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Daoism and Animals
E. N. Anderson and Lisa Raphals

The Animal World of Ancient China

Ancient China was a world rich in animals. In dramatic contrast to the devastated modern landscape, China’s biodiversity was the greatest of any temperate land. It was a land of vast lush forests, rich grasslands, fertile mountains, and enormous expanses of wetland-marsh, swamp, and river bottom. In these dwelt elephants, rhinoceri, pandas, apes, tigers, leopards, and countless smaller forms.

The earliest Chinese artifacts from the Shang dynasty (traditionally 1766–1122 BCE, actually somewhat later) include many representations of dragons and other imaginary creatures, but relatively few portrayals of real-world animals. Actual animals depicted include water buffaloes, tigers, sheep, and birds. Pigs, the most common animal found in archaeological remains, are conspicuously absent. In succeeding periods, more and more animals were portrayed, as were countless imaginary creatures, such as the nine-tailed fox, human-headed birds, the three-legged crow, and the humanoid owl.

The ancient Chinese knew their fauna intimately. The Classic of Poetry or Shi jing mentions at least ninety-three species, including twenty-one mammals (one mythical), thirty-five birds (one mythical, the phoenix), three reptiles (plus the mythical dragon), one amphibian, thirteen fish, and nineteen insects. Here and elsewhere in Chinese literature, there is a striking awareness of insect life. The songs of the Shi jing reflect the fresh, direct vision of people who knew animals from daily experience. The wasp carries off the caterpillar to feed its young; the rats nibble the grain; the spider spins her web over abandoned doorways.

By the Warring States period (ca. 403–221 BCE), China’s heartland—the North China Plain, the loess uplands west of it, and the Yangtze and Huai river valleys—had already been transformed by humans and biotically impoverished. Rhinos and elephants were exotic creatures, known from trade with non-Chinese
groups on the margins. The common animals of daily experience were domestic: Horses, donkeys, cattle, goats, dogs, buffaloes, sheep, pigs, chickens. Of these, the last four were native, the others introduced (as domesticates—although some had local wild forms) but known for millennia. Pigs, then as now, were by far the most important meat source. Chickens and dogs were common, but horses were a luxury for the elite and cattle were uncommon beasts of the plow. Rulers kept large game parks, in which they hunted deer and other large animals. These were seen by many social critics as wasteful luxuries that tied up good land.

Animals per se are not a distinct category in most Chinese texts, Daoist or otherwise. More typically, texts that talk about animals at any length use the four or five distinct categories of beasts, birds, insects, and fish, with the occasional addition of dragons and snakes.

The term Daoism is equally problematic, because of the unclear affiliations of some of the texts and practices in which animals are most prevalent. Most textual accounts of animals come from the Six Dynasties period. While hagiographies from the Dao zang are unproblematically Daoist, the same cannot be said for the Souhen ji and other literature dealing with anomalies, which prominently features accounts of animals, both “normal” and anomalous.

In this essay we focus discussion on actual animals or on individual instances of animals that are described as anomalies for their kind. This approach largely omits the many accounts of mythological animals (the dragon, phoenix, unicorn, etc.) and the use of animals as purely directional symbols. We draw on both standard texts from the Warring States period and on recently excavated archaeological texts.

Early Daoism

The term “Daoism” as a specific body of thought is anachronistic when applied to ancient China. Attributed to Sima Tan in the Historical Records or Shi ji (ca. 100 BCE), the term has been widely used to refer to mystical and quietistic interpretations of two texts: the Dao de jing, a collection of gnomic verses still widely popular today, probably compiled about 200 BCE, and Zhaungzi, attributed to the fourth-century BCE figure Zhuang Zhou. Recent archaeological finds and contemporary scholarship have brought about a reappraisal of the term as applied to pre-Han texts. Sima Tan’s use of the term included a number of thinkers whose common ground was skepticism about active, interventionist government. Most of them talked about the need to find dao—the Way, the proper way of living, acting and governing—but so did most other Chinese philosophers.

Another important source was the Chu ci or Songs of the South, a collection of early poems by court officials of Han and immediately pre-Han times. Most of these invoke shamanistic and/or Daoist images, and some are frankly Daoist. The Chu ci is incredibly rich in animal and plant images, mentioning at least eighty-eight animal species, many of which are imaginary. Its pages are rich with dragons, rainbow-serpents, wasps as big as gourds, and ants as big as elephants. Even the “real” animals are often completely unidentifiable.

The Zhaungzi is the most philosophically challenging, and the most rich and diverse, of the early sources. Like other early Chinese works, it was edited and supplemented in the Han dynasty, but it retained a solid core of early material—presumably by Zhaungzi himself—that have come to be called the “inner chapters.” The Zhaungzi mentions approximately seventy-five animals, many of them mythical or unidentifiable. Like other early Chinese writers, Zhaungzi (and the other authors of the material that has accumulated around his name) were conscious of even the smallest insects. A pig louse becomes a symbol of foolish security, and insect transformations are recorded in exquisite, if biologically inaccurate, detail.
Animals in Early Daoist Thought

Animals appear in many contexts in these writings. First, their practical value is immediately obvious. They provided food, clothing, and medicine. Meat, leather, silk, wool, and animal-derived medications are very frequently mentioned. In the early Daoist texts there is no indication that such uses were considered immoral. Excessive consumption of meat was identified with luxury and disparaged for that reason, but the general tendency of animals to eat each other was frequently and explicitly mentioned as a natural process, in harmony with Dao.

The horse probably is the most often mentioned animal in early Chinese texts. It was identified with wealth, power, and worldly glory, and it was an important source of energy for the elites. One of the most striking passages in the Zhuangzi attacks worldly power by contrasting the happiness and freedom of wild horses with the misery and bad behavior of captive ones:

When they live out on the plains they eat grass and drink the water, when pleased they cross their necks and stroke each other, when angry swing round and kick at each other. . . . If you put yokes on their necks and hold them level with a crossbar, the horses will know how to smash the crossbar, wriggle out of the yokes, butt the carriage hood. ⁴

Daoist texts also describe and depict human figures mounted on cranes, dragons, phoenixes, and other creatures. ⁵

Second, animals were sacrificed to gods and ancestors, as they still are in traditional Chinese communities. Archaeologists have traced this practice back to highest antiquity. Among the animals mentioned are dogs, chickens, turtles, oxen, and sheep. There is little textual evidence that Daoists protested these practices. In one apocryphal anecdote, Zhuangzi, when asked to be minister of state, declined by comparing himself to a sacrificial tortoise, