

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00171-8 - Food, Sacrifice, and Sagehood in Early China

Roel Sterckx

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

### FOOD, SACRIFICE, AND SAGEHOOD IN EARLY CHINA

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

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

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00171-8 - Food, Sacrifice, and Sagehood in Early China

Roel Sterckx

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

# Food, Sacrifice, and Sagehood in Early China

ROEL STERCKX

University of Cambridge



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
 978-1-107-00171-8 - Food, Sacrifice, and Sagehood in Early China  
 Roel Sterckx  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,  
 Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press  
 32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
 Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107001718](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107001718)

© Roel Sterckx 2011

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
 no reproduction of any part may take place without the written  
 permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2011

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*  
 Sterckx, Roel, 1969–  
 Food, sacrifice, and sagehood in early China / Roel Sterckx.  
 p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-00171-8 (hardback)

1. Confucianism – Rituals – History – To 1500.
2. Food – China – Religious aspects – History – To 1500.
3. Food habits – China – History – To 1500.
4. Rites and ceremonies – China – History – To 1500.
5. Sacrifice – Confucianism – History – To 1500.
6. Senses and sensation – Religious aspects – Confucianism – History – To 1500.
7. Philosophers – China – History – To 1500.
8. China – Kings and rulers – History.
9. China – Religious life and customs.
10. China – History – Han dynasty, 202 B.C.-220 A.D.

I. Title.  
 BL1859.F66S74 2011  
 299.5'1138–dc22 2010046885

ISBN 978-1-107-00171-8 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

## CONTENTS

## Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>1 Customs and Cuisine</b>	11
Diets and Food Lore in Warring States and Han China	14
Meat and Morals	26
Banquets	34
Cenat Confucius	42
<b>2 Cooking the World</b>	49
The Butcher and the Cook	49
Cooking and Harmony	59
Yi Yin and Fundamental Tastes	65
Cosmic Dining	76
<b>3 Sacrifice and Sense</b>	83
Offering the Tasteless	84
Spirit and Spirits	95
Searching for Spirit	106
<b>4 The Economics of Sacrifice</b>	122
Sacrificial Levies	124
Monthly Ordinances	128
Maintenance Towns and Personnel	134
Spirit Commerce	143
Regulating Sacrifice	148
Gifts for Spirits, Goods for Mortals	152
The Rhetoric of Plenty	157

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00171-8 - Food, Sacrifice, and Sagehood in Early China

Roel Sterckx

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

vi

## CONTENTS

<b>5</b>	<b>Sages, Spirits, and Senses</b>	167
	Olfaction	168
	Seeing and Hearing	174
	Sensory Synthesis	178
	Sages, Screens, and Earplugs	191
	The Clairvoyant and the Blind	196
	<b>Concluding Remarks</b>	203
	<i>Bibliography</i>	207
	<i>Index</i>	227

## Figures

1.1	Ale distillation. Rubbing of a Han mural; Xindu county, Sichuan	<i>page 15</i>
1.2	Kitchen scene. Rubbing of a Han mural; Jiexiang county, Shandong	25
1.3	Feeding the elderly. Rubbing of a mural; Eastern Han, Zengjiabao, Chengdu, Sichuan	31
1.4	Banqueting scene; Eastern Han. Chengdu, Sichuan	36
1.5	Rubbing of a mural depicting Fan Sui “horse-feeding” the envoy from Wei. Wu Liang shrines, 2nd century CE; Jinxiang county, Shandong	42
2.1	Kitchen scene with butchers. Rubbing of a mural. Wu Liang shrines, 2nd century CE; Jinxiang county, Shandong	54
2.2	Portrait of Yi Yin	66
4.1	Raising and decorating sacrificial victims	131
5.1	Drawings of the jade-bead cap (Zhou and Han models)	194

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00171-8 - Food, Sacrifice, and Sagehood in Early China

Roel Sterckx

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Acknowledgments

Colleagues, graduate students, and friends have been generous with comments, criticisms, and tips along the way. They include Michael Loewe, David McMullen, Joe McDermott, Romain Graziani, Michael Puett, Liu Lexian, Vivienne Lo, Geoffrey Lloyd, John Lagerwey, Carine Defoort, Antonello Palumbo, Eamonn O’Ciardha, Adam Yuet Chau, Oliver Weingarten, Paul Cartledge, and many others. I am grateful to the three anonymous reviewers for detailed comments and corrections. Charles Aylmer and Noboru Koyama at the Cambridge University Library and John Moffett at the Needham Research Institute have shown their usual generosity with bibliographical assistance. Marigold Acland and Joy Mizan helped steer the manuscript to production at the Press. The British Academy and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences supported a period of research in China, and the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council funded an additional term of sabbatical leave. A subvention from the Newton Trust helped cover editorial assistance. I thank my wife, Chengeng, for patiently testing many of the ideas and metaphors in this book in our conversations, and the fellowship at Clare College for stimulating companionship. I would like to dedicate this book to the memory of Maria Keersmaekers (1911–2009), who taught me more than any of the sages that fill the pages that follow.