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# CONFERRING MEAT IN ARCHAIC CHINA: BETWEEN REWARD AND HUMILIATION

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## *Abstract*

The purpose of this article is to explore the place of ritual conferral and eating of meat inside the nobility's network of power. Sacrificial meat-giving was a means to manifest political relationships, between either rulers and officers or states, hierarchy, reciprocal (asymmetric) obligations and dependency. This system of ruling is not only documented in received sources but also in bronze inscriptions. Later ritual elaborations show that the body of the victim was taken as a metaphor for society: the cutting of this victim was to be made according to hierarchical principles, equity and generosity. The obligation of the ruler to give (particularly sacrificial meat) to his inferiors (within the noble class) was mirrored by the gifts of kind made by those subordinate to their own "clients." The denial of such gifts to a person made him a social outcast. The circumstances in which food (and not only meat) is partaken are also discussed. Since accepting food from a person was to acknowledge one's inferior status, the ritual took great care of ensuring that humiliation was avoided, at least between members of the nobility. In the turmoil beginning at the end of the Chunqiu period, the *shi* started to question this system of hierarchy. They chose to reject the submission implied by the old ritual of sacrificial meat-giving, and tried to assert their independence by "marketing" their specialized knowledge.

## 1. Introduction

In the 10<sup>th</sup> year of the duke Zhuang, trouble was brewing at the frontier of Lu. Although the duke was preparing to repel the invasion, the *Zuozhuan* reports the following:

齊師伐我. 公將戰. 曹劌請見. 其鄉人曰: 肉食者謀之. 又何間焉. 劌曰: 肉食者鄙, 未能遠謀.

The army of Qi invaded our state, and the duke was about to fight, when one Cao Gui requested to be introduced to him. One of Gui's fellow-villagers said him, "the flesh-eaters are planning for the occasion, what have you to do to intermeddle?" He replied, "the flesh-eaters are poor creatures, and cannot form any far-reaching plans."<sup>1</sup>

1 *Shisanjing Zhushu*, 十三經注疏, (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983), 8.65. The translations are by James LEGGE, *The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen* (Taipei: SMC, 1994):86.

Cao Gui and his friends were not peasants; the tone they adopt to talk about the rulers makes it clear. They presumably belonged to the class of the *shi* 士 who, according to Li Ling, belonged to the lowest grade of the nobility, specialists and heirs to the court historians (史) and other learned specialists.<sup>2</sup> These specialists started to proffer their knowledge after the social transformations during the final stages of the Chunqiu period. The fact that they called the class of rulers “flesh-eaters” indicates two things: (a) They were not members of the ruling class *per se*, although able to associate with it. It must be noted that this text expresses a very strong feeling of despise and resentment for this class. (b) The *shi* themselves apparently did not eat certain types of meat, but by calling the ruling class “meat-eaters” (or “flesh-eaters”), acknowledged this high class as having a particular relationship with meat, a relationship so significant that it possibly was taken as a symbol of its status.

In this article, my aim is to shed some light on this particular relationship, i.e. to study the different usages of meat within the high class of archaic Zhou Chinese society. These usages encompass the way meat was obtained, consumed, conferred, and received or denied, in different social contexts, ritualized or not. I shall therefore try to assess its value as a vehicle for meaning and exchange, and analyze as precisely as possible the different circumstances in which those meanings appear and those exchanges take place. References will be made to other texts where food, and not only meat, appears. Given the fact that such an enquiry demands a high level of details, our primary sources will be the received texts. It is true that their historical validity has been questioned, but the wealth of information they contain is unmatched by any other source. Nevertheless, when possible, these texts will be confronted with bronzes inscriptions; in some instances, the inscriptions provide historically datable information that constitutes a kind of precise temporal signpost. Reference will also be made to anthropological data, when such data shed light on the Chinese corpus.

I shall first present the use of meat in official circumstances, linked to civil and military affairs. It will be shown that this kind of meat is the primary tool for ritual exchanges in ritual relationships within the high sphere of government. Access to meat is regulated, within the ritual, not only by ideas but also by the physical conditions (functioning as a kind of absolute limitation, or interpreted as such); these conditions have been assimilated by the ritual. The ritual can in

2 Cf. LI Ling 李零, *Jianbo Gushu yu Xueshu Yuanliu* 簡帛古書與學術源流, Beijing: Sanlian, 2004:200, 228 sq; see also YANG Kuan 楊寬, *Zhanguo Shi* 戰國史, Zhonghe: Gufeng, 1989, t.II:487 sq.

turn be interpreted as the tool through which relationships between nature (the physical conditions) and culture (including social strata, expression of power and legitimization etc.) are articulated. The ritual *par excellence* being the sacrifice, this articulation is foremost a matter of physically cutting a victim and distributing it; within this process, the specific status of what is cut and distributed will be analyzed.

The second part of this article will concentrate on the protocols governing the conferring and circulation of sacrificial meat, the meaning attached to it, and more generally, the potential pitfalls and problems arising in social contacts, whenever food is exchanged or partaken. This, in turn, will provide the means to decipher more completely, in the text first presented, the reasons behind the apparent despise for the “flesh-eaters” by Cao Gui and his peers.

## Part One: Meat as a sacred political tool

### A. Conferring meat in official circumstances

In archaic China, most documents mentioning the origin of (animal) meat are related either to hunting or to sacrifices. It appears that this meat was sometimes transferred within the framework of official functions, either military or civilian. For example, meat coming from the sacrifice to the god of the Soil (the principal god of the territory) was given to generals, as mentioned in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳, 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the duke Min 閔公:

帥師者受命於廟，受脤於社。

Commanders of an army receive their command in the ancestral temple, and sacrificial meat at the altar of the soil.<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes, as stated in the *Zuozhuan* (16<sup>th</sup> year of the duke Zhao 昭), an officer is in charge of the sacrifice at the altar of the soil, prior to military expedition, and part of the meat is given back to the lord:

3 *Chunqiu Zuozhuan*, *Shisanjing* ed., 11.83. translation by J. LEGGE, *The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen* (Taipei: SMC, 1994):130.

受脤歸脤

(Kong Zhang, having been ordered to offer the sacrifice to the altar of the soil), received the *shen* meat and gave (it) back (to the lord).<sup>4</sup>

Another text of the *Zuozhuan* (13<sup>th</sup> year of the duke Cheng 成公) mentions this fact, with other details:

祀有執膾，戎有受脤。

In the ancestral temple, [the officers] receive the roasted flesh; in war, they receive the *shen* meat offered at the altar of the soil.<sup>5</sup>

There is no precise indication in either text as to whether the meat offered was actually eaten by the officers but the *Lunyu* provides such an information:

祭於公不宿食。

When he [i.e. Confucius] had been *assisting* at the prince's sacrifice, he did not keep the meat *which he received* over night.<sup>6</sup>

The meat given was therefore not consumed *in situ* but indeed eaten. In any case, the meat of sacrifices was to be given to officers, this transfer being linked to the nature of their mission, through both the place of the sacrifice and the nature of the recipient of the sacrifice (the god of the soil or the ancestors). The inscription of the *He zun* 何尊 (Western Zhou, period of the king Cheng 成王) allows us to shed light on the underlying logic of this transfer:

4 *Shisanjing* ed., 47.377. Using the text of the *Zuozhuan*, a text in the *Zhouli* (*Shanfu* 膳夫, *Shisanjing* ed., 4.22) – “(the *shanfu*) receives the viand obtained by those offering sacrifices (on behalf of the king) and prepares it.” 凡祭祀之致福者. 受而膳 – can be amended. The *shanfu* receives and prepares the meat coming from sacrifices made on behalf of the king (thus, our translation); it is not flesh coming from private, ancestral sacrifices, which would have been hard to justify. Since (in the *Zuozhuan*) it is the *shen* meat, linked to sacrifices prior to military activities, it would be difficult to conceive such an activity (with the relevant sacrifice associated to it) not under the control of the master of the army, either the king or (in the different states) the lord of the state. Therefore, the meat received by the *shanfu* must have come from a sacrifice commanded by the king and executed on his behalf by subordinates; this meat was to be given back to the king, as it was he, who commanded such a sacrifice; therefore, it was normal that the meat (the benediction) came back to him, as a kind of homage or allegiance and acknowledgment of his power.

5 *Shisanjing* ed., 27.209, translation in *The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen*:382.

6 *Lunyu*, chapter Xiangdang 鄭黨, *Shisanjing* ed., 10.39, translation J. LEGGE, *The Four Books, Confucian Analects*, Wenxing re-ed., Taipei 1966:233.

復禹(稱)T 王豐(禮)福自天

(He) praised anew the blessed meat offered to king Wu in Heavens' hall.<sup>7</sup>

The meat is obtained through a sacrifice to the Zhou king's ancestors and given away to officers. Since the power of the Zhou king proceeded from his ancestors, their grace imbued the meat (hence the name *fu* 福 given to it)<sup>8</sup> and was passed unto those who received it, this meat being the repository of a specific quality, a blessing or a grace – a quality transmitted through it and by it, in a very concrete way.<sup>9</sup> Western Zhou bronze inscriptions also refer to sacrifices made prior or linked to military activities. One of the best examples is the inscription of the *Yihou Ze gui* 宜侯矢簋, Western Zhou (period of the king Kang 康王):

王省T 王成王伐商圖S (延)省東或(國)圖王立(位)于宜入土(社)南鄉(向)王令V 侯  
矢曰U 侯于宜

The king [Kang] examined the documents [related to] the military expeditions of the kings Wu and Cheng against the Shang, extended his examination to the documents [related to] the northernmost territories.<sup>10</sup> The king stood near the sacrificial tray, entered the altar of the soil, faced south. The king gave the (following) order to the Marquis of Wu, saying, “Very well, [I] am enfoeffing you as the Marquis of Yi.”<sup>11</sup>

The character *yi* 宜, written  in the inscription, designates primarily a sacrificial tray on which the meat of the victim was displayed.<sup>12</sup> The part of the in-

7 *Shang Zhou qingtongqi mingwen xuan*, t. 3:20–21. Some characters being barely visible on the inscription, we use the transcription given by the commentary.

8 As we have seen above, this term “benediction,” (福) which designates the sacrificial meat, has been conserved in some received texts.

9 The notion of “grace”, without the specific tones this term has in Western civilization, expresses on the one hand the power of the one who gives it, and on the other what makes the receiver of it fortunate. In Siberian regions, a kind of meat (“dalenga”), obtained through sacrifice to the ancestors, is potent with fortune and happiness; receiving it is done according to rank and social status, which in turn is confirmed by the meat itself. Cf. R. HAMAYON, *La Chasse à l'âme*, Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie, 1990:625 sq.

