains of a wall in a courier station near Dunhuang. It omits some of the more abstract and cosmological parts found in the received *yue ling*, and leaves out some important imperial rituals (such as the welcoming of spring in the eastern suburb). The fact that its prescriptions are unevenly distributed from month to month suggests that calendars were adapted or abridged to serve different purposes or recipients.<sup>19</sup>

If we take as our guide the almanac in the first twelve chapters of the *Lüshi chunqiu* and its variant preserved in the *Liji*, the following scenario of activities emerges. The ritual year starts in the first month of spring, when the ruler conducts prayers for a munificent harvest and plows the Sacred Field together with his chief officials. Sacrificial codes (*ji dian* 祭典) are drawn up that prohibit the use of female animals as victims in sacrifice because they are central to the growth of the flocks. In the second month, the use of live animals in sacrifice continues to be tabooed in favor of jades, skins, and silks. In late spring, the women are spurred on to tend to the production of silk to be used for sacrificial robes. Calves and foals marked for sacrifice are selected

<sup>15</sup> See Dubs (1938), vol. 1, 281–3; Bodde (1975), 223–41, discusses the ritual and its sources from Han through Tang times. A form of the plowing ritual is already attested in Shang oracle bone inscriptions. See Chen Xuguo (rpt. 2002), vol. 1, 192–8.

<sup>16</sup> *Hanshu*, 65.2853; *Xi Han huiyao*, 11.107.

<sup>17</sup> For Cai Yong's attribution, see *Bowuzhi*, 3.3b.

<sup>18</sup> See Xing Yitian (1998); and Yang Zhenhong (2004), 17–38.

<sup>19</sup> *Dunhuang Xuanquan yue ling zhaotiao*, 4–37.

and their numbers are written down. In the first month of summer, the tax on silk needed for ritual purposes is set.<sup>20</sup> The ritual canon presents the production of silk as the natural complement to the agricultural production of sacrificial grains. Thus the Sacred Field plowed by the ruler was complemented by the Silkworm House (*can shi* 蠶室) reserved for silks used in sacrificial rituals and run by the women at the court:

Anciently, the Son of Heaven and the feudal lords had their public mulberry trees (*gong sang* 公桑) and Silkworm Houses. The latter was built in the form of a dwelling near a river, one *ren* and three Chinese feet in height, with surrounding walls covered with thorns and gates closed at the outside. In the early morning of a bright first day of the month the ruler, wearing a leather skin cap and plain skirt, divined to select the most auspicious palace ladies from inside the three palaces of his wife. They were made to take the silkworms into the Silkworm House. They received the (silkworm) eggs and washed them in the river, picked the leaves from the public mulberry trees, dried them in the wind and fed them to the silkworms.<sup>21</sup>

Midsummer sees a flurry of activity: Musical instruments used in ceremonies are tuned and repaired, prayers are conducted to mountains, streams, and springs, and the ruler conducts the annual rain sacrifice to pray for a bountiful harvest. In late summer, in all districts, hay and fodder (also known as *chu gao* 芻藁 “sacrificial hay tax”) is levied by the court to feed the victims needed in state and ancestral sacrifices. Silks dyed and decorated for ceremonial robes and flags are inspected.<sup>22</sup>

Mid-autumn is the time for the annual inspection of the sacrificial victims, also regularly referred to as “grass and grain-fed animals” (*chu huan* 芻豢).<sup>23</sup> Officers of slaughter and priests do the rounds among the victims, “inspecting that they are whole and complete, examining their fodder and grain, and assessing their condition as fat or thin; they examine the coloration of their coats to ensure that the animals match the characteristics of their kind, measure their size, and inspect their height so that everything fits the correct standards.”<sup>24</sup> In the *Liji*, these inspections of animal victims are identified as

<sup>20</sup> *Liji jijie*, 16.446 (“Yue ling”).

<sup>21</sup> *Liji jijie*, 46.1223 (“Ji yi”). See also *Han jiu yi*, 2.2b. For a later diagram of a walled mulberry and silkworm house compound, see *Li shu*, 30.1b.

<sup>22</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 1.2, 2.64, 3.122, 4.186, 5.241, 6.311.

<sup>23</sup> *Guoyu*, 18.567 (“Chu yu, xia” 楚語下); *Da Dai Liji*, 5.102 (“Zengzi tian yuan” 曾子天圓). On the raising and selecting of animal victims, see also Okamura Hidenori (2003), 1–80, esp. 3–17; Cao Jiandun (2008); and Guo Moruo (1982).

<sup>24</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 8.422 (“Zhong qiu ji”); cf. *Liji jijie*, 17.473 (“Yue ling”); *Huainanzi*, 5.176 (“Shi ze xun”). For a statement that the ancients only offered sufficiently fattened animals, see *Mozi jiangou*, 3.82 (“Shang tong, zhong” 尚同中).



a way in which a ruler demonstrates his strength and utmost sense of filial piety.<sup>25</sup> Granaries are repaired in anticipation of the arrival of the grain levies. By late autumn, all supplies of grain and animal victims for sacrifices should be matured and, as described earlier, ready for collection together with regular tax and tribute duties. Grains for the spirits harvested from the sacred fields are stored in the state's "spirit granaries" (*shen cang* 神藏/倉).<sup>26</sup> These then sustain the winter sacrifices to the altar of the soil, the gates of cities and towns, as well as sacrifices to ancestors and household spirits.<sup>27</sup> Just as a virtuous ruler was expected to store up in times of prosperity and distribute in the hour of need, so he is to economize on sacrificial expenditure in times of hardship and stock up the granaries with excess grain and silk for the spirits in times of plenty.

In the last month of the year, the ruler orders his clerks to rank the feudal lords and sacrificial animals required of them for the sacrifices to Heaven, Shangdi, and the altars of soil and grain. States sharing his surname supply the fodder for the animals to be slaughtered to the lineage ancestors. The final month in winter is also the time when wood is collected for the suburban sacrifices, those in the ancestral temple and all others.<sup>28</sup> Wood was important not only as fuel for sacrifices, but also as raw material for ritual implements (baskets, trays, etc.). Certain species of wood and grasses – such as white wooly grass, mulberry, cypress, or peach – were believed to be especially potent for ritual purposes. For instance, the *Liji* prescribes that to prepare sacrificial wine fermented with fragrant herbs, "the mortar should be made of cypress wood, the pestle of dryandra, and the ladle (for lifting the offerings out of the vessels) of mulberry wood."<sup>29</sup> Wood was also needed to encoffin those who could afford a proper burial. In a final logistic act in the year, the important link between the possession of land and sacrificial duty is reinforced again when:

the ruler orders the steward to run through the numbers of all those who possess land from ministers and grandees down to the common people

<sup>25</sup> *Liji jijie*, 46.1223 ("Ji yi").

<sup>26</sup> *Liji jijie*, 17.478 ("Yue ling"); *Huainanzi*, 5.178 ("Shi ze xun"); *Zhouli zhengyi*, 31.1227 ("Lin ren" 廩人). Zheng Xuan comments that grain for occasions other than the most important sacrifices is not stored in these spirit depots. The *Chunqiu* gives another term (*yulin* 御廩), unattested elsewhere, for such spirit granaries and reports a spirit depot going up in flames in the year corresponding to 697 BCE. See *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 139 (Lord Huan, year 14). For a later drawing of a spirit granary, see the Song period *Li shu*, 29.3b.

<sup>27</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 10.516 ("Meng dong ji" 孟冬紀).

<sup>28</sup> *Liji jijie*, 17.502 ("Yue ling"). Wood and horns to be used in funerary rites were supplied by the chief forester. See *Liji jijie*, 43.1144 ("Sang da ji" 喪大記).

<sup>29</sup> *Liji jijie*, 40.1065 ("Za ji" 雜記).



4.1. Raising and decorating sacrificial victims.

Source: Chen Xiangdao (1053–1093), *Li shu* (*Beijing tushuguan guji zhenben congkan* 3), 75.1b, 2a–b (Reduced photolithographic reprint of the 1347 edition).

so that animal victims can be levied from them to supply the sacrifices to mountains, forests, and famous streams. Generally all people who inhabit the nine provinces under Heaven must, without exception, do their utmost to offer the necessary supplies required for sacrifices to August Heaven, Shangdi, the altars to soil and grain, ancestral temples, mountains, forests, and famous rivers.<sup>30</sup>

In sum, the picture derived from the “monthly ordinances” is one of a highly organized religious economy, an enterprise that combines the exaction of sacrificial goods and taxes from landholding individuals with corvée labor delivered by tenant and subsistence farmers, and the management of public lands and parks to deliver those services. Sacrificial corvée was levied on both regular and occasional bases. It could consist of supplying offerings and implements for sacrifices or, as we will see later, of maintaining sites such as funerary parks. In the case of important local sacrifices or offerings to mountains, local rivers, and spirits away from the cultic centers near the capital, the local population could be charged with the duties to provide and prepare for a sacrifice, sometimes in return for a tax exemption. In antiquity, Ban Gu (32–92 CE) remarks in his “Treatise on Food and Goods” (“Shi huo zhi” 食貨志), sacrificial levies were an integral part of the regular taxes on products (*shui* 稅) used to cover government expenses and as such complemented military taxes (*fu* 賦) as the two main revenues of state.<sup>31</sup>

Sacrificial logistics could also be enforced by law. One common punishment falling under the general category of hard labor in Qin and Han law was “(gathering) firewood for the spirits” (*gui xin* 鬼薪), which in essence meant collecting fuel for sacrifices. According to the Qin statutes, this was a punishment reserved for male convicts. The corresponding punishment for females was known as “(sifting) white rice” (*bai can* 白粲), which meant selecting and cleansing pure white rice for offerings in ancestral temples. Convicts had to wear clothes dyed red and wear manacles while on the job. Allowing these convicts to escape was subject to punishment.<sup>32</sup> These forms of convict labor, according to commentators, could last up to three years in Qin times.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 12.616 (“Ji dong ji”); *Liji jijie*, 17.504 (“Yue ling”).

<sup>31</sup> *Hanshu*, 24A.1120. Note that taxes levied for sacrifice are also ranked as *fu* levies elsewhere. See, e.g., *Zhouli zhengyi*, 11.446 (“Da fu” 大府). It is clear that sacrificial income was levied both through tribute and taxation, and often the difference between these forms of taxation is negligible. For a more detailed study, see Lin Yaozeng (1977).

<sup>32</sup> *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 51 (strip 134); Hulseyé (1985), 68 (A86). Elsewhere in the Shuihudi legal corpus, these firewood gatherers are referred to as “collectors” (*jiren* 集人). See *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 139 (strip 193); Hulseyé (1985), 176 (D172). See also *Han jiu yi*, 2.7a.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Ying Shao’s commentary to *Hanshu*, 2.85 (note 13), and *Hanshu*, 12.351 (note 1); and Ru Shun’s 如淳 (fl. 189–265 CE) commentary to *Shiji*, 6.227 (note 17). See further *Hanshu*, 23.1099, 77.3254, 97A.3964; and *Hou Hanshu*, 3.143, 3.147, 3.158, 79A.2564, “zhi” 2.3040.

Likewise, for the landowning gentry, failure to meet a prescribed quantity of sacrificial levies could result in being demoted in official rank or stripped of hereditary status.<sup>34</sup>

The detailed organization of the previously described sacrificial logistics suggests that considerable amounts of animal victims, grains, silks, and other implements could be requisitioned for ritual purposes. Sources no doubt inflate figures for rhetorical purposes or on occasion simply use set expressions, but it is worthwhile pausing briefly with a few examples to illustrate the potential scale of these logistic demands. In an exchange in the *Zuozhuan* between Duke Ai 哀 of Lu 魯 (r. 494–77 BCE) and messengers from the state of Wu 吳, the issue of victim numbers is brought up. At the heart of the dispute in question lies what the *Zhouli* would later refer to as the “method of the ritual bestowing of victim animals” (*lao li zhi fa* 牢禮之灋), essentially the proportioning of victim numbers and timing of their presentation.<sup>35</sup> On this occasion, Wu requested 100 *lao* 牢 sets (each consisting of an ox, a pig, and a sheep) and is accused of excess (*yin* 淫). Ritual propriety, the Lu official argued, requires that a set number of sacrificial victims be agreed on, and he invokes the kings of Zhou who allegedly never exceeded the number twelve. Despite the edifying example of Zhou, Wu insists and in the end receives 100 sets.<sup>36</sup>

The communal banquets and drinking ceremonies that regularly accompanied sacrificial rituals could pose a significant addition to the economic burden of ceremony. These included goods required for the treatment of guests, such as gifts for official visitors. A passage from a chapter on hosting in the *Liji* suggests that they were given not only food and lodgings but also animals for sacrifice and animal fodder:

Both when guests came to court and when they left, they were supplied from three stores of provisions. With a gift of living animals they were hosted in their lodgings. The provisions of five *lao*-sets of animals were laid out inside. Outside, thirty cartloads of rice and thirty cartloads of grain were provided and twice as much straw for fodder and firewood. Five pairs of birds of the species that went in flocks were given every day, and all attendants were supplied with cattle for food. There was one meal (a day in the court) and two sacrificial entertainments (in the temple). The amount of banquets and occasional gifts were without definite number. This was how one gave an expression of generosity to the importance of ritual precept.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> E.g., *Hanshu*, 24B.1173.

<sup>35</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 6.201 (“Zai fu” 宰夫). For *lao li*, see also *Zhouli zhengyi*, 23.927 (“Niu ren”), 31.1239 (“Chong ren” 充人), 73.3063 (“Zhang ke” 掌客).

<sup>36</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 1640–1 (Lord Ai, year 7).

<sup>37</sup> *Liji jijie*, 61.1463 (“Bin yi” 聘義).

Purported figures of sacrificial expenditure, however, could far exceed the gift of a few hundred animals. One account describing the conquest of the Shang records that the campaign was sealed with the slaughter of more than 500 oxen to Heaven and Houji 后稷 and offerings of nearly 3,000 sheep and boar to other spirits.<sup>38</sup> Duke De 德 of Qin 秦 (r. 677–76 BCE) used 300 *lao*-sets of animals to sacrifice at the Altar of Fu 酈.<sup>39</sup> In imperial times, sacrificial expenditure grew along with the perceived grandeur of those initiating the rituals. By the late Western Han, lavish spending on the cult of imperial ancestors had proliferated. For instance, during the reign of Yuandi 元帝 (49–33 BCE), more than 12,000 specialists were mustered to oversee the preparation of more than 24,000 offerings at considerably more than 300 shrines in the capital and the provinces. Each shrine was staffed with a sacrificial crew that included cooks, priests, and musicians. Those in charge of breeding and feeding animal victims are not included in Ban Gu's figures.<sup>40</sup> Shortly after Aidi 哀帝 (r. 7–1 BCE) came to the throne, no fewer than 37,000 shrines were constructed in one year, spread over more than 700 locations.<sup>41</sup> By the end of the reign of Wang Mang, still over 1,700 sites were places of worship dedicated to all types of deities requiring animal sacrifices exceeding 3,000 kinds.<sup>42</sup>

At the level of the household, we may get some idea of the relative share of household income devoted to sacrificial duties from Ban Gu's "Treatise on Food and Goods." He writes that around 400 BCE, the total average farming income of a family of five members was reduced by one-tenth through taxes in kind (a share similar to what the "Royal Regulations" prescribed for the state). Three hundred coins (*qian* 錢) were to be set aside for offerings at local shrines and for spring and autumn sacrifices at village altars. The latter corresponded to more than half the annual budget for food for one member of a family.<sup>43</sup>

#### MAINTENANCE TOWNS AND PERSONNEL

To supplement income for cultic purposes obtained through regular taxation and tribute, sacrificial revenue was also drawn from ambulant sources, that is, human or natural resources located near a site of worship or along the route

<sup>38</sup> *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu*, 4.470 ("Shi fu" 世浮).

<sup>39</sup> *Shiji*, 5.184.

<sup>40</sup> *Hanshu*, 73.3116.

<sup>41</sup> *Hanshu*, 25B.1264.

<sup>42</sup> *Hanshu*, 25B.1270. Ying Shao reports an incredulously high number of more than 700,000 victims used in sacrifices to the temple of Mount Tai. See *Fengsu tongyi*, 10.447 ("Shan ze").

<sup>43</sup> *Hanshu*, 24A.1125; figures are tabulated in Swann (1950), 140–1.

followed by ritual processions to sacred sites. The court could issue orders to local authorities to perform sacrifices at local expense. For instance, in 197 BCE, Gaozu approved a request from his officials that all districts be ordered to offer a sheep and a pig to the local altars of the soil and grain in spring and at the New Year. Local communities were expected to raise the expenses for these sacrifices themselves.<sup>44</sup>

A prominent institutional mechanism to maintain cults at local sites, tombs, and cemeteries was the so-called *shou yi* 守邑 “maintenance/guardian town.” These were household communities, consisting anywhere from a few to several hundred households, settled near tombs, shrines, or sacred peaks and charged with the maintenance of their sacrifices and monuments. Imperial tombs required the most elaborate human resources to service the ancestral cult. Large communities consisting of thousands of inhabitants were resettled in special towns near imperial tombs. Resident communities at the tombs of the Western Han emperors near Chang’an drew significant wealth and manpower to the capital region and provided a recruitment pool for officials serving at the court.<sup>45</sup>

Establishing entire resident communities charged with the upkeep of a cult center or gravesite was a costly enterprise mostly reserved for relatives of the imperial family. Yet on occasion, political motivations inspired such expenditure. For instance, in 180 BCE, Han Wendi assigned one town in the district of Zhending 真定 to take charge of sacrifices to the ancestral graves of Zhao Tuo 趙佗 (d. 137 BCE), King of Nan Yue 南越, in an attempt to gain his support for the Han court.<sup>46</sup> Setting up these communities could be lengthy and elaborate enterprises, as is illustrated by the run-up to Han Wudi’s *feng* and *shan* sacrifices in 110 BCE. Twelve years in advance of the actual performance of the sacrifices on Mount Tai 泰山, all towns surrounding the mountain and the mountain itself were presented to the throne by the King of Jibei 濟北, who received a district elsewhere as compensation.<sup>47</sup> Throughout the years following the establishment of a shrine to Houtu 后土 (114 BCE) and Taiyi 太一 (113 BCE) “Grand Unity” and leading up to the actual *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, preparations continued to be made:

All commanderies and kingdoms under Heaven concerned put roads and bridges in good order and repaired old palaces (for occupancy). At the same time in all districts through which the imperial road ran, the district

<sup>44</sup> *Shiji*, 28.1380.

<sup>45</sup> *Shiji*, 6.256 (30,000 *jia* 家 for the First Emperor’s mausoleum); *Shiji*, 85.2512 n.4 (30,000 households for the tombs of Wudi, Zhaodi, and Xuandi, quoting *Han jiu yi*).

<sup>46</sup> *Shiji*, 113.2970; *Hanshu*, 95.3849.

<sup>47</sup> *Shiji*, 28.1387.



authorities made ready palaces and stores, prepared all utensils, and kept a lookout for the imperial cortège.<sup>48</sup>

On his way to Mount Tai in the early spring of 110 BCE, Han Wudi ordered sacrifices to another sacred peak, Mount Songgao 嵩高山, in response to a series of auspicious omens (including mountain spirits shouting out “Long Life” during his climb). Orders were given to increase sacrifices, ensuring that trees and plants on the mountain not be cut. To maintain the sacrifices, 300 households at the foot of the mountain were made an estate, called Songgao Town 邑. They were to provide only for the sacrifices and were exempted from any other taxes.<sup>49</sup> With the average Western Han household consisting of five members, this would amount to around 1,500 people in charge of sacrifices to this particular mountain alone.<sup>50</sup>

Figures in the range of several hundred households occur again later at the court of Xuandi in 73 BCE during discussions on the assignment of posthumous titles and the establishment of a funerary park and town for Liu Ju 劉據 (heir apparent to Wudi, driven to suicide in 91 BCE), his favorite concubine, and Xuandi’s father. It was recommended that the graves of the emperor’s parents be allocated a satellite town of 300 households, the late crown prince’s tomb 200 households, and 30 households to guard his late concubine’s tomb. Special officials were to be appointed to supervise, guard, and maintain the parks, all of this according to the customary norms (*ru fa* 如法).<sup>51</sup> Eight years later, the allotment for Xuandi’s father was increased to 1,600 households, on a par with sacrifices one would normally provide for deceased emperors. The late crown prince’s concubine now received a park and town with 300 households, and the crown prince’s maintenance town was enlarged with another 300 households.<sup>52</sup> Huo Guang 霍光, who served as marshal of state at the time of his death in 68 BCE and was treated to a burial equivalent to that of an emperor, was treated to a funerary town of 300 households. His descendants were exempted from tax.<sup>53</sup> By the time of Chengdi 成帝 (r. 33–7 BCE), another 100 resident households had been added to Huo Guang’s necropolis, with designated officials and guards to tend to the sacrifices.<sup>54</sup> Emperor Zhao 昭 (r. 87–74 BCE) honored his mother with a grave mound tended by no fewer

<sup>48</sup> *Shiji*, 30.1438; *Hanshu* 24B.1173.

<sup>49</sup> *Hanshu*, 6.190; *Shiji*, 12.474, 28.1397.

<sup>50</sup> On a typical Western Han household consisting of five members, see Zhao Pei (2002), 71–83.

<sup>51</sup> *Hanshu*, 63.2748.

<sup>52</sup> *Hanshu*, 63.2749.

<sup>53</sup> *Hanshu*, 68.2948–50.

<sup>54</sup> *Hanshu*, 68.2959.

than 3,000 households and his maternal grandfather with a funerary park and town of 200 households.<sup>55</sup> Old grave sites could be repaired posthumously and granted maintenance towns or special guards, as happened in the case of the tomb of Xuandi's maternal grandfather.<sup>56</sup> In short, those of status and in positions of power could demonstrate their political and religious authority or change personal allegiance by reducing, augmenting, or reviving expenditure on certain cults and cultic sites.

As is clear from the preceding discussion, the organization and management of the sacrificial economy was a task handled by an elaborate system of bureaucrats and government offices specially dedicated to the task. In many cases, no clearly articulated divisions existed between ritual tasks and other labor. References to professions dedicated to the upkeep of sacrifices may go back as far as Shang times. For instance, the "Pronouncement on Alcohol" discussed in the previous chapter refers to a group of artisan-officials as *zong gong* 宗工 "temple craftsmen." This term might be no more than an honorific title, but it is also possible that it designated artisans active in temple complexes or other ritual centers.<sup>57</sup>

The *Zhou guan* 周官, "Offices of Zhou," or *Zhouli* is by far the richest source of information on the officialdom connected to the sacrificial economy. Despite its overidealized depiction of the bureaucracy of the royal state, a significant share of its information most likely draws on actual practice because more than one-third of its task descriptions and techniques are attested in some form or another in other texts.<sup>58</sup> Chores related to sacrificial obligation figure prominently among the descriptions of most offices throughout the first five sections of the book describing the departments of the royal household (Offices of Heaven), the people (Offices of Earth), cults (Offices of Spring), war (Offices of Summer), and justice (Offices of Autumn). Areas of public life that involve the offices described immediately following include not only designated sacrifices, but also other rituals that involve the presentation of offerings such as the hosting of guests and visitors, banquets, and funerals.

The centrality of the sacrificial economy emerges in the task descriptions of the main office in the department of Heaven, the grand steward

<sup>55</sup> *Hanshu*, 97.3957.

<sup>56</sup> *Hanshu*, 97.3963–4.

<sup>57</sup> *Shangshu jin gu wen zhushu*, 16.382 ("Jiu gao").

<sup>58</sup> Broman identifies 133 (38 percent) of the 347 *Zhouli* officers in other pre-Han texts. See Broman (1961), 1–88. For *Zhouli* parallels with offices attested in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, see Zhang Yachu and Liu Yu (1986), and Li Feng (2008), 8. On the close relationship between administrative and ritual functions, or liturgy and government, across the offices it describes, see Lewis (1999a), 42–8, and the secondary scholarship listed there. Parallels related to officials dealing with the natural world are discussed in Sterckx (2002), 46–50.

(*da zai* 大宰). Sacrifices rank first among the statutes he implements in towns and dependencies assigned to dukes, ministers, and grandees. Furthermore sacrifices are the first among measurements used to determine the state's expenses and sacrificial provisions rank first among nine types of tributary goods to be collected by the feudal state.<sup>59</sup> The grand steward further issues all necessary instructions to subordinate officials involved in sacrifices, divines the timing of sacrifices, orders the fast, and organizes the cleansing and presentation of offerings and implements.<sup>60</sup> His aides, the junior steward and assistant minister of state, assist in these sacrificial duties.<sup>61</sup> A central figure, whose political role was highlighted in Chapter 2, is the steward or provisioner (*shan fu*), who arranges the viands to be sacrificed at the occasion of banquets and prepares the sacrificial meats received by the king from his subjects.<sup>62</sup> Cooks supply meats for sacrificial ceremonies, chefs flay, boil, and cut up the victims and lay out their pieces in vessels and baskets, while stove attendants prepare the sacrificial stews.<sup>63</sup>

A supervisor of the hinterlands supplies fragrant reeds and grasses used to wrap up offerings and strain sacrificial ale. He also collects wild fruits for offering.<sup>64</sup> Hunters supply living and dead animals for sacrifice, fishermen and turtle catchers supply fish and shellfish, and dried meats are furnished by a special keeper of meats.<sup>65</sup> Sacrificial ales are prepared by a wine supervisor and wine makers, while ice men supply ice used to preserve food offerings, and basket handlers look after the contents to be offered in baskets.<sup>66</sup> Other officers contributing to the cuisine of sacrifice include officials in charge of pickled mince, vinegar, salt, and sacrificial wine covers.<sup>67</sup>

Designated officials take care of tents and curtains used in sacrificial ceremonies and supply furs for the king's outfit during sacrifices to Heaven.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>59</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 2.67, 3.100, 3.103 ("Da zai"). Sacrificial tribute is specified by Zheng Sinong 鄭司農 (Eastern Han) as animal victims and fodder on this occasion.

