Goossaert, Vincent. *L'interdit du bœuf en Chine. Agriculture, éthique et sacrifice*. Bibliothèque de l'Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, Volume xxxiv. Paris: Collège de France, 2005. 320 pages. Illustrations, bibliography, index. Paper, EUR 33; ISBN 2-85757-066-x.

This book is a monograph about the beef taboo, a very important moral rule in China, which linked two demands: not killing cows and not eating their meat. This essay in Sinology approaches several anthropological themes concerning alimentary taboos, however the author says he uses "a historian's method" (11). This enables him to measure the development of the taboo, from its beginning around the eleventh century up to its almost complete disappearance today. It also allows him to show how this taboo is integrated within the Chinese social system conceived as a whole and how it takes place within "Chinese religion," an expression which designates "the totality of the forms of individual (…) or collective (…) religious practices inscribed in the frame of Chinese cosmology. It includes ancient sacrificial religion, the Confucianism that continues it, Taoism and Buddhism, as well as later sectarian movements" (10). This encompassing conception of "Chinese religion," showing a total view that goes beyond the divisions between institutional religions (Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism) as well as popular practices, is demonstrated through the study of the beef taboo which passes through all the different ideologies.

The book is divided into five chapters and the demonstration is made in two steps. The first two chapters draw the context in which the beef taboo may be defined: it is related to vegetarianism, either for or against vegetarianism, setting the specific situation of cows in China, especially what is known as the "plowing cow." The following chapters, through an extensive study of written sources, define the taboo and its evolution, and particularly its place within the mechanism of the "retribution of acts" (by which those who transgress moral rules are punished by divine maledictions). The last chapter is about the effects of the taboo on Chinese society between the sixteenth and twentieth century, in particular the line that draws a limit between beefeaters and non-eaters.

The first chapter entitled "Chinese people, the animal, the meat and sacrifice" is especially interesting from an anthropological point of view, because it raises the questions of the link between men and animals in Chinese society as well as animal sacrifice. The ancient Chinese thought of animals as living beings, like men, "but of a less spiritual nature" (24). Thus, there is no clear cut between humans and animals. Moreover, a feeling of proximity and compassion toward animals requiring benevolence may exist. Thus a tension lies between two contradictory demands: benevolence toward animals (especially toward cows) and the necessity of the bloody sacrifice in religious cults, particularly in cults for ancestors. Meat sacrifice is the most important element of cults, so that the expression "bloody food" came to designate all cults, be they State cults or lineage cults (29). The way one prepares meat enables to point out the entire range of relationships between men and supernatural beings who consume their aroma. Chinese religion is fundamentally a sacrificial religion where the alliance with divine entities is grounded in a communion where the central element is meat offerings to gods, followed by their shared eating in banquets (36). The sacrifice was preceded by a purification or a fast, so that "the sacrificial religion followed by Confucianism was built on an alternating of times of penitence and times of sacrifice" (41).

This basis of Chinese Religion is questioned by the two "sacrificial revolutions" which rejected bloody sacrifice at the beginning of our era. Around the second century, Taoism started to advocate the establishment of a "purity pact" which excluded bloody sacrifice, thus marking the borderline between adepts and non-adepts. The commensality ideal still endures around the new idea of frugality, and the purifying fast became the principal rite. However, the Taoist revolution failed to reform local cults whose divinities still consumed meat: they were therefore inscribed on an inferior level in the Taoist pantheon whose superior gods obtain vegetarian offerings. The Buddhist discourse that was gradually forming from the first century insists on notions of life and retribution, where killing sentient beings entails bad consequences for the culpable. The Buddhist doctrine of the killing taboo had the same result, which was to forbid meat sacrifices. Without succeeding in eradicating these cults, the Buddhist doctrine did give rise to the value of this prohibition to enter Chinese religion. The Buddhist clergy adopted the rule of vegetarianism, which set them apart from society. Vegetarianism and the ideal of non-violence toward animals lasted for two thousand years. The three "institutional religions" were all obliged to adapt to "a morality and common social values" (73), the results of a compromise on the abstention of killing, on the regulation of meat consummation and on moments of abstinence.

The second chapter, "Chinese cows, political animals," outlines the practical situation of cows on an economic and political level. For two thousand years, cows were used for field farming, particularly for plowing, and were glorified as "plowing cows." Cow breeding was almost non-existent in China until the twentieth century. The most significant law of cow politics from the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) to the last Qing dynasty (1644–1911)

is the prohibition of slaughter, this action being considered as a crime. This law, based on the idea that cows are helpful to man, implies the proscribing of selling beef. There is no official sanction against eating beef, however the law leaves little space for its consummation, apart from what is authorized for imperial sacrifices and the sacrifice to Confucius. Nevertheless, the law authorizes the cutting of animals who have died a natural death and the selling of their meat. In reality, beef had always been consumed in China, but on a very secondary basis, and was reserved for certain marginal social classes.