10 The word *tu* 圖, according to the *Xizhou Ceming Zhidu Yanjiu*, t. 3:99–100, does not mean “map” but “written document”, “written order”.

11 *Yihou Ze gui* 宜侯矢簋, in *Shang Zhou qingtongqi mingwen xuan*, 商周青銅器銘文選, vol. 3, ed. MA Chengyuan 馬承源 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1988) t.3:34.

12 In that case, it is not rendered by *yi* 宜 but by *zu*俎 ‘tray’, of which several different types were used. For example, in the inscription of the *Tianwang gui* 天亡簋 (Western Zhou, period of the king Wu, *Shang Zhou qingtongqi mingwen xuan*, t. 3:14–15) 王鄉 (饗)大宜: “[two days after a sacrifice offered to Heaven] the king offered a banquet with a

scription selected presents thus a complete sequence: the king first attends to the displaying of the sacrificial meat, enters the next stage of the ceremony, at the altar of the soil, and positions himself facing the south. Afterward, the inscription notes the king's order to Ze (enfeoffing Ze with Yi) and his subsequent gifts to him (slaves and territories).<sup>13</sup> Another inscription, on the *Qin gui* 禽簋 (Western Zhou, period of the king Cheng) underlines the specific role played by the meat in the whole process through which an official receives a command by the king:

禽又(有)W(脰)祝.

Qin, received a piece of sacrificial meat, uttered the invocation.<sup>14</sup>

The context of the inscription is one of a military expedition launched against the Marquis of Yan 奄侯. The duke of Zhou, brother of the king Wu, instructed one of his sons to proceed to the ceremony at the altar of the soil, prior to this expedition. In a manner of speaking: The officers received the blessing of the spirits in the form of a piece of meat, this piece being the transmitter of the ancestors' and spirits' "blessing". Apart from the individual giving of a piece of meat to officers, the *Zhouli* records also the importance of meat in establishing contacts between kin states:

以脰膳之禮親兄弟之國.

[The *Dazongbo*] uses the ritual [gift] of sacrificial *shen* meat and *fan* meat to give blessings to brother states.<sup>15</sup>

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display of sacrificial flesh on a big [wooden] tray." In the case of the *Yihou Ze gui*, the word written with this character means "ceremony of flesh offering at the altar of the soil." The ceremony described here corresponds to those in the received texts examined above.

13 Further information can be extracted from this passage: The completion of the ritual sequence, with the king finally facing south. Thus, the completion of the ritual was important enough to be recorded in the inscription. It was probably because the enfeoffment recorded by the inscription was further validated by the mention of the completion of the necessary ritual, thus expressing that every step of the procedure has been respected. The ritual sequences involved in the enfeoffment process have been analyzed thoroughly in CHEN Hanping 陳漢平, *Xizhou Ceming Zhidu Yanjiu* 西周冊命制度研究, Shanghai: Xuelin, 1986:101–130.

14 *Shang Zhou qingtongqi mingwen xuan*, t. 3:18.

15 *Shisanjing* ed., 18.122.

*fan* is the meat coming from the ancestral sacrifice; *shen* is the meat coming from the altar of the soil. The *Dazongbo* was thus in charge of the distribution of this meat to brother (i.e. possessing the same ancestor) states. Another example of this ritual is given in the *Zuozhuan*, 14<sup>th</sup> year of the duke Ding 定公:

天王使石尗來歸脤。

The king [by] Heaven's grace sent Shishang to Lu with a present of the flesh of sacrifice.<sup>16</sup>

According to the commentaries, the *fan* meat and *shen* meat were portions of meat put into a sea-shell. A tantalizing detail is presented by the *Chunqiu Gongyangzhuan*, for the same 14<sup>th</sup> year of the duke Ding. The *Gongyang* 公羊 says that the *fan* meat was cooked and that the *shen* meat was raw.<sup>17</sup> Since the *fan* meat was used to commission officers for civilian mission and the *shen* meat given to military commanders (an information confirmed by the *Qin gui*'s inscription), there would be an opposition between the cooked, the civilian domain and the raw, the domain of war. Unfortunately, only the *Gongyang* (and the *Guliang*) give this explanation, an explanation contradicted by the commentators of the *Zhouli* passage.<sup>18</sup> A text in the *Zhouli*, chapter Dasima (大司馬 “great commander in chief”) contains a clue allowing one to give some credit to the *Gongyang* explanation:<sup>19</sup> 大祭祀饗食. 羞魚. 授其祭 “In all important sacrifices and banquets, the Great commanding officer brings the fishes offered in sacrifice.”<sup>20</sup> Since fishes are a “cold” animal species, close to “rawness” (while meat retains for sometimes the warmth of the body, even after the killing), it would indeed suggest that rawness was associated with the military affairs.

In any case, the meat of sacrifice was a symbol of closeness between those who conferred it and those who received it.

16 *Shisanjing* ed., 56.449. Translation: *The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen*:787. On this point, see also J. L. BILSKY: *The State Religion of Ancient China* (Taipei: The Chinese Association for Folklore, 1975):110.

17 *Shisanjing* ed., 26.149.

18 The motive they give is that the vases used for the ceremonies to the god of soil and the ancestors were both decorated with sea-shells.

19 It must be noted that the *Dictionnaire Ricci de Caractères Chinois* (art. 9662 for *shen*, art. 3364 for *fan*) retains the explanation given by the *Gongyang*.

20 *Shisanjing* ed., 29.20; see also *Xizhou Ceming Zhidu Yanjiu*:198–199.

*B. Ritual as the cross-road of ideal and material*

If this closeness, either between brother states (i.e. states with an ancestor in common) or between the ruler and his officers, was established through sacrificial meat, was this meat always to be eaten? We have seen that the meat offered to brother states was put into a sea-shell (according to the commentaries, this was the case also with the meat offered during sacrifices at the local altar of the soil), which means that the portions were not big. Furthermore, since this meat was to be sent away from the original location of its “creation” (i.e. the sacrificial site) to quite faraway states, one can imagine what would have been the sight of this meat after a few days of transportation. Confucius himself

食體而餳. 魚餒而肉敗不食. 色惡不食. 臭惡不食. 失飪不食 [...]

did not eat rice which had been injured by heat or damp and turned sour, nor fish or meat which was gone. He did not eat what was discoloured, or what was of a bad flavour, nor anything which was ill-cooked [...].<sup>21</sup>

Because of the distances between the different states and the absence of refrigeration, either cooked or – what would be worse – raw meat was not edible anymore upon arrival. It does not mean that the meat was not edible *per se*, but we can rather assume that the ritual not only took into account ideas and symbols but also physical realities and limits.<sup>22</sup> Most of the time, such physical realities act as an absolute limit under which the accomplishment of “normal” ritual is simply not possible. Sometimes, limits linked to the factual are part and parcel of the ritual (as it belongs to the ideal) and is integrated into it. A good example of this is given by Maurice Godelier: In some African nomadic societies, cattle is slaughtered and distributed immediately among the community, the absence of means of refrigeration demanding, so to speak, that the distribution be immediate and collective. Meat not immediately disposed off in this way is liable to rot

21 *Shisanjing* ed., 10.39, *Confucian Analects*, 233.

22 I refer here to the theories of Maurice GODELIER: *L’Idéel et le Matériel*, Paris: Fayard 1984, particularly p. 9 sq for the definition of the “mental” (idéel) and the “material” (materiel); see also by the same author *L’Enigme du Don*, Paris, Flammarion, 2002:141–144. Godelier, examining the social institutions and their connections with the physical/ecological conditions, makes a distinction between the “idéel” (ideal or ideological) and the “matériel” (material reality or the factual): every act linked to an institution is the conscious act of a specific person, which cannot be performed unless the conscious representations of the society are assimilated and acknowledged as such by this person. But this specific act itself is materialized through physical changes and exchanges.

very quickly. At the same time, distribution is made according to the differences in social status, the alliances etc.<sup>23</sup> In archaic China, problems related to the conservation of meat were an integral part of the ritual, as shows a text from the 4<sup>th</sup> year of the duke Zhao 昭公:

食肉之祿位, 冰皆與焉.

The ice was given to all who were entitled by their station to eat meat.<sup>24</sup>

This text shows two things: (a) Access to meat was linked to social status. (b) The technical possibility to preserve meat (e.g. with ice) was thus an integral part of the distribution of meat, i.e. that it commanded also access to certain natural resources. Such limitations were to be observed in the regulations for sacrifice. In times of restraint, due to bad conditions, harsh weather or poor harvests, restrictions applied to victims allowed for sacrifices, as shows a text in the *Liji* 禮記, chapter *Yuzao* 玉藻:

君無故.不殺牛.大夫無故.不殺羊.士無故.不殺犬豕.

Without some cause for it, a ruler did not kill an ox, nor a great officer a sheep, nor a lower officer a pig or dog.<sup>25</sup>

23 *L'Idéal et le Matériel*:64–66.

24 *Shisanjing* ed., 42.332. Translation: *The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen*, 596. For an examination of the different rituals attached to the handling of ice, see R. STERCKX, "Food and Philosophy in Early China," in *Of Tripod and Palate*, (R. STERCKX ed.), New York: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2004:36.

25 *Liji*, *Shisanjing* ed., 29.246, translation J. LEGGE, *Lichi* (New Hyde Park: N.Y. University book, 1967), v. 2:4. The following portion of the text is interesting: 君子遠庖廚. 凡有血氣之類弗身踐 “A superior man had his shambles and kitchen at a distance (from the) house; he did not tread wherever there was such a thing as blood or (tainted) air (this in context of insufficient rain, with food restrictions).” This must be compared with a passage from *Mengzi* 孟子 (chapter Liang Huiwang, 梁惠王, *Shisanjing* ed., 1 下. 6, translation in J. LEGGE, *The Four Books, The Work of Mencius*, Taipei: Wenxing, 1966:141): 君子遠庖廚 “The superior man keeps away from his slaughter-house and cook-room.” James Legge's translation of the same text in two different sources (君子遠庖廚) allows to understand the two different informations it provides; the first one is related to the ritual repugnance to blood (cf. my “Some Ritual Elaborations on Cooking and Sacrifice in Late Zhou and Western Han texts,” *Early China* 23–24 1998–1999:93–96); the second is a reminder that some specialized building had to be placed outside the human dwellings, not only for ritual purity's sake, but also (in the case of the cook-room) as a precaution against fire hazards (as in medieval Europe). This is a good example of the convergence of the ideal and the material within the ritual.

The cause mentioned here was of course the duty to perform a sacrifice; we can see clearly that there was a double kind of restraint, first on the quantity of animals used or slaughtered, and second on the quality of animals, each strata allowed victims according to their status. This text indicates conversely that when poor conditions demanded it, even those entitled to certain kinds of victims were not ritually allowed to sacrifice and eat them.<sup>26</sup> Another text goes even further:

歲凶, 年殺不登. 君膳不祭肺. 馬不食穀.

In bad years, when the grain of the season is not coming to maturity, the ruler at his meals will not make the (usual) offering of the lungs, nor will his horses be fed on grain.<sup>27</sup>

Commentaries allow to understand that the forfeiting of the offering of lungs meant that there was no sacrifice in times of distress. It indicates too that a part of the animal victim, the lungs, could be used as a symbol for the whole animal, since after the killing, the lungs were the first to be offered to the spirits. The lungs would therefore be a kind of synecdoque, the part standing in lieu of the whole.

### C. The whole and the part

While there is no precision regarding the provenance or the exact nature of the morsel of meat (*shen* or *fan*) given to officers in public functions, the aforementioned text using the lungs as representative of the whole victim indicates that some parts of the victim had a particular status. This in turn will allow us to deepen our understanding of the logic behind the ritual conferral and circulation of meat.

The first text is given in the *Liji*, chapter *Yuzao*, describing the ritual governing the visit to the royal court of feudal lords, in a context where the sovereign received the princes at the court to hear their advice (聽政):

26 The *Lunyu*, *Shisanjing* ed., 10.39, mentions that “[Confucius] did not partake of wine and dried meat bought in the market” 沽酒市不食 (trans. R. STERCKX, “Food and Philosophy in Early China”:50). Was Confucius’ attitude motivated by hygiene alone? It is possible that he refused to buy meat the origin of which was not clear, in order to avoid consuming less than healthy food. On the other hand, he was also avoiding the possibility of consuming flesh coming from an animal he was not, in ritual terms, allowed access to.

27 *Liji*, chapter *Quli* 曲禮下, *Shisanjing* ed., 4.31, *Lichi*, v.1:106. Restrictions seem to apply to the major activities of the state, namely sacrifices (represented by the lungs) and war (the horses).

特牲，三俎，祭肺。

There was a single animal, with three (other) dishes of meat, the lungs forming the sacrificial offering.<sup>28</sup>

While not exactly in a sacrificial context (being a meal offered to the princes by the king), something of the “single animal,” the lungs, is treated as an offering (presumably to ancestors). In archaic China the ritual domain was not limited to ceremonies of sacrifice, but as a rule, when food was involved, it did not proceed without some sort of offering. Numerous non-sacrificial ceremonies are described particularly in the *Yili*, for example the district symposium (饗飲酒) or the district archery meeting (鄉射禮) among others. These ceremonials were not sacrificial *per se* but included at some point the ingestion of food, sometimes coming from a sacrificial victim; but eating the food was not done without a gesture of offering beforehand. Zheng Xuan says: 禮飲食必祭 “[in] ceremonies, [when it comes to] eating and drinking, there must be offering.”<sup>29</sup> What has been translated as “offering” is the word *ji* (祭) which is usually rendered as “sacrifice” or “making a sacrifice”. The “District symposium” chapter of the *Yili* describes the complete sequence of offering this way:

主人阼階東疑.立.賓坐左執爵.祭脯醢.尊爵于廡西.興.右手取肺卻左手執本.坐.弗繚.右絕末以祭.尚左手躋之.興.加于俎.

The host takes his stand to the east of the eastern step in an attitude of expectancy, and the guest, seating himself, takes the cup in his left hand, and with his right makes an offering of the dried meat and hash, afterwards placing the cup to the west of the relishes. Then he gets up, and taking the lung in his right hand, with his left hand, palm inwards, grasps the base of it, and, sitting down, he does not hold it through all its length, but with his right cuts off the end to use as an offering. Then, lifting his left hand, he puts the lung to his mouth, and tastes it, thereafter, rising and lying it on the stand.<sup>30</sup>

In this text, two terms are quite important, the first being *ji* (祭), the second, *ji* (躋). *ji* (祭) in the oracular inscriptions meant a sacrifice which was part of the

28 *Liji*, *Shisanjing* ed., 29.246, *Lichi* vol. 2:3.

29 Commentary found in chapter *Shanfu* 謇夫 in the *Zhouli*, *Shisanjing* ed., 4.22. This can be illustrated by the attitude of Confucius who: “Although his food might be coarse millet and vegetable soup, [...] would offer a little of it in sacrifice with a grave respectful air [...] 雖疏食菜羹瓜祭，必齊如也鄉黨 (*Lunyu*, chapter *Yongye*, *Shisanjing* ed., 10.39, translation *Confucian Analects*:234).

30 *Yili*, chapter *Xiangyinjiu* (饗飲酒), *Shisanjing* ed., 8.38, translation J. STEELE, *The I-Li* (Taipei: Ch'eng-wen, 1966):54–55.

five cyclical sacrifices of Shang ancestral ceremonies.<sup>31</sup> When it is used in texts not directly related to ceremonies of sacrifice, it designated in fact a technical term, a ritual gesture of physically cutting and handling a piece of meat, for example, or dropping some wine from a cup. In this text, it has another, technical meaning: it consists in taking part of the meat/victim and making a gesture of offering. The second term *ji* (嗜) means “to taste”. Two observations can be made: (a) Everything that is eaten must be first offered in part to (presumably) the spirits. (b) Whereas during the ceremony dried meat and hash are offered before being eaten, it is significant that the text explicitly states that the lungs are not only offered in part but also tasted (but not consumed). A physical ingestion of the lungs, akin to eating, must take place, in a very intimate way of putting the body of the participant and a part of the body of the victim (but the part here meaning the whole) into contact. Back to the aforementioned text in chapter Yuzao of the *Liji*, we can surmise that the lungs were offered and tasted by the king. A passage in the chapter *Shanfu* 膳夫 in the *Zhouli* says: 膳夫授祭品. 詧之. 王乃食 “the *shanfu* gives the sacrificial parts [to the king]. He tastes them [first]. Then the king eats.”<sup>32</sup> The commentary of Zheng Xuan permits us to understand that the *shanfu* removed the lungs and the spine in order that it could be offered by the king. Of course, the *shanfu* had to taste it first, probably as a precaution against poisoning.<sup>33</sup> The chapter *Jitong* 祭統 of the *Liji* says that the king removed the lungs himself: 君執鸞刀羞嗜 “the ruler held in his hands the knife with bells; he prepared the lungs [to be offered to the personator].”<sup>34</sup> Several other texts indeed mention the lungs as a very important morsel. The *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 notes three times that in the royal sacrifices 祭先肺 “the lungs are first offered.”<sup>35</sup> The Tang commentary of the *Shanfu* text ventures to say that the Shang considered the liver to be the prime offering, whereas the Zhou gave this status to the lungs. Whether this commentary is valid for the Shang period remains to be seen; but it certainly holds true for Zhou pe-

31 See CHANG Yuzhi 常玉芝, *Shangdai Zhouji Zhidu* 商代周祭制度, Zhongguo Shehui ed., 1987:1, 14–15. According to the *Dictionnaire Ricci de Caractères Chinois* (art. 855), the original meaning was an offering of a piece of meat.

32 *Zhouli* 周禮, *Shisanjing* ed., 4.22.

33 Such an attempt to poison the ruler is narrated in the *Zuozhuan*, the 4<sup>th</sup> year of the duke Xi 僖公 (12.91).

34 *Liji*, *Shisanjing* ed., 49.375, translation *Li Chi*, vol. 2, 241. It is not clear in what circumstances the king would have removed the lungs himself or let the *shanfu* do it.

35 *Zhuzi jicheng* 諸子集成, ed. YANG Jialuo 楊家駱 (Taipei: Shijie, 1955), chapter Meng-xiaji 4.34, chapter Zhongxiaji 5.44, chapter Jixiaji 6.54.

riod, at least in the received texts. Unfortunately, no source directly explaining the exact meaning of the lungs is to be found. Explanations given by the commentators, based partially on the *Lüshi chunqiu*, with reference to latter time medicinal literature, link the lung with one of the five elements, in this case, metal. The only indirect reference to our knowledge is in the ode Sang Rou 桑柔 in the Daya part of the *Shijing*. In criticizing a bad counselor, the ode says about him that 自有肺腸 “he holds only to his own thoughts.”<sup>36</sup> The following lines of the ode indicate that this vile person reckoned only his view to be good while the preceding lines contrast this person to the righteous ruler. Therefore, the lungs seemed to be linked with mind and intelligence, and it is probably in that way that the offering of the lungs was considered important: this vital organ was offered (and tasted) to acknowledge the will of the ancestors and to fortify ones' own. Another element must be taken in account: By saying that the vile counselor held only his thoughts to be worthy of consideration, the ode Sang Rou implies that a good counselor should be of one mind with either his peers or his lord. The lungs would therefore be taken as an image of wholeness and unanimity.<sup>37</sup> In view of those elements, I propose that the lungs were the chief offering because they represented coherence and unanimity, a guaranty or a sign that all the participants to the sacrifice were of one mind.

This way of using animal victim's parts as an image for virtues can be seen in other texts as well. The inscription of the *Qiang pan* 牆盤 (Western Zhou, period of the king Gong 恭王) gives:

遠猶x (腹)心

[Your ancestor Yi] had far-reaching plans and was loyal [to his king].<sup>38</sup>

What is translated by “was loyal” literally has the meaning “to be like belly and heart [for the king].” It is clear then that the body of the sacrificial victim embodied, by way of correspondence, many virtues. These correspondences were expatiated in a more detailed fashion by other texts; for example, according to the *Liji*, chapter Jitong, the bones had a special significance:

36 *Shijing*, *Shisanjing* ed., 18-2:291. Translation in *The She King*:524.

37 Interestingly, Aristotle considered the innards to be the elements by which coherence was given to the animals. Cf. J.L. DURAND, “Bêtes Grecques” (in M. DETIENNE, J. P. VERNANT, *La Cuisine du Sacrifice en Pays Grec*, Paris: Gallimard, 1979):150.

38 See *Shang Zhou qingtongqi mingwen xuan*, vol. 3:153–154. The expression 腹心 can be found for example in the *Shijing*, part Zhounan 周南, ode 兔置.

凡爲俎者骨爲主. 骨有貴賤 [...] 周人貴肩. 凡前貴於後. 爵者所以明祭之必有惠也. 是故貴者取貴骨. 賤者取賤骨. 貴者不重賤者不虛. 示均也. 惠均, 則政行, 政行, 則事成, 事成, 則功立. [...] 善爲政者如此. 故曰: 見政事之均焉.

In all arrangements with the stands the chief attention was given to the bones. Some bones were considered nobler, and some meaner [...]. The Zhou favoured the shoulders. Generally, the bones in front were thought nobler than those behind. The stands served to illustrate the rule in sacrifices of showing favors. Hence the nobler guests received the nobler bones, and the lower, the less noble. The nobler did not receive very much, and the lower were not left without any: – impartiality was thus shown. With impartiality of favors, government proceeded freely. With the free proceeding of government, undertakings were accomplished; with the accomplishment of undertakings, merit was established [...]. So did the skilful administrators of government proceed, and hence it is said that (sacrifices showed the principle of) impartiality in the business of government.<sup>39</sup>

This reveals, in the art of good government, the intricate relationship between the victim and the way its bones are distributed. Whether this text is a genuine pre-Han document is questionable, but two passages in the *Mengzi*, chapter Gaozi 告子 offer a parallel. Although not directly related to sacrifice, they show the use of the same terms as in the text in the *Liji* and a similar comparison between body parts and the hierarchical structure of the society as a whole:

體有貴賤, 有小大. 無以小害大, 無以賤害貴.

Some parts of the body are noble, and some ignoble; some great, and some small. The great must not be injured for the small, nor the noble for the ignoble.<sup>40</sup>

At the same time, *Mengzi* introduces the notion that feeding must be done in a spirit of just consideration for the whole, i.e. avoiding being partial to a part only with detriment to the rest (of the society):

養其一指而失其肩背而不知也, 則爲狼疾人也.

He who nourishes one of his fingers, neglecting his shoulders or his back, without knowing that he is doing so, is a man who resembles a hurried wolf.<sup>41</sup>

Ancient Chinese ritualists insisted upon the idea of differentiation in society, differentiation manifested within the ceremonies of sacrifice. We see here that the body of the victim, and particularly the structural parts (the bones), served as

39 *Liji*, *Shisanjing* ed., 49:377–378. *Li Chi*, vol. 2:248.

40 *Mengzi*, *Shisanjing* ed., 11下:88. Translation: J. LEGGE: *The Four Books, The Work of Mencius* (Taipei: Wenxing, 1966):416.

41 *Mengzi*, *Shisanjing* ed., 11下:89. Translation in *The Four Books, The Work of Mencius*:417.

a metaphor for the society as a whole. This society was composed of different parts, noble and non-noble people (therefore with distinctive categories), but a good government consisted in equilibrating the distribution of favors. The distribution of bones manifested in a very tangible way equity, justice, and thus, as the text says, impartiality. The art of government was very akin to the art of the chef, cutting through a victim but at the same time being aware of the necessity not to favor a part an incurring detriment to other parts, i.e. preserving the wholeness and the equilibrium of the society (or the ingredients!). One thinks of the famous figure of Yi Yin 伊尹, who was a cook before becoming the minister of Shang Tang 商湯.<sup>42</sup>

These examples show that sacrifice was a rich source of metaphor: Through the process of cutting up a victim, distributing the parts among the different participants, order (i.e. meaning) was conferred to society and the universe. The metaphors were not limited to the political sphere *stricto sensu*. R. Sterckx quotes a passage from the *Lunheng*, where Wang Chong mentioned the case of Chen Ping, a minister of Han Gaozu, who was formerly a butcher. Wang Chong said that that “the cutting of meat and the cutting of words” were the same thing.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, Plato (in *Phaedrus*) compared the dialectic method, consisting in finding the natural articulations of things, to the cutting of the animal victim along the natural articulations of its body,<sup>44</sup> while in ancient India, the sacrificial knife was comparable to a poem, i.e. the dividing and cutting of a victim was equivalent to the mastery of the articulations of language.<sup>45</sup>

Wang Chong notwithstanding, it seems that archaic China was mainly interested in the value of the sacrifice as a political tool, helping to order the society following its “natural” articulations.

Another comparison with India will allow a finer understanding of the relationship between ceremonies of sacrifice, food and government. When the meat of the victim is eaten, what is left are the bones, the most basic structure in animals but also a convenient image of social order at its most elementary level. Chinese ritualists explained that the distribution of bones was done first to take into account the hierarchical differences between men but, second, at the same time this distribution was to be done with impartiality. Fundamentally, we have

42 For a more complete exposition of the connection between Yi Yin, cooking and government, see “Food and Philosophy in Early China”:46 sq.

43 “Food and Philosophy in Early China”:41.

44 “Bêtes Grecques”:151.

45 On this point, see Charles MALAMOUD, “Les Chemins du Couteau” in *Cuire le Monde*, (Paris: La découverte 1989):215.

these two notions: *separation* (the bones, to be distributed, must be first cut out, separated) and *unification* (through impartiality, i.e. by avoiding the creation of too much difference). The well-being of society as a whole was symbolized by the body of the victim and the subsequent ritual gestures that ensured its proper treatment. Ultimately, the ruler was responsible for these different acts, which had a deep political resonance.

In Vedic India, a royal ceremony of sacrifice offers a striking parallel: this ceremony, called *asvamedha* used one horse as victim.<sup>46</sup> The horse represented the kingdom, and before the body was cut, pins in different metals, representing the different classes of subjects, were stuck on it by the wives of the king. These pins made of the horse's body an equivalent to the whole kingdom. In this sacrifice, as well as in other kinds of sacrifices, the underlying idea was to preserve the unity of the body of the victim, in spite of the fact that this body was to be dismembered.<sup>47</sup> Such a notion of conserving by ritual artifice the wholeness of the victim is not found in archaic China. Nevertheless, one common point is present within the two systems: the metaphoric meaning of the victim as the embodiment of the social structure. For both civilizations, the treatment of the victim in sacrifice was considered an integrating part of government: the art of combining the diversity of the society into the wholeness of an order.

## Part Two: The protocols of meat and food offering

### A. Meat, obligations and subordination

The process by which the order of the society was maintained was manifested, as we have seen, through the circulation of meat coming from the sacrifice. Meat was also used in a more “mundane” way: the affection, the deep connection between the king and his officers was expressed specifically, outside the realm of official circumstances (i.e. the sacrificial meat), by gifts of meat, as shown by the *Zhouli*, chapter *Neiyong* 內饗:

凡王之好賜肉脩.

All whom the king appreciates [are] given dried meat.<sup>48</sup>

46 “Les Chemins du Couteau”:212–217.

47 See particularly “Les Chemins du Couteau”:212.

48 *Zhouli*, *Shisanjing* ed., 4.24. Whereas it is not specified here that the dried meat came from a sacrifice, it is significant that the officer in charge of giving this meat to those the king

Everything the king gave was imbued with specific qualities, simply because it came from him, as a superior being, and could not be treated without respect. This was done either directly in the presence of the king or afterwards, as the *Liji* shows:

御食於君. 君賜餘. 器之漑者不寫. 其餘皆寫. 飴餘不祭. 父不祭子. 夫不祭妻.  
 When one is attending the ruler at a meal, and the ruler gives him anything that is left, if it be in a vessel that can be easily scoured, he does not transfer it (to another of his own); but from any other vessel he should so transfer it. Portions of (such) food should not be used as offerings (to the departed). A father should not use them in offering even to a (deceased) son, nor a husband in offering to a (deceased) wife.<sup>49</sup>

So if the meat can be received in a vessel that can be wiped clean (removing all traces of what has been in physical contact with the body of the king, since it is a left-over of what has already been consumed by the king), there is no need to transfer it to another vessel; if this is not the case, transfer should be made in order to avoid that what comes from the body of the king be mixed up with another substance. There is another element: this meat (having been in physical contact with the king and therefore imbued with his essence) cannot be offered in funeral sacrifices. Such a ritual prescription (avoiding the contact between the king and death) can be observed in many other texts.<sup>50</sup> Besides, what comes from the king (who is in a superior position vis-à-vis the receiver of the meat) cannot be given to those (the son or the wife of the receiver) who are in a inferior position already vis-à-vis the receiver and, *a fortiori*, the king himself.

According to M. Godelier, the giver keeps rights on what has been given, thus reinforcing the link, the obligation incurring when something is received as a gift; to accept a gift is to accept a debt. Social exchanges through gifts are thus characterized by acts of giving-for-keeping and keeping-for-giving. It must be added that the one who gives is *ipso facto* in a position of superiority vis-à-vis the receiver, the receiver having contracted a debt to the giver.<sup>51</sup> Noncompliance with this obligation would put somebody outside the realm of the ritually ordered society; as the chapter *Quli* 曲禮上 of the *Liji* says:

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appreciated (the *neiyong*) was also in charge of the cooking during sacrifices. He was also in charge of the cooking for feasts, and this is a further indication that, indeed, feasts and sacrifices shared common points.

49 *Liji*, chapter *Quli* 曲禮上, *Shisanjing* ed., 2.15, translation *Lichi* t. I:82.

50 See my article "Wu and Shaman," *BSOAS*, vol. 65 part 2, 2002:362.

51 See *L'Enigme du Don*:46, 52 sq, 61.

往而不來，非禮也。來而不往，亦非禮也。

Going (giving something) and not receiving (a gift back / a visit back) is not ritually proper. Receiving a gift (being visited) and not giving something back (not visiting back) is equally ritually improper.<sup>52</sup>

The obligation linked with sacrificial meat, the debt contracted, was even more powerful, as shows the attitude of Confucius:

朋友之饋，雖車馬，非祭肉不拜。

When a friend sent him a present, though it might be a carriage and horses, he did not bow. The only present for which he bowed was that of the meat of sacrifice.<sup>53</sup>

The obligation linked to the gift of meat was so strong that Confucius, solicited by a *daifu* whose attitude he disapproved of, had to – without success – resort to a ruse to avoid seeing him:

陽貨欲見孔子。孔子不見。歸孔子豚。孔子時其亡也，而往拜之。遇諸塗。謂孔子曰：  
[...]

Yang Huo wished to see Confucius, but Confucius would not go to see him. *On this*, he sent a present of a pig to Confucius, who, having chosen a time when Huo was not at home, went to pay his respects *for the gift*. He met him, however, on the way [...].<sup>54</sup>

Of course, this might be interpreted as the attempt to bribe Confucius but had it been the case, the master would only have had to refuse the “gift”. there was something in this meat that carried an obligation, at least to formally pay a visit to the giver. One can conclude that this meat, the pig, was intended to be received by Confucius to perform a sacrifice.