<sup>60</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 4.134–48 ("Da zai").

<sup>61</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 5.181 ("Xiao zai" 小宰), 6.199 ("Zai fu" 宰夫).

<sup>62</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 7.251, 255 ("Shan fu").

<sup>63</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 7.260–1 ("Pao ren" 庖人), 8.277, 281 ("Wai yong" 外饗), 8.283 ("Peng ren" 烹人). The Shuihudi legal texts refer to "furnace men" (*cuan ren* 爨人) in charge of *cuan* 爨 "furnaces" and *zao* 竈 "stoves." See *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 139 (strip 192); Hulsey (1985), 176 (D171).

<sup>64</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 8.289 ("Dian shi" 甸師).

<sup>65</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 8.299 ("Shou ren" 獸人), 8.303 ("Yu ren"), 8.306 ("Bie ren" 鼃人), 8.310 ("Xi ren" 腊人).

<sup>66</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 9.342, 354 ("Jiu zheng" 酒正), 10.365, 367 ("Jiu ren" 酒人), 10.375 ("Ling ren" 凌人), 10.393 ("Bian ren" 邊人).

<sup>67</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 10.406 ("Hai ren" 醢人), 11.410 ("Xi ren" 醢人), 11.411 ("Yan ren" 鹽人), 11.414 ("Mi ren" 冪人).

<sup>68</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 11.431 ("Mu ren" 幕人), 436, 442 ("Zhang ci" 掌次), 13.491 ("Si qiu" 司裘).

Money and precious materials to subsidize ceremonies are dispensed by the treasury.<sup>69</sup> A palace administrator assists the queen in performing libations and instructs palace ladies in the art of silk production for the manufacture of sacrificial attire.<sup>70</sup> Several categories of palace women are charged with duties including preparing and inspecting offerings to be presented by the queen in exorcisms and healing prayers, and sacrifices to the household gods inside the palace.<sup>71</sup>

The Offices of Earth include an equally diverse range of officials. The grand minister for the masses (*da situ* 大司徒) sets up the enclosures for the altars to the soil and grain, displays the flesh and bone parts of the sacrificial victim, and, first among twelve types of instruction, teaches his people reverence by means of sacrificial rituals.<sup>72</sup> Local officials, from district level in the vicinity of the royal capital to local wards, assist in various tasks: preparing ritual vessels, assisting in the presentation of animal parts and herbs for great sacrifices, and running sacrifices to the altars of soil and grain in their districts, as well as sacrifices to ward off drought and floods.<sup>73</sup> Exorcistic spring and autumn sacrifices are further performed by the superintendent of grain supplies, and village assistants recruit people for sacrifices, corvée labor, and funerals.<sup>74</sup>

Boundary markers mark off the earthen boundaries for soil and grain altars. They also clean, decorate, and prepare the sacrificial oxen, and chant and dance while the victims are killed.<sup>75</sup> Drummers and dancers accompany sacrifices to the spirits of the soil, grain, mountains and rivers, and the four directions.<sup>76</sup> Breeders, oxherds, fatteners, and animal keepers raise sacrificial victims and ensure that the correct types of victims are available for various ceremonies.<sup>77</sup> The palace protector instructs his ruler on how to adopt the

<sup>69</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 12.472 (“Wai fu” 外府).

<sup>70</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 13.517, 528 (“Nei zai” 內宰). Silk goods used in sacrifice also fall within the remit of the manager of silk (*dian si* 典絲). See *Zhouli zhengyi*, 15.572. Others involved in preparing clothing worn during sacrifices include a footwear provisioner (*ju ren* 屨人); see *Zhouli zhengyi*, 16.632.

<sup>71</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 14.554 (“Jiu bin”), 14.558 (“Shi fu”), 14.560 (“Nü yu”), 14.562–3 (“Nü zhu”).

<sup>72</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 18.692, 705, 764 (“Da situ”). His junior deputy performs similar tasks for minor sacrifices. See *Zhouli zhengyi*, 20.811, 814 (“Xiao situ”).

<sup>73</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 21.821, 836 (“Xiang shi” 鄉師), 22.862, 866 (“Zhou zhang” 州長), 22.868, 876 (“Dang zheng” 黨正).

<sup>74</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 22.878 (“Lü shi”), 22.884 (“Lü xu”). Different interpretations exist on the meaning of *pu* 酺 here. Zheng Xuan takes this to refer to harmful spirits, others speculate it might refer to ghost steps harmful to humans and animals (cf. cognate *bu* 步) etc.

<sup>75</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 22.895–7 (“Feng ren” 封人). The singing and dancing is explained as a way to announce the superior quality of the offerings to the spirits.

<sup>76</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 23.899–900, 905 (“Gu ren”); 23.911 (“Wu shi”).

<sup>77</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 23.915–23 (“Mu ren” 牧人); 23.923–31 (“Niu ren”); 23.931–6 (“Chong ren” 充人); 31.1221 (“You ren” 圉人). On the specification of animal victims, see Sterckx (2002), 58–61.

proper countenance for sacrificial ceremonies.<sup>78</sup> A gate supervisor feeds the sacrificial animals tied up to the gates. He also receives the leftovers from the seasonal sacrifices offered to the city gates.<sup>79</sup> District and local officials supply sacrificial victims from their pastures for sacrifices of state and hold deprecatory sacrifices in their jurisdiction.<sup>80</sup> Dogs destined for sacrifice are fed by banquet caterers.<sup>81</sup>

Firewood for sacrifices is to be supplied by foragers, paddy supervisors arranged supplies for rain prayers during droughts, and mountain and forest supervisors lead the preparation of sacrifices to mountains and rivers.<sup>82</sup> Waterway guardians and marsh supervisors provide sacrificial ingredients from rivers and lakes, and clamshell keepers supply pulverized shells to whiten sacrificial vessels and utensils.<sup>83</sup> Gardeners supply fruits for banquets and sacrifices; granary masters, house squires, hullers, and cooks supply sacrificial grains and baskets.<sup>84</sup>

Core personnel for cultic service in the Offices of Spring is supervised by the minister of rites (*da zongbo* 大宗伯) and his deputy, who oversee all sacrificial and ritual matters ranging from setting up altars for various sacrifices to distinguishing names and quantities of sacrificial grains and ritual vessels.<sup>85</sup> Other officers whose tasks consist almost entirely of duties related to sacrifice include a master of sacrifices, collectors of aromatic herbs, and keepers of sacrificial wines, who prepare fragrant millet wine for libations and rituals washings.<sup>86</sup> Chicken officers supply chickens used in blood consecrations of gates and rooms in temples and in directional sacrifices.<sup>87</sup> Goblets used in sacrifice are provided by a manager of wine goblets, and the ceremonial seating supervisor provides mats.<sup>88</sup> The keeper of the ancestral temple treasures

<sup>78</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 26.1010 (“*Bao shi*” 保氏).

<sup>79</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 28.1103–4 (“*Si men*”).

<sup>80</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 29.1140 (“*Sui ren*” 遂人), 29.1145 (“*Sui shi*” 遂師), 29.1156 (“*Bi shi*” 鄙師). Note that these are called *ye sheng* 野牲; it is possible that ambulant or “wild” victims were only to be used for sacrifices at state level, whereas domestic animals raised at home could be used for lower-level sacrifices.

<sup>81</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 31.1243 [“*Gao ren*” 羹人 (稟人/槁人)].

<sup>82</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 30.1176 (“*Wei ren*” 委人), 30.1193 (“*Dao ren*” 稻人), 31.1202 (“*Shan yu*” 山虞).

<sup>83</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 31.1206 (“*Chuan heng*” 川衡), 31.1207 (“*Ze yu*” 澤虞), 31.1218–19 (“*Zhang shen*” 掌蜃).

<sup>84</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 31.1222 (“*Chang ren*” 場人), 31.1227 (“*Lin ren*” 廩人), 31.1229 (“*She ren*” 舍人), 31.1239 (“*Chong ren*” 舂人), 31.1240 (“*Xi ren*”).

<sup>85</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 35.1408 (“*Da zongbo*”), 36.1421–63 (“*Xiao zongbo*” 小宗伯).

<sup>86</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 37.1465–90 (“*Si shi*” 肆師), 37.1490–6 (“*Yu ren*” 鬱人), 37.1496–510 (“*Chang ren*” 鬯人).

<sup>87</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 37.1510–12 (“*Ji ren*” 雞人).

<sup>88</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 37.1510–41 (“*Si zunyi*” 司尊彝), 37.1551 (“*Si jiyi*” 司几筵).



and manager of seals are responsible for valuable objects such as jades to be used in sacrificial ceremonies.<sup>89</sup> A clothes supervisor is responsible for the ruler's ceremonial wear, a manager of sacrifices for the rules governing altars for suburban sacrifices. Convicts are recruited to assist in cleaning these ritual enclosures.<sup>90</sup>

Hereditary consorts, royal kinswomen, and women in the royal clan assist in the preparation and performance of ancestral sacrifices.<sup>91</sup> Music and the performance of dance during sacrificial ceremonies are overseen by the chief musicians and music master complemented by blind musicians and a host of officers in charge of specific instruments.<sup>92</sup> Determining the occasion and timing of sacrifices and selecting the victims are the responsibility of the grand diviner and tortoise keeper.<sup>93</sup> A senior invocator and his deputy act as the technical specialists of sacrificial procedure. They are in charge of liturgy, ritual nomenclature, identifying various formats of invocations and prayers, and distinguishing different sacrificial techniques as well as the layout of offerings according to place and occasion.<sup>94</sup>

Military sacrifices offered during hunting exercises were the preserve of a hunting invocator, who also led prayers to the guardian spirits of horses and other animal victims that were slaughtered. A fulminator presided over covenants and various other expulsion sacrifices.<sup>95</sup> A separate category of officiants were sorcerers (*wu* 巫) whose tasks ranged from performing sacrifices for rain to exorcisms against disease and epidemics.<sup>96</sup> In charge of sacrificial rituals in fiefs belonging to members of the royal family was the ritualist of the inherited region, who, among other tasks, guarded ritual enclosures from looters.<sup>97</sup>

Religious duties discharged by the Offices of Summer include performing sacrifices during the spring, summer, autumn, and winter hunts. These are discharged by the minister of war (*da sima* 大司馬), who also supplies

<sup>89</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 38.1564–72 (“Tian fu” 天府), 39.1573–604 (“Dian rui” 典瑞).

<sup>90</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 40.1620, 1673 (“Si fu” 司服), 41.1674–5 (“Dian si” 典祀).

<sup>91</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 41.1686 (“Shi fu” 世婦); 41.1690 (“Nei zong” 內宗); 41.1692 (“Wai zong” 外宗).

<sup>92</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 42.1739–53 (“Da siyue” 大司樂); 44.1807 (“Yue shi” 樂師); 45.1846–7 (“Da shi”); 46.1885 (“Qing shi”); 46.1892 (“Zhong shi”); 46.1899 (“Sheng shi”), 46.1904 (“Yue shi”); 46.1911 (“Yue zhang”), et al.

<sup>93</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 47.1942 (“Da bu” 大卜); 48.1953, 1955 (“Gui ren” 龜人).

<sup>94</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 49.1985–2031 (“Da zhu” 大祝); 50.2032–43 (“Xiao zhu” 小祝).

<sup>95</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 50.2055–60 (“Dian zhu” 甸祝); 50.2060–2 (“Zu zhu” 祖祝).

<sup>96</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 50.2060–72 (“Si wu”); 50.2072–5 (“Nan wu”); 50.2075–8 (“Nü wu”).

<sup>97</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 53.2226 (“Du zong ren” 都宗人). He is assisted in his tasks by other experts including the household sacrificer (*jia zong ren* 家宗人) and spirit devotees (*shen shi* 神仕). See *Zhouli zhengyi*, 53.2227–34.



fish for important sacrifices and banquets.<sup>98</sup> Measurers and servants take care of sacrificial meats, cut up victims in appropriate portions, decorate victims, and assist in blood consecrations.<sup>99</sup> Sheep officers deliver the sacrificial sheep, which includes buying victims from merchants if the number of suitable animals raised by shepherds on the state's pastures falls short.<sup>100</sup> A fire director offers thanksgiving sacrifices to the inventor of fire; archers assist in presenting sacrifices in front of targets during shooting ceremonies, and help shooting victims selected for sacrifices.<sup>101</sup>

Wild animals for sacrifice are delivered by animal tamers, bird shooters kill off birds of bad omen during sacrifice, and animal keepers supply birds and eggs for sacrifice.<sup>102</sup> A royal valet selects clothes to be worn by the ruler during sacrifices, a sacrificial aide oversees sacrifices offered by a royal substitute, and a grand charioteer performs sacrifices to wheel axle and crossbars of the chariot.<sup>103</sup> Stable officers and grooms sacrifice to protective horse spirits, select horses to draw the chariots in sacrificial ceremonies, and consecrate the stables with blood.<sup>104</sup>

Sacrificial activity winds down among the Offices of Autumn. The minister of justice (*da sikou* 大司寇) and his deputies contribute their dues by offering dogs (victim animals linked with the metal phase and the season of autumn). The latter are raised and selected for the occasion by a dog officer.<sup>105</sup> A protector of corpses is to remove all impure persons such as condemned criminals and people wearing mourning garments away from the place where important sacrifices are held.<sup>106</sup> A light tender uses mirrors to catch sunrays for torches to lighten up the sacrificial display and mirrors moonlight to obtain pure water (*ming shui* 明水) for sacrificial wine.<sup>107</sup> Stewards sort out live and

<sup>98</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 55.2307, 2318, 2327, 2350, 2361 ("Da sima").

<sup>99</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 57.2379–83 ("Liang ren" 量人), 57.2386–93 ("Xiao zi" 小子).

<sup>100</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 57.2393–5 ("Yang ren" 羊人).

<sup>101</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 57.2399 ("Si guan" 司燿), 58.2437, 2439 ("She ren" 射人). Arrows for shooting at victims are delivered by the manager of bows and arrows (*si gong shi* 司弓矢). See *Zhouli zhengyi*, 61.2565.

<sup>102</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 58.2444 ("Fu bu shi" 服不氏); 58.2447 ("She niao shi" 射鳥氏); 58.2453 ("Zhang chu" 掌畜).

<sup>103</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 59.2490 ("Jie fu shi" 節服氏), 60.2513–16 ("Ji pu" 祭僕), 61.2588 ("Da yu" 大馭). According to some commentators, this refers to the driving over sacrifice in which one crushes a victim underneath the wheels of a chariot; as in *Zhouli zhengyi*, 69.2867 ("Quan ren").

<sup>104</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 62.2614–17 ("Xiao ren"); 62.2627 ("Sou ren" 廋人); 62.2631 ("Yu ren" 圉師). On these sacrifices, see Sterckx (1996).

<sup>105</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 66.2758 ("Da sikou"); 66.2777 ("Xiao sikou"); 67.2792 ("Shi shi"); 69.2867 ("Quan ren").

<sup>106</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 70.2900 ("Zha shi" 蟠氏).

<sup>107</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 70.2909 ("Si xuan shi" 司煊氏).

dead sets of victims for banquets and guests.<sup>108</sup> The “Kao gong ji” 考工記, which replaces a lost chapter on the Offices of Winter, further mentions a jade keeper in charge of specific jades used in certain sacrifices, and carpenters assisting in sacrifices put before targets.<sup>109</sup>

The list of officials charged with sacrificial duties is long and detailed. Even allowing for the overtly systematizing and in parts, no doubt, fictitious nature of the *Zhouli* model of the bureaucratic state, it is clear that the management of sacrificial provisions not only took center stage in much of official life, but also that it was subsumed within and subjected to meticulous bureaucratic control and principles of accountancy. It is also noteworthy that many of the sacrificial officers listed here double up as officials in charge of food and catering for more worldly purposes. This again illustrates the interdependency of sacrificial religion and secular food culture and shows that both were not only related conceptually but also in terms of practical management.

In Han times, personnel concerned with ceremonial logistics at state level were concentrated in offices under the supervision of the Grand Master of Ceremonies (*tai chang* 太常), whose elaborate network of subdepartments and officials included prayer masters, butchers, musicians, tax collectors, tomb supervisors, diviners, and libationers. Similar officials were deployed in the territories immediately outside the capital and near important cult centers. They included officials such as a Prefect of the Office of Sacrificial Oblations and Victims (*lin xi ling* 廩犧令), a Prefect in Charge of Domestic Animal Victims (*zhang chu ling* 掌畜令), or a Chief of the Kitchen in charge of supplying the altars at Yong (*Yong chu zhang* 雍廚長). With the exception of staff for imperial funerary parks, for ancestral temples located in commanderies away from the capital, and priests in the service of the kingdoms, far less information survives on officially employed religious personnel serving in the local administration in the provinces.<sup>110</sup>

### SPIRIT COMMERCE

To be sure, the *Zhouli* model or the practice of dedicating entire villages to the maintenance of sacrificial facilities near tombs and important ritual sites are examples at the top end of ritual occasion. Yet as the prescriptive models of the “monthly ordinances” and the *Zhouli* bureaucracy indicate, it is also

<sup>108</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 73.3060, 3066–7 (“Zhang ke” 掌客).

<sup>109</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 80.3330–7 (“Yu ren” 玉人), 82.3404–5 (“Zi ren” 梓人). The text includes the liturgy of an incantation performed during this ritual. For the incantation, see also Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin shi*, 4.50.

<sup>110</sup> Bielenstein (1980), 17–23, 88, 98, and 107; Bilsky (1975), 250–2.

clear that the sacrificial economy was part and parcel of community life at all levels of society. Those of lesser means could seek loans to fulfill their sacrificial obligation. As early as the *Zuozhuan*, the transfer, following a change in allegiance, of sacrificial fields and towns for the performance of particular sacrifices is expressed in terms of “exchanging” (*yi* 易) and “borrowing” (*jia* 假) ownership over such fields.<sup>111</sup> The *Zhouli* notes that goods for sacrifices and funerals could be purchased on credit.<sup>112</sup> Han government authorities would on occasion issue interest-free loans out of the taxes levied from craftsmen and merchants to assist in covering the costs for sacrifices, funerals, and mourning ceremonies. According to one account, credit for sacrificial expenses was allowed for up to ten days and for funerals up to three months.<sup>113</sup>

Markets functioned as venues for the trading of sacrificial offerings and other commodities used for ritual purposes. Religious activity sparked commerce as far as the western border regions of Han. Wooden documents from the military settlements in Juyan 居延 mention a market held on the day before the sacrifices to the altar of the soil and contain records of monetary expenses required for the “altar goods” (*she huo* 社貨) used at the festival. These include a reference to the purchase of bundles of dried vegetables to be used as wicks at the altar of the soil, a receipt of cash paid by officers for the use of the shrine (*she qian* 社錢), and an inventory of goods for the festival (including chicken, millet, sorghum, wine, and salt).<sup>114</sup>

Away from the market, similar emphasis was laid on accountability in the transaction of goods for the spirits. This is evident in several types of funerary texts uncovered in tombs. Some were drafted in formats similar to administrative documents. Others shared features resembling that of bookkeeping, or indeed adopted the format of a contract. Tomb inventories (variously referred to as *qian ce* 遣策 or *feng shu* 贈書 by archaeologists) were lists of burial goods interred with the deceased. Some recorded items displayed during the funeral intended for burial, others listed gifts received from relatives and guests and named the donors. The lists were read out aloud and verified by ritualists

<sup>111</sup> In the year corresponding to 715 BCE, Zheng suspends sacrifices to Mount Tai and proposes to Lu to exchange the nearby town established to service the sacrifices to Mount Tai for another sacrificial field closer by, where they would offer sacrifices to the Duke of Zhou instead. Lu only responded four years later when Zheng was requested to add a jade scepter to the transaction (to make up for the difference in value between both sacrificial territories). Thus, the text states, Zheng could “borrow” (*jia* 假) the fields from Lu. See *Zuozhuan*, 58 (Lord Yin, year 8), 82 (Lord Huan, year 1); and *Shiji*, 14.552. On the rhetoric behind this narrative, see Li Wai-ye (2007), 77–9.

<sup>112</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 28.1097 (“Quan fu” 泉府).

<sup>113</sup> *Hanshu*, 24B.1181.

<sup>114</sup> See Li Zhenhong (2003), 123–31 (especially strips 10.39, 63.34, E.P.T59:173, E.P.T52:185, E.P.T51:424); Shen Songjin (2003), 269–73; and Loewe (1967), vol. 1, 114; vol. 2, 99.

before the actual funerary procession and entombment of the goods. This served as an announcement (*gao* 告) to both the spirits and the living.

The practice of burying detailed lists with names and quantities of goods emerged during the Warring States period, the best recently studied example being the inventories recovered from the tomb of a high-ranking Chu official buried in 316 BCE at Baoshan 包山 (tomb no. 2; Jiangling county, Hubei). The Baoshan inventories list bronze and wooden sacrificial vessels, metal items and foodstuffs, and chariots and everyday items used for traveling (towels, combs, fans, etc.) to assist the deceased on his afterlife journey.<sup>115</sup> Most inventories list the date of burial and some give titles for the categories of goods. There appears to be a correspondence between the ways in which the goods were distributed in the tomb in terms of space, function, and the structure of the inventory, although more evidence is required to corroborate the exact relationship between text and tomb. That the inventories do not always match the actual objects buried in the tomb suggests that the lists themselves may partly have served as symbolic substitutes for the goods.<sup>116</sup>

Another funerary document common from the Eastern Han onward were land contracts, commonly referred to as *di quan* 地券. Their purpose was to establish ownership for the deceased over the plot of land used as burial site. Modeled on contracts used in the real world, these documents record the purchase of land and name the buyer (usually the deceased), the seller (who could be a divine figure), the location, boundaries, and surface area of the plot, the price of the transaction, as well as witnesses or guarantors.<sup>117</sup> At the heart of these documents is the notion that economic transactions such as completing a purchase or bestowing a gift were perpetuated both with and in the spirit world, and that these transactions needed to be sealed by proper account keeping.

One type of funerary object that sparked a real industry around major towns from Warring States times onward were so-called *ming qi* 明器 “spirit vessels.” These were miniature ceramic or metal replica of objects as varied as ritual vessels, animals, houses, granaries, daily utensils (e.g., cooking stoves, a well), and indeed human figurines. Xunzi distinguishes them from objects used by the living (*sheng qi* 生器) and notes that they “have the appearance (of real objects) but cannot be put to use.”<sup>118</sup> The practice of sending the dead to their graves with prototypes of objects and buildings that imitated the way they had lived was part of a conscious effort to break the ties between

<sup>115</sup> *Baoshan Chu jian*, 37–9 (plates 110–121); translated in Cook (2006), 211–47.

<sup>116</sup> See Lai Guolong (2002), chapter 2.

<sup>117</sup> Kleeman (1984).

<sup>118</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 13.369 (“Li lun”).

living and dead kin and separate both worlds categorically.<sup>119</sup> Even though commonly found in tombs of most social strata, the use of pottery substitutes proliferated among the nobility. One unparalleled find of painted pottery animal figurines was recovered in the early 1990s from the mausoleum of Han Jingdi at Yangling 陽陵 (Shaanxi). The terracotta figurines – mostly domestic animals such as chickens, roosters, dogs, pigs, goats, sheep, horses, and oxen – were lined up in rows and flocks by species.<sup>120</sup>

Demand for such objects sparked economic activity in manufacturing workshops and markets near capitals, major burial grounds, cemeteries, and other cultic sites. Several workshops and factories were established in the capital areas of Qin that mass-produced luxury items and funerary articles destined for the imperial tombs. The remains of a tomb figurine workshop and its kilns, capable of firing more than 8,000 figurines at one time, have been found in the market area in the northwestern corner of Han Chang'an.<sup>121</sup> A department known as the Artisans of the Eastern Park (*dong yuan jiang* 東園匠) was charged exclusively with the production of portable spirit articles for the imperial tombs.<sup>122</sup> Inside the Weiyang 未央 Palace in Chang'an, several departments dealt with logistics for sacrificial rituals. These included an Ice Room (*ling shi* 凌室) where ice was stored to keep fresh the food-stuffs used in sacrifices and banquets or cool corpses prior to burial, and the Weaving Shop (*zhi shi* 織室) that produced the garments used by the court in temple sacrifices.<sup>123</sup>

The religious economy was flourishing on markets near cultic sites or in the run-up to certain festivals, but markets also appear as a public space where anybody claiming to have expertise in the business of serving the spirits (astrologers, diviners, shamans, physiognomists, doctors) could advertise their wares. The market was a venue where people could express sentiments, emotions, and aspirations outside the regulated confines of the household.<sup>124</sup> Like the folksong, products traded on the markets reflected the mood of the people. By observing the market, the “Royal Regulations” note, a ruler

<sup>119</sup> Falkenhausen (2006), 302–6, 382–91, 395; and Lai (2002), chapter 3.

<sup>120</sup> Shaanxi sheng kaogu yanjiusuo ed. (2001), 10–12, 24–5, 51–9, 154. The same tomb also contains a large number of human statuettes including nude figurines, originally dressed in silk, that show genitals.

<sup>121</sup> Zhou Suping and Wang Zijin (1985).

<sup>122</sup> *Hou Hanshu*, “zhi” 6.3141. See further Barbieri-Low (2001), 35–6, 56, 71–3.

<sup>123</sup> *Sanfu huangtu jiaozhu*, 159, 160.

<sup>124</sup> The idea that the market is a place where one externalizes pent-up feelings may be reflected in the saying that “in the household one is angry, on the market-place one shows off one’s shame/anger” (*shi yu nu, shi yu se* 室於怒市於色). See *Zuozhuan*, 1405 (Lord Zhao, year 19); and *Zhanguo ce*, 27.981. On the market and its occupations as an order antagonistic to court and government, see Lewis (2006a), 164–7.

could take stock of the likes and dislikes of his people and understand their frame of mind.<sup>125</sup> The market was also the place for commerce of the soul, and some made a handsome living out of the business of searching for spirits. Not infrequently the profession of diviner-priest was branded an opportune career path to wealth. Such was the appeal to seek fortune by offering religious services, critics at the Han court remarked, that the streets and alleyways were packed with shamans, and villages and hamlets were teeming with priests.<sup>126</sup> The flourishing state of these professions may explain a statement in the “Royal Regulations” that those who report false spirit sightings or perform divinations that delude the people should be executed.<sup>127</sup> The income some religious specialists drew and their widespread activity was enough for Wang Mang to force them to register their trade like normal craftsmen and merchants and pay taxes:

All those who gathered products of any kind, birds and beasts, fish and turtles, or the hundreds of other types of creatures from mountains and woods, streams and marshes, as well as those who reared and pastured animals, concubines and wives (who cultivated) mulberry trees or tended silkworms ... craftsmen and carpenters, physicians, sorcerers, diviners and invokers, as well as practitioners of other methods and techniques, travelling traders or residential merchants, whether in their booths and stalls, in villages, at home, or at travellers’ inns, each of these was required to declare on their own initiative their activities to the district official in their place of residence. They were to subtract their base capital, calculate their profits, take one tenth of it, and pay it as tribute.<sup>128</sup>

Others argued that offering so-called religious expertise was a drain on the household economy. Wang Fu 王符 (90–165 CE) singles out the particularly negative influence of these professions on women. The lure of quick profits to be made by selling religious services, Wang argues, drew women away from their primary occupation:

The Odes reprimand women who “do not spin their hemp yet dance in the marketplace.” Today many do not “tend to the food at home” but “take leave of silkworms and weaving.” Instead they embark upon the study of shamanic incantations and drumming and dancing to serve the spirits, thereby deceiving the weak and deluding the common people. With wives and daughters so weak and feeble, disease descends upon the households, and, full of worry and confusion, they easily fall victim to fear, even to the

<sup>125</sup> *Liji jijie*, 12.328 (“Wang zhi”). See also *Shangshu da zhuan*, 1.8.

<sup>126</sup> *Yantie lun jiaozhu*, 6.352 (“San bu zu” 散不足).

<sup>127</sup> *Liji jijie*, 14.374 (“Wang zhi”).

<sup>128</sup> *Hanshu*, 24B.1180–1.



point that some are forced to flee from their seasonal labor and abandon their legitimate homes.<sup>129</sup>

In essence, Wang's comment sums up the basic tensions that run through many discussions on ritual expenditure in the Warring States and Han period. First there is the danger that energy devoted to ritual obligation reduces the labor force for the primary occupations of agriculture and sericulture. One intrinsic tension behind the performance of sacrificial rituals was that, not unlike overindulgence in food, their logistic requirements could undermine the purpose they were meant to serve in the first place. For instance, elaborate sacrificial rituals to seek a bountiful harvest might pull human and material resources away from the fields. Hence the *Lüshi chunqiu* insists that during the height of the farming season, one should not only avoid public works or mobilizing armies, but "commoners should not be permitted to perform the capping ceremony, betrothal, marriage, and sacrificial offerings."<sup>130</sup> The second tension follows from the fact that sacrificial activities tended to be mostly public in nature or were often shared by groups that transcended the household. To be mobilized to contribute or participate in public religious festivals or official ceremonies could drain away resources needed to support one's private subsistence, just as public corvée labor, taxes, and tribute impinged on the household economy.

#### REGULATING SACRIFICE

It is clear that economic obligations related to sacrificial religion were, first and foremost, the preserve of sumptuary ritual codes and taxation systems overseen and enforced by ritual officials and bureaucrats. Yet, as is illustrated by the aforementioned hard labor punishments in the Qin legal code, regulations related to the sacrificial economy or rules that indirectly influenced the management of resources for ritual usage were also incorporated in administrative statutes and ordinances and sanctioned by criminal law. There is no clear evidence to suggest a gradual shift from ritual normativity to legal enforcement with the advent of empire and its expanding bureaucratic organization. Administrative law and ritual precept coexisted and indeed could complement each other. The diverse vocabulary used to describe the ways in which sacrificial activities were monitored suggests that various models of enforcement were at play.

<sup>129</sup> *Qianfu lun*, 12.143 ("Fu chi" 浮侈); the references are to Mao 137 and 264, and to hexagram no. 37 in the *Zhouyi*.

<sup>130</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 26.1711 ("Shang nong" 上農).

Ritual texts speak of implementing sacrificial rules in terms of “tabooing, prohibiting” (*jin* 禁) or “directing, overseeing” (*du* 督) activity.<sup>131</sup> Frequent reference is made to a shared code of sumptuary rules known as sacrificial statutes (*si dian* 祀典, *ji dian* 祭典) or the need to “regulate/canonize” (*dian* 典) existing practices.<sup>132</sup> An official can be charged with changing or remedying disregard for “sacrificial orders” (*si ming* 祀命).<sup>133</sup> In several of the passages on the maintenance towns discussed earlier in this chapter, it is insisted that these are allocated and staffed “according to the rules” (*ru fa* 如法), and the same term is used to mean the “norm” against which more than one hundred marquises were stripped of their rank by Han Wudi in 112 BCE for not supplying the ancestral temples with sufficient goods.<sup>134</sup> Reference to clerks “reading out the methods of ritual” (*du li fa* 讀禮法) or “writings on ritual” (*li shu* 禮書) suggest that some understood the correct execution of sacrificial rituals to mean following the guidelines in a specific text.<sup>135</sup> And although little evidence survives today, the mention of “Han ordinances on sacrifice” (“Han si ling” 漢祀令) and “Han ordinances on shrine offerings” (“Han ci ling” 漢祠令) by early medieval commentators suggests that detailed regulations may have circulated at the time.<sup>136</sup>

We are fortunate to possess fragments of the Qin legal code that enable us to gain an insight into the nature of some of these rules and regulations. The legal codes not only contain detailed rules on animal husbandry and agriculture but also comment on the supply of sacrificial goods. The articles in the Qin code, at least those currently transmitted, do not elaborate much on the ideology behind the performance of sacrifices, yet they demonstrate in considerable detail that the law applied to sacrificial culture. For instance, if stealing sacrificial offerings was sufficient to provoke the wrath of avenging spirits, the legal code adds a more worldly punishment to this as is illustrated in the following judicial case evaluation:

[quote from the original statutes; now lost]

“When an official sacrifice (*gong ci* 公祠) is not yet over, stealing the preparations (*ju* 具) warrants a fine ... having the beard shaved off and being made a bond servant.”

<sup>131</sup> E.g. *Zhouli zhengyi*, 49.2030 (“Da zhu”); and Zheng Xuan’s commentary to *Zhouli zhengyi*, 53.2225 (“Du zong ren” 都宗人); 67.2800 (“Xiang shi” 鄉士), speaks of *jin ling* 禁令 “prohibitory rules.”

<sup>132</sup> *Guoyu*, 4.166, 170 (“Lu yu, shang”); *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 1.2 (“Meng chun ji”); *Zhouli zhengyi*, 41.1674–5 (“Dian si”); *Hanshu*, 21B.1012, 25B.1268; *Hou Hanshu*, 4.196, 60B.1992.

<sup>133</sup> *Zuo zhuan*, 487 (Duke Xi, year 31); *Zhouli zhengyi*, 49.2030 (“Da zhu”).

<sup>134</sup> *Hanshu*, 6.187.

<sup>135</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 51.2090 (“Da shi” 大史), 51.2100 (“Xiao shi” 小史).

<sup>136</sup> *Hanshu*, 4.109, in a commentary by Ru Shun 如淳 (3rd century CE); and *Hanshu*, 25B.1269, in a commentary by Chen Zan 臣瓚 (fl. ca 270 CE).

[*case in question*]

Now somebody steals; he steals a kidney, and the illegal profit of one kidney is not fully one cash; how is he to be sentenced?

[*answer*]

In sacrifices one uses, as a rule, hearts and kidneys as well as other joints; all these are each “one preparation” (*yi ju* 一具). When the illegal profit of one preparation is not fully one cash, stealing it warrants shaving off the beard. It may have a value of twenty cash, but it is only partly stolen, and so it is not completely one preparation; (for such a theft) as well as stealing “incorrect” ones, one is condemned according to the Statutes.<sup>137</sup>

It appears that legal liability in this case only applies to stealing those sacrificial offerings that were approved as a “preparation”, that is, set aside as a sanctioned set of offerings. The organs used in this passage – heart and kidney – are noteworthy. They are organs rich in blood but it is uncertain whether their choice should be related to models known in *yue ling* literature and elsewhere that specify the use of a particular organ according to five phase seasonal correspondences. Another problem here is what exactly is meant by a public sacrifice.<sup>138</sup> Sacrifices with varying degrees of participation were held at various levels beyond the household. Conversely, private sacrifices (e.g., in the ancestral temple) could be part of or a first stage in larger ceremonies. What exactly constituted a private versus public body in relation to sacrifice is not always clearly delineated because private sacrifices could be performed by plural subjects, and corporate rituals such as banquets and the feasting of guests were not necessarily open to outsiders.

Another article in the Qin code describes a crime known as “thievishly digging in a pit,” that is, digging up offerings buried in the soil in so-called interment sacrifices.<sup>139</sup> The *Zhouli* indeed mentions sorcerers who guard the spot where victims and precious jades are sacrificially interred until the sacrifice is over.<sup>140</sup> Even the duration during which an offering can be legally defined as a “sacrifice” is explained in the Qin code:

<sup>137</sup> *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 99 (strips 25–26); Hulsewé (1985), 127 (D21).

<sup>138</sup> Hulsewé’s initial reading of the term *gong* 公 has been rejoined recently by Peng Hao who suggests to emend the term to *gong* 共祠 “public sacrifices” and dismisses suggestions that 公, read “ducal,” might imply that the statute could date from a period prior to Qin when the title *wang* 王 was used, possibly at the time of Shang Yang. See Peng Hao (2006). Chen Xuguo (rpt. 2002), vol. 2, 28–9, discusses the passage without questioning the issue. A locus classicus explaining the graphs for public 公 versus private 私 occurs in *Han Feizi jishi*, 19.1057–8 (“Wu du”); cf. Bottéro (2002), 16. In *Lunyu* 10.9, Confucius is said to sacrifice in public (*gong*). In *Liji jijie*, 27.741 (“Nei ze”), a private sacrifice is an offering to one’s own ancestors as opposed to a sacrifice to the wider lineage elders.

<sup>139</sup> *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 100 (strip 28); Hulsewé (1985), 128 (D23).

<sup>140</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 50.2070 (“Si wu”).

[*Question*]

What is the meaning of [the sentence] “the sacrifice is not yet over?”

[*Answer*]

When the beakers and stands that have been placed before the spirits have not yet been removed – that is [the meaning of the sentence] “(the sacrifice) is not yet over”. (Sacrifices) not yet placed (before the spirits) as well as those that are “incorrect” do not constitute a “preparation” (*ju*); they must already have been placed (before the spirits) and only then are they “preparations”.<sup>141</sup>

Another legal statute seeks to define what constitutes the performance of unauthorized or irregular sacrifices (*qi ci* 奇祠). The latter most likely refers to the type of rituals classified as *yin* 淫, “excessive, illicit,” in other writings of the period:

[*Original statute*] “To perform irregular sacrifices without authority is fined two suits of armour.”

[*Question*] What constitutes “irregular” (*qi* 奇)?

[*Answer*] There exist, of course, sacrifices which the royal clan is warranted to perform. (But what we mean is) that possessing altars for spirits (*gui wei* 鬼位) without authority is “irregular”; others are not.<sup>142</sup>

We have yet to recover evidence that legal precepts such as these were widespread. Indeed the fact that all of the examples quoted earlier appear as requests for judicial clarification may indicate that officials had difficulty deciding whether sacrificial culture should be adjudicated under the rule of law or whether infringements should be treated following ritual precept. No doubt more regulations related to the conduct of sacrifices will be uncovered in legal codes in the years ahead.<sup>143</sup> Anecdotal evidence suggests that in Han times, nonconformity to sacrificial regulations continued to be a potential cause for indicting one’s enemies. For instance, as part of their conspiracy against Chancellor Wei Xiang 魏相 (d. 59 BCE), the Huo 霍 clan suggested he should be charged with the crime of having, on his own authority, eliminated the offerings of lambs, rabbits, and frogs in the ancestral temple. The commentator Ru Shun 如淳, writing in the 3rd century CE, refers to a regulation issued in the early days of the Han according to which anybody who, of his or

<sup>141</sup> *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 99 (strip 27); Hulsewé (1985), 128 (D22).

<sup>142</sup> *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 131 (strip 161); Hulsewé (1985), 166 (D141).

<sup>143</sup> The fact that a text such as the *Shuowen jiezi* quotes Han statutes (*Han lü* 漢律) as its source for the explanation of a rare graph denoting a sacrifice of a suckling pig to the Director of Destiny (*Si ming* 司命), indicates that the codes may have contained more information. See *Shuowen jiezi*, 1A.9b.

her own accord, made up (and presumably changed) plans related to ancestral temples would be executed and exposed on the market square.<sup>144</sup>

#### GIFTS FOR SPIRITS, GOODS FOR MORTALS

Given the significant demands posed by sacrificial obligation on the economic organization of society, sacrificial religion and ritual in general also offered an avenue that enabled one to detach oneself from the conventional economy. By Warring States times, increased tensions emerged between a religious gift economy and the workings of a new and more complex conventional economy. The economic landscape was undergoing a far-reaching transformation. From the late eastern Zhou into the early Warring States period, land ownership gradually shifted from hereditary aristocrats and landowners to individual peasant households in exchange for taxes. This, together with the rise of markets, private property, the increased use of money, the expansion of trade and handicraft industries, and the rise of an ever-expanding merchant class, created a new social reality. At the same time, religious orientations changed. The ancestral cult declined in relative importance, and sacrifices to nature spirits and the cosmos at large, as well as local and state-led cults, gained in prominence.

The nobility no longer co-owned all human and material resources through their traditional right to transfer property to themselves. As we have seen in the earlier discussion, extracting labor and natural resources to support the religious economy – a practice mainly enforced through ritual obligation by the Spring and Autumn nobility – could now only be achieved through more sophisticated mechanisms of taxation. Ritual agency during the Warring States transition was no longer solely defined by the religious privileges of ranked elites. Property obtained by other means than noble station became much more significant as a means to exert authority. In material culture, as Lothar von Falkenhausen has shown, the symbolic value of ritual vessels and implements was increasingly neglected in favor of quantitative factors, that is, the size and number of vessels and goods: “[E]conomic wealth superseded ritual and descent-based rank as the principal criterion for drawing social distinctions.”<sup>145</sup> “Style,” Martin Powers writes, was gradually overtaken by new criteria of worth:

... in feudal times, grain paid to a lord was abstracted in ceremony, which is to say, “style,” so that its transfer from producer to nobility could be justified

<sup>144</sup> *Hanshu*, 86.2956.

<sup>145</sup> Falkenhausen (2006), 391.

in terms of a nobleman's virtue/*de* [德]. By the third century [BCE], "style" had been dissociated from material, yielding raw grain. At this basic level it could be treated as a universal measure of value, transformed into an impersonal state and thus transferable to anyone who "deserved" it under the new criteria of worth. This transfer from farmer to official was not justified on the basis of the monarch's charisma, but on the pragmatic argument that a good official is of benefit to the people. In place of style, we have numeric assignments keyed to individual performance.<sup>146</sup>

Against the background of a changing economic landscape in which a religious gift economy and market perceptions of commodities challenged each other, new ideas arose on the relationship between material wealth and the exercise of virtue. The latter will form the subject of a separate study. For our purpose here, it should be noted that the question how to morally justify the use of material goods for the procurement of spiritual ends became prominent on the agenda of most Warring States and Han thinkers. In a world where property had become more inalienable than before, the extraction of goods and services for religious and ritual purposes needed a more cogent justification.

Some proposed resourceful ways to marry economic imperatives to religion and argued that a ruler could draw on sacrificial obligation as a way to remedy shortcomings in the state's economy. Such methods, at least in theory, offered the possibility to escape the potentially corrupt effects associated with taxation in kind or, as critics would argue, the possibility to cover up government incompetence in managing the state's resources. The *Guanzi* 管子 – a composite text dating to no later than the mid-2nd century BCE – describes several such schemes. In its economic chapters, an eponymous Guan Zhong 管仲 (d. 645 BCE) sets out his views on taxation to his patron, Duke Huan 桓 of Qi 齊 (fl. 685–643 BCE). The bulk of these chapters deal with common themes such as the relationship between agriculture and trade, the use of natural and human resources, and the circulation of goods and agricultural produce. But scattered among these seemingly straightforward expositions of the economic sustenance of the state are passages in which fiscal policy is intricately tied to sacrificial obligation. In one exchange, Guan Zhong suggests that sacrificial ritual can be exploited to stimulate economic activity:

"To maintain what is proper and take advantage of the situation is the way to gain advantage in one's affairs; to make careful plans and utilize one's political power is the way to expedite and enhance affairs. A king takes advantage

<sup>146</sup> Powers (2006), 206.



of the circumstances (*cheng shi* 乘勢); a sage takes advantage of the realm of the mysterious (*cheng you* 乘幼).<sup>147</sup> They are both in accord with things.”

“How then does one carry this out?” asked Duke Huan.

Guanzi replied: “Since ancient times, Yao’s 堯 five ministerial officials have had no one to provide them with sacrificial offerings. I suggest that you establish sacrifices to appease their malicious spirits. When sacrificing to Yao’s five ministerial officials, in the spring, present them with orchids; in the autumn present them with chrysanthemums. Use large fish for the dried offerings and small fish for the mixed dishes. If you do this, the taxes derived from fish in the marshes will increase a hundredfold from one day to the next. That way you may avoid having to impose a tax on the non-production of grain, or a household tax. This is called ‘establishing [self-sufficiency] by means of sacrificial prayers and promoting it with ritual and ceremony.’ If you do this you will become self-sufficient. What else would you need to seek from the people?”<sup>148</sup>

Guanzi suggests that tax evasion can be remedied by transforming the goods one fails to levy through normal channels into a sacrificial duty. He speaks of “availing oneself of ghosts and spirits,” which would ensure that people do not falsify numbers to be reported for poll tax, kill off domestic livestock, or harm or hoard other natural resources. For instance, when fields are unsuitable for agriculture, they can be put to economic use by establishing a government monopoly on the purchase and sale of sacrificial victims and products that hail from these pastures. In practice, Guanzi argues, people would refuse to have their own sheep and cattle mate with wild herds. So a ruler could stimulate demand and increase revenue by allowing only those animals that have been cross-bred with cattle and sheep from infertile neighboring lands to be used in spring and autumn sacrifices. That way the people’s sense for ritual and ceremony could be made to prevail over their initial mistrust to mate local breeds with imported herds.<sup>149</sup> Sacrificial obligation in this logic would cause everyone to spontaneously pay their due to the government and, we must assume, failure to oblige would result in the vengeance of ghosts and spirits.

Thus the clever ruler can coerce the extraction of goods under the guise of sacrificial duty. Indeed the search for material wealth and attempts to grasp

<sup>147</sup> I follow Ding Shihan 丁士涵 and other commentators who propose the gloss *you*/\**ʔiu* 幽 (or indeed *xuan*/\**gwɛn* 玄 or *yao*/\**ʔiù*? 窈) for 幼 \**ʔiuh* and take it to refer to the invisible realm of ghosts and spirits.

<sup>148</sup> *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 32.1412–13 (“Qing zhong jia”); *Guanzi qingzhong pian xin quan*, 517; tr. Rickett (1998), 453–4 (modified).

<sup>149</sup> *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 22.1346 (“Shan zhi shu” 山至數); Rickett (1998), 417–18.

the fluctuating nature of profit can be compared to a quest for benefits derived from the spirit world: “Profits cannot be taken as constant, so people chase after them. Spirits cannot be taken as constant, so people make offerings to them.”<sup>150</sup> Given that cults at local sites and natural landmarks such as mountains and rivers were often controlled by local elites, economic interests could be served by such events. Guanzi proposes several other schemes. They follow a general pattern in which certain segments of society are to be excluded from access to natural resources such as parks, mountains, and marshlands. For instance, he speaks of “fencing off sacred mountains to offer sacrifice to them”<sup>151</sup> or “establishing sacrifices to restrict entrance to mountains and marshes.”<sup>152</sup> These schemes consist of turning mountains rich in ores and wood into sacred sites and so tabooing access to them for ordinary people.

If a mountain reveals its riches, a lord should carefully seal it off with an earthen boundary (*feng* 封) and offer sacrifices to it. At a distance of ten *li* from the sealed-off area he should construct an altar. This being done he should make those who are riding dismount and walk and those who are walking should be required to quicken their steps. Those who violate these orders should be sentenced to death without pardon. In this way, they will be kept far away from any opportunity to exploit the mountain’s wealth.<sup>153</sup>

Guanzi here suggests that a ruler can effectively protect his natural assets by turning an area into a walled, sanctified sacrificial space with altar, in which one could conduct a spirit search – a space of the type we discussed in the previous chapter. He mentions such schemes together in one breath with determining the size of the well-fields for taxation purposes.<sup>154</sup>

Another ploy to stimulate economic activity is to have the rich spend lavishly on funerals and rituals:

Have the rich build grandiose tombs to employ the poor, construct highly elaborate grave sites to employ engravers and sculptors, use large coffins to provide work for carpenters, and prepare numerous sets of funerary clothing and coverlets to provide work for seamstresses. Since this is still not enough, there should be bundles containing different gradations of sacrificial meat, containers holding different types of grain, and funerary objects of metal, pottery and jade. Doing this provides a source of living from which,

<sup>150</sup> *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 12.725 (“Chi mi” 侈靡); tr. Rickett (1998), 328.

<sup>151</sup> *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 12.637 (“Chi mi”). Guo Moruo 郭沫若 situates the composition of this chapter in the early Western Han. I concur with recent scholarship that dates it back to Warring States times. See Hu Jiacong (2003), 298–306.

<sup>152</sup> *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 23.1394 (“Guo zhun” 國准); Rickett (1998), 444.

<sup>153</sup> *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 23.1355 (“Di shu”); tr. Rickett (1998), 423 (modified).

<sup>154</sup> *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 12.689 (“Chi mi”); Rickett (1998), 319–20.

thereafter, all people benefit, and it is appropriate even when the country is preparing for war.<sup>155</sup>

The most detailed sacrificial revenue scheme Guan Zhong proposes is the so-called Jing reed scheme (*jingmao mou* 菁茅謀). These *jing* reeds, said to have “a stalk with three ribs running all the way down to its root,” grow in the south and are associated with the southern state of Chu in several sources. In sacrificial ritual, they were highly valued because, among other things, they were used to strain sacrificial ale.<sup>156</sup> One Ming author made these reeds the subject of a prose-poem.<sup>157</sup> The “Jing reed scheme” was aimed at gaining revenues through one’s feudatories’ moral obligation to contribute sacrificial taxes in the form of these reeds. The scheme, Guan Zhong argues, would ensure that feudal lords would not break away when extra taxes had to be levied from them. Duke Huan is advised to do the following:

I suggest that you have civil functionaries of the Son of Heaven surround and protect these reeds. The Son of Heaven should then perform the *feng* sacrifice on Mount Tai and the *shan* sacrifice on Mount Liangfu 梁父 and issue orders to the feudal lords of the empire stating that all those who wished to follow him in performing the *feng* sacrifice on Mount Tai and the *shan* sacrifice on Mount Liangfu must bring a bundle of *jing* reeds in order to make mats to be used in these sacrifices. Those who do not conform to this order will not be allowed to participate.

The text continues by stating that, in the golden age of Zhou, feudal lords vied with each other in their rush to be the first in line to deliver their *jing* reeds. “Without the Son of Heaven doing anything the price of *jing* reeds from the Yangzi and Huai rose tenfold, amounting to one hundred catties per bundle” and in the end, “the empire’s gold was flowing into Zhou like a rushing stream.”<sup>158</sup>

<sup>155</sup> *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 12.688 (“Chi mi”); tr. Rickett (1998), 319. As Rickett notes, elsewhere (*Guanzi jiaozhu*, 22.1337) Guan Zhong contradicts this argument and points out that the construction of elaborate tombs draws away labor force from markets and farms. Such discrepancies illustrate the composite nature of these chapters, which are unlikely to come from the same hand. At *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 22.1240–1 (“Shi yu” 事語), Guanzi suggests that stimulating the production of domestic animals through sacrificial obligation only works in places where the amount of territory of lord and feudatories is fixed. Cf. Rickett (1998), 369.

<sup>156</sup> *Jingmao* are mentioned in the “Yu gong” 禹貢 where Zheng Xuan notes they are used for straining ale. See *Shangshu jin gu wen zhushu*, 3.167. See further *Zuozhuan*, 290 (Lord Xi, year 4); *Fengsu tongyi*, 1.19 (“Huang ba” 皇霸); *Hou Hanshu*, 73.2360 (mentioning an attack on Chu to obtain these reeds). For the expectation that Chu tributes should include such reeds see *Han Feizi jishi*, 11.641 (“Wai chu shuo zuo, shang”); *Xinxu jiaoshi*, 4.499 (“Za shi” 雜事).

<sup>157</sup> A “Jingmao fu” 賦 (Rhapsody on the Jing Reeds) is attributed to Wang Ruzhen 王儒真. See *Yuding lidai fuhui*, 50.22b–23b.

<sup>158</sup> *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 24.1473 (“Qing zhong, ding” 輕重丁); tr. Rickett (1998), 481–2. For the use of these felicitous three-ridged reeds in *feng shan* sacrifices, see also *Shiji*, 28.1361. The reeds

It remains difficult to determine to what extent religious imperatives were adduced to exact revenue for other purposes, but the fact that proposals such as the previously mentioned survive reflects an acute awareness of the intricate relationship between ritual obligation and economic expenditure. Guanzi's tax on sacrificial reeds may appear to be a trivial excursion in an otherwise well-versed treatise on economic policy. But what operates at the heart of these debates is a tension between the workings of a market economy and the private or corporate nature of the gift economy embodied in ritual and sacrificial exchange. The market requires people to enter into a relationship for the sake of a commodity, whereas in the gift economy, commodities are exchanged to forge or reaffirm social relationships. Not infrequently, gift exchange is singled out as morally superior, whereas conventional market exchange could threaten or undermine networks created through social and ritual obligation. The feudal prerogative of being assigned as revenue the income of *she* altars – Master Guan himself was the beneficiary of 300 altars in return for his services, according to Xunzi<sup>159</sup> – was naturally at odds with developing notions of monetary and mercantile exchange. The policies set out by Guanzi all revolve around the question of how and in what circumstances accepted economic and material criteria of value can be rightfully replaced with moral criteria derived from a ritual system of exchange, and vice versa.

#### THE RHETORIC OF PLENTY

The demands placed on the human economy in the service of the spirit world were a topic of considerable debate in Warring States and Han times. Arguments on the pros and cons of spending significant resources on the spirit world varied. A much heard criticism was that the demands of the sacrificial economy undermined the conventional economy. The paradox of needing to be seen as generous in entreating spirits and ancestors on the one hand while avoiding excess expenditure on the other preoccupied the minds of most thinkers. Ideally ritual implements and offerings had a finite lifespan. They were not to be recycled, and the use of ragged or blemished implements would undermine the sense of reverence distinctive of sacrificial occasion. When sacrificial robes were worn out, the *Liji* advises, they were to be

were available in 110 BCE, when Han Wudi performed the sacrifices. See *Shiji*, 28.1398. For the metaphorical value attached to rushes and reeds in sacrifice, see also *Zuozhuan*, 1151 (Lord Xiang, year 28).

<sup>159</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 7.107 (“Zhong Ni” 仲尼). For another example of a transfer of land, human, and material resources measured in *she*, see *Zuozhuan* (Lord Zhao, year 25), 1465, where Qi intends to give up 1,000 *she* to Duke Zhao of Lu. See also *Shiji*, 32.1503–4. Jia Kui 賈逵 (30–101 CE) notes that one *she* corresponds to 25 households.

burned; worn-out sacrificial vessels were to be buried, and so were tortoise-shells and divining stalks used for the occasion, or sacrificial victims that had died. No traces of a sacrifice should remain visible, Zheng Xuan claims, lest people will treat these paraphernalia with irreverence.<sup>160</sup> Likewise great care was to be devoted by craftsmen producing sacrificial vessels and implements to ensure that the right measurements and quality were ensured. Some articles were to have the name of their manufacturer engraved on them as a trademark for its genuineness.<sup>161</sup> Some argued that one could be rich in spirit without having to be rich in means.<sup>162</sup> Others suggested that expenditure on the spirit world ultimately would benefit society as a whole.

Whereas changing perceptions of the role of commodities, ownership, wealth, and its moral justification inspired discussions among philosophers on the relationship between concepts such as profit (*li* 利) and righteousness (*yi* 義),<sup>163</sup> one topic of debate central to the economics of sacrificial religion was the issue of moderate versus opulent ritual expenditure. The debate is most articulate in discussions on funerary rituals and state sacrifices and pitches Mozi (late 5th–early 4th century BCE) against Xunzi (mid 4th–late 3rd century BCE) to culminate in the *Lüshi chunqiu* (ca. 239 BCE). The issue continues to preoccupy critics throughout the Han period, from memorials on the establishment of court ritual under Liu Bang 劉邦 to critical evaluations of local cult expenditure in the work of Eastern Han writers such as Wang Chong and Ying Shao, who wrote against the background of ever more ostentatious spending on sacrificial cults and burials.

Mozi, who was a strong supporter of the belief in a spirit world that could sanction human behavior, argued that the ancients' detailed attention to sacrificial logistics proved that they firmly believed in the existence of ghosts and spirits:

Therefore it was said that, when the government offices provide the implements, they must first ensure that the proper sacrificial vessels and robes are

<sup>160</sup> *Liji jijie*, 4.88–9 (“Qu li”).

<sup>161</sup> *Liji jijie*, 15.489–90 (“Yue ling”); *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 10.516 (“Meng dong ji”). On quality-control measures for fabricated objects generally, see Barbieri-Low (2007), 75–6.

<sup>162</sup> Terry Kleeman (1994) has used the term “ethicization” to identify an evolving emphasis in Han China on the moral intent of the sacrificer over the materiality of the actual offering. I agree with Kleeman that such calls for morality over materiality in sacrifice are widespread, yet I doubt whether the development was simply a linear one running up to Daoist and Buddhist practice. The ethical debates surrounding sacrifice certainly predated Han and the *Liji* and were not limited to the blood sacrifice.

<sup>163</sup> The debate runs through parts of the *Zuozhuan*, *Guoyu*, and *Lunyu* (4.12, 4.16, 7.12, 7.16, 9.1, 9.13, 14.1, and 14.12) to culminate, most famously, in the opening passages of the Mencius (1A.1). See also Pines (2002), 199–203, and Schumacher (1993).

fully stocked in the warehouses, that the invocators of the ancestral temple and all other officials in charge [of sacrifices] have all been appointed in the court, and that the animals to be used as sacrificial victims are no longer grouped together with the common herds. Since the sage kings of antiquity conducted their government in this fashion, it must be the case [that they believed in the existence of ghosts and spirits].<sup>164</sup>

Mozi's justifications for the need for frugality in ritual expenditure are often practical and utilitarian in nature, and form part of his overall condemnation of Ru practices. Yet in one passage, he claims that sumptuous funerary expenditure also has a so-called theological effect because it might deplete resources that could otherwise be used to uphold regular sacrifices:

Now if one follows those who support elaborate funerals and lengthy mourning to conduct government, then the state will necessarily become poor, the people few, and the government will necessarily be in chaos. If the state is poor, then the sacrificial grains and wine will not be of the required purity. If the people are few, there will be few to serve Shangdi and the spirits. And if the government is in chaos, then sacrifices will not be conducted at the appropriate times or in the appropriate measure. If now one conducts government in such a way that one effectively prevents the proper services to Shangdi and the spirits, they will be the first to look down from above and, considering how to soothe the people, might say: "What is better for us, to have these people exist or have them not exist?" Or: "Whether they exist or not does not make any difference to us!" Consequently Shangdi and the spirits will send down cruel punishments for the people's misdemeanors and abandon them. And if they do so, wouldn't that just be the appropriate thing to do!<sup>165</sup>

By arguing that lavish expenditure does not only deplete the state's resources but incites discontent in the spirit world itself, Mozi indirectly extols the spirits as ultimate moral arbiters of ritual expenditure. Mozi also relies on the notion of religious obligation to promote his views of an egalitarian society: Social harmony and the impartial division of wealth will ensure that the state will always have the necessary resources to provide offerings to the spirit world.<sup>166</sup> At one point, Mozi refers to the image of graded sacrificial levies in defense of the idea that people of humble social station are potential sources for great ideas: "Now the peasant pays his taxes to his superior, who (uses these to) make sacrificial wine and grain offerings and, with these, sacrifices

<sup>164</sup> *Mozi jiangou*, 31.237 ("Ming gui, xia" 明鬼下).

<sup>165</sup> *Mozi jiangou*, 25.179–80 ("Jie zang, xia" 節葬下).

<sup>166</sup> *Mozi jiangou*, 27.199 ("Tian zhi, zhong" 天志中).



to Shangdi, ghosts and spirits. Can you claim that (the spirits) would refuse these offerings because they come from people of low standing?”<sup>167</sup> Thus at the core of the argument is the idea that the division of wealth would lead to an equally shared burden of sacrificial obligation, which in turn prevents ritual expenditure from undermining conventional economic productivity.

Xunzi takes issue with the notion that ostentatious display of wealth in funerary and ritual paraphernalia necessarily leads to moral decay. Ritual expediency for Xunzi is partly conditioned by material factors. He speaks of “objects of value (*cai wu* 財物) to be used (in rituals), distinctions between noble and base to create patterns, and the use of larger and smaller quantities to mark distinctions in station.”<sup>168</sup> Ritual display, therefore, is essential and effective as a marker of social status and division provided that government is conducted well:

[In ancient times] although the body was covered with pearls and jades, the inner coffin filled with elegant embroideries, the outer coffin filled with yellow gold and decorated with cinnabar with added layers of laminar verdite; and although [in the outer tomb chamber there was] rhinoceros and elephant ivory fashioned into trees, with precious rubies, magnetite loadstones, and flowering aconite for their fruit, despite all this, people still did not violate them. Why is that? It is because people discovered that tricks in the pursuit of profit were ineffective and that the shame of offending against one’s social station was great.<sup>169</sup>

The ancient model invoked then is that of a center occupied by a virtuous ruler and supplied with sacrificial goods and tribute by concentrically graded zones surrounding it (the so-called *wu fu* 五服 “five dependencies” model):

Those serving in the royal domain provide offerings for the sacrifices of thanks (*ji* 祭); those serving in the feudal domain provide offerings for the cult sacrifices (*si* 祀); those who serve as guests provide for the drinking ceremonies (*xiang* 享); those who serve according to treaty obligations present tribute offerings (*gong* 貢); and those who do irregular service come to pay respect at the succession of a new king. Each day offerings of thanks must be provided, each month cult offerings, each season there is a drinking ceremony, each year tribute is offered ...<sup>170</sup>

The graded tributary obligations imposed on feudatories in the *Zhouli* concur with the notion that the delivery of sacrificial goods acts as the primary

<sup>167</sup> *Mozi jiangou*, 47.441 (“Gui yi” 貴義).

<sup>168</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 19.498 (“Da lue” 大略); cf. Knoblock, vol. 3, 218.

<sup>169</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 12.338–9 (“Zheng lun” 正論); tr. Knoblock, vol. 3, 44 (modified).

<sup>170</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 12.330 (“Zheng lun”); tr. Knoblock, vol. 3, 39 (modified). Xunzi’s model echoes a similar passage in *Guoyu*, 1.4 (“Zhou yu, shang” 周語上).

bond that links feudatories to the center. Hence the zone immediately beyond the royal domain is required to donate sacrificial goods (*si wu* 祀物) annually, whereas the frequency of tributary visits to the center diminishes as one moves further away geographically from the center. The nature of the required tributary goods likewise changes for each zone: silk, utensils, garments, raw materials, tortoise, and cowrie shells.<sup>171</sup> Sacrificial obligation and contributions to the sacrificial economy diminish in frequency as the distance to the royal domain increases.

With Mozi taking the spirit world as moral arbiter and Xunzi insisting that ritual expenditure justifiably follows from the need to instill social hierarchies, a third leg in the philosophical debate on ritual expenditure occurs in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, where frugal burial is advocated on equally materialistic grounds. The argument put forth here is that moderation in tomb furnishings detracts grave robbers and hence allows the dead to rest in undisturbed peace.<sup>172</sup> Debates on funerary and ritual expenditure would continue into the imperial period at the court and elsewhere. The topic figures prominently in the court debates of 81 BCE recorded in the *Yantie lun*, and Han rulers were urged periodically to reduce expenditure on imperial mausolea or in sacrifice by means of measures such as substituting live victims with wooden dummies.<sup>173</sup> In his campaign to reduce and reform Han state cults in the late 30s BCE, chancellor Kuang Heng 匡衡 notes that the ancients did not indulge in extravagant sacrificial paraphernalia and argues that the highest forms of reverence do not require ornament (*shi* 飾).<sup>174</sup> Wang Chong takes issue with lavish expenditure to purchase funerary objects: “People produce dummies to serve the corpses in their coffins and they stuff the latter with edibles to please the spirits. The practice has become so persistent and widespread that some will ruin their families and exhaust their property to fill the coffins of the dead.”<sup>175</sup> Throughout the *Lunheng*, Wang Chong portrays the issue of ritual expenditure in essence as a scholastic or intellectual problem by arguing that such practices derive from a misunderstanding of the nature of the spirit world and the impact of the dead on the living.<sup>176</sup> These protracted debates on funerary expenditure suggest that such demands, although rarely the sole cause of political decay, could significantly precipitate the economic ruin of the state and local communities.

<sup>171</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 71.2974–5 (“Da xing ren” 大行人).

<sup>172</sup> For a more detailed review of the arguments, see Riegel (1995), 301–30.

<sup>173</sup> See e.g. *Shiji*, 28.1402, where Han Wudi replaces live colts with wooden figurines; and *Hanshu*, 72.3072, where Han Yuandi 元帝 (r. 49–33 BCE) is urged to drastically reduce the number of women residing at the imperial mausolea.

<sup>174</sup> *Hanshu*, 25B.1256.

<sup>175</sup> *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 23.961 (“Bo zang” 薄葬).

<sup>176</sup> *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 23.966 (“Bo zang”), 29.1184 (“Dui zuo”).

Funerary customs are only one example of the problems that could result from the competing demands of economic production and religious duty. Such tensions applied to sacrificial culture in general. Hence, for instance, similar to comments on moderation in funerary expenses, one finds suggestions that sacrifices generally ought to be adapted to the outcome of the harvest. Or that in times of disaster or famine, sacrifices should be substituted with less costly prayers, just as rulers would adapt their diet and abstain from other sensory pleasures.<sup>177</sup> Pace Guanzi, for the virtuous ruler charged with filling the state's granaries, the dictates of sacrificial obligation could provide a useful tool to extract goods from one's subjects. One of the benefits of sacrifice, as Walter Burkert observes, is that the principle of reciprocal giving is not verifiable in relationship to the spirit world or the realm of the dead.<sup>178</sup> And so extorting income from one's subjects under the pretext that it was destined for the spirits was a practice that ranked among the defining features of what Warring States and Han texts refer to as illicit or "excessive" (*yin* 淫) cultic practices. Other characteristics associated with *yin* cults were excessive expenditure (such as the extravagant use of animals in sacrifice) leading to the depletion of household resources, the involvement of spirit mediums as opposed to authorized ritual officers, a reliance on uncoded prayers, songs, and dance, the worship of local and minor spirits, or other unauthorized rituals such as expiation procedures to heal disease.<sup>179</sup> A typical example of the latter is preserved in a story in the *Han Feizi*, in which villagers start buying and sacrificing cattle without authorization in order to propitiate a spirit that was causing illness to King Zhao 昭 of Qin (r. 306–251 BCE). The king, once he had recovered, fined those responsible for organizing the events two armored suits. The underlying message is that a good legalist ruler does not fall for expressions of personal compassion but sticks to the rules and regulations. The latter, in this particular case, only allowed for the slaughter of cattle at the earth altar on one's own initiative during the New Year festival.<sup>180</sup> An edict issued by Ying Shao to curb excessive sacrifices to Liu Zhang 劉章 (King Jing of Chengyang 城陽景王), grandson of Gaozu, eloquently summarizes the issues at stake:

When I arrived here I heard about this custom. In the past it has given rise to many excessive sacrifices that waste resources and impede agricultural activity, fuel disorder and increase superstition. The extravagance of these cults is infuriating, their stupidity is pitiful. In the past Confucius did not

<sup>177</sup> *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu*, 1.84 ("Di kuang"), 2.171 ("Da kuang jie"). See also *Chunqiu Guliang zhuan*, 16.7a (Lord Xiang, year 24); *Liji jijie*, 23.627 ("Li qi").

<sup>178</sup> Burkert (1996), 140–1.

<sup>179</sup> *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu*, 1.32, 1.35, 1.38, 1.40 ("Ming xun" 命訓). See also Kleeman (1994), 194.

<sup>180</sup> *Han Feizi jishi*, 14.768–9 ("Wai chu shuo you, xia").

permit Zi Lu's prayers [for his recovery from illness] and Duke Dao 悼 of Jin did not exorcise the evil cult of Sanglin 桑林. Life and death each have their allotted fate, but good fortune and misfortune depend on man. How miserable are the black haired people that they should increasingly be deluded by superstition and errors. How can they be happy? [...] For his loyalty, righteousness and overflowing courage, it is proper according to ritual that [King Jing] should receive sacrificial offerings. But what to make of these carriages, this boiling and slaughtering, these male and female entertainers, and this promiscuous mingling of the sexes? We are tied in combat on three frontiers, our troops get old, and their weapons wear out. The court is postponing its banquets and the common people are in uproar. Rites flourish in times of plenty but are reduced in times of famine. From today onwards, it should be permissible only to have two sacrifices a year that involve an entire set of preparations, that's all.<sup>181</sup>

The edict then goes on to forbid the slaughter of oxen, and Ying Shao firmly pledges to put an end to local excesses.

A world in perfect order, the "Royal Regulations" recall, was one in which good years did not lead to extravagance in sacrifices while bad years would not lead to an overly drastic scaling-down in servicing the spirits.<sup>182</sup> Repeated condemnations of excessive cults throughout the Han, however, suggest that reality was often far removed from such ideals. The frugal past, according to some, stood in shrill contrast with the decadence of the present when personally acquired wealth enabled the rich to buy piety from the spirits beyond the normal charge:

In ancient times commoners offered sacrifices of fish and vegetables and cultivated their ancestral shrines in spring and autumn. Officers maintained one temple hall and grandees three. According to the appropriate times services were offered to the five household deities for indeed no sacrifices were made outdoors. Now however the rich pray to famous mountains, offer vista sacrifices (*wang* 望) to mountains and streams, knock cattle over the head and beat drums, and stage singers and pantomime actors. Those of average means have (sacrifices dedicated to) the Southern Lord (Nanjun 南君) and Roadblock Spirit (Danglu 當路), build cloud-reaching pavilions on the water, and butcher sheep and slaughter dogs while drumming their zithers and playing the pipes. The poor have chickens, pigs, and the five fragrances; and the provisions that sustain their well-being are wasted on the New Year festivities as they loiter around the altar space.<sup>183</sup>

<sup>181</sup> *Fengsu tongyi*, 9.395 ("Guai shen"). For the cult, see *Hou Hanshu*, 42.1451; *Hou Han ji*, 3.40–1. For its suppression by Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220 CE), see *Sanguo zhi* (*Wei shu*), 1.4n.1.

<sup>182</sup> *Liji jijie*, 13.339 ("Wang zhi").

<sup>183</sup> *Yantie lun jiaozhu*, 6.351–2 ("San bu zu"); emending 居 to 君 following Yang Shuda.

Objections against opulent spending on matters of ceremony repeated an age-old argument, namely that such spending undermined the general welfare of people and distracted them from their primary occupation of tilling the land. “Funerals and sacrifices that know no measure,” one Han critic remarked, “are a plague that harms the living.” Ritual expenditure drained away labor resources and stimulated craftsmen and merchants to engage in commerce at the cost of agricultural work.<sup>184</sup> Others claimed that, over and above the material expenditure they required, “illicit sacrifices” were an inefficient means to influence the spirits and should be remedied by reverting to canonical or orthodox ritual practices (*dian li* 典禮).<sup>185</sup> The conflicting interests between the sacrificial economy and the material welfare of society would continue to spark debate. So when Xun Yue 荀悅 (148–209 CE), writing at the end of the Eastern Han, advocated an economy of scale in sacrificial expenditure, he essentially rehearsed a sentiment that had traversed the agenda of ritual scholars and court critics for centuries:

If the affairs of the people are not yet settled and consequently the sacrificial services in the commanderies are deficient, that should not be an occasion for blame. If we must perform [our services to the spirits], we should give preference to the important ones, and offer sacrifices accordingly. As for the vista sacrifices to the five sacred peaks and four sacred streams, the offerings to these spirits in certain districts have become established and permanent. If now commanderies wish to perform these sacrifices, then the offerings should be economical. Ceremonial rites are meant to uphold what is fundamental and show the people that nothing is transgressed. Moreover they serve to exemplify what is established. Preparations for such offerings should be made in years of good harvest. As for the calamities sent down by sun and moon, these are different and not part of the established tradition.<sup>186</sup>

So those in early medieval times in need of rhetorical ammunition to condemn practices such as blood sacrifice could look back on plenty of documentary evidence to do so. Ge Hong 葛洪 (284–364 CE), to quote one example, condemns Qin and Han religious practices and the resources invested in them in unmistakable terms:

Formerly during the Qin and Han dynasties, there was widespread use of supplications and prayers for blessing. In the sacrifices to deities such as Taiyi 太乙[一] and the five spirits and Chen Bao 陳寶 and the eight spirits there was constant use of oxen, sheep, grain, and silk. The cost ran

<sup>184</sup> *Yantie lun jiaozhu*, 6.356 (“San bu zu”).

<sup>185</sup> See e.g. *Hou Hanshu*, 10A.422.

<sup>186</sup> *Shen jian*, 2.4b.

into millions but in the end the benefits amounted to nothing. How much more so in the case of those ordinary folk who, lacking in virtue and with bodies not nurtured, sought to prolong their years by means of sacrificial animals, libations, and imprecations directed to ghosts and spirits. It was utter delusion.<sup>187</sup>

In sum, feeding the spirits meant spending material resources on them and often involved entertaining the senses of ritual participants with lavish ceremonies. The need to provide for goods, objects, and human resources in the service of the spirits firmly placed sacrificial culture within the province of human economic endeavor. In Warring States and Han texts, discussions on how to legitimate ritual expenditure outweigh theoretical debates on the moral, theological, or philosophical values ritual was meant to embody. In a society where sacrifice lay at the heart of religious practice, devotional expression required an economic base and moral piety was therefore intricately linked to the material world.

Gaining influence over the spirit world consisted, first and foremost, in the negotiation of ceremony and the material goods needed to sustain it. It is this same paradoxical requirement of needing to demonstrate material generosity toward the spirit world on the one hand, and the knowledge that the desire to please the spirits through a sumptuous display of goods can undermine that virtue on the other hand, that runs as a thread through debates on sacrifice in early China. This tension between the obligation to materially accommodate the spirits on the one hand while preserving one's moral integrity on the other hand was another version of the ambiguous predicament of religious devotion highlighted in the previous chapter: namely, the obligation for the ritualist to service the spirit world through a sensory ritual arsenal rooted in the material world of humans, while at the same time having to claim authority by seeking to distance oneself from this world of goods and objects and transcend the world of mundane sensory desires and material values.

Xunzi's definition of ritual (*li* 禮) as "nourishment" (*yang* 養) illustrates how this world of religious practice in early China was conceived of as a discourse on the senses. In his "Treatise on Ritual," he refers to the impact of ritual paraphernalia on the human body. The performance of ritual is said to be a process in which one materially stimulates the human sensory organs and, by extension, the spirit world:

Thus ritual means "to nourish". The meat of pastured and grain-fed animals, rice and millet, and fragrant blends of the five flavors are the means by

<sup>187</sup> *Bao Puzi nei pian jiaoshi*, 14.256 ("Qin qiu" 勤求).



which one nourished the mouth. The fragrances of peppercorns and orchids are the means whereby one nourished the nose. Carved and polished [jade], incised and inlaid [metals] and [fabrics] embroidered with the white and black axe emblem, the azure and black notched-stripe, the azure and crimson stripe, the white and crimson blazon, are what nurture the eye. Bells and drums, flutes and chime-stones, lutes and zithers, reed pipes and reed organs are what nurture the ear. Spacious rooms, secluded chambers, mats of plaited rushes, couches and bed mats, armrests and cushions are what nurture the body.<sup>188</sup>

The fact that contact with the spirit world was to be established by means of physical and material media implied that these implements and the sensory conduits they facilitated were essentially seen as an integral part of the moral substrate of the participants involved. What was conceived of as moral could be material. Yet not everything material was necessarily moral. Just as there could be virtue in cooking and sacrificial fragrance, odors of overindulgence and decadence could emanate from the same source. Only the sage or virtuous ruler, as the final chapter will show, was able maintain a balance between such conflicting sensory paradigms.

<sup>188</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 13.346–7 (“Li lun”); tr. Knoblock, vol. 3, 55.

## 5



## Sages, Spirits, and Senses

In eating it is best not to fill up,  
In thinking, it is best not to overdo.<sup>1</sup>

Both the strategies aimed at conditioning the bodies and minds of ritual participants and the care invested in preparing and selecting the material apparatus and offerings for sacrifice drew on the idea that the sacrificial exchange facilitated access to the spirit world through sublimated modes of sensory perception that transcended normal everyday life. Preparatory acts such as purifying the body through diet or marking out the sacrificial space through olfactory, visual, and aural stimuli served to distinguish human agency during sacrifice from conduct in daily life. Similarly, offerings and implements used in sacrifice were set apart from daily usage, and often their selection was dictated by taboos and requirements specific to the ritual occasion. At the end of a ritual cycle, some offerings or parts thereof could transform back into edibles for human consumption during sacrificial banquets or feasts.

The efficacy of sacrificial ritual in early China was thought to depend largely on the degree to which the ritualist was able to tap into the right sensory channels through fragrance, sound, color, flavor, and orchestrated movement and dance. Although firmly anchored in the physical world, the powers generated by sensory stimuli through sacrifice were transgressive in that they both provided ephemeral contact with the spirit world and transformed the body and sensory engagement of the human participant(s). The sacrificial act embodied a transient stage between the realms of the empirical and nonempirical, between a world of fully sensed physicality and that of sensory partiality, abstraction, and imagination. Fragrance, flavor, and scent become progressively detectable as they are released through burning,

<sup>1</sup> *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 16.945 (“*Nei ye*”); tr. Roth (1999), 84.

cooking, or gustation. Yet olfaction, aural, and visual stimuli during ritual sacrifice also remained volatile, unpredictable, and subject to interpretation by ritual agents.

The fact that the elements exposed to the sensorium of humans and spirits during sacrificial procedures were often transitory and intangible, or invisible and uncontainable in nature, meant that ritual authority partly derived from the mastery of superior forms of sensation. Since sensory stimuli were at once present and discernable while at the same time remaining elusive and unfixed, ritual power and authority hinged on one's ability to sense what was beyond normal human sensation, or, put differently, to sense what is senseless.

As we have seen in previous chapters, this ability to forge superior sensory impulses out of seemingly bland and un-"sensational" media was a central theme in Warring States and Han narratives on cooking and sacrifice, from Yi Yin's "perfect tastes" to the raw offerings, sacrificial water, or tasteless stew in the ritual codes. Yet such sensory ideologies were not limited to the world of cooking and sacrifice. They were also instrumental in shaping models of human sagehood and in the portrayal of enlightened rulers and individuals with extraordinary knack and talent, who distinguished themselves from ordinary mortals through extraordinary faculties of sensation.

An advanced sensory disposition formed part of the general type casting of sagehood and skill in early China. It was also reflected in the manner in which men of superior insight or special talent were to conduct themselves in a ritual setting, in the types of clothing and ritual paraphernalia they were to use, and in the demeanor and capabilities of the personnel that assisted them in the performance of ritual ceremonies. At the heart of the association of human sagehood with extraordinary faculties of sensation was the premise that, ultimately, sensory stimuli conveyed moral meaning. Sages sensed the world beyond ordinary human sensation much as invisible spirits sensed the essence of offerings at a level that transcended their appreciation by those who presented and consumed them in sacrifice.

#### OLFACTION

A first group of sensory stimuli that receives ample comment in relation to sagehood is smell and flavor. Olfactory and gustatory experience in ritual can influence the formulation of religious knowledge. In early Christianity, as Susan Harvey has shown, the use of incense, holy oil, and olfactory metaphors to describe the divine "allowed Christians to draw on shared cultural codes by which olfactory experience marked a moral cosmology as much as it marked religious ceremony." Early Christians in late antiquity inherited a

world deeply steeped in the universe of Greco-Roman sacrificial religion.<sup>2</sup> The religious significance of scent gradually became removed from its original sacrificial context and served as an epistemological claim about the spirit world itself. Olfaction, Harvey continues, came to signify access to and knowledge of the divine order itself:

Ritual substances bridged across the divide, transferring qualities from the divine to the human as seamlessly as odors are transferred and absorbed by mere proximity. . . . Scents blurred the boundaries between ritual and natural space, between liturgical and mundane practice, between human and divine domains.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise in early China, olfactory metaphors were widely used to express moral judgment and contact with the spirit realm. Good government and proper human conduct were described in terms of fortuitous fragrances wafting up to the spirit world or invoked with imagery of beneficial winds and airs transforming the nature of the human and nonhuman world. As we saw in the treatment of alcohol in texts such as the “Pronouncement on Alcohol,” moral decay, strategic failure, political ineptitude, and social perversion were equated with foul and putrid influences, the stench of which would disgust both the spirit world and human society. Good things appeared fragrant whereas bad morals and dysfunctional governments caused bad smells. Olfactory and sensory metaphors also served to denote the other, be it foreign lands, foreign people, or nonhuman species and spirits.<sup>4</sup>

In the “Lü xing” 呂刑 (Punishments of Lü), an early Spring and Autumn chapter preserved in the New Text *Shangshu*, the ancients’ exaggerated reliance on cruel punishments is condemned with an olfactory metaphor: “Shangdi surveyed the people but there was no fragrant virtue (emerging from them), the odor coming forth from their punishments being nothing but putrid.”<sup>5</sup> In another chapter, the merits of the government associated with the Duke of Zhou are compared to piercing fragrances that stir the spirit world in sacrifice:

I have heard that perfect order/government (*zhi zhi* 至治) is like a wafting fragrance that moves the spirit luminescences. It is not the case that

<sup>2</sup> On the continued importance of animal sacrifice in Greek religion and Judaism after the appearance of Christianity, see Petropoulou (2008), 48–106, 137–206, 225–84.

<sup>3</sup> Harvey (2006), 24, 55, 65, 72, 89.

<sup>4</sup> On olfactory codes as a means of social classification and metaphor for “otherness,” see Classen (1993), esp. 79–105; and Corbin (1986).

<sup>5</sup> *Shangshu jin gu wen zhushu*, 27.523 (“Lü xing”). Note that references to the reverberating sound of virtue and to spirits appreciating fragrance are stock expressions in Eastern Han stelae. See, e.g., *Li shi*, 2.1a–3a (“Xi yue Huashan miao bei” 西岳華山廟碑); cf. Gao Wen (1997), 269–71.

the grains and millet produce the fragrance, only bright virtue brings forth fragrance.<sup>6</sup>

Scent as a conduit for contact with the spirit world is a recurring theme in sacrificial liturgy, ritual song, and temple hymns. Several pieces preserved in the *Shijing* play on the aromatics of the divine and describe how scented offerings are appreciated by ancestors and other spirits. In “Chu ci” (Thorny Caltrop), the invocator, on behalf of the spirits, congratulates the representative of the dead for having made offerings that are fragrant and aromatic (*bi fen* 苾芬).<sup>7</sup> The final stanza of “Xin nan shan” 信南山 (Truly, the Southern Hills) ends:

So we present, so we offer;  
fragrance and aroma are all around (*bi bi fen fen* 苾苾芬芬).  
Complete and brilliant were the offering services.  
August, indeed, are our ancestors.  
They will reward [their descendants] with great blessings,  
and with unending longevity.<sup>8</sup>

In “Sheng min” 生民 (Birth to the People), an ode that praises Houji 后稷 (Lord Millet) for initiating agricultural sacrifices, the concluding stanza again invokes the pervasive influence of sacrificial scent on the spirit world:

High we load the wooden stands,  
Wooden trenchers and earthenware platters.  
As soon as the fragrance rises  
Shangdi is at peace and pleased:  
This far-reaching scent is strong and good.<sup>9</sup>

In “Zai shan” 載芟 (Clearing the Grass), a song that possibly describes a thanksgiving ceremony following agricultural labor, the essence of perfect sacrificial offerings is identified with fragrance: “When there are aromas so fragrant, glorious will be our state. When pungent like pepper the scent, our ancestors will be at rest.”<sup>10</sup> Likewise “fragrant” (*xing* 馨) and “savory” (*fen fen* 芬芬) are desirable qualities associated with sacrificial viands in “Fu yi” 鳧鷖 (Wild Duck).<sup>11</sup> Throughout the Odes, the ritualist’s potential to secure sensory contact with the spirit world appears to be generally acknowledged. Yet the ultimate power, Heaven, so the ode entitled “Wen wang” 文王 (King Wen)

<sup>6</sup> *Shangshu zhengyi*, 18.10b–11a (“Jun Chen”).

<sup>7</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi*, 13B.12a (“Chu ci”; Mao 209).

<sup>8</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi*, 13B.22b (“Xin nan shan”; Mao 210).

<sup>9</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi*, 17A.19b (“Sheng min”; Mao 245).

<sup>10</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi*, 19D.8a (“Zai shan”; Mao 290); tr. Waley (1996), 304.

<sup>11</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi*, 17B.16a, 17B.20b (Mao 248).

concludes, remains unfathomable and shows its ways by means that transcend the human sensorium. And hence the Zhou people are urged on in the poem to emulate tangible exemplars such as King Wen instead: “The workings of High Heaven operate without sound (*sheng* 聲) and without smell (*chou* 臭). Model yourself on King Wen, and the myriad regions will confide in you.”<sup>12</sup>

Nowhere is the image of scent and fragrance as a conduit to the divine more articulated than in the poems preserved in the *Chuci*. The fragrant herbarium of the *Chuci* inspired the Southern Song poet Xie Ao 謝翱 (1249–1295) to compile a *Chuci fang cao pu* 楚辭芳草譜 (Table of Fragrant Herbs in the *Chuci*).<sup>13</sup> Wang Chong goes as far as to metaphorically link the poet Qu Yuan’s 屈原 predilection for fragrant words to his predicament in the swampy and unpleasant south: “Qu Yuan felt sick from the stench and filth of Chu, and therefore he composed lines on fragrance and purity.”<sup>14</sup>

The interplay of olfactory impulses together with aural and visual display in sacrificial ritual is borne out in detail in “Dong Huang Taiyi” 東皇太一 (Grand Unity, Spirit of the Eastern Sky), a piece among the *Jiu ge* 九歌 (Nine Songs) that describes a ceremony addressed to a deity, possibly Taiyi:

On a lucky day with an auspicious name  
 Reverently we come to delight the Lord on High.  
 We grasp the long sword’s haft of jade,  
 And our girdle pendants clash and chime.  
 From the god’s jewelled mat with treasures laden  
 Take up the fragrant flower-offerings,  
 The meats cooked in melilotus, served on orchid mats,  
 And libations of cinnamon wine and pepper sauces!  
 Flourish the drumsticks, beat the drums!  
 The singing begins softly to a slow, solemn measure:  
 Then, as pipes and zithers join in, the sound grows shriller.  
 Now the priestesses come, splendid in their gorgeous apparel,  
 And the hall is filled with a penetrating fragrance.  
 The five notes mingle in rich harmony;  
 And the god is merry and takes his pleasure.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi*, 16A.14a (“Wen wang”; Mao 235).

<sup>13</sup> *Chuci fang cao pu* is transmitted in one scroll in Tao Zongyi’s 陶宗儀 (fl. 1360–1368) *Shuofu* 說郛 (oldest block print dated to 1646).

<sup>14</sup> *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 14.638 (“Qian gao” 讞告).

<sup>15</sup> *Chuci jin zhu*, 43; tr. Hawkes (1985), 102. Hawkes suggests that the Nine Songs (in reality totaling eleven pieces) were written at the Chu court in Shouchun 壽春 ca. 243–223 BCE, and may have been revived and re-edited by Liu An 劉安 (?179–122 BCE). See Hawkes (1985), 98–9. Wen Yiduo and others have suggested to set this piece and the last one in the series apart from the others because the latter do not describe sacrifice. For the state of the field see Lewis (1999a), 184–5; and Lan Jiayun and Chen Xuguo (2006).



In this piece, the spirit world is enchanted by the synaesthetic effect of scent, visual display, and sound created by ritual paraphernalia, the officiants' clothing, and the performance of music. The ritualized space in which a spirit response is to be induced is a hall full of fragrance and sounds wafting up to the invisible world of the spirit addressed. Fumes, sounds, and scents break down the perceived distance between the ritual participants and the spirit world, which is invited to manifest itself temporarily in the presence of the human supplicants. Similar imagery pervades several of the later hymns associated with the suburban sacrifices dateable to the Han Wudi era. There fat and artemisia are burnt, and fragrant sacrificial grains and aromatic wines are laid out to welcome the spirits. Sweet wine is used to cleanse the sacrificial victim while the altar is rubbed with a mixture of aromatic ash-tree bark and epidendrum.<sup>16</sup>

The remaining poems in the *Jiu ge*, except the last hymn in the series, do not explicitly deal with sacrifice, yet several among them continue to associate the appearance of spirits with fragrance or portray fragrance as an expedient channel to the divine. Throughout the *Jiu ge*, reference is made to more than twenty types of herbs and trees, and more than forty lines contain herbal and floral imagery focused on scent.<sup>17</sup> In “Yun zhong jun” 雲中君 (The Lord within the Clouds), the worshippers purify themselves with fragrant water, “hav[ing] bathed in orchid water and washed our hair with perfumes, and dressed ourselves like flowers in embroidered clothing ...”<sup>18</sup> In “Xiang jun” 湘君 (Goddess of the Xiang), the poet is frustrated with his inability to “waft his magic” (*yang ling* 揚靈) over to the goddess: “pollia I’ve plucked in the scent-laden islet to give to the lady in the depths below.”<sup>19</sup> In “Xiang furen” 湘夫人 (Lady of the Xiang), “perfumed pepper shall make the hall,” “a thousand sweet flowers shall fill the courtyard, and the rarest perfumes shall fill the gates.”<sup>20</sup> In “Shao siming” 少司命 (The Lesser Master of Fate), “the leaves of green and the pure white flowers assail me with their wafted fragrance.” The poem finishes with an address to the deity: “You only, Fragrant One (*quan* 荃), are worthy to be judge over men.”<sup>21</sup> In “Shan gui” 山鬼 (Mountain

<sup>16</sup> *Hanshu*, 22.1052, 1063, 1067; *Yuefu shi ji*, 1.3, 1.7, 1.8; for detailed annotated translations of these hymns see Kern (1997), 186–284.

<sup>17</sup> Following the figures given in Xiong Liangzhi (2002), 82–3.

<sup>18</sup> *Chuci jin zhu*, 46; tr. Hawkes (1985), 103. In a dream revealed to a concubine of Duke Wen of Zheng (d. 606 BCE) in the *Zuozhuan*, the orchid/peony (*lan* 蘭) is identified as the most fragrant scent in the state of Zheng (its *guo xiang* 國香 “fragrance of the realm”), following which the heir to the throne born from her is named Lan after the flower. See *Zuozhuan*, 673 (Duke Xuan, year 3).

<sup>19</sup> *Chuci jin zhu*, 48; tr. Hawkes (1985), 107.

<sup>20</sup> *Chuci jin zhu*, 53–4; tr. Hawkes (1985), 108–9.

<sup>21</sup> *Chuci jin zhu*, 62; tr. Hawkes (1985), 111–12.

Spirit), the goddess “gathers sweet scents to give to one she loves.” And further, “the lady of the mountains is fragrant with pollia.”<sup>22</sup>

Fragrance not only appears as a property of offerings in the ritual arsenal that might enchant the spirit world; it is also directly associated with exemplary conduct, sagehood, and sage speech. Thus roaming together with a virtuous gentleman, the *Da Dai Liji* notes, sparks a fragrant atmosphere as if one enters a room full of orchids and irises. If after a while one no longer senses this special air, it means that one has transformed oneself with him. Reversely, a petty person is surrounded by a stench of dejected materiality as if one enters a fish shop.<sup>23</sup> A link between sagehood, harmonious speech, and fragrance is also made in the *Xici zhuan* 繫辭傳 (Great Treatise), which plays on the idea that words and feelings experienced in unison are aired with a fragrance:

The Master said:  
As for the Way of the gentleman  
Sometimes he goes out in public  
At other times he dwells in private.  
Sometimes he is silent,  
Sometimes he acts through speech  
When two persons are one in heart  
They have an edge that cuts through metal.  
The words of people who are agreed in heart  
Are fragrant like orchids.<sup>24</sup>

This use of the virtue metaphor in terms of a sensory display to characterize the sage echoes the relationship between character and outward appearance one finds in descriptions of rulers and noblemen in texts such as the *Zuozhuan* and in prescriptive guidelines on ritual procedure. One remonstrance in the *Zuozhuan* links the ritual authority of a ruler with the objects he displays and their sensory effects. Ritual paraphernalia here exteriorize the inner gravitas of the person and manifest the perceived order that underlies his activities:

Therefore the Great Ancestral Temple has a thatched roof, the grand chariot has mats made from rushes, the great sacrificial stew is unseasoned, and the sacrificial grains are not ground: these measures manifest a ruler's frugality. The ceremonial robes, cap, apron, and jade tablet; the belt, skirt, leg coverings, and double-layered shoes; the hat-pin, ear-plug cords, hat string and cap board, these display his sense for proper standards. The platter for

<sup>22</sup> *Chuci jin zhu*, 71; tr. Hawkes (1985), 115–16.

<sup>23</sup> *Da Dai Liji jiegou*, 5.97 (“Zengzi ji bing” 曾子疾病). For an interesting parallel in early Christianity, where sages and saints were said to be emitting an “odor of sanctity,” see Classen et al (1994), 52–4.

<sup>24</sup> *Zhouyi zhengyi*, 7.18a (“Xici, shang”).

offering jades, scarf, sheath, and knife-handle decorations; the leather belt, tassels, pennant streams, and bridle; these manifest his sense of hierarchy. The patterns with flames, dragons, black and white axes, and waving blue and black; these manifest his sense for proper patterning. The five colors matched the depictions of natural phenomena: these manifest his grasp of the appearance of things. The bells on the horses' foreheads, on chariots, on carriage poles, and on banners: these manifest his sense of sound/reputation. The three heavenly bodies that decorate his flags display his brilliance.<sup>25</sup>

Here the ruler's desired inner qualities are condensed in external material symbolisms, his character and sense of judgment is manifested outwardly through the ritual display of clothes and paraphernalia that encompass all sensory stimuli. Human character is displayed in a decorative maze to be decoded by the observer.

Therefore, sacrificial scent and sound could reflect virtue and reputation. In a chapter entitled "Yao shou" 夭壽 (On Premature Death and Longevity), Xu Gan 徐幹 (170–217 CE) argues that it is not physical longevity but rather virtuous conduct during one's lifetime that ultimately ensures someone's reputation, in the same way that sound and fragrance result from the mechanical act of playing musical bells and cooking sacrificial offerings:

It is by hitting the bell and striking chimes that one produces sounds with them, and it is by boiling sacrificial wine and burning incense that one spreads one's fragrances. The hardship and humiliation suffered by a man of worth matches the meaning of "hitting and striking"; his death and downfall accord with the category of "burning and boiling".<sup>26</sup>

Virtue and reputation are put on a par with sounds and fragrances as they are forged out of the materiality of bells and offerings during ritual sacrifice.

#### SEEING AND HEARING

If fragrance provided a conduit to spirit power and a medium that radiated virtue and sagacity, visual and aural acuity constituted another faculty in the

<sup>25</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 86–9 (Lord Huan, year 2). The remonstrance is delivered by Lu official Zang Aibo 臧哀伯 (Zangsun Da 臧孫達, d. ca. 680) to Duke Huan (r. 711–694 BCE) who had committed the ritual impropriety of displaying cauldrons offered as a bribe by Song in the royal ancestral temple of Lu. Cf. Schaberg (2001), 62; Pines (2002), 93; and Li Wai-yee (2007), 111–12, who comments: "One feels increasingly that the surface *is* the meaning, because at issue is not so much the character of the ruler but the effect of his displayed person and demeanor." For the use of colored garments, caps, and jade ornaments in ritual as a way to sound one's presence, see also *Zhong lun*, ch. 2, p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> *Zhong lun*, ch. 14, p.191.

sensorium that characterized human sages. Sages and virtuous rulers were endowed with a refined sense of vision and hearing that set them apart from ordinary mortals. The spirit world too was both susceptible to and capable of commanding extraordinary powers of vision and hearing.<sup>27</sup> Not infrequently sages and enlightened rulers are said to operate as extended sense organs of the spirit world, an idea we also encountered in the context of the food sacrifice, where the ritualist communicates with the spirit world through refined and tasteless offerings that transcend the world of ordinary sensation.

The endowment of sage-rulers with superlative visual and aural qualities was embedded in narratives describing the origins of political rule. At least as early as the 4th century BCE, the astute management of the human senses is explicitly linked to the exercise of political power. This link between the ruler's senses and society operated in two directions. On the one hand, as we have seen, the sensory apparatus of the ruler was to be cultivated in an appropriate manner to strengthen and preserve his physical and psychological potential to command. On the other hand, because he acted as the exemplary sensory organ of society at large, the good ruler was to avoid the pursuit of individual sensory pleasures at the expense of his subjects and, more importantly, was to refrain from overexposing himself or his subjects to sensory desire and temptation.<sup>28</sup> The moral physiology underlying this principle is illustrated in a passage in the *Guoyu*. Here a music master remonstrates against the casting of a large bell, arguing that its disproportionate size would cause his king to die from a disease of the heart. The efficiency of musical sound is explained as follows:

The ear and eye are the axis and pivot of the heart; therefore they necessarily listen to what is harmonious (*he* 和) and observe what is correct (*zheng* 正). When one is able to listen to what is harmonious then intelligent perception (*cong* 聰) will emerge; when one is able to observe what is correct then clairvoyance (*ming* 明) will emerge. When one is intelligent then one's words will be complied with; when one is clairvoyant one's virtue will radiate. When words are complied with and virtue radiates one is able to concentrate on what is fine and stable. When one can enforce one's virtue upon the people through language, then the people will appreciate this and return virtue

<sup>27</sup> For spirits "hearing" or "listening," see, e.g., *Mao shi zhengyi*, 9C.2a ("Fa mu"; Mao 165), 13A.25a ("Xiao Ming" 小明; Mao 207); cf. *Zuozhuan*, 952 (Lord Xiang, year 7), *Xunzi jijie*, 1.3 ("Quan xue"), *Liji jijie*, 51.1313 ("Biao ji"), *Huainanzi*, 20.665 ("Tai zu").

<sup>28</sup> One way in which the link between sensory perception and moral character was explained was the claim that the eyes and ears are in charge of the heart-mind. See, e.g., *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu*, 3.326 ("Wu shun jie" 武順解). Hence excess or exposure to illicit sound can corrupt the ruler's heart and his people. See *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 3.201 ("Wu fu" 五輔).

(to the ruler), thereby demonstrating their allegiance to his heart. . . . Thus the ear takes in harmonious sounds and the mouth emits beautiful words in order to issue commands and spread these among the people. If one rectifies these to the right proportion then the people will use the force of their hearts and follow the ruler without tarrying. When they are unfaltering in their accomplishment of affairs, this is the highest accomplishment of music. The mouth takes in flavors and the ears absorb sounds, sounds and flavors generate *qi*.<sup>29</sup> When *qi* is located in the mouth it forms words; when located in the eyes, it forms clarity of perception. Words serve to examine names (commands); clarity of perception serves to adjust oneself to the seasonal movements. Names serve to accomplish government, (eye) movement serves to fructify the growing of things. The accomplishment of government and the fructification of things are the highest accomplishments of music. *If one's seeing and hearing are not in harmony and one is shaken with confused vision, then flavors that enter are not refined; not being refined there will be a depletion of qi, and when there is a depletion of qi, there will be no harmony.* Next there will follow mad and perverse language and a visual perception that is dizzy and deluded . . .<sup>30</sup>

Advanced aural (*cong* 聰) and visual (*ming* 明) alertness here form the basis that enables the ruler's physical body to become properly "politic." Clairvoyance, as Henri Maspero once pointed out, is not only a question of intelligence but entails a form of spiritual intuition.<sup>31</sup> The dynamic is one in which the sage-ruler first internalizes external stimuli through sound, vision, flavor, and ultimately *qi*, following which he will in turn be able to externalize and radiate his virtuous judgment in society. This association of human sagacity with the possession of a subtle hearing faculty is also reflected in the occurrence of the term *sheng*/*\*hjen* 聲 ("sound," "reputation," "aura") as a paronomastic gloss for the graph *sheng*/*\*lhjenh* 聖 "human sage."<sup>32</sup>

Several passages in the later *Shangshu* chapters play on the visual and aural interplay between Heaven and the ruler. The "Gao Yao mo" 皋陶謨 (Council of Gao Yao) notes that Heaven possesses the powers of acuity and clairvoyance (*cong ming* 聰明).<sup>33</sup> In "Zhong Hui zhi gao" 仲虺之誥 (The Announcement of Zhong Hui), Heaven gives birth to rulers of enlightened

<sup>29</sup> The commentator Wei Zhao notes that the five flavors and five sounds ensure that one's "purposeful energies" (*zhi qi* 志氣) are produced.

<sup>30</sup> *Guoyu*, 3.125 ("Zhou yu, xia") [my italics]. See also *Zuozhuan*, 1423–4 (Lord Zhao, year 21).

<sup>31</sup> Maspero (1933).

<sup>32</sup> See *Fengsu tongyi*, 415 ("Yi wen"); *Bohutong shu zheng*, 7.334. Rao Zongyi speculates that the graph 聖 may be etymologically related to 聰 in Shang oracle bone script. See his foreword to Ching and Guiso (1991), xiii. On the role of music and its influence in the governance of the natural world, see Sterckx (2000).

<sup>33</sup> *Jinwen Shangshu kaozheng*, 2.102.

perception (*cong ming*) and charges them to guide the masses who would otherwise merely act on their inborn desires.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, in “Tai shi” 泰誓 (The Great Declaration), the intelligent (*cong*) and perspicacious (*ming*) among men are said to become rulers.<sup>35</sup> In “Yue ming” 說命 (The Charge to Yue), the sage king is admonished to model himself on Heaven that in turn is said to be intelligent (*cong*) and omnivoyant (*ming*).<sup>36</sup> In these passages, rulers act as sensory extensions of Heaven, with eyes and ears serving as organs/officials that mediate impulses from the outside world. “Be my legs and arms, my heart and backbone,” King Mu 穆 (r. 956–918 BCE) urges on his minister.<sup>37</sup> “Avoid flatterers to fill the offices of my ears and eyes (*er mu zhi guan* 耳目之官),” he instructs another.<sup>38</sup> To no great surprise, we find cook-minister Yi Yin advising Tai Jia 太甲 to be perspicuous (*ming*) in looking at what is distant and perceptive (*cong*) when listening to virtue.<sup>39</sup> Just as he mastered the essence of flavor, in the figure of Yi Yin, the synaesthetic powers of aural acuity and visual perception come together, each faculty embodying more than mere intelligence.

Hence, just as the sage tastes what is flavorless, his acuity reaches beyond what is normally audible, including the realm of silence. Like flavorless offerings, supreme music, according to the *Da Dai Liji*, “does not have sound yet all people under heaven are in harmony.”<sup>40</sup> Thus cultivating a diet that avoids excess enables the eyes and ears to be perceptive and highly observant.

While insisting on the need for a material and physical basis that facilitates political, social or intellectual authority, most Warring States masters of philosophy were also acutely aware of the inherent conflict posed by the demands of material necessity versus moral propriety. And so the tension between, on the one hand, possessing superior sensory powers that open up to process the external world, while, on the other hand, the need to refrain from either over-exercising or blocking off external stimuli that cloud the inner self, crops up in most discussions of sagehood. The *Zhuangzi* comments extensively on the illusionary nature of external sensory stimuli and argues that keen sensory

<sup>34</sup> *Shangshu zhengyi*, 8.6b (“Zhong Hui zhi gao”).

<sup>35</sup> *Shangshu zhengyi*, 11.4a (“Tai shi, shang”).

<sup>36</sup> *Shangshu zhengyi*, 10.4b (“Yue ming, zhong”).

<sup>37</sup> *Shangshu zhengyi*, 19.11b (“Jun Ya” 君牙). For a similar expression, see *Shangshu zhengyi*, 5.4b (“Yi Ji” 益稷); *Kong Congzi*, 1.17–18 (“Ji yi” 記義).

<sup>38</sup> *Shangshu zhengyi*, 19.15b (“Jiong ming” 罔命).

<sup>39</sup> *Shangshu zhengyi*, 8.22b (“Tai Jia, zhong”).

<sup>40</sup> *Da Dai Liji jiegou*, 1.7 (“Zhu yan” 主言). For similar passages, see, e.g., *Shuoyuan*, 16.397–8 (“Tan cong”); *Deng Xizi*, 1.13 (“Wu hou” 無厚). On the power of silence, the *Han shi wai-zhuan*, 1.24 (I.23), notes: “The sound that has sound does not go beyond one hundred li; the sound without sound extends to reach the four seas.”



perception lies in sensing the self: flavors, odors, colors, and sounds cause the loss of one's original nature.<sup>41</sup> *Laozi* 47 speaks of the sage knowing the universe and Heaven's Dao without having to step through the door or stare through a window. The sage names things without seeing them. The received *Wenzi* 文子 proposes that different levels of knowledge can be obtained depending on the organ that acts as the seat of perception: Listening or hearing with one's spirit (*shen ting* 神聽) is superior to hearing with the heart (*xin ting* 心聽), which in turn is superior to hearing with the ears (*er ting* 耳聽).<sup>42</sup> Through aligning his body and tranquilizing his "blood and *qi*," like the "Nei ye" 內業 (Inner Workings) prescribes, the sage avoids overstimulating his eyes and ears. That way, what is distant will appear close at hand to him. The sage keeps a balance between overfilling the body with food and overrestricting its consumption to enable vital essences to lodge themselves in the body.<sup>43</sup> Perched at the center in a state of contemplative quiescence, the perspicacious ruler does not simply rely on his personal and immediate senses, but sees and hears with the eyes and ears of the entire world.<sup>44</sup> These characterizations of the ruler's sensorium and its implications for ruling the world formed a subject of debate far beyond the proto-Daoist texts quoted so far. As the next section will show, the topic lies at the heart of portrayals of sagehood in texts such as the *Xunzi*, *Lüshi chunqiu*, and *Han Feizi*.

#### SENSORY SYNTHESIS

In a moral cosmology that located the ruler or sage at the heart of the cosmos, the power to absorb the world converged in the microcosm of the ruler's body and its sensory apparatus. Nowhere is this theme explored with more detail than in the *Xunzi* and *Lüshi chunqiu*. We turn to *Xunzi* first.

Emphasizing the need to curb humans' innate tendency to satisfy one's desires through ritual and education, *Xunzi* is forced on more than one occasion to comment on the workings of the senses and their relationship to

<sup>41</sup> *Zhuangzi jishi*, 8.327, 12.453 ("Tian di"). For an alternative treatment, see Geaney (2002), 153–73, and Graziani (2006), 295–311.

<sup>42</sup> *Wenzi*, 5.218 ("Dao de" 道德). Further down in the text, in a few lines that have also been preserved in the Dingxian *Wenzi* (excavated in 1973), the text claims that knowledge obtained through these different ways of hearing is graded and located in the body: Listening with the ears leads to learning that remains limited to the level of the skin; those who listen with the heart produce learning that is lodged at the level of the tendons and flesh; and listening with the spirit generates learning that is most integrated and therefore resides in the bone marrow. For a reconstruction of the Dingxian fragments against the received version of chapter 5, see Leblanc (2000), 18 (lines 012–014).

<sup>43</sup> *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 16.943, 16.947–8 ("Nei ye"); cf. Roth (1999), 82, 90.

<sup>44</sup> *Huainanzi*, 9.293, 298 ("Zhu shu")

moral government. Xunzi argues that the choice to give in to sensory desires ought to depend on social conditions. This extrapolation of sensory perception to social theory occurs in several passages. Although acknowledging that satisfying the senses is part of man's inborn nature, Xunzi insists that sensory fulfillment should only be permitted when the state is secure. If not, for a ruler to indulge his senses merely amounts to "loving sounds and colors without having eyes or ears":

It is the essential nature of man that his eyes desire the most intense of colors, his ears the richest of sounds, his mouth the most intense of flavors, his nose the richest of aromas, and his heart-mind the fullest relaxation and repose. Desiring these "Five Limits of Intensity" (*wu qi zhe* 五綦者) is something the essential nature of man cannot escape.<sup>45</sup>

Yet social conditions need to be met before the sage-ruler can find full pleasure in sensory satisfaction. His organs are only capable to "sense" to the fullest when the state is well ordered. In other words, sensory pleasure – one of the formative elements that feed human emotion – is conditioned by a social substrate.<sup>46</sup> The sage-ruler should only be permitted to entertain his sensory apparatus to its full potential when the body politic is healthy.

Paradoxically, one essential stratagem to establish social order consists of catering to one's subjects' senses. And so Xunzi's sage-ruler is to desist from gratifying his own sense organs in order to facilitate some sensory pleasures among his people. In order to be seen, the sage-ruler ought to avoid feasting his own eyes, in order to be heard he should abstain from entertaining his own ears, in order to be fed he needs to feed others. In one of several tirades against the Mohist advocacy of frugality, Xunzi submits that the satisfaction of basic desires creates the conditions for social hierarchy. The argument refutes the sort of claims made in one of the *Mozi* core chapters, which holds that the sages of old would cut out all gustatory luxuries other than those that facilitate basic physical competence:

The sage kings of antiquity devised a model for food and drink that stipulated: "If you have enough to fill an empty stomach, maintain your *qi*, strengthen legs and arms, and sharpen your ears and eyes, you should stop."<sup>47</sup>

Yet even beneath the arguments of the minimalist Mohists, the association of physical nourishment with sensory perception is never far away. A passage in

<sup>45</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 11.211 ("Wang zhi"); tr. Knoblock, vol. 2, 156 (modified).

<sup>46</sup> The same idea is reiterated in *Xunzi jijie*, 12. 246 ("Jun dao"), which states that a ruler needs to be able to identify talented ministers, if not he would "preclude enjoyment of the pleasures of the eye and ear."

<sup>47</sup> *Mozi jiangou*, 6.164 ("Jie yong, zhong").

one of the dialog chapters underscores the link by comparing Yi Yin's role in sharpening his ruler's perception to that of administering medicine. When King Tang is challenged about his intention to go and find his inferior servant in person (rather than issue a summons to him), he rebuts:

This is not something you can understand. Now here is some medicine. If it is the case that, upon eating it, the ears will be sharpened and eyes will be brightened, then I would inevitably be pleased to be forced to eat some. Now to my state Yi Yin is like a good physician and an effective medicine. Yet you do not wish that I go see him, which means that you don't want to see me become good.<sup>48</sup>

Contrary to Mohist minimalism, Xunzi proposes that people are to be provided with "the meat of pastured and farmed animals, with rice and millet, with the five flavors, and with aromas and bouquets" to ensure that they remain adequate at their tasks.<sup>49</sup> Fulfilling these sensory desires, Xunzi argues, ensures that a ruler is sought after by his people. Hence for the ruler to be able to give rein to his own senses (and ultimately to communicate with Heaven through ritual), it is crucial that his subordinates be provided with the material tools (food, clothes, music, objects of physical beauty) that stimulate the senses. And so it is not wholesale abstention from worldly desire but rather the creation of a modicum of sensory abundance that creates the foundation for the establishment of social distinction and hierarchy.<sup>50</sup> Frugality not only turns people into paupers; it also strips rulers of their potential to "sense" accurately what is going on in society.

Xunzi ends his attack on the Mohist advocacy for frugality by quoting a sacrificial hymn from the Zhou cycle in the *Shijing* ("Zhi jing" 執競, Mao 274). The invocation of a sacrificial hymn is not coincidental considering that, as was shown earlier, many such hymns laud the sensual display of food, drink, and fragrance offered to the spirits. The reference to sacrifice then serves to reinforce Xunzi's moral argument in favor of the organization of society by means of sensory display. For if generations of people have enticed the spirit world through the display of sound, color, and fragrance in sacrificial rites, then rulers ought to be commended for making a similar gesture to their human subjects. Recall that Xunzi defined ritual itself as an act of "feeding"

<sup>48</sup> *Mozi jiangou*, 12.441–2 ("Gui yi").

<sup>49</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 10.186 ("Fu guo" 富國); tr. Knoblock, vol. 2, 129.

<sup>50</sup> The same idea occurs in *Xunzi jijie*, 12.238 ("Jun dao"); tr. Knoblock, vol. 2, 183: "Now as to the multiplication of colors to perfect patterns and decorations, and the augmentation of flavors to provide rare and precious delicacies, these were made possible by abundance."

or “nurturing,” thereby emphasizing that sensory pleasure is a necessary condition for ritual principles to emerge.<sup>51</sup>

In his description of ritual nourishment, Xunzi includes the body (*ti* 體) as a sensory organ on a par with the eyes, ears, mouth, and nose. This inclusion of the body as a sense organ recurs throughout the text. Usually physical leisure and relaxation are the corresponding sensory impulses the body seeks:

... one must also consider that it is the essential nature of man that the eye does not desire the full range of colors (*qi se* 綦色), the ear does not desire the full range of sounds (*qi sheng* 綦聲), the mouth does not desire the full range of tastes (*qi wei* 綦味), the nose does not desire the full range of smells (*qi chou* 綦臭), and the body (*xing* 形) does not desire the full range of leisure.<sup>52</sup> In regard to these “five full sensory ranges” (*wu qi zhe* 五綦者) can it indeed also be considered that the essential nature of man is such that these (extreme sensations) are not desired?<sup>53</sup>

The inclusion of the body as a sense organ also occurs in a passage arguing for the need to regulate one’s natural desires. In addition, Xunzi introduces the heart-mind (*xin* 心) as an organ with intentions naturally oriented toward benefit (*li* 利):

Accordingly, it is the essential nature of man that the *mouth* is fond of flavors, yet no flavors or aromas are more refined than those enjoyed by the Son of Heaven; the *ear* is fond of sounds, yet no music is more grand; the *eye* is fond of color, yet no assemblage of pattern or design, however complex, or of beautiful women is greater; the *body* is fond of relaxation, yet no contended ease or period of quietude is more pleasant; and the *heart* is fond of profit, yet no emolument or salary is more substantial than his.<sup>54</sup>

Body and heart-mind are portrayed here as autonomous sense organs rather than the physical seat that hosts the other sensory faculties.<sup>55</sup> Note therefore that inscribing the body into a world of sensory perception appears to be an ambition not limited to proto-Daoist or self-cultivation literature. Yet Xunzi’s regimen for bringing the senses into an equilibrium that is morally acceptable departs from the physical cultivation tradition. Whereas the latter conceives of the body as a receptacle or physical catalyst refining

<sup>51</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 19.346–7 (“Li lun”); tr. Knoblock, vol. 3, 55.

<sup>52</sup> The idea that ultimate sensory satisfaction for the body consists of relaxation, leisure, or ease (*yi* 佚) also occurs in *Xunzi jijie*, 24.450 (“Junzi”); tr. Knoblock, vol. 3, 165.

<sup>53</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 18.344 (“Zheng lun”); tr. Knoblock, vol. 3, 47–8.

<sup>54</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 11.217 (“Wang ba” 王霸); tr. Knoblock, vol. 2, 160.

<sup>55</sup> For other passages where the body is juxtaposed to the other sense organs, see *Xunzi jijie*, 4.63 (“Rong ru” 榮辱), 21.389 (“Jie bi” 解蔽), 23.437–8 (“Xing e” 性惡).

rough substances from the outside world, Xunzi proposes that the senses are refined by a natural taxonomy of ritual principles that are inherent in the cosmos and that need to be appropriated by the sage-ruler in order to balance his natural instincts. Nevertheless both approaches advocate the idea that centering the body leads to cosmic and ritual balance. The following excerpt, which appears very cognate to the proto-Daoist material visited above, describes how, ultimately, the sage-ruler accretes power when he manages to tranquilize the senses:

The Son of Heaven does not look yet sees, does not listen yet hears, does not think yet knows, does not move yet accomplishes: rather, like a clod of earth he sits alone on his mat, and the world follows him as though it were of a single body with him, just as the four limbs follow the dictates of the mind. This may indeed be described as the Grand Embodiment (*da xing* 大形).<sup>56</sup>

So for Xunzi too, a ruler should be screened off from immediate stimuli: “The Son of Heaven has an external screen; the feudal lords an internal screen. This is in accord with ritual principles. The former has an outside screen because he does not wish to see outside; the latter has an internal screen because he does not wish to be seen inside.”<sup>57</sup> For Xunzi’s sage-ruler, the principles of sensory perception do not originate from his physical organs. Rather the sage perceives or “senses” by identifying – through intuition – with ritual principles embedded in the cosmos. His body, still and positioned at the center, represents a vessel or mirror on which all cosmic principles converge. Just as physical cultivation texts portrayed the tranquil body as a medium that “concentrates” external forces into one, so Xunzi portrays the ruler’s body as the physical representation of all sensory, and hence ritual, principles inherent in the world at large. Not only does he attribute a faculty of knowledge to the senses themselves, as Jane Geaney has emphasized, but more importantly, the implication is that ritual itself is seen as a claim to knowledge because its principles are embedded in the cosmos, where they await to be detected by the sage.<sup>58</sup>

Xunzi’s definition of sensory perception within the context of ritual principle (and hence social hierarchy) is closely related to his views on human emotions. For Xunzi, human emotions and the bodily organs that host them do not operate as autonomous forces. Rather, emotions are embedded in

<sup>56</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 12.239 (“Jun dao”); tr. Knoblock, vol. 2, 185. For the idea that the sage or gentleman comprehends and perceives without having to fall back on intentional sensory actions, see also *Xunzi jijie*, 24.450 (“Junzi”).

<sup>57</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 19.485 (“Da lüe”); tr. Knoblock, vol. 3, 207.

<sup>58</sup> Geaney (2002), 35–49, 89–92, 145.

Heaven. The body and its sensory organs merely channel those potential powers in Heaven into concrete individuals:

The eye, ear, nose, mouth and body each have the capacity to provide sense contact (*jie* 接) but their capacities are not interchangeable (*bu xiang neng* 不相能) – these are termed “the faculties given us by Heaven” (*tian guan* 天官). The heart-mind (*xin* 心) that dwells within the central cavity is used to control the five faculties (*wu guan* 五官) – it is called “the lord provided by Heaven” (*tian jun* 天君). The heart-mind finds its resources in things that do not belong to the human category (?) and uses them for the nourishment of humans – this is called “the nourishment provided by Heaven” (*tian yang* 天養). . . . The sage purifies his “heavenly lord”, rectifies his “heavenly faculties”, completes his “heavenly nourishment”, abides by the “heavenly government” (*tian zheng* 天政), nourishes his “heavenly emotions” (*tian qing* 天情) and thereby brings to completion the achievements of Heaven (*tian gong* 天功).<sup>59</sup>

Noteworthy here is that the workings of the sensory apparatus are said to depend on the heart-mind. Whereas each of the five senses may exist separately within Heaven’s taxonomy, sensory perception – that is, the interplay of all the senses – is best enabled by the heart-mind that causes impulses from the outside world to be felt or perceived. Elsewhere we read:

Forms, colors, and designs are differentiated by the eye. Pitch and timbre, bass and treble, modal keys and rhythm, and odd noises are differentiated by the ear. Sweet and bitter, salty and bland, pungent and sour, and distinctive flavors are differentiated by the mouth. Fragrances and stench, perfumes and rotten odors, putrid and rancid smells, foul and sour odors, and distinctive strange smells are differentiated by the nose. Pain and itching, cold and heat, smoothness and roughness, and lightness and heaviness are differentiated by the body (*xing ti* 形體). Speech and phenomena, pleasure and anger, sorrow and joy, love and hate, and desire are differentiated by the heart-mind (*xin* 心).<sup>60</sup>

Xunzi goes on to argue that each of these sensory organs (*tian guan* 天官) acts as a conduit that enables humans to gain knowledge (*zhi* 知): “If the five senses (*wu guan* 五官) come into contact with a thing and you do not become aware of it, or if the heart-mind notes its defining characteristics and you can

<sup>59</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 17.309–10 (“Tian lun”).

<sup>60</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 22.416–17 (“Zheng ming”); tr. Knoblock, vol. 3, 129 (modified). Xunzi elsewhere refers to the *wu zuo* 五鑿, glossed by some commentators as the “five emotions” (*wu qing* 五情). See *Xunzi jijie*, 31.539 (“Ai Gong” 哀公); tr. Knoblock, vol. 3, 260. Geaney (2002), 16–22, gives an overview of the metaphor of the senses as officials.



offer no explanation, then everyone will agree that there is ‘no knowing.’”<sup>61</sup> Once the senses have registered the outside world, names can be attributed to these knowledgeable phenomena. Fear and anxiety, however, cause the malfunction of the heart-mind and ultimately will perturb the senses:

If the mind is anxious or filled with fear, then although the mouth is filled with fine meats, it will not be aware of their taste. Although the ear hears bells and drums, it will not be aware of their sound. Although the eye beholds fine embroidered patterns, it will not be aware of their appearance. And, although the body is clothed in warm, light garments and rests on a fine bamboo mat, it will not be aware of their comfort.<sup>62</sup>

When, by contrast, the heart-mind is tranquil and happy:

Colors that are less than ordinary can nurture the eye. Sounds that are less than average can nurture the ear. A diet of vegetables and a broth of greens can nurture the mouth. Robes of coarse cloth and shoes of rough hemp can nurture the body. And a cramped room, reed blinds, a bed of dried straw, plus a stool and mat can nurture the bodily frame.<sup>63</sup>

Xunzi concludes that through cultivating the heart-mind, the sage-ruler is able to engage in a self-imposed process of sensory purification (or, in other words, emotional discipline). Ultimately power emerges from “interiorization”: the gestation of ideas is superior only when the intellect is channeled through the entire sensory apparatus guided by the unperturbed heart-mind. Thinking and feeling are interdependent faculties:

The learning of the gentleman enters through the ear, is stored in the heart-mind, spreads through the four limbs, and is visible in his activity and repose. . . . The learning of the petty man enters the ears and comes out of the mouth. Since the distance between the mouth and ear is no more than four inches, how could it be sufficient to refine a seven-foot body of a man!<sup>64</sup>

And so the human body provides a physical substrate for the varying degrees to which learning can be refined. Learning is more efficient if, literally, it is “embodied” and channeled through all senses.

In the end, the central role of the sage king as the fountainhead of power lies in his capability to be the axial sensor of the universe. In [Chapter 2](#), we saw how, in practice, this was translated in social and ritual guidelines aimed at nurturing the Son of Heaven’s acuity and perceptiveness. In Xunzi’s

<sup>61</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 22.418 (“Zheng ming”); tr. Knoblock, vol. 3, 130 (modified).

<sup>62</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 22.431 (“Zheng ming”); tr. Knoblock, vol. 3, 137–8.

<sup>63</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 22.432 (“Zheng ming”); tr. Knoblock, vol. 3, 138.

<sup>64</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 1.12 (“Quan xue” 勸學); tr. Knoblock, vol. 1, 140 (modified).

abstraction, it is indeed ritual itself that nurtures the senses. Therefore ritual, like nutrition, should prevent the sage's senses from fading away with age. A ruler, following Xunzi's logic, should never abdicate because of old age and infirmity because his body has enjoyed a highly privileged exposure to the material world and has benefited from excellent care throughout. Instead measures should be taken to sharpen and maintain the ruler's sensory faculties: when riding in his chariot, his body is made comfortable, fragrant herbs are placed next to him to nurture his sense of smell, the yoke shaft in front of him is ornamented to nurture his sense of sight, and tinkling bells on the horse's trappings nurture his sense of hearing.<sup>65</sup>

Another 3rd-century BCE text, the *Lüshi chunqiu*, also emphasizes the notion of sensory prudence as a hallmark of sagehood. The need to balance sensory satisfaction against overindulgence forms a thread through several of its chapters. In "Ben sheng" 本生 (Taking life as the root), the following regimen is proposed to keep one's nature intact and achieve longevity:

If there are particular sounds that are certain to satisfy the ear but cause someone to go deaf when heard, one would certainly not listen to them. If there are particular colors that are certain to please the eye but cause blindness to those who have stared at them, one would certainly not look at them. If there were particular flavors that were certain to satisfy the mouth but caused those who tasted them to be struck dumb, one would certainly not taste them. Therefore the sages' relationship to sounds, colors and flavors was such that, if they would benefit our natures, they would select them; if they were harmful to our natures they would reject them. This is the way to keep one's nature intact. Among the noble and wealthy people of today (however) many are deluded with regard to sounds, colors and rich flavors. They seek these things day and night. If by good fortune they obtain them, they totally give in to them. If they give in to them, how can their natures not be damaged?<sup>66</sup>

The sages, therefore, did not abstain from food, music, and visual spectacle but were judicious in their choice of those stimuli that would benefit the cultivation of human nature. Sensory moderation is the message here, an idea reinforced in "Zhong ji" 重己 (Valuing the self), which states that the former kings kept a right balance between *yin* and *yang* and did not reside in huge palaces:

(Their) flavors were not concentrated, and their clothes were not heavy and hot. If clothes are heavy and hot, the veins will be blocked. If the veins are

<sup>65</sup> Xunzi jijie, 18.335–6 ("Zheng lun" 正論); tr. Knoblock, vol. 3, 41–2; variant in Xunzi jijie, 19.347 ("Li lun" 禮論); tr. Knoblock, vol. 3, 56.

<sup>66</sup> Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi, 1.21 ("Ben sheng"); cf. Knoblock and Riegel (2000), 65 (modified).

blocked, *qi* will not circulate. If flavors are concentrated, then the stomach is stuffed. If the stomach is stuffed, one's innards will become bloated.<sup>67</sup>

In other words, physical health and long life depend on the ruler lodging his body in perfect balance. Note also the link between clothing and the workings of the body and its blood circulation. Just as intense flavors stop up the bowels, so inappropriate clothing will clog up the veins. The text continues by pointing out that to create an environment that facilitates such sensory equilibrium, parks and gardens in antiquity were measured to a size just sufficient to enjoy the sights and exercise the body. Palaces, chambers, and pavilions were not overelaborate but merely meant to protect the body from damp and heat. Likewise food, drink, millet wine, and spirits were just sufficient "to moderate the flavors (*shi wei* 適味) and fill the emptiness," and nothing more.<sup>68</sup> So the sages of antiquity partook of sensory delights with measure and were never drawn to excess.

In "Qu si" 去私 (Discarding partiality), the authority of the Yellow Emperor is invoked to emphasize the need for a balanced exposure of the senses. The excess to be avoided here is understood as sensory stimuli that are "heavy" (*zhong* 重): "In sounds, prohibit excess; in colors prohibit excess; in clothing prohibit excess; in fragrances prohibit excess; in flavors prohibit excess; in dwellings prohibit excess."<sup>69</sup> By extension, the sensory organs are said to sustain life in the same way as government officials sustain the state:

The sages, having profoundly contemplated the world, found nothing more worthy than life. The ears, eyes, nose, and mouth are the servants of life. Even though the ear desires sounds, the eye colors, the nose fragrant aromas, and the mouth delicious flavors, if these cause harm to life, they should be prohibited. Even when these four sensory organs/ "officials" (*guan* 官) have no particular desires, when something benefits life, one should do it. Looking at it in this way, since the ears, eyes, nose, and mouth are unable to act on their own initiative, they must be controlled by some agency (i.e. the heart-mind). You can compare this to a government office that lacks the power to act on its own initiative and must be controlled by some other agency. Such is the art of esteeming life."<sup>70</sup>

How to manage the senses also forms the subject of the "Qing yu" 情欲 (Emotions and desires) chapter, which stipulates that all humans possess

<sup>67</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 1.34 ("Zhong ji"); cf. Knoblock and Riegel (2000), 69.

<sup>68</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 1.34 ("Zhong ji"). A similar passage occurs in the *Guanzi*: "Make sure that palaces and halls are just sufficient to avoid heat and damp, food and drink are just sufficient to harmonize the blood and *qi*, clothing is just sufficient to suit the temperature, etc." See *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 17.1012 ("Jin cang" 禁藏)

<sup>69</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 1.55 ("Qu si"); cf. Knoblock and Riegel (2000), 73.

<sup>70</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 2.74 ("Gui sheng"); cf. Knoblock and Riegel (2000), 80 (modified).

inborn desires but only sages manage to control them. Ordinary rulers in turn are plagued by “ears that cannot be satiated, eyes that cannot be satisfied, or a mouth that cannot be filled.” These sensory malfunctions result in ill health so that “the body is burdened by aches and pains, tendons and bones become heavy and stiff, blood congeals and veins are obstructed.”<sup>71</sup>

At no point is the sage required to entirely forego or avoid a modicum of sensory enjoyment or indeed pleasure. The “Shi yin” 適音 (Balanced tones) chapter offers a theory on how sensory impressions are to be enjoyed.<sup>72</sup> It distinguishes between the desire (*yu*) for sensory satisfaction and the faculty to find pleasure (*le* 樂) in these. The latter is said to depend largely on the state of the heart-mind (*xin* 心) that avails itself of the sensory organs to either delight in or desist from sensory satisfaction:

It is the essential nature of the ear to desire sounds, but if the heart-mind does not find pleasure in them, the ears will not listen to the five tones even if they are right in front. It is the essential nature of the eye to desire colors, but if the heart-mind finds no pleasure in them, the eye will not look at the five colors even when they are right in front. It is the essential nature of the nose to desire perfumed fragrances; but if the heart-mind finds no pleasure in them, the nose will not smell them even if they are right in front. It is the essential nature of the mouth to desire rich flavors; but if the heart-mind finds no pleasure in them, the mouth will not taste the five flavors even if they are right in front. The faculty of desire (*yu*) is the ears, eyes, nose, or mouth, but the faculty of pleasure or displeasure lies with the heart-mind. Only when the heart-mind has first attained harmony and equilibrium does it find pleasure (in these stimuli). Only after the heart-mind has found pleasure in them do the ears, eyes, nose and mouth gain the means whereby to attain their desires. Therefore the task of finding pleasure in things consists in making the heart-mind harmonious; and making the heart-mind harmonious consists of instilling a balance between things.<sup>73</sup>

This careful management of sensory desire and pleasure, according to the same chapter and echoing Xunzi, underpins the ancients’ choice of ritual and music in their performance of the “Qing miao” 清廟 (Pure Temple) ode and in their use of insipid offerings of water, raw fish, and unseasoned stews during sacrifice.<sup>74</sup>

Therefore when the Former Kings instituted ritual and music, they did so not solely to please the ears and the eye or to satisfy the desires of the mouth

<sup>71</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 2.85 (“Qing yu”); cf. Knoblock and Riegel (2000), 84.

