

## Animals through Chinese History: Earliest Times to 1911. Edited by Roel Sterckx, Martina Siebert, and Dagmar Schäfer. 2019. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK. 277 pp.

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This edited volume deserves the attention of anyone interested in comparative ethnozoology. It includes a short introduction, followed by 12 chapters on various aspects of Chinese animal knowledge. Like most edited volumes, it is uneven in quality, but the chapters are all well done, and several are outstanding. They are not thematically united, so must be considered as separate items.

The first chapter, “Shang Sacrificial Animals: Material Documents and Images” by Adam Schwartz (pp. 20–45), is a specialized introduction to animals sacrificed during the Shang Dynasty (ca. 1500–1050 BCE). The usual domestic animals were sacrificed, but particularly interesting here is reporting the recent identification of the *zhi*—long considered mythical and imaginary—as the Tibetan antelope and gazelle (collectively *ling* in later usage). Animals were shown in art in highly stylized ways, making identification difficult.

The following chapter, Roel Sterckx’ “Animal to Edible: The Ritualization of Animals in Early China” (pp. 46–63), reveals in fascinating detail the exceedingly complex ways that animals were turned first into sacrifices to gods and ancestors and then into food for the living. This was still an issue when I lived in Hong Kong almost 60 years ago: a sacrificed animal could not be simply cut up and eaten; its body had to be managed in reverent and ritualized ways.

Third is Keith Knapp’s “Noble Creatures: Filial and Righteous Animals in Early Medieval Confucian Thought” (pp. 64–83). Chinese adore stories about virtuous animals as much as Americans do. Some of

the dog stories here anticipate Albert Payson Terhune by several centuries, telling of dogs that saved their masters—sometimes at the expense of their own lives. Tigers are sometimes sensitive to human virtue, refraining from devouring good people. Crows and monkeys show devotion not so much to people as to their own parents and elders, feeding them and grieving when they die. Dr. Knapp points out that the less obviously exaggerated stories are probably accurate; crows, monkeys, and dogs do show care, grief, and mutual aid. A minor fault is translating one noble dog’s name, Diwei, as “True Tail”; *di* is surely used here in its literal sense of an archery bullseye target, not in the metaphoric meaning (which is the same as that we know in English as “hitting the bullseye”). The dog evidently had a target-shaped spot on his tail.

This is followed by a study of the cat in China: “Walking by Itself: The Singular History of the Chinese Cat,” by T. H. Barrett and Mark Strange (pp. 84–98). The domestic cat came rather late to China, probably introduced by Buddhists from the West. It moved from granary protector to beloved pet.

“Bees in China: A Brief Cultural History,” by David Pattinson (pp. 99–117), starts with ancient ideas about *feng*, wasps. The Book of Songs already discusses wasps getting caterpillars to feed their larvae, and stinging humans. Bees and honey did not emerge, at least in writing, “until the second century CE” (p. 99) and were extensively discussed after the fourth century. They were not called honeybees, *mifeng* (lit. “honey wasp”), until a century later. (I can add



that *mi* for honey is an Indo-European loanword, cognate with *miel* in Romance languages, so the concept of beekeeping for honey is very possibly an introduction from the West at about this time. The Chinese bee, *Apis cerana*, is different from the western *A. mellifera*, and exploring which ones were kept at what time is a project for the future.) The idea of bees as an organized society ruled by a “king” also appeared around this time; as in the West, the ruler was automatically assumed to be a king, not a queen. The hive became a model for human society, just as in the West (yet more reason to suspect influence). This chapter is an important contribution to ethnoentomology.

“Where Did the Animals Go? Presence and Absence of Livestock in Chinese Agricultural Treatises” (pp. 118–138) is by the brilliant historian of agriculture Francesca Bray. She shows the rise of importance of animals in the relevant books, with horses notable in later imperial collections.

“Animals as Text: Producing and Consuming ‘Text-Animals’” by Martina Siebert (pp. 139–159) reviews animals in literary sources, especially *pulu*, ‘treatises and lists,’ in this case meaning monographs on particular animal species, especially their presence in earlier literary sources. Imperial Chinese scholars loved to collect prior wisdom about all subjects. Horses, cats, and tigers are selected as case studies here, with thorough reviews of literature on them. Even goldfish get worthy attention.

Dagmar Schäfer and Han Yi contribute “Great Plans: Song Dynastic (960–1279) Institutions for Human and Veterinary Healthcare” (pp. 160–180). This is a comprehensive review of veterinary medicine and its relation to human treatment in a period when medicine was dramatically changing in China, with more scientific ideas developing and more influence from the western world beginning to come in. The Song state was highly involved in the process.

“Animals in Nineteenth-Century Eschatological Discourse” by Vincent Goossaert (pp. 181–198) is a truly fascinating study of predictions of the end of the world, or at least the destruction of the Chinese state, as a consequence of mistreating, killing, and eating animals. Vegetarianism and avoidance of violence to animals had come with Buddhism long ago, been adopted and to some extent developed independently by Confucian and Daoist thinkers, and become established as a common folk view. Radical rebels such as the Taipings in the nineteenth century saw

killing animals as leading to ruin; fewer extreme vegetarians and less sectarian individuals had more moderate views, such as the sinfulness of killing dogs and cattle because of their usefulness to humans. Many older Chinese and Japanese still will not eat beef for this reason. This paper is an important contribution to studies of nuanced attitudes toward vegetarianism and animal respect.

“Reconsidering the Boundaries: Multicultural and Multilingual Perspectives on the Care and Management of the Emperors’ Horses in the Qing” by Sare Aricanli (pp. 199–216) is a study of horse management in a dynasty where Manchu speakers ruled, Han Chinese speakers were the majority, and Mongol and Turkic speakers were often the horse experts. The non-Han languages had incredibly complex horse terminology; every part of the horse, every possible pathology, and every color variant had its name. In Manchu, for instance, a *hasrun sirga* is a white horse with red spots around its nose and eyes. This chapter provides dozens of terms in several languages. Horse-keeping in Qing times must have required a battery of language experts. Folk taxonomy scholars will want to learn those languages and get at the sources.

“Animals as Wonders: Writing Commentaries on Monthly Ordinances in Qing China” by Zheng Xinxian (pp. 217–232) deals with the highly technical matter of names for calendric periods in the Chinese calendar. Many are named after animal activities, e.g., “Insects Awaken,” and these had to be squared with local experience.

Finally, Mindi Schneider provides “Reforming the Humble Pig: Pigs, Pork and Contemporary China” (pp. 233–243), a short essay on the rise and triumph of pig-raising in the modern world. China has followed the West in transitioning from local farms and households to huge industrial-style operations, to the discomfort of gourmets and traditionalists.

The entire book is of considerable interest to ethnozoologists but is far enough outside the usual ethnobiology citation universe that I feel a need to call it to everyone's attention. The articles by Knapp, Pattinson, Goossaert, and Aricanli may be particularly interesting to anyone studying cognition of animals in cross-cultural perspective, but all the articles are valuable contributions that review a large and arcane literature that can be hard for nonexperts to access.