Whether coming from a sacrifice or otherwise, the offering of cooked meat was an important part of the ritualized relationship between the leadership and the officers who served it.<sup>55</sup> Mencius recalls an episode during which Confucius was denied this gift:

52 *Liji, Shisanjing* ed., 1.3.

53 *Lunyu*, chapter Yongye, *Shisanjing* ed., 10.39, translation *Confucian Analects*:235.

54 *Lunyu*, chapter Yanghuo 陽貨, *Shisanjing* ed., 17.68, *Confucian Analects*:317.

55 Since it included a strong, physical connection between the participants (through the manipulation of meat), the officers specially in charge of this manipulation, because of this physical proximities, were able to be given a quite elevated status, status witnessed either in bronze inscriptions or in received texts. For example, the Western Zhou (period of the king Xiao 孝) *Da Ke ding*'s inscription says that the *shanfu* was charged with transmitting the king's orders (出內(納)朕令) (cf. *Shang Zhou qingtongqi mingwen xuan*, t. 3:215–217);

曰：孔子爲魯司冠。不用。從而祭。膾肉不至。不稅冕而行。不知者以爲爲肉。其知者以爲爲無禮。

[Mencius] answered, 'when Confucius was chief minister of justice in Lu, the prince came not to follow his counsels. Soon after there was the solsticial sacrifice, and when a part of the meat (膾) presented in sacrifice was not sent to him he went away without even taking off his cap of ceremony. Those who did not know him supposed it was on account of the meat. Those who knew him supposed that was on account of the neglect of the usual ceremony.<sup>56</sup>

The duke of Lu, by denying Confucius what he was ritually entitled to receive, manifested clearly that the services of the officer were no longer required. In other words, Confucius was "eliminated" from the business of government, put outside the network of exchange and obligations through which state affairs were conducted, with the meat being an all-important mark of this network. The fact that Confucius, as an official, was entitled to the meat shows that this meat was invested with a kind of legitimating power, the material sign that Confucius' office was indeed part of the government.

When Confucius was denied the meat he was rightfully entitled to, the duke of Lu placed him outside the circle of those who were obliged to him, outside the network of his affectionate ministers, denying him his social status. It could be objected that Confucius was not exactly treated as a criminal but his very strong reaction to his exclusion of the ritual gift of meat shows that it went indeed farther than a simple breach of etiquette. To a certain extent, Confucius became a social outcast. While this episode is placed in a ritual context, the social death is reminiscent of the casting off of criminals, as narrated in the *Liji*:

爵人於朝。與士公共之。刑人於市。與衆棄之。是故公家不畜刑人。大夫弗養。士遇之塗。弗與言。屏之四方。唯其所之。不及以政。亦弗故生也。

It was in the court that rank was conferred, the (already existing) officers being (thus) associated in the act. It was in the market-place that punishment was inflicted; the multitude being (thus) associated in casting the criminals off. Hence, neither the ruler, nor (the head of) a clan would keep a criminal who had been punished about him; a great officer would not maintain him nor would an officer, meeting him on the road, speak to him. Such men were sent away to one of the four quarters, according to the sentence of each. They were not allowed to have anything to do with affairs of the government, to show there was no object in allowing them to live.<sup>57</sup>

see also *Xizhou Ceming Zhidu Yanjiu*:202 and R. STERCKX, "Food and Philosophy in Early China":42.

56 *Mengzi*, *Shisanjing* ed.,12.93. Translation in *The Four Books, The Work of Mencius*:434.

57 *Liji*, chapter Wangzhi 王制, *Shisanjing* ed.,11.89. Translation in *Lichi I*:215–216.

In this text, we can see the parallel between reward and punishment, both public; the criminals could not even be fed, i.e. they were not even considered as animals that can be fed. This linkage between feeding and subordination is marked by the use of two terms, *chu* (畜) and *yang* (養). Are the officers fed by their lords? While the text of the *Liji* does not say it explicitly, it alludes to a kind of relationship based on feeding; the sacrificial meat denied to Confucius is not primarily conceived as food. Nevertheless, it is a kind of food, food to which only certain categories of people had access. Sacrificial food would be all the more significant. When it comes to meat, meat very often obtained through sacrifice, excluding somebody from it was to exclude him from the entire system at the core of which was sacrifice.<sup>58</sup>

### *B. A cascade of blessings*

The king (or the ruler) was supposed to divide the victim in a fashion that would at the same time be impartial and according to the different strata of the society. A text in the *Liji* even says that the good sovereign was a generous one:

祭者澤之大也。是故上有大澤，則惠必有下。顧上先下後耳。非上積重而下有凍餒之民也。是故上有大澤，則民夫人待于下流。知惠之必將至。有餒見之矣。故曰：可以觀政矣。

What is done at sacrifices afforded the greatest example of the dispensation of favors. Hence when the superior possessed the greatest blessing, acts of favors were sure to descend from him to those below him, the only difference being that he enjoyed the blessing first, and those below him afterwards; – there was no such thing as the superior's accumulating a great amount for himself, while the people below him might be suffering from cold and want. Therefore when the superior enjoyed his great blessing, even private individuals waited till the stream should flow down, knowing that his favors would surely come to them. This was shown by what was done with the relics at sacrifices, and hence come the saying that 'by the dealing with these was seen (the method of) the government.'<sup>59</sup>

While this passage might be written in a very late period, one has to consider the Western Zhou bronze inscriptions to realize that, indeed, the king was manifesting his generosity through a vast array of gifts (slaves, land, specific clothes, objects ...). For a powerful man, accumulation of wealth was only a means to an end because it put him in the position to distribute this wealth, to acquire the

58 In ancient Greece, non-citizens or outcasts were excluded from sacrifice and ritual meals; cf. M. DETIENNE, "Pratiques Culinaires et Esprit de Sacrifice" in *La Cuisine du Sacrifice en Pays Grec*:10–11.

59 *Liji*, chapter Jitong, *Shisanjing* ed., 49.376, translation *Lichi* vol. 2:243.

services of those who were then obliged to him. Hence the veiled (*a contrario*) criticism of the monopolizing of riches by powerful men, who could frustrate the inferiors depending on their generosity.<sup>60</sup> On the contrary, good rulers were like a pond<sup>61</sup> (etymological origin of the word written with the character *ze* 澤) the water of which was flowing downwards. There is one more element that must be considered: what was flowing downwards were not the riches but what is qualified in the text as “relics” of those riches. The source was the sacrifice. Therefore, a detailed examination of the process of ancestral sacrifice is justified. I have chosen texts from the *Shijing* 詩經, extracted from the odes Chuci 楚茨, Jizui 卽醉 and Fuyi 売鬻. The ode Chuci, like others in the *Shijing*, does not contain as many details as (for example) the *Yili* but offers a clear and synthetic view of the ceremonies of sacrifice, from beginning to end, albeit not always strictly in chronological order. At the beginning, the victim was prepared:

濟濟蹻蹻. 累爾牛羊. 以往蒸嘗. 或剝或亨. 或肆或將.

With correct and reverent deportment, the oxen and sheep all pure, we proceed to the sacrifices [Zheng] and [Chang]. Some flay [the victims]; some boil [their flesh]; some arrange [the meat]; some adjust [the pieces of it] [...]<sup>62</sup>

The amount of preparations for royal sacrifices was important. The preparation of the victims *per se* seems to have been the task of male officers; the wives of the host were in charge of another kind of cooking:

君婦莫莫. 爲豆孔庶.

Wives presiding are still and reverent, preparing the numerous [small] dishes.<sup>63</sup>

60 A general study of the political role of gifts during the Zhou period is outside the scope of this article but it could be interesting to see whether the downfall of the Zhou dynasty was accompanied by a weakening of their capability to extend gifts to the feudal lords, in a way akin to what happened to the Carolingian dynasty in Medieval Europe.

61 In the Koran (surat II, verses 261–267), the generous man is compared to a garden situated on a hill and sprinkled by the rain (information courtesy of M. Kerkalli).

62 *Shijing*, *Shisanjing* ed.,13-2:200. Translation in J. LEGGE, *The She King*, (Taipei, SMC, 1994):369.

63 *Shijing*, *Shisanjing* ed.,13-2:201. Translation in *The She King*:370. The numerous (small) dishes 孔庶 could be an equivalent of the “numerous tasty viands” 庶羞, whose characteristics and symbolism I studied in “Some Ritual Elaborations on Cooking and Sacrifice in Late Zhou and Western Han Texts”:101–108.

The ingredients for these smaller dishes probably came in part from the meat of the victims but were also prepared beforehand, as some dishes included dried meat. The next stage saw the seating of the personators:

以爲酒食. 以饗以祀. 以妥以侑.

[...] we proceed to make spirits and prepare viands, for offering and sacrifice. We seat the representatives of the dead, and urge them to eat.<sup>64</sup>

And indeed, as the ode Fuyi notes, they did eat:

公尸來燕來寧.

The personators of your ancestors feast and are happy.<sup>65</sup>

Following this, the spirits were supposed to come: 神保是格 “The spirits quietly come.”<sup>66</sup> At the end of the ceremony, the presiding officer announced: 神嗜飲食 “The spirits have enjoyed your spirits and viands.”<sup>67</sup> But this enjoyment was supposed to be very dignified: 神保是饗 “The spirits enjoy calmly their feast.”<sup>68</sup> During the ceremony, the wives and the spirits seemed to be equally calm. For living participants, the ceremony of sacrifice was not about eating to the full but about dignity and restraint. Of course, it is said that 神具醉止 “the spirits have drunk to the full.”<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, the prevalent atmosphere was one of correctness for the living participants to the ceremony: 既匡既敕 “You have been correct and careful.”<sup>70</sup> This carefulness was partly to ensure that no mistakes were made during the process, as is duly noted: 我孔煥矣. 式禮莫愆 “We are very much exhausted and have performed every ceremony without error.”<sup>71</sup> It is obvious that such care was incompatible with the merriment of a more “relaxed” feast.

64 *Shijing*, *Shisanjing* ed., 13-2:199. Translation in *The She King*:369.

65 *Shijing*, *Shisanjing* ed., 17:269. Translation in *The She King*:479. The personators ate, but if the aforementioned chapter “Funerals of an officer” in the *Yili* is an indication, they tasted more than they actually ate.

66 *Shijing*, ode Chuci, *Shisanjing* ed., 13-2:200. Translation in *The She King*:371.

67 *Shijing*, *Shisanjing* ed., 13-2:200. Translation in *The She King*:371.

68 *Shijing*, *Shisanjing* ed., 13-2:200. I differ from the translation by Legge, who renders 保 as “happily”, whereas the commentaries indicate that the word means “peace” or “peacefully” 安. This sentence is indeed paralleled by the sentence “the spirits quietly come.”