<sup>72</sup> For a discussion of musical moderation in this chapter and elsewhere in the *ji* section, see Cook (2002), esp. 334–8.

<sup>73</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 5.272 (“Shi yin”); cf. Knoblock and Riegel (2000), 142–3.

<sup>74</sup> As Scott Cook observes, these references to moderation in ritual sacrifice seem to be lifted straight out of Xunzi. See Cook (2002), 335n. 71, 339.

and belly; instead, they intended to use it to instruct the people in how to balance their likes and dislikes and how to conduct themselves with reason and principle.<sup>75</sup>

Finally, as in Xunzi, the nourishment of the senses becomes a moral act. What appear at first sight to be purely moral or idealistic principles ultimately depend on a physical substrate. And in the same way as this principle allowed Xunzi to define ritual as a form of nourishment, filial conduct can then be defined as a holistic process in which one “nourishes” (*yang* 養) the senses of one’s parents, the aged, the senior, and the noble:

There are five ways of nourishment. To keep palaces and rooms in repair, make beds comfortable, and moderate one’s diet, is the way of nourishing the body. To establish the five pure colors, exhibit the five intermediary shades, and to distinguish the green and red symbols and the red and white emblems, is the way of nourishing the eyes. To rectify the six pitch-standards, harmonize the five sounds, and blend together the eight notes, is the way of nourishing the ears. To thoroughly cook the five grains, steam the meats of the six domestic animals, and harmonize their fragrances and flavors, this is the way to nourish the mouth. To be agreeable in your expression, cheerful in your speech, and respectful in stepping forward or retreating, this is the way of nourishing one’s intent (*zhi* 志). To promote each of these five ways alternately and expand their use can be called “being good at nourishing.”<sup>76</sup>

Nourishing (*yang*) thus becomes an abstracted form of feeding, a holistic way to inculcate moral conduct through physical measures.

An advanced sensorium also forms the hallmark of the legalist ruler. The *Han Feizi* comments at length on the ways in which the enlightened or clairvoyant ruler (*ming zhu* 明主) should engage his senses to command the world. For the legalist ruler, as for the model sages described earlier, introspection and outward observation are not conceived as two different orders.<sup>77</sup> Likewise, the legalist ruler relies on stimuli that transcend his own physical senses and deploys the entire world as his eyes and ears:

Therefore although the ruler of men does not instruct the hundred officials by means of his own mouth and does not search out villains and ruffians

<sup>75</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 5.273 (“Shi yin”); cf. Knoblock and Riegel (2000), 145.

<sup>76</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 14.732 (“Xiao xing”); cf. Knoblock and Riegel (2000), 305 (modified).

<sup>77</sup> Or as Anna Ghiglione puts it in a discussion of the notion of contemplation, *guan* 觀: “[T]he introspective and synoptic vision of the sage which has penetrated the mysteries of the cosmos does not become a mark of a mental dimension. With the dimension of the visible not being opposed to what is intelligible but rather to the invisible, there is no need for a rupture between both orders of comprehension.” See Ghiglione (1999), 131, 147.

with his own eyes, the state is nevertheless always in good order. It is not the case that the ruler of man needs the eyes of a Li Lou 離婁 to be perspicacious or the ears of (Music Master) Shi Kuang 師曠 to be perceptive. (On the contrary) if he does not confide in measures but only relies on what he can see with his own eyes to see something clearly, then what he sees will be little. For this is not a technique to avoid being deluded. If he does not rely on his relative position of authority but only relies on his own ears to be perceptive, what he hears will be little. For this is not a method to avoid being deceived. The enlightened ruler gives everyone under heaven no alternative but to see and hear on his behalf. Therefore although he himself remains hidden in the innermost parts of the palace, his brightness (*ming*) illuminates all within the four seas ...<sup>78</sup>

Thus the enlightened ruler senses the world invisibly. He is an inaudible and hidden force that “observes others, but does not allow others to observe him.”<sup>79</sup> He sees without being seen and hears without being heard.<sup>80</sup> Like a military commander who uses flags and drums as the eyes and ears of his army,<sup>81</sup> the enlightened legalist ruler externalizes his sentiments by informing his subject’s eyes through insignia, whereas their ears are alerted to announcements by drums, and their hearts by means of the law.<sup>82</sup>

In the preceding passage, Li Lou and Shi Kuang symbolize advanced sensory perception at the physical level of the individual, a level the sage-ruler is advised to transcend. Li Lou, alias Li Zhu 離朱, occurs in several texts as the archetypical champion of good vision.<sup>83</sup> He is to vision what Yi Ya is to flavor and Shi Kuang to sound. Little is known of Li Lou other than that the Mencius names a chapter after him and that Zhao Qi’s 趙岐 (d. 201 CE) commentary situates him at the time of the Yellow Emperor. The legend associated with him tells of the Yellow Emperor who once lost a dark jade pearl and sent Li Lou in search of it, since he was allegedly able to spot the tip of

<sup>78</sup> *Han Feizi jishi*, 4.247 (“Jian jie shi chen” 姦劫弑臣). A similar passage appears under the heading “Zhu ming” 主明 (The ruler’s clairvoyance) in the *Guanzi*: “The eye values clarity of sight. The ear values sharpness of hearing. The heart-mind values knowledge. If one takes the eyes of the world to see, there is nothing that will not be seen. If one takes the ears of the world to hear, there is nothing that will not be heard. If one takes the heart-mind of the world to think, there is nothing that will not become unknown. If one’s ministers, rallying around him like the spokes of a wheel, come forward one by one, his clarity of vision will never be blocked.” See *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 18.1040 (“Jiu shou” 九守).

<sup>79</sup> *Han Feizi jishi*, 8.480 (“Guan xing” 觀行).

<sup>80</sup> *Han Feizi jishi*, 1.68 (“Zhu dao” 主道).

<sup>81</sup> For this image, see also *Guoyu*, 11.402 (“Jin yu, wu”); *Zuozhuan*, 792 (Lord Cheng, year 2); and *Sunzi bingfa*, 7.69.

<sup>82</sup> *Han Feizi jishi*, 8.498–9 (“Yong ren” 用人).

<sup>83</sup> See *Shang jun shu*, 24.132 (“Jin shi” 禁使); *Zhuangzi jishi*, 8.314 (“Pian mu”), 10.353 (“Qu qie” 祛箝); *Mengzi zhengyi*, 14.475 (“Li Lou”); *Zhong lun*, ch. 15, p. 213.



an autumn hair beyond a distance of a hundred steps.<sup>84</sup> Blind musician Shi Kuang appears first on the scene in the *Zuozhuan* as a sage adviser in the service of the Jin court.<sup>85</sup> In a speech shortly after the demotion of the overlord of Wei in 559 BCE, he adopts the bold political view that ministers are entitled to assume political command and execute the will of Heaven if their sovereign proves to be inept or corrupt.<sup>86</sup>

The contrast that the *Han Feizi* passage sets up is one between individual and partial sensory perfection as opposed to a comprehensive sensory engagement with the world that transcends the immediate. In this, Han Feizi was preceded and followed by others. One of the fragments associated with the philosopher Shen Dao 慎到 (ca. 360–ca. 285 BCE) for instance comments:

Li Zhu's (i.e. Li Lou) clairvoyance was such that he could examine the tip of an autumn hair from a distance beyond a hundred steps; but when he went down into the water he could not see a foot deep in the water. It was not the case that his eyes were not clairvoyant but that the circumstances made his vision difficult.<sup>87</sup>

A cognate passage occurs in the later *Huainanzi*. It notes that, despite his gift to spot minute detail at vast distances, Li Zhu was unable to spot the fish in the depths.<sup>88</sup> Great optical skill in other words does not necessarily amount to great insight, a sentiment also echoed in the *Lüshi chunqiu* when it states that “if one uses the vision of the multitude, one need not be in awe of Li Lou.”<sup>89</sup> Similarly, the *Huainanzi* concurs, although Shi Kuang's ears were sharp enough to enable him to combine the harmonies of the eight winds, he was unable to hear something at a distance that was farther away than ten *li*.<sup>90</sup>

The idea that overexposing the senses distracts the ruler from observing what is essential is reemphasized in Han Feizi's commentary on the *Laozi*:

Human beings rely on the brilliance of Heaven (*tian ming*) to see, lodge themselves in the acuity of Heaven (*tian cong*) to hear, and entrust themselves

<sup>84</sup> *Han Feizi jishi*, 14.256, n. 36. See also *Huainanzi*, 18.612 (“Ren jian”).

<sup>85</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 1016 (Lord Xiang, year 14), 1038, 1043 (Lord Xiang, year 18); *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu*, 9.1084 ff. (“Taizi Jin”); *Huainanzi*, 11.365 (“Qi su”), 20.694 (“Tai zu”). For other anecdotes figuring Shi Kuang as counsel at the court of Duke Ping, see *Huainanzi*, 19.658 (“Xiu wu”), 11.369 (“Qi su”); *Qianfu lun*, 9.512 (“Zhi shi xing” 志氏姓); *Xinlun*, 4a; *Shuoyuan*, 3.69 (“Jian ben” 建本), 18.467–8 (“Bian wu”); *Shangshu da zhuan*, 6.63; and *Yantie lun jiaozhu*, 10.130 (“Ci fu”).

<sup>86</sup> *Zuozhuan*, 1016–18 (Lord Xiang, year 14). For Shi Kuang as an example of an increasing number of *Chunqiu* ministers advocating such views, see Pines (2002), 139–46.

<sup>87</sup> *Shenzi* as in Thompson (1979), 274.

<sup>88</sup> *Huainanzi*, 1.15 (“Yuan dao”).

<sup>89</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 4.232 (“Yong zhong” 用眾); cf. Riegel (2000), 131.

<sup>90</sup> *Huainanzi*, 1.15 (“Yuan dao”).

to the wisdom of Heaven in order to think and cogitate. Therefore if one's vision is too strong (i.e. if one sees too much), the eyes won't be clairvoyant and if one hears too much the ears will not be sharp. . . . If the eyes are not clairvoyant, they won't be able to distinguish black from white; if the ears are not sharp they won't be able to distinguish pure and impure sounds. . . .<sup>91</sup>

The text continues by suggesting that the type of blindness and deafness described here – one that essentially results from overexerting the sense organs – leads to personal trauma and social chaos. Introspection, therefore, is as important as the ability to digest exterior stimuli, an idea repeated again in Han Feizi's explanation of *Laozi* 47:

Holes and cavities (in the body) are the doors and windows of the spirit (*shen ming*). Ears and eyes get exhausted by sounds and colors; and the essential spirit (*jing shen*) gets exhausted by external appearances. Therefore there is no master (*zhu*) in the centre of the body.<sup>92</sup>

The sage-ruler, therefore, avoids excesses and extremes since “anything with a nice fragrance and soft taste, such as strong wine or fat meat, is delicious to the mouth but brings disease to the body.”<sup>93</sup> Yet whether through direct or indirect engagement, the ruler should remain the ultimate source of judgment:

Regardless of whether the flavor is sour, sweet, salty or bland, if (the ruler) does not judge it by means of his own mouth but instead defers judgement to his master cook, then the kitchen staff will think lightly of the ruler and revere the cook. Regardless of whether the sounds are high, low, clear or mixed, if (the ruler) does not judge them by his own ears but, instead, defers judgment to his chief musician, then the blind musicians will think lightly of the ruler and instead revere the chief musician. If the rights and wrongs of governing the state are not judged by the ruler's own skills but instead decided by his favorites, then his ministers and lower officials will think lightly of the ruler and instead revere his favorites.<sup>94</sup>

#### SAGES, SCREENS AND EARPLUGS

A concern with sage perception and the proper management of the senses was not limited to philosophical discourse. In addition to linking the sustenance of the senses to human diet and the figure of the sage cook, Warring States and Han texts further suggest that the ruler's sensorium was to be

<sup>91</sup> *Han Feizi jishi*, 6.349 (“Jie Lao”).

<sup>92</sup> *Han Feizi jishi*, 7.409 (“Yu Lao”).

<sup>93</sup> *Han Feizi jishi*, 2.121 (“Yang quan” 揚權).

<sup>94</sup> *Han Feizi jishi*, 18.976 (“Ba shuo” 八說).

maintained by other material means. These included adequate ritual clothing and aids such as curtains, canopees, screens, veils, and earplugs. Furthermore the ruler's entourage was to include men of extraordinary sensory knack who assisted him during ritual procedures. The latter was epitomized by the figure of the blind musician whose lack of vision was overcompensated by extraordinary aural skills.

Several texts mention accessories that serve to block off or shield the sage-ruler's sensory organs. The *Liji* notes that the Son of Heaven's cap was to have twelve pendants with jade beads hanging down from its top before and behind.<sup>95</sup> Although it makes no specific reference to its purpose, a comment on the symbolical meaning behind the design of these jade bead eye-curtains (also known as *liu* 流) is supplied in a passage in the *Bohutong*:

[Question] Why are long pendants suspended from the cap at the front and at the back? [Answer] It shows the promotion of the worthy and the retirement of the incapable. The suspended beads mean that [the wearer] does not see evil; silk earplugs that block the ears show that he does not listen to slander. For if the water is too clear there will be no fish and if a person examines things (too critically) he will have no followers. (These implements) clarify that a (superior) should not value knowing his inferiors in minute detail. Therefore the Rites state that "the Son of Heaven wears twelve pendants with jade beads hanging down from the front and back of his cap."<sup>96</sup>

The emphasis here is laid on safeguarding the ruler's deeper awareness of things by shielding his senses from overexposure to immediate detail. Dongfang Shuo's 東方朔 (fl. ca. 130 BCE) "Da ke nan" 答客難 (Answer to a Guest's Criticism) explores the concept further:

Therefore it is said: "If the water is crystal clear no fish will gather in it. If a person is excessively investigative he won't attract any followers. The ruler's ceremonial cap has a screen of draped jade beads in front designed to dim his clear vision. Pendant yellow ear plugs cover his ears to block off his keen hearing. They signify that in clairvoyance there is something that cannot be seen, and that keen hearing has something it does not hear, that one should extol outstanding virtue, be lenient in regards to minor faults, and not look for everything in one single person."<sup>97</sup>

<sup>95</sup> *Liji jijie*, 29.774 ("Yu zao"). See also *Han guan yi*, 2.8b; *Dong guan Han ji*, 5.6a; *Shi ming*, 4.155 (no. 4).

<sup>96</sup> *Bohutong shu zheng*, 10.499–500 ("Fu mian" 紉冕). See also *Du duan*, 2.26–7; *Li han wen jia*, 504; *Yiwen leiju*, 89.1546 (quoting *Yanzi chunqiu*). On this rectangular-topped cap with pendant beads, see *Hou Hanshu*, "zhi" 30.3663–4 ("Yu fu zhi" 輿服志), Harada (1937), 65–6, and plates 8.2 and 8.3; Hua Mei (2001), 141; and Yan Buke (2009), 40, 115–24, 135.

<sup>97</sup> *Hanshu*, 35.2866.

In other words, *ming* 明 “clairvoyance” is a form of insight that transcends mere vision, and *cong* 聰 “intelligent perception” transcends the powers of hearing. The inferences made here are reminiscent of the stratagems associated with the sage cook and the management of flavors: The sage savors the essence of flavor beyond the stimuli provided by individual ingredients; his ultimate knack is to connect with the essence of things by aspiring to taste the tasteless and by shielding himself from overindulgence in worldly flavor. The yellow silk balls tied to the ruler’s cap (*tou kuang* 紉纊) protect his ears from gossip and small talk, just as a canopied chariot shields him from singular distractions. Another type of earplug mentioned in the literature was made of jade (and known as *tian* 瑱). In funerary ritual, they were used to prop up the aural cavity of the corpse. It is not certain whether, as some commentators suggest, these earplugs were viewed as the counterpart of plugs worn dangling at the side of the ears during life. Yet it is plausible that the practice of plugging the eye sockets and aural and oral cavities of the deceased drew on the same ideal – in this case, the wish that the corpse’s sensory gateways could be shielded to assist it on its perilous journey through the netherworld.<sup>98</sup>

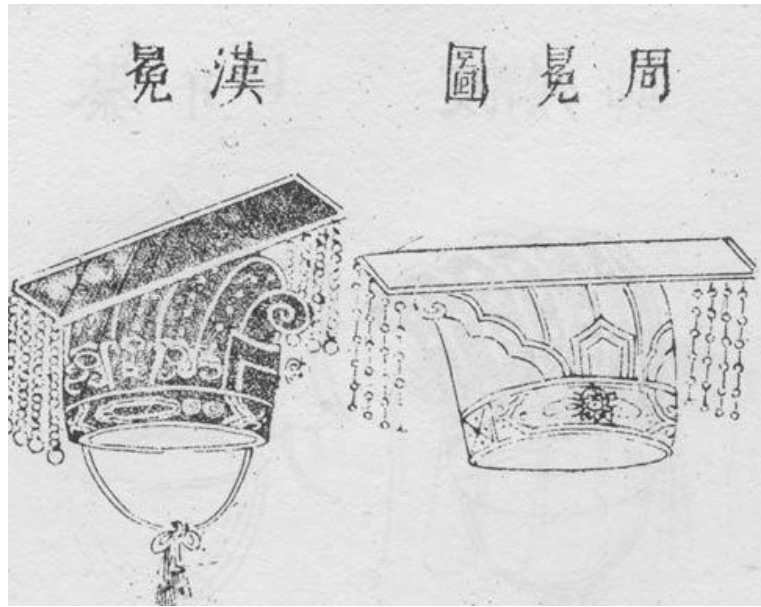
Behind this symbolism of ritually covering the eyes and ears lurks the idea that the ruler can be vulnerable if his senses get entangled by his immediate surroundings. This image is explored in Zhang Heng’s 張衡 “Dong jing fu” 東京賦 (Rhapsody on the Eastern Capital), where the invisible ruler’s movements are regulated, announced, and indeed orchestrated to the outside world through the sounds of bells and jade pendants:

Even a ruler of a myriad chariots who has nothing to fear  
may be daunted and alarmed by a single man.  
All day long he does not leave his baggage cart;  
Travelling alone incognito, where can he go?  
The ruler’s yellow tassels plug his ears;  
In his chariot he does not turn his head outside.  
Girdle pendants regulate his demeanor;  
Simurgh bells set his pace on the road.  
When walking, his jades’ tinkling does not vary;  
When driving, his horses’ pace is never wild.<sup>99</sup>

As David Knechtges notes, the image here is that of powerful rulers being intimidated by “seemingly inconsequential persons.” The implication is then

<sup>98</sup> *Yili zhushu*, 35.12a (“Shi sang li” 士喪禮), 40.10a (“Ji xi li” 既夕禮); *Shuowen jiezi*, 1A.26b; examples of jade earplugs have been found in several Han tombs, see Li Rusen (2003), 8–9.

<sup>99</sup> *Wenxuan*, 3.130; tr. Knechtges (1982), 304–5 (modified); the rulers implied here are Qin Shihuang and Han Gaozu.



5.1. Drawings of the jade-bead cap (Zhou and Han models).

Source: Wang Qi (fl. 1565), *San cai tu hui* (facsimile reprint, originally published in 1607).

that, at best, a ruler should not be exposed to this first order of worldly encounters since this type of exposure may sidetrack him from steering a steady course and concentrating on the essentials. The same sentiment is elaborated in the *Huainanzi*, where the sheltering of the sensorium from immediate stimuli is said to allow the sage-ruler to concentrate on the essence of things:

Therefore the kings of antiquity hung a veil of pearls in front of their caps to prevent them from seeing too clearly (*ming*); they had yellow silk plugs stuck in the ears to suppress a hearing that would be too keen (*cong*). The Son of Heaven was surrounded by external screens in order to separate himself off. . . . If his eyes were to see in a disorderly fashion, that would lead to excess; if his ears were to hear in a reckless way that would lead to confusion; and if his mouth would speak foolish words that would lead to disorder. These three (sensory) gateways (*guan* 關) were to be carefully guarded. . . .<sup>100</sup>

<sup>100</sup> For the “three gateways,” also known as *san guan* 三官 “three organs/officials,” as referring to the mouth (eating), eyes (seeing), and ears (listening), see Gao You’s 高誘 commentary in *Huainanzi*, 14.475 (“Quan yan”). Some passages add the nose (smelling) to the list; see, e.g., *Wenzi shu yi*, 4.193–6 (“Fu yan” 符言). For the “three officials/organs” as extended sense organs of the ruler, see *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 17.1064–5 (“Ren shu”). Although most Warring States and Han texts identify five or six main senses (vision, hearing, taste, smell, heart, the body/touch), terminology appears to be in flux. For instance, *Da Dai Liji*, 40.9 (“Ai Gong wen wu yi”), speaks of the *wu zuo* 五鑿 “five cavities,” which a commentary to Xunzi glosses as *qiong* 窮 meaning the ear, eye, nose, mouth, and the cavity lodging the heart.

Beyond the curtains and draperies, [the ruler's] eye can't see further than ten *li* and his ears can't hear beyond a hundred paces. Yet there are no things in the world he does not comprehend because the sources that pour into him are great and those who tap him are numerous. Therefore, without leaving his door, he knows the world; without peeping out through his window, he understands the heavenly Dao.<sup>101</sup>

The screen or moveable door-screen mentioned here shields off the ruler spatially from his immediate surroundings. As one Han lexicon notes, screens block off the “wind” (*feng* 風), a force that was also associated with inappropriate moral influences or local customs.<sup>102</sup> In Yang Sheng's 羊勝 (mid-2nd century BCE) “Ping feng fu” 屏風賦 (Rhapsody on the screen), the ruler is concealed from the outside world behind a decorated screen that displays his illustrious forebears:

The door-screen forms a multi-layered enclosure  
That hides away my sovereign king.  
Layers of flowers are embroidered on its surface,  
strings of suspended jades dangle in concert above it.  
The screen is decorated with patterned brocade,  
and dazzles with hanging yellow.  
On it are portrayed illustrious men from the past,  
How reverent their postures, how lofty their spirits!  
My lord protector accords them a fitting place  
so that they may enjoy longevity without bounds.<sup>103</sup>

Decorated with auspicious motifs and graced with virtuous heroes from the past, the screen wards off influences that are direct, temporary, and transient. Standing upright, to quote an Eastern Han screen-door inscription, “it conceals the elegant and graceful, mist and fog it opposes, extolling what is above and concealing what is below, (so that things) never lose their constancy.”<sup>104</sup> Such imagery encoded in poetry and ritual prescription may well reflect metaphorical ideals as much as it records social reality. But the premise that sage-rulers ought to shield their senses to enhance their perception of the world was clearly prevalent across texts of the period.

<sup>101</sup> *Huainanzi*, 9.270, 282 (“Zhu shu”); for the idea that the ruler rules without leaving his room, see also *Shizi*, 1.43 (“Chu dao” 處道).

<sup>102</sup> *Shi ming*, 5.188 (no. 4), 6.200 (no. 29). On the concept of wind and custom, see Lewis (2006a), 190–1 ff.

<sup>103</sup> *Xi jing za ji*, 4.189–90. “Lord protector” translates *fan hou* 藩后 in which, I suspect, *fan* serves as a pun for the boundary marking property of the screen. The ruler in question is King Xiao of Liang 梁孝王, at whose court the poet was a retainer. A different rhapsody but with the same title is attributed to Liu An, King of Huainan. See *Yiwen leiju*, 69.1202.

<sup>104</sup> Attributed to Li You 李尤 (d. after 135 CE). See *Yiwen leiju*, 69.1202–3.