The third chapter, " The revelation of a new sin," studies a corpus of anecdotes from the ninth to the thirteenth century (Song dynasty) which defines the beef taboo in relation to the retribution of sins. The protagonists of the taboo often receive a divine revelation requiring them to stop eating beef or killing cows; if they don't do so, they are submitted to terrible punishments such as death followed by torments in hell. These revelations raise the themes of the avenging cow (cows take revenge by asking gods to punish the people who mistreated and killed them, the avenging sentence often being rebirth as a cow) and of the purity of non-eaters of beef to which is linked the eaters of beef becoming polluted. The taboo discourse, entirely formed in the twelfth century, always associated killing cows and eating beef. It is followed by several other social practices, such as the *fangsheng*, where cows were placed in asylum in Buddhist or Taoist monasteries. The taboo was not a state institution, but constituted a revelation which appeared progressively in several layers of Chinese society. The taboo was justified by the merit of the plowing cow and by the fact that beef is the food of heaven (imperial sacrifices to heaven). As a different animal, cows helped to solve the tension between the value of non-violence and of vegetarianism on one side and of the necessity of bloody sacrifice on the other. Lastly, the beef taboo helped the overall consummation of pork.

The fourth chapter, "The beef taboo and the formation of modern Chinese ethics," analyses a corpus of "books of morals" published since the sixteenth century, which had a strong influence on ethical and religious practices. These books all transmit the idea of the retribution of acts, which is common to the whole body of Chinese religions. This movement was accompanied by the creation of charity institutions with moral programs, one of them being the beef taboo. Many "books of morals" copied the "revealed texts" in which gods commanded people to follow the taboo and threatened to punish them if they didn't. The killing of cows was sometimes compared to that of human beings, because the cow is the nearest animal to man as his privileged companion of work in this farming civilization. All these discourses resulted in that the beef taboo became a constitutive part of Chinese morals.

The last chapter, "The beef taboo and Chinese society between the sixteenth and the twentieth century," analyses the tensions between the discourse of the taboo and the realities of the practices during this time. On one side, there was a wealthy milieu of beef sellers who catered to several clients: fundamentalist Confucians who continued to practice cow sacrifice, ruffians and hooligans, soldiers who always traditionally ate beef, and rich members of urban classes, businessmen etc., which amounted to quite a number of people, although all these groups were marginal (243). On the other side, the vast majority of Chinese society followed the beef taboo; some villages and lineages made collective vows to abstain from eating beef, "thus showing the crucial link between the taboo and the religious organization of society" (243). The beef taboo was therefore a way to mark the limits between the strictly structured social groups and the marginal ones; it also marks the limit with other religions in China, Islam and Christianity, whose adepts are beefeaters.

This fascinating trip inside an alimentary practice developed during two millenaries gives a transversal view of Chinese society and shows its unity: since the Taoist and

Buddhist rules at the beginning of our era up to nowadays, the taboo has continued and was instituted as a moral rule of "Chineseness." Many different discourses have found this taboo, as an important element of Chinese culture, to be so deeply rooted that it is often forgotten today. It is still present, however, on an underlying level, even if China's modern transformations have diminished its social importance.

This very rich book has few weaknesses. First, it is written for Sinologists; non-Sinologists must ignore information that is inaccessible (book titles not translated and not presented, Chinese words not translated, and so on). More importantly, from an anthropological point of view, the constant use of Christian vocabulary (such as communion, penitence, sin, and grace) when discussing Chinese religion is surprising. The most problematic word is "saint" which is quite strange in a Chinese context, and its meaning is not explained in the book: the expression "the local saints" regularly occurs (for example, on pages 32, 50, 146), but does it designate the same entities as the "local gods" (235)? One encounters several other surprising expressions such as "the saint patrons" (153), "the saint edicts" (214, 222), "the saint drunkenness" (28), and Confucius is the "greatest saint of Chinese culture" (194). The author certainly has his own reasons for using such words, however the book lacks explanations on this question. It can be said that this term is quite commonly used by French Sinologists specializing in the science of religions (*sciences religieuses*). As such it may , therefore, be a sign of an understanding which differs from that of anthropologists. Another problematic word is "retribution" which is mostly used in the negative sense of "divine punishment" and not in the positive sense of a reward. A last point must be raised: the author explains that he has made a multifactor analysis insisting on the liturgical dimension and ethic rules of sacrificial cult communities. The reader would like to have a clearer presentation of the elements which prioritize the moral rule of the beef taboo from the inside.

In spite of these few weaknesses, the book is well written and is pleasant to read. The bibliography, divided into primary sources and studies, is prolific (however the titles of Chinese and Japanese books are not translated). The index, which includes *pinyin* transcriptions and their translations, principal French words and the names of important authors, is extensive. To conclude, this book is fascinating due to the originality of its theme and the way its global presentation reveals Chinese society in its daily practices. This book, which claims to belong to historical science, also represents an anthropological study that will be of interest to anthropologists as well as to Sinologists.

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