69 *Shijing*, *Shisanjing* ed., 13-2:201. Translation in *The She King*:372.

70 *Shijing*, *Shisanjing* ed., 13-2:201. Translation in *The She King*:372.

71 *Shijing*, *Shisanjing* ed., 13-2:201. Translation in *The She King*:371.

At the end, the representatives of the dead departed and 神保聿歸 “the spirits tranquilly return [to their place].”<sup>72</sup>

At the conclusion of the ceremony, everything was removed and then a feast for the living took place:

諸宰君婦。廢徹不遲。諸父兄弟。備言燕私。

All the servants and the presiding wives, remove [the trays and dishes] without delay. The uncles and cousins all repair to the private feast.<sup>73</sup>

And then it was time for the living to enjoy life and good food, and music:

樂具入奏。以綏後祿 [...]. 既醉既飽。小大稽首。神嗜飲食。

The musicians all go in to perform and give their soothing aid at the second blessing [...]. They [the guests] drink to the full, and eat to the full; Great and small, they bow their heads [saying], ‘The spirits enjoyed your spirits and viands.’<sup>74</sup>

We may suppose that after the tension of the ceremony, where everything had to be proper and dignified, exhausting the participants keen on not making any mistakes, the music had indeed a calming effect, but it was the calm before the tempest! Two preliminary conclusions can be made from the various passages quoted: (a) During the ceremony of sacrifice *per se* very little eating actually took place, and only by the spirits and their representatives (the personators), (b) A ceremony of sacrifice was a very serious business, with no place for error, and that precisely precluded any merriment.<sup>75</sup> On the whole, men could only rejoice and eat after the spirits had eaten. The main reason was that one of fundamental purposes of sacrifice was to keep the domains of living humans and the spirits

72 *Shijing*, *Shisanjing* ed., 13-2:201. Translation in *The She King*:372.

73 *Shijing*, *Shisanjing* ed., 13-2:201. Translation in *The She King*:372.

74 *Shijing*, *Shisanjing* ed., 13-2:202. Translation in *The She King*:373.

75 This attention to details and the care with which improper or disrespectful behavior was avoided was already a characteristic of Shang sacrifices, as is observed in the *Zuoce Ban yan* 作冊般甗 inscription (Shang, period of Di Yi-Di Xin in *Shang Zhou qingtongqi mingwen xuan*, vol. 3, 3, 6): 王宜人方無 悔 (悔), 咎 [...] “the king presided over the military ceremonial (prior to an expedition) against the Ren, (the ceremony was conducted) without disrespect; (when the ceremony was accomplished) [...].” This echoes the text of the *Shijing*, with the attitude of the wives, quiet and reverent during sacrifice, and the two mentions of proper conduct: 既匡既敷 “You have been correct and careful” and 我孔煥矣. 式禮莫愆 “We are very much exhausted and have performed every ceremony without error.”

separated.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, as the spirits and the personators ate during the ceremony itself, it would have been very improper for the living participants to join the spirits and eat the same food at the same moment. Humans and ancestors, however close to one another they were supposed to be, could not eat together: the logical conclusion is that men ate what was left over by the spirits.<sup>77</sup> This conclusion, however trivial it seems to be, was deemed worthy of a specific elaboration in the *Liji*:

夫祭有餕. 餕者祭之末也, 不可不知也. 是故古之人有言曰: 善終者如始. 餕其是已. 是故古之君子曰: 尸亦餕鬼神之餘也. 惠術也. 可以觀政矣. 是故尸謾. 君與卿四人餕. 君起, 大夫六人餕. 臣餕君之餘也. 大夫起, 士八人餕. 賤餕貴之餘也 [...]. 下餕上之餘也.

At sacrifices, there are the provisions that are left. The dealing with these is the least important thing in sacrifices, but it is necessary to take knowledge of it. Hence, there is the saying of antiquity, ‘the end must be attended to even as the beginning:’ – there is an illustration of it in these leavings. Hence, it was the remark of a superior man of antiquity, that ‘the personator also eats what the spirits have left;’ – it is a device of kindness, in which may be seen (the method of) government! Hence, when the personator rose, the ruler and his three ministers partook of what the personator had left. When the ruler has risen, the six great officers partook: – the officers partook of what the ruler had left. When the great officers rose, the eight officers partook: – the lower rank ate what the higher had left [...] the inferior class ate what the superior had left.<sup>78</sup>

The ritualists of Vedic India were also concerned with this ritual order of sacrifice. It became one of the key notions in Brahmanism. There is for example the ceremony of sacrifice S'raddha, whose recipients are the human ancestors.<sup>79</sup> An offering was made to the three great gods (Agni, Soma and Yama), and this offering was considered to be the sacrifice as such. Then, what remained was consumed by the representatives of the Fathers, the human ancestors. After that, what was left over was offered to another category of defunct, the uninitiated

76 See “Some Ritual Elaborations on Cooking and Sacrifice in Late Zhou and Western Han Texts”:111, and particularly n.72.

77 The closeness between men and their ancestors was an outcome of common kinship. A passage in the *Zuozhuan*, 31<sup>st</sup> year of the duke Xi 僖公 (*Shisanjing* ed., 17.130; translation: *The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen*:218) says: 鬼神非其族類, 不歆其祀 “Spirits do not accept [litt. enjoy the odor of] the sacrifices of those who are not of their own line.”

78 *Liji*, *Shisanjing* ed., 49.376. Translation by J. LEGGE, *Li Chi*, vol. 2:242–243.

79 The following information come from Charles MALAMOUD, “Observation sur la Notion de ‘Reste’ dans le Brahmanisme,” *Cuire le Monde*:18–19.

Brahmans (dead before the age of 2). What was finally left over could only be eaten by people of servile condition. This ceremony shows the same aspects of gradation and hierarchy linked to the actual consumption of food that we observe in the Chinese ceremonies.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, it can be observed that this rule of conduct ensured for everybody that he or she would eat only something that was pure, precisely because somebody higher in the hierarchy (and therefore purer or more honorable) had already partaken of it. The only exception to this rule was the *samnyasin*, the one who renounced the world and went outside the social order. In reverse, this exception shows that the notion of the consumption of leftovers was intimately connected to social order or, as the Chinese sources put it, to the government of men. It appears also that even the king was not considered the ultimate source of riches (or blessings): he enjoyed what was given to him by his own ancestors, but he could not enjoy it alone, but had to let people of the next grade enjoy what he had left – and those of the next grade could neither eat all the remaining blessings (the sacrificial food) without letting those of the following grade enjoy some of the food in turn. We come to the conclusion that the king, although not quite in the initial position of the food chain, was the one able to make gifts of food to his subordinates.

Since power was equated to the ability to give, it follows that this could not have been restricted to the king but could be applied to any man in a superior position modeling his attitude on that of the ruler. This was valid in sacrificial contexts but applied too every times a superior gave food (particularly meat) to an inferior. A text in the *Lunyu* seems to infer as much:

君賜食，必正席. 先嘗之.

When the prince sent him [Confucius] a gift of cooked meat, he would adjust his mat, and then give it away to others.<sup>81</sup>

80 There is a difference though: Vedic India considered the leftovers as a potential source of impurity; but on the other hand, what was eaten, no matter the circumstances, was a leftover. This paradox can be explained if we consider that although it is improper to consume the left-overs of someone who is lower in the social hierarchy, it is honorable and pure to eat the leftovers of a god or of someone who is higher in the same hierarchy. On this point, see “Observation sur la Notion de ‘Reste’ dans le Brahmanisme,” *Cuire le Monde*:22–23.

81 *Lunyu*, chapter Xiangdang 鄭黨, *Shisanjing* ed., 10.39, translation *Confucian Analects*:234. James Legge’s translation of this sentence follows the commentaries in the *Shisanjing* edition. The text itself has only the verb “to taste” (嘗) but a gloss adds that the gift was to be divided and given (以班賜).

This obligation to “let the riches flow” downward can be seen in other texts as well, for example:

夫大饗既饗，卷三牲之俎，歸于賓館。

At a great feast, given by a great officer, after all have partaken, he rolls up what is left on the stands for the three animals, and sends it to the lodging of his guests.<sup>82</sup>

We can now understand that when Confucius was denied the gift of *fan* meat (cooked meat), he was also denied the means to feed other people, i.e. he was unable to take his place within a network of power characterized by the transmission of meat. The network was a systematic cascade of gifts (leftovers), going in one direction only: from the superior to the inferior. Consequently, Confucius, deprived of the possibility to give, was also denied the position of superiority vis-à-vis those who should have received part of what he should have been given. At the same time, we can say that he depended for his well-being on the largesse of his superior who, under the prevailing circumstances, can be said to have monopolized the riches and thus prevented that Confucius could meet his own obligations – hence his strong reaction.

### *C. Meat, food giving and social exchanges: A business with hazards*

We have seen that the ritualized network of power functioned with the circulation of sacrificial meat at its core and main medium. This circulation was of course asymmetric: if the king was the (almost) ultimate source of blessings (i.e. sacrificial meat or even, as we have seen, dried meat), he could not be fed by any other than his own ancestors. Therefore, the ritual took great care of all the circumstances where the king was in position to receive food:

有以少爲貴者。天子無介。祭天特牲。天子適諸侯，諸侯膳以饗。諸侯相朝，灌用鬱鬯。無籩豆之薦。大夫聘禮，以脯醢。天子一食，諸侯再，大夫士三，食力無數。In other usages, the paucity of things formed the mark of distinction.<sup>83</sup> To the son of heaven there were given no attendant, and he sacrificed to heaven with a single victim; when he visited the princes (on his tour of inspection), he was feasted with a single bullock. When princes went to the courts of one another, fragrant spirits were used in libations, and there were no dishes in stands, either of wood or bamboo [...]. The son of heaven declared

82 *Liji*, chapter Zaji 雜記下, *Shisanjing* ed., 42.334, translation *Lichi* II:157.