## THE CLAIRVOYANT AND THE BLIND

Given the emphasis on refined sensory perception as a hallmark of sagehood, early Chinese texts credit several sage-rulers and advisers with extraordinary sense organs. Shun, son of the morally inept Gu Sou 瞽瞍, was said to have two pupils in his eyes granting him doubled visual acuity (*chong ming* 重明) and hence increased moral authority over the blind father that tried to murder him. Yu's ears were said to have three holes. The inventor of the script Cang Jie 倉頡 had four eyes. Fuxi 伏羲, inventor of the trigrams, had extraordinarily large eyes.<sup>105</sup> Like spirits, these cultural heroes are portrayed as omnivoyant and aware of all events in the realm. So Yu's three aural cavities enabled him to acquire "great comprehension" (*da tong* 大通), whereas Shun's doubled pupils gave him luster and a comprehension of cosmic proportions akin to the position of the heavenly bodies.<sup>106</sup> While no text makes a direct link between Laozi or Lao Dan's 老聃/聃 purportedly long ears and his aural acuity, one 3rd-century BCE text does portray him as listening to the soundless.<sup>107</sup> The later *Liezi* notes that Lao Dan's disciple, Gengcang zi 亢倉子, was able to "see with his ears and listen with his eyes", a mode of perception the disciple himself qualifies as internalized spontaneous knowledge or knack:

I can look and listen without using eyes and ears. I cannot exchange the functions of eyes and ears. . . . My body is in accord with my mind (*xin*), my mind with my energies (*qi*), my energies with my spirit (*shen*), my spirit with Nothing (*wu* 無). Whenever the minutest existing thing or the faintest sound affects me, whether it is far away beyond the eight borderlands, or close at hand between my eyebrows and eyelashes, I am bound to know it. But what I do not know is whether I perceived it with the seven holes in my head and my four limbs, or knew it through my heart and belly and internal organs. It is self-knowledge (*zi zhi* 自知) and that's all.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>105</sup> *Jinwen Shangshu kaozheng*, 1.36–7; *Huainanzi*, 19.641 ("Xiu wu"); *Shangshu da zhuan*, 6.57 ("Lüe shuo xia"); *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 3.110, 3.112 ("Gu xiang"); *Shizi*, 2.69 (no. 60). Several Han apocrypha play out this theme. See, e.g., *Chunqiu yan Kong tu* 春秋演孔圖 for Fuxi's large eyes, the four-eyed Cang Jie, Yao with eyebrows in eight colors illustrating his "penetrating perspicacity" (*tong ming* 通明), etc. See *Weishu jicheng*, 573–5. See also *Li wei* 禮緯 and *Chunqiu yuan ming bao* 春秋元命包 in *Weishu jicheng*, 531, 589, 592. On the relationship between Shun and Gu Sou, exemplifying the image of sage sons born from wicked fathers, who transmit political authority through the rejection of the father figure, see Lewis (2006b), 84–5, 100–2. Wang Zhong 王中 (1745–94) emphasizes that Gu Sou stands, first and foremost, for the title of the office of blind musician rather than a name in its own right. See *Shu xue* (bu yi), 118.

<sup>106</sup> *Huainanzi*, 19.641 ("Xiu wu"); *Bohutong shu zheng*, 7.339 ("Sheng ren" 聖人).

<sup>107</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 18.1157 ("Zhong yan").

<sup>108</sup> *Liezi jishi*, 4.117–18 ("Zhongni"); tr. Graham (1991), 77–8 (modified).

In short, these narratives associate special talent with anomalously shaped sense organs or, as in the example of Lao Dan's disciple, the ability to transcend the normal use of the sense organs.

A variation on the topic of advanced sensation was the idea that the loss of one sense organ could result in the overcompensation of another. The latter is illustrated by the figure of the blind musician who, like the cook, was another agent through which the ruler communicated with the spirit world. In the discussion of the figure of the cook-advisor in [Chapter 2](#), we showed how, through providing nutritional sustenance for his ruler, he also imparted a moral influence on his superior. Just as cooks and stewards drew power and authority from their proximity to the ruler, court musicians did so on account of the fact that political authority and the art of governing was equated with the ruler's capacity for listening or "sounding out" the realm. Interpreting music frequently stood for gauging the mood and intentions of people or regions certain songs and melodies were associated with.<sup>109</sup> The powerful role played by music officials, as David Schaberg notes, is prominent in early Chinese historiographical narrative: "As keepers of music's regularities, these *shi* 師 'masters of musicians' are the human personae through which music's metaphysical truths express themselves."<sup>110</sup> The metaphors served up in descriptions of famous court musicians are those commonly ascribed to music by the masters of philosophy: Music encourages social and cosmic harmony, musical airs embody morality or the lack thereof, music links human government to patterns in the natural world, music reflects rank and order, music balances aesthetic pleasure against ethical conduct, music unites, and the like. And so music masters that act as personal counsels to rulers are associated with most of the *Chunqiu* and Warring States feudal states and their courts.<sup>111</sup>

A recurring physical attribute of court musicians who performed ritual music at banquets and sacrificial ceremonies was that they were blind. One of the earliest references to significant blindness occurs in the "Yao dian" mention of Shun's father Gu Sou, although, as noted earlier, there blindness is imbued with allegorical pejoratives to set up a contrast with Shun's enlightened vision. Gu Sou is called a *gu zi* 瞽子 "blind man" and thus carries the signifier in his name.<sup>112</sup> The graph *gu* itself has received several explanations. The *Shuowen*, which glosses it as composed of the signfic "eye" (*mu*) and

<sup>109</sup> For a discussion of music as a moral indicator of regional customs and character, see Sterckx (2002), 129–37.

<sup>110</sup> Schaberg (2001), 117, 117–20, with references to the figure of Shi Kuang in other *Zuo*zhuan anecdotes and their parallel passages in the *Guoyu*.

<sup>111</sup> For a tentative list, see Takagi (1990), 23–4.

<sup>112</sup> *Jinwen Shangshu kaozheng*, 1.36–7. See also Wang Guowei (rpt. 1975), 7, 49.

phonetic *gu* “drum,” takes it to refer to having only one eye pupil.<sup>113</sup> Liu Xi 劉熙 (d. ca. 219 CE) defines *gu*/*\*kâ?* 瞽 “blind” paronomastically as *gu* 鼓 “drum” and suggests the image of eyelids joining together like the skin on a drum.<sup>114</sup> These etymological gymnastics all draw a link between blind musicians and drums. In his commentary to the *Zhouli*, where the office of blind musicians is known as *gu meng* 瞽矇, Zheng Sinong specifies *gu* 瞽 as someone with no eye pupils, and *meng* 矇 as someone with eye pupils yet nevertheless unable to see. Similar distinctions are made by commentators elsewhere.<sup>115</sup> In origin, these terms probably designated different offices, as is suggested in a passage in the *Guoyu* where the royal entourage includes three types of blind officials: *gu* who present songs, *sou* 瞽 who present poems, and *meng* who intone messages of remonstrance.<sup>116</sup>

Blind musicians were, first and foremost, ritual functionaries. Like ritual cooks blending flavors to attract the spirits, blind musicians blend sounds and rhythms to attract their attention. Indeed a Zhou hymn in the *Shijing* describes how their enchanting musical performance induces the ancestors “to listen.”<sup>117</sup> In the *Liji*, blind musicians examine the pitch of the music played after the Son of Heaven has finished his meal.<sup>118</sup> Their extraordinary musical skills are also praised in a Han rhapsody dedicated to them by Cai Yong.<sup>119</sup>

Blind musicians were accorded additional status as masters in the art of instruction and veiled comment, and they are often seen acting as wise counsel to their ruler.<sup>120</sup> In death, they were revered as ancestors of music in a special hall in honor of the blind (*gu zong* 瞽宗).<sup>121</sup> According to the *Liji*, this Hall of the Blind also functioned as a school building where, among other subjects, young heirs to the throne were taught the art of music.<sup>122</sup> The *Zhouli*

<sup>113</sup> *Shuowen jiezi*, 4A.12b–13a.

<sup>114</sup> *Shi ming*, 8.271 (no. 10). Zhou Qingquan (2003), vol. 1, 529–30, through a series of questionable etymological and other inferences, links this particular shape of the eyes with a drum made from hollow mulberry and hence the origin myth of the Shang people being born from a mother impregnated by a mulberry.

<sup>115</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 32.1269 (“Xu guan”). See also Wei Zhao’s commentary to *Guoyu*, 1.10 (“Zhou yu, shang”). For a description of the office itself, see *Zhouli zhengyi*, 45.1864. The *Zhouli* further includes the office of the “guide for blind musicians” (*shiliao* 眡矇; literally “those of clear sight”) who assisted them. See *Zhouli zhengyi*, 45.1869–70.

<sup>116</sup> *Guoyu*, 1.10–11 (“Zhou yu, shang”).

<sup>117</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi*, 19C.6b–7a (“You gu” 有瞽; Mao 280). For another blind musician performance, see *Mao shi zhengyi*, 16E.7a (“Ling tai” 靈臺; Mao 242).

<sup>118</sup> *Liji jijie*, 29.778 (“Yu zao”).

<sup>119</sup> “Gu shi fu” 瞽師賦 (Rhapsody of the Blind Music Master). See *Quan Han fu*, 593.

<sup>120</sup> The *Liji* even notes that they would use a special formula – “I wish my name to be reported” (*wen ming* 聞名) – to request an audience rather than, Zheng Xuan explains, a form of words that requests being “seen” (見) in audience. See *Liji jijie*, 35.920 (“Shao yi”).

<sup>121</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 42.1720 (“Da siyue”).

<sup>122</sup> *Liji jijie*, 20.557–8 (“Wen Wang shi zi”), 31.853 (“Ming tang wei”).

notes that all great teachers were honored with sacrifices in the Hall of the Blind.<sup>123</sup> One deified ancestor of blind musicians is known in the *Guoyu* as the “Sacred Blind Musician” (Shen Gu 神瞽). Little is known about this figure other than that Wei Zhao comments that after his death he became an ancestor of musicians and received sacrifices.<sup>124</sup>

As connoisseur of music, the blind musician is cast in rituals that draw on the cosmic powers associated with music. In the *Guoyu*, a blind musician “listens to the winds” five days prior to the plowing ceremony and then “announces that a harmonious wind has arrived,” signaling that the king should start a period of ritual fasting. On the day of the ritual plowing itself, the blind music master, together with another official, inspects the soil by means of the pitch pipes, a procedure known as *feng tu* 風土 “airing the soil,” which, following Wei Zhao, was a method to establish whether the soil vapors were sufficiently harmonious to produce bountiful crops.<sup>125</sup> In soliciting counsel and enacting important rituals, the Son of Heaven in the center relies on officials with partial sensory powers to gain information about the periphery: He “listens to” government affairs (*ting zheng* 聽政) by having blind officials submit poems, songs, records, and remonstrance.<sup>126</sup> It is as though the art of rulership consists of gaining a comprehensive view of affairs by means of informants who, each in their own way, possess some abnormal or advanced form of perception.

Renowned blind musicians, such as Master Kuang, appear in clusters of narratives. Like cooks and stewards, they are cast in various roles, ranging from being actual musical performers to acting as personal advisors, or as interpreters of the past or foretellers of future events.<sup>127</sup> Their status as key actors in ritual performance may be reflected in a passage in the *Lunyu*, where Confucius explains the sort of deference that should be displayed when one invites a blind music master:

Blind music master Mian had an audience with Confucius. When he reached the steps Confucius said, “Here are the steps,” and on reaching the mat, the Master said, “Here is the mat.” When they were all seated together the Master informed him of who was present saying: “So-and-so sits here, and so-and-so sits there.” When music master Mian had left, Zizhang asked Confucius: “Is this the way in which one should speak with a blind music

<sup>123</sup> *Zhouli zhengyi*, 42.1720 (“Da siyue”).

<sup>124</sup> *Guoyu*, 3.132–3, n. 4 (“Zhou yu, xia”).

<sup>125</sup> *Guoyu*, 1.18, 1.20 (“Zhou yu, shang”).

<sup>126</sup> *Guoyu*, 1.9–10 (“Zhou yu, shang”).

<sup>127</sup> Reminiscent of the idea that food could have a moral influence over the fetus, one story tells of a mother summoning a blind musician at night to influence the moral character of her unborn child. See *Lienü zhuan*, 1.4b (“Mu yi zhuan” 母儀傳).

master?” Confucius replied, “Indeed, this has been the traditional way of assisting a music master.”<sup>128</sup>

Elsewhere, the *Lunyu* notes that “when meeting someone wearing a ceremonial cap or accompanying a blind musician, even though they were well-known acquaintances, he (Confucius) would invariably pay his respects.”<sup>129</sup> The *Liji* likewise includes the guidance of blind musicians as a hallmark of ritual propriety.<sup>130</sup> These references could be explained as demonstrations of ritual propriety or as examples of Confucius’ selfless respect for ritual officials or people of lower social status.<sup>131</sup> However, they gain more significance when read against a parallel discourse on the senses. Underneath the adoption of the blind musician into the arena of political discourse and the close entourage of the ruler lies again the ubiquitous metaphor of sensory perception.

Stories featuring blind musicians intimate that their apparent physical handicap does not prevent them from being able to “see” and diagnose the deep structures of society and expose their ruler’s shortcomings. The narrative of the blind advisor reprimanding his sighted superior for being “blind” to society’s evils is another version of the topos that real sages sense what at first sight appears senseless, or that virtuous rulers need not be able to physically look to see things.<sup>132</sup> So Music Master Kuang saved the state of Jin from disorderly government, the *Huainanzi* notes, because he had something of greater value than sight. Likewise, wordless orders and “seeing without looking” enabled Fuxi and Shennong to act as sound advisors.<sup>133</sup> The blind musician exemplifies the idea that apparent physical deficiencies can be a source of power.<sup>134</sup> One Han text even juxtaposes them to the Ru in an analogy: “Blind music masters do not know the difference between white and black yet they are skilled at speaking leisurely. The Ru do not know about government yet they are good at vaunting criticism.”<sup>135</sup>

And so, like the cook, the figure of the blind musician offers a mirror that reflects the values of self-cultivation and perception the sage-ruler should aspire to acquire. For the blind and deaf have cultivated an inner sense that enables

<sup>128</sup> *Lunyu*, 15.42 (pp. 170–1). See also *Shiji*, 47.1940.

<sup>129</sup> *Lunyu*, 10.25 (p. 107).

<sup>130</sup> *Liji jijie*, 24.657 (“Li qi”).

<sup>131</sup> As in, e.g., Lin Wenrui (2003).

<sup>132</sup> For a story portraying physical loss of sight as a lesser evil over being blind to untoward developments in society, see *Xinxu*, 1.140–2 (“Za shi”). For the idea that the righteous and virtuous are invisible and inaudible and that sages do not force themselves to see and hear things but have stimuli come to them, see *Shizi*, 1.2 (“Quan xue” 勸學), 6.23 (“Fa meng” 發蒙).

<sup>133</sup> *Huainanzi*, 9.274 (“Zhu shu”).

<sup>134</sup> See, e.g., *Huainanzi*, 10.321 (“Miu Cheng”) stating that dwarfs and blind musicians are deployed by the ruler despite their handicap.

<sup>135</sup> *Yantie lun jiaozhu*, 10.595 (“Zhao sheng”).



them to display deep vision and acuity.<sup>136</sup> Blind clerks, a 3rd-century CE commentator to the *Guoyu* notes, are people “who know the way of Heaven.”<sup>137</sup> Blind musicians are also credited with old age as their blindness forces them to “introspect,” a technique reminiscent of Daoist calisthenics. Huan Tan 桓譚 (ca. 43 BCE– ca. 28 CE) recounts the story of blind musician Sir Dou 竇公 (active during the reign of Han Wendi), who went blind from the age of thirteen and became skilful at playing the zither. When questioned how he reached such great age, Dou replied that he did not do any exercises or swallow pills. Huan Tan comments: “I felt that this explanation was plausible because Sir Dou, having been blind from youth, concentrated on the One and looked inward.”<sup>138</sup> Like the butcher and the cook, the blind musician’s art emerges spontaneously as a result of inner cultivation. To return to *Huainanzi*: “The fact that a blind musician gives free rein to his thoughts in order to assess things, lets his spirit flow to inspire the dance and shapes himself around his strings, this is something even an older brother can not show to a younger brother.”<sup>139</sup> Like the cook or steward, the blind musician provides yet another example of how, in early China, officiants who originally ply their trade in the context of ritual sacrifice inspired the conceptual vocabulary of virtuous rulership and astute sensory perception. And just as narratives on food and sacrificial offerings hailed mastery of the bland and tasteless as a hallmark of sagehood, so the voices that have been aired in this chapter advocate that seeing and hearing what lies at the heart of society and what lies hidden in the depths of cosmos starts with being blind and deaf to the challenging temptations and stimuli of one’s immediate surroundings. For these are forces that constantly threaten to dislodge both those who are in power and those who serve the powerful.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>136</sup> An eloquent exposition on this idea occurs in *Wenzi shu yi*, 2.87 (“Jing cheng” 精誠). See also *Huainanzi*, 17.568 (“Shui lin”); *Wenzi shu yi*, 6.263 (“Shang de” 上德).

<sup>137</sup> *Guoyu*, 10.344 (“Jin yu, si”). Some have speculated that Zuo Qiuming 左丘明, the alleged author of the *Zuozhuan*, was a blind annalist. See Zufferey (2003), 128. To further testify to the status of the blind musician, elsewhere, Duke Xiang of Dan 單襄公 (6th century BCE) states: “I am not a blind musician nor am I a clerk, how should I know the way of Heaven . . . ?” See *Guoyu*, 3.90 (“Zhou yu, xia”).

<sup>138</sup> *Xin lun*, in *Taiping yulan*, 740.5a–b; cf. Pokora (1975), 74–5.

<sup>139</sup> *Huainanzi*, 11.364 (“Qi su”).

<sup>140</sup> An apocryphal saying associated with the *Shenzi* 慎子 plays with this imagery while implying indirectly that inferiors might do well at times to shut their ears and eyes in order to stay in favor with their overlord:

不聽不明 [\*miang] Without keen hearing and clear sight  
 不能為王 [\*giwang] one cannot become king  
 不瞽不聵 [\*lung] without being blind and deaf  
 不能為公 [\*kung] one cannot become a lord.

See Lu Qinli, *Xian Qin shi*, 7.79. Several sources suggest that *long* refers to a lack of clarity in hearing rather than deafness. Hence it has the association of being “daft” or failing to communicate. See Zhou Qingquan (2003), vol. 1, 390–2.



In sum, Warring States and Han texts indicate that several of the key features that mark the sage-ruler's engagement with the world were based on the inversion of accepted or ordinary models of the human senses. These images often drew on narratives linked to sacrificial culture where the synaesthetic interplay of fragrance, sound, and visual spectacle was a central element in procedure. Just as the sacrificial officiant purified himself and the offerings prior to sacrifice through fasting and meticulous preparations, the sage abstained from overtly sensory delights in order to host spirit essence within his self. The sacrificial officiant nourished the spirits exterior to his person; the sage nourished the spirit within himself. Whereas musical performance in sacrifice sought to lure the spirits to the offerings, the pursuit of silence and the blocking off of ears and eyes enabled the sage to draw essential energy and spirit forces within himself. Whereas dance and motion accompanied the sacrificial address of the spirit world in ceremony, the motionless body provided a receptacle for spirit power to the adept of self-cultivation. And whereas sacrificial discourse hailed fragrance and color among the plethora of sensors that could be exploited to solicit intervention from the spirit world, a predilection for blandness, insipidness, and tastelessness as well as sensory austerity were key features associated with the sage-ruler. The same paradox of the senses that confronted the ritual officiant in sacrifice – namely how to reach spirits that operate in a world that transcends ordinary sensation by means of goods that are fully anchored in it – also presented itself to the sage or the sage-ruler. To sense the world in all its complex manifestations, the sage both needed to engage and comprehend the sensory stimuli that originated in his realm while at the same time transcending them to learn to sense the senseless.

## Concluding Remarks

By multiplying colors, patterns are formed. By combining flavors, delicacies are created. It is through such methods that the sages distinguish between the worthy and the foolish, and show up the noble and the base.<sup>1</sup>

In a recent book, Cambridge archaeologist Martin Jones offers a fascinating account of the history of bread. He shows how bread, much as it was a source of nutrition in the ancient Mediterranean world and Christian Europe, should also be thought of as a cultural object. The “artistry of the loaf” – its color, shape, and ingredients – turns bread into an intriguing semiotic tool for the archaeologist through which to interpret the cultures that consumed it: “Just as different clays mixed with different tempering agents produce different kinds of ceramic, so different flours, combined with different ingredients, create different kinds and shapes of loaf.”<sup>2</sup> In many ways, scholars seeking to unravel the semantics of food in ancient societies are like the cooks, bakers, and diners they write about. They decide on a set of sources, temper these with questions inspired by their discipline, and cook up an analytical narrative that connects with the investigative taste of their readership. The story of food in China is one that has attracted the attention of China scholars very early on. It does not end here. Food culture will continue to offer a fruitful window through which to examine Chinese thought and society, in past and present.<sup>3</sup>

This book has offered one among many possible recipes to further our understanding of the subject. It began with an account of early Chinese cuisine and the world of butchers, cooks, and philosophers. It proceeded with

<sup>1</sup> *Han shi waizhuan*, 5.199 (V.31).

<sup>2</sup> Jones (2007), 262–74 (quote p.263).

<sup>3</sup> For excellent recent work on modern China, see Farquhar (2002) and Swislocki (2009).

the culture of ritual sacrifice and ends, like so many texts of Warring States and Han China, with a word on the figure of the sage.

The texts that inform this study have revealed a world in which cooking, consuming, sharing, and sacrificing food emerged as activities that empowered individuals and communities in early China with faculties that far transcended the demands of physical sustenance. The world of Cook Ding and Confucius, or at least society as it was depicted or imagined by those who produced the texts on which we rely, was a world in which food culture was inscribed with intricate moral and social codes, a universe in which eating and feeding supplied metaphors for social and political thought and helped shape expectations of what it meant to conduct oneself as an exemplary person. By the end of Han, at the dawn of centuries of political disunion and religious change that would thoroughly transform Chinese society and its intellectual climate, men of letters continued to evoke models of exemplary personhood by paraphrasing culinary and sensory metaphors that had been articulated throughout the classical age. To quote Xun Yue, writing in the latter part of the Eastern Han:

A gentleman eats a well-balanced stew (i.e. diet) to regulate his vital energies, listens to harmonious sounds to regulate his mental attitude, accepts harmonious words (i.e. counsel) to regulate his administration, and engages in harmonious conduct to regulate his virtue. Sourness, saltiness, sweetness, and bitterness differ in taste, but together they contribute to good flavor, this is what I mean by a well-balanced diet. *Gong*, *shang*, *jue* and *zhi* are different sounds, but together they make good music, this is what I mean by harmonious sound. Words of consent or disapproval and criticism or suggestion differ from each other, but by targeting the golden mean and what is upright one is able to issue instructions. This is what I mean by harmonious counsel. Action and retreat, movement and quietude, differ from each other, but a refined balance between them enables one to be even-measured. This is what I mean by harmonious conduct.<sup>4</sup>

Food, as well as the environment in which it was consumed and discussed, also furnished a platform that linked humans to the world of the spirits through ritual sacrifice. Since many of the levers of political, ritual, and religious authority in early China originated in the context of sacrificial culture, much of the language and imagery that described how humans ate and shared food was transposed to formulate strategies that could be used to converse with the spirit world. This world of ritual sacrifice was, first and foremost,

<sup>4</sup> *Shen jian*, 4.4b; the text paraphrases the Yanzi passage in *Zuo zhuan* discussed in [Chapter 2](#), pp. 60–3, including its quote of Mao 302.

a culture of decorum, material display, and sensory ostentation, and so it challenged observers and participants to reflect on broader moral choices about how to balance the need for material sustenance with the aspiration to achieve more spiritual ends or gain a more refined insight in human affairs or the world at large.

These conflicting demands between a desire for physical welfare and aspirations to cultivate moral and spiritual well-being often converged in debates on how the sage ruler was to take command of his sensory faculties. Perceptions of moral virtue and sagehood and, ultimately, the genesis of religious, intellectual, and political authority in ancient China can only be fully understood if one acknowledges that the early Chinese located the mastery of the human sensorium at the heart of what it meant to be human. Early Chinese perceptions of power were grounded not only in the premise that rulers should command a rational understanding of the world, but also in the realization that thinking or commanding the world consisted of processing it astutely through the senses. When the Chinese sage thinks or reasons, he tastes, sees, hears, and smells the world and adjusts and regulates his individual body and the world around him accordingly.

As we have seen, this intricate link between perceptions of power and the necessity to master the realm of the senses and the human body manifested itself from the concrete to the abstract, from debates on how to balance a stew to guidelines on how to ingest the cosmos and command its deepest principles. Just as the ancient Chinese did not conceive of a metaphysical world that privileged ideas without thinking subjects, so they renounced the principle that thinking the world could be separated from sensory experience. And so it is fitting perhaps to end with a passage from Xunzi that sums up how a real Son of Heaven best conducts his affairs, not through disengaging himself from the trappings of things material, but in an atmosphere of comprehensive sensory comfort:

The Son of Heaven holds the most important position of power yet his body is at utmost ease. His heart is filled with the purest pleasures and there is nothing that thwarts his will; his physical body is not subjected to toiling labor since he holds in honor no superior. The clothes and garments he wears are of the five basic colors with every gradation of shade in between. They are adorned with repeated patterns and embroidered designs with ornaments of pearl and jade. His food and drink include abundant servings of the meat from sacrificial animals, replete with rare and exotic delicacies and with the most refined aromas and tastes. With an array of dancers the food is presented; at the beating of the great drum the feast begins; to the tunes of the Yong music, food for presentation in the Five Sacrifices is taken

away, and a hundred attendants lay out the offerings for presentation in the Western Antechamber.

When he resides at court, curtains and protective screens are set up; when he takes his position standing with his back to the ornamented screen, feudal lords hasten with quickened steps to their positions at the lower end of the audience hall. When he goes out the inner door, shamankas and shamans busy themselves. When he leaves the gate, the master of sacrifices and the invocators busy themselves. When he is to ride in the Great Chariot, they place rush mats to nurture his comfort. On either side they place fragrant marsh angelica to nurture his nose (i.e. his sense of smell). In front there is the ornamented yoke shaft to nurture his eyes (i.e. his sense of sight). There are the harmonious sounds of the tinkling bells on the horse's trappings; the chariot moves along in time with the "Martial" and "Imitation" music and the horses gallop along with the "Succession" and "Guarding" music – all to nurture his ears (i.e. his sense of hearing). The Three Dukes hold the yoke bow in their hands and hold the inner reins of the outside horses. The feudal lords hold onto the wheel, steady the carriage body, and lead the horses along. The great marquises arrange themselves in rows behind, with the grand officers arrayed behind them. The lesser marquises and the principal knights follow afterward. The ordinary officers plated in armor protect both sides of the road. Commoners hide away in secret places for none dares witness the event. When at rest he is like a great spirit, in motion he is like the Lord of Heaven.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Xunzi jijie*, 18.333–6 ("Zheng lun"); tr. Knoblock, vol. 3, 41–2 (modified); cf. *Xunzi jijie*, 19.347 ("Li lun").

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