83 WANG Hui 王暉, in *Shangzhou Wenhua Bijiao Yanjiu* 商周文化比較研究, (Beijing: Renwen, 2000):241–242, 400–407, makes interesting remarks on the historic variation of the quantities of victims before and after the reign of the king Cheng and the emphasis on simplicity in sacrificial ceremonies beginning with Spring and Autumn period.

himself satisfied after one dish; a prince, after two; a great officer and other officers, after three; while no limit was set to the eating of people who lived by their labour.<sup>84</sup>

This text indicates that the higher in the hierarchy somebody is, the less food he eats. Lower and upper echelons are exactly opposed when partaking of food is concerned. This opposition can be represented this way:

	Food intake	offerings
king/ruler	Minimal	Prescribed
Lower noble echelon	More than the king, according to rank (the higher, the more food taken)	Prescribed
Commoners / 畜工	Maximal	None/denied

While the ruler was not supposed to be fed to satiety by any other than his ancestors,<sup>85</sup> the text mentions those “who lived by their labour”; such people could eat as they pleased, without any restriction to their intake of food. The *Yili* has a passage alluding to this practice:

薦脯醢. 使人相祭. 工飲不拜, 既爵, 授主人爵. 畜工不拜, 受爵祭飲辯. 有脯醢不祭.

Then the dried flesh and hash are served, and a man is deputed to help the musicians to make the offering. The senior musician does not bow when drinking, but finishes the cup and hands it back to the host. Nor do the rest of the musicians bow in receiving the cup. They pour a libation when about to drink, but take the dried flesh and hash as they please without making an offering.<sup>86</sup>

Those who are on the last echelon of the system were, in fact, excluded from the ritual *per se*. This was marked either by the unrestricted access to food or (in the case of the musicians) by the fact that the obligatory offering was performed on their behalf, and not by them directly. Besides, they did not bow, i.e. they could not even acknowledge their (inferior) place in those circumstances – a place made clear also by their unrestricted intake of food. By the same device, king and labourers were in this way put in absolute opposition:

84 *Liji*, chapter *Liqi* 禮器, *Shisanjing* ed., 23.240, translation *Lichi* I:398.

85 We can then surmise that the bullock offered to the king was not conceived primarily as a way to give him food but as an homage to his dignity, the dignity of the only one that could say “I, the unique man” 余一人.

86 *Yili*, chapter *Xiangsheli* 鄉射禮, *Shisanjing* ed. 11.52, translation *The I-Li*:83.

king/ruler	Lower noble echelon	Commoners
Feeder/giver of food	Receiver of food/giver of food	Receivers of food (no possibility to transmit further down)

Commoners were excluded from the possibility of making offerings because, being absolute receivers of food, they had nothing to give to anybody else. The *Liji* states that:

禮不下庶人. 刑不上大夫.

The ritual does not descend to the commoners (and) the punishments do not concern (litt. ascend) to the daifu.<sup>87</sup>

Kong Yingda's 孔穎達 commentary adds: 庶人貧無物爲禮 “the commoners are poor (and) have nothing to (carry out) the ritual.” We can conclude that what the commoners received was entirely for their own consumption and was not intended for them to give to anybody else, living or dead. They were not supposed to have ancestors precisely because everything they had was coming from their living benefactors, and they were the last in the chain of distribution. They were *par excellence* those who were fed. On the contrary, the king, who was responsible for the just distribution of resources, had to feed everybody, including those (elders)<sup>88</sup> who could not be fed by their own children.<sup>89</sup>

If the inferior was to be fed by the superior, i.e. if the superior manifested his superiority by his ability to give food (understood as a blessing or favor coming from his own ancestors), then any occasion where food was given had to be managed very carefully. The connection between inferiority and satiety could explain such ritual prescription as:

共食不飽.

When eating with others from the same dishes, one should not try to eat (hastily) to satiety.<sup>90</sup>

87 *Liji*, chapter Quli 曲禮上, *Shisanjing* ed. 3.21.

88 See for example *Liji*, chapter Wangzhi 王制, *Shisanjing* ed. 13.118.

89 As Zilu purportedly said (in *Liji*, chapter Tangong 檀弓下, *Shisanjing* ed.10.82, translation *Lichi* vol. I:182): 子路曰：傷哉貧也。生無以爲養，死無以禮 “Zilu said, ‘alas for the poor. While (their parents) are alive, they have not the means to nourish them; and when they are dead, they have not the means to perform the mourning rites for them.’”

90 *Liji*, chapter Quli 曲禮上, *Shisanjing* ed. 2.14, translation *Lichi* vol. I:80.

Eating to the full was the mark of inferiors; consequently, doing so was to place oneself in an inferior position.

When people of a very high rank met, the situation would be even more delicate to manage. We have seen that when princes or feudal lords met, no partaking of food would take place. Why? Any feast would have been arranged by one of the participants, all of them in the same rank. The food would come from the organizer and be given to those who were not originally in a position of inferiority but would become the obligés of the one whose food they would partake of – hence, no food. In consequence, we may assume that when the king was given one and only one bullock, it was meant to signify that those who received him were not in the position to offer more because of their places in the whole system, i.e. places inferior to the king. For a subordinate, feasting the king (or the ruler) was considered extremely improper:

大夫而饗君，非禮也。大夫強而君殺之。由三桓始也。

For a great officer to receive his ruler to an entertainment was contrary to propriety. For a ruler to put to death a great officer who had violently exercised his power was (held) an act of righteousness; and it was first seen in the case of the three Huan.<sup>91</sup>

Feeding the king or the ruler was to manifest one's superiority over him, thus revealing that his authority was no longer respected. The ruler would therefore be justified to recover his power by any means necessary. This situation reminds one of examples in other civilizations. Haroun Al Rachid (8<sup>th</sup> century AD) destroyed the Barmaki family, guilty of having led a magnificent life-style, offensive to the royal dignity of the Caliph.<sup>92</sup> Nicolas Fouquet, the “grand argentier” of the Sun king, was arrested and imprisoned for the rest of his life, after having given a magnificent feast to the royal court at his castle of Vaux-le-Vicomte.<sup>93</sup> In the latter case, entertaining the monarch was a sure sign of the ambitions of the subordinate, and the strong reaction of the ruler is understandable because being fed is being inferior: he must have felt deeply humiliated, bereft not only of his social status but even of his very being. Death for the perpetrator of this unforgivable insult was thus a logical outcome. This could also be the case for the insulted, as shown in the following famous story:

91 *Liji*, chapter Jiaotesheng 郊特性, *Shisanjing* ed., 25.219, translation *Lichi* I:421.

92 See M. MOURE, *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique d'Histoire*, Vol. a-c, Paris: Bordas 1996:577–578.

93 His programmatic motto, “quo non ascendet”, was a particularly provocative choice.

齊大饑. 黔敖爲食於路. 以待餓者而食之. 有餓者蒙袂輯屨. 貿貿然來. 黔敖左奉食, 右執飲. 曰: 噟來食. 揚其目而視之. 曰: 予唯不食嗟來之食. 以至於斯也. 從而謝焉. 終不食而死.

During a great dearth in Qi, Qian Ao had food prepared on the roads, to wait the approach of hungry people and give to them. (One day), there came a famished man, looking as if he could hardly see, his face covered with his sleeve, and dragging his feet together. Qian Ao, carrying with his left hand some food, and holding some drink with the other, said to him "Poor man! come and eat," The man, opening his eyes with a stare, and looking at him, said, "It was because I would not eat 'poor man come here's food, that I am come to this state!" Qian Ao immediately apologized for his words, but the man after all would not take the food and died.<sup>94</sup>

Since satiety and humiliation were linked, specific ritual devices were employed to avoid the potential pitfall:

孔子曰: 吾食於少施氏而飽. 少施氏食我以禮. 吾祭, 作而辭曰: 疏食不足祭也. 吾飧, 作而辭曰: 疏食也不敢以傷吾子.

Confucius said, "When I was at a meal at Shao Shi's, I ate to the full. He entertained me courteously, according to the rules. When I was about to offer some in sacrifice, he got up and wished to stop me, saying, 'My poor food is not worth being offered in sacrifice.' When I was about to take the concluding portions, he got up and wished to stop me, saying, 'I would not injure you with my poor provisions.'"<sup>95</sup>

When Confucius followed the invitation of Shao Shi, he put himself in a position to accept food from him, and therefore risked being treated as an inferior. Still, Confucius said that he "ate to the full," adding immediately that he was never-

94 *Liji*, chapter Tangong 檀弓下, *Shisanjing* ed., 10.86, translation *Lichi* vol. I:194–195. M. Mauss mentioned this potentially devastating effect of charity (in "Essai sur le Don," *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, Paris: PUF, 1985:258). In France, during the XVII<sup>th</sup> century, Vincent de Paul used to tell the sisters he worked with: "Smile, Sisters, for the poor to forgive you the food you give him." There is also an Arab saying: "Do not trust the one to whom you give a favor" (information courtesy of M. Kerkalli).

95 *Liji*, chapter Zaji 雜記下, *Shisanjing* ed., 43.341, translation *Lichi* vol. 2:171. This text is very close to another (*Liji*, chapter Yuzao 玉藻, *Shisanjing* ed., 30.255, translation *Lichi* vol. 2:20): 客祭. 主人辭曰: 不足祭也. 客飧. 主人辭以疏. "When the guest put down the offering, the host apologized, saying that the food was not worthy of such a tribute. When the guest was enjoying the viands, the host apologized for their being scanty and poor." The information given in the form of an anecdote in the Zaji is presented as a direct ritual prescription in the Yuzao. It is difficult to say whether the anecdote was added in order to illustrate the righteousness of the ritual – with a reference to the saint patron of the ritualists – or whether the ritual prescription was a reformulation of Confucius' conduct in a normative form.

theless treated in a ritually acceptable manner. For Shao Shi, this manner was to first debase himself and his food, thus putting Confucius in a superior position, “condescending” to accept his food. Since Confucius’ dignity was respected, this (re)established equality between him and his host. In other words, face was saved for both of them.

Inversely, accepting food (and specifically food imbued with the grace of the ancestors of the superior) was legitimate and honorable, if the relationship between superiors and inferiors was a matter of fact, and, amongst members of the class of nobles, if those who received it were in position to be themselves givers of food. Those at the very bottom of the system received food without being able to further transmit it, neither in reverse nor to dependents. Within the ritual system governing the high classes, meat was the means by which allegiance was proposed and accepted.

When Confucius refused to consume meat (不食肉) at a dinner offered by the Ji 季 clan<sup>96</sup> (one of the three clans issued from a duke of Lu, usurpers monopolizing the legitimate power of the duke in Confucius’ time), he did not do so only to express his disapproval of some ritual improprieties.<sup>97</sup> If he had let himself be “forced” (out of simple courtesy) to accept the invitation, and if he would have specifically consumed meat, this, according to ritually normative obligations, would have made him appear to be pledging allegiance to the Ji clan, which for him was unthinkable, precisely because he considered this clan’s claim to power to be illegitimate. From the Ji clan point of view, however, offering meat was a way to recruit Confucius as an obligé, a time-honored and ritually sanctioned custom for a superior to treat people in his service. Confucius himself acted within this system, his refusal is not understandable outside of it. The refusal of a meal, or more specifically, the refusal of meat was not meant as criticism of the system as such, but was congruent with the obligations and meanings linked to it: to refuse meat was to refuse allegiance. His disciples were not necessary of the same opinion when it came to ritual:

子貢欲去告朔之餼羊。子曰：賜也爾愛其羊。我愛其禮。

Zigong wanted to get rid of the sacrifice of a sheep every new moon. The master said: ‘Ci! You hold dear your sheep, but I hold dear the ritual.’

96 See *Liji*, chapter Yuzao 玉藻, *Shisanjing* ed., 30.255.

97 See “Food and Philosophy in Early China”:51.

Mencius, answering a question whether gifts of cooked meat to officers could be repeated often, recalls in the chapter Wanzhang 萬章 a story linked to an other disciple of Confucius, to Zisi:

曰：繆公之於子思也：亟問亟餽鼎肉。子思不悅於卒也 [...]. 不受，曰：今而後知君之犬馬畜伋。

[Mencius] answered, “There was the conduct of the duke Mu to Zisi – He made frequent inquiries after Zisi’s health, and sent him frequent presents of cooked meat [鼎肉, literally ‘meat of the cauldron’]. Zisi was displeased [...] declined the gift, saying, ‘From this time forth, I shall know that the prince supports me as a dog or a horse.’”<sup>98</sup>

It is clear that Zisi understood what was involved in those constant offers, but he chose to consider it solely under the angle of dependency. By refusing the meat, he denied legitimacy to the practice of obtaining allegiance, equating it with an attempt to domesticate him! Indeed, the potentiality for vicious humiliation was always present within the social exchange of food. R. Steckx mentions the fate of an ambassador of Wei at the hands of a minister of Qin: the latter forced the former to feed on hay and beans, like a horse, i.e. like an animal, completely submitted to the power of the minister.<sup>99</sup> Those who forced the ambassador to eat were “tattooed” criminals, i.e. people completely outside the normal social sphere of the elite: the ambassador was not even at the bottom of the human order (one who is fed to satiety) but at the very bottom of the hierarchy of living beings, no better than a fed animal, under (barely) human control.<sup>100</sup> Was the interpretation of Zisi then correct? Did the duke Mu really want to enslave him? In my understanding, the story shows that the prevailing system was using its

98 *Mengzi, Shisanjing* ed., 10 下, 81. Translation in J. LEGGE, *The Four Books, The Work of Mencius*, (Taipei: Wenxing, 1966), 385–386. This passage echoes another one in the Analects (*Lunyu* 論語, chapter 爲政 (*Shisanjing* ed., 2.6, translation in J. LEGGE, *The Four Books, Confucian Analects*, Taipei: Wenxing, 1966, 148): 子曰：今之孝也者。是謂能養。至於犬馬。皆能有養。不敬，何以別乎？“The master said, ‘The filial piety of now-a-days means the support of one’s parents. But dogs and horses likewise are able to do something in the way of support; – without reverence, what is there to distinguish the one support given from the other?’” It was going to take more than feeding to respect the kind of social relationship the master had in mind, although it could be interpreted within the hierarchical system, too: parents were in a superior position vis-à-vis their own children; therefore, for children to treat their parents as absolute dependants would be a complete reversal of ritual normalcy.

99 In “Food and Philosophy in Early China”:56–57.

100 The *Liji* (chapter Quli 曲禮上, *Shisanjing* ed. 3.21) says that 刑人不在君側 “criminals should not stand side by side with the ruler”.

normal, ritually approved way of conduct (using meat, specifically sacrificial meat, i.e. “meat of the tripod,” as a means of obtaining allegiance) to deal with a member of the same system, who started to rebel against it. Zisi did not want to be included into the ancient system of dependence. But then, to what kind of relationship were Zisi and the *shi* aspiring to?

Confucius himself, while still an integral part of the ancient feudal system, accepted to share his knowledge with anyone able to pay him. The payment was dried meat:

子曰：自行束脩以上。吾未嘗無誨焉。

The master said, “From the man bringing his bundle of dried flesh for my teaching upwards, I have never refused instruction to any one.”<sup>101</sup>

This relationship was reciprocal, not entirely symmetric (since the master retained an upper position in the relationship) but it was different from the relationship superior-inferior within the sacrificial meat system, in that the meat did not include allegiance but could be considered as a salary, a compensation for services rendered. In that sense, Confucius was not the *obligé* of the one who gave him food. The dried meat could be considered as the transformation of a ritual device into a kind of currency. The *shi*, taking advantage of the historical upheaval at the end of Chunqiu period, were in the position to market their knowledge and to benefit such *daifu* who themselves aspired to a new level of independence. The story of Feng Xuan is quite interesting in this regard:

齊有馮諤者。貧乏不能自存。使人屬孟常君，願寄食門下。孟常君曰：客何好。曰：客無好也。曰：客何能。曰：客無能也。孟常君笑而受之。曰：諾。左右以君賤之也，食以草具。居有頃倚柱彈其劍歌曰：長夾！歸來乎！食無魚。左右以告。孟常君曰：食之比下客。

In the state of Qi, there was a man named Feng Xuan, who was so poor that he could not sustain himself; he sent a intermediary to the lord of Mengchang to ask him to employ him as a retainer. The lord of Mengchang asked: “What is this guest good at?” The intermediary answered: “He is good at nothing.” The lord asked: “What are the capabilities of this guest?” The intermediary answered: “He has none.” The lord of Mengchang laughed and gave his assent. His entourage, believing that their master despised him, fed him with coarse food. Having been a retainer for some time, Feng Xuan, standing near a pillar and beating the rhythm on his sword, sang: “My long sword! Let us go back home. Nobody gives us fish

101 Lunyu, chapter Shuer, 述而, Shisanjing ed., 7.26, translation *Confucian Analects*:197.

to eat." When the entourage reported this to the lord, he said: "Feed him as a guest of the second grade."<sup>102</sup>

Feng Xuan, being a difficult man to please was unwilling to settle for a mediocre position. But he indeed proved a wise investment for his master: through his help, the lord of Mengchang was able to obtain more power and advantages from his prince, who made him his principal minister and allowed him to establish his own ancestral temple. This is an example of the new opportunities offered to powerful *daifus* to parley their power in substantial benefits, culminating in the case of the lord of Mengchang in the right to set up their own ancestral temple. The knowledge and astute thinking of the *shi* Feng Xuan proved invaluable. Two elements in this text are noteworthy: (a). The use of food as a humiliating device. (b) The fact that the *shi* Feng Xuan, although accepted as retainer by the lord of Mengchang, i.e. having become one of those who were fed by him, did not consider this situation as commanding his full allegiance. He was able to negotiate his position, even before providing the *daifu* with his full intellectual resources. This is decidedly different from the ancient system of dependence, based on asymmetric relationship, where the *obligés* of a person in a superior position were supposed to be of one mind with him.

## Conclusion

Cao Gui and his friends were definitely not of one mind with their ruler (cf. the story at the beginning of the article). Their dissatisfaction with a network of relationships based on the ritual conferral and distribution of meat is symptomatic of the new "class consciousness" of the *shi* in a time of social and economic changes. These changes resulted from the weakening of the Zhou king's power, and the subsequent tendency of the feudal states to separate themselves from their past loyalties. The changes induced a partial and gradual withdrawal from ritual practices associated with the ancient system. Thus, the learned specialists in charge of the fine points of those rituals saw their status diminished. On the other hand, the independence gained by the newly formed

102 *Zhanguoce Yizhu* 戰國策譯注, (ed. Meng Chuangxiang 孟床祥) Heilongjiang Renmin ed. 1986:282. (See also J. I. Crump, *Chan-Kuo Ts'e*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970:189.) The guests of the lord of Mengchang (cf. n. 8) were divided in three classes, the first received meat, the second fish, the third coarse millet.

states demanded new skills, providing opportunities to the same class of learned specialists, able then to recycle their knowledge. This knowledge was offered, no longer within the frame of the ancient relationship superior/inferior, marked by asymmetrical exchanges of (sacrificial) food, but used as a "bargaining chip," even if the "currency" demanded or exchanged was also food-based.

The ancient (meat/food-based) network of power/social relationship was the sole marker of social status (the first step of social death being precisely the denial either of meat or food). It functioned through a cascade of gifts, from the king down, obliging the lower echelon of lords, who, in turn, acted in the same way toward their own subordinates. If the supreme giver of food was under the obligation not to hold on to his riches but to circulate and distribute them, the lower echelon also had to allow the flow of riches downward. The mark of a superior position was the possibility to confer, to be a source of riches for the subordinates. The ultimate giver was the king. Inversely, those outside the ritual context could not, as we have seen, either give or offer sacrifices/make offerings: they were at the bottom of the cascade initiated by the king/ruler; they gave nothing because they had nothing in proper, receiving everything from a superior echelon. Riches were of diverse nature, but among them food was preeminent. Sacrificial meat, or more generally food, was the means through which positions of superiority and inferiority were marked with utmost clarity. The act of conferring food comprised the duty of the superior to feed, and the acknowledgement of dependence by the one who was fed. Feeding and being fed in the world of humans was paralleled in the ritual relation between the living and the ancestors with a slight (apparent) distortion: the ancestors (through their representative) were invited to eat, one could say that they were fed by their descendants, i.e. the inferiors were feeding the superiors. But in actual fact, the feeders (the descendants) were fed by their ancestors, since all grace (the blessing, the meat, the food) proceeded from the ancestors, and the position of inferiority of the descendants vis-à-vis their ancestors was marked by two facts: (a) They ate after the ancestors, consuming their leftovers. (b) The descendants then ate to the full (飽), mirroring the relationship between living persons, i.e. the lower one was, the more food was consumed. It would have been humiliating for the superior to eat to the full food given to him by an inferior.

The ancestral sacrifice was the origin of the distribution of riches conceived as a flowing down of leftovers, leftovers imbued with the essence of the ancestors, distributed to inferiors according to their social status. This distribution, and the subsequent consumption, was intended to reinforce the unity of society. This was particularly marked by the metaphoric value given to some sacrificial

parts, especially the lungs. The *shi*, choosing to focus only on the potential for humiliation, i.e. absolute dependence contained in the asymmetrical conferral and giving of meat and food, refused this dependence and constituted a factor of division inside a society already confronted with massive changes. The future empire reestablished unanimity (thus almost sterilizing the flowering of new thinking during the Warring States period) by recruiting the learned elite and putting it exclusively at the service of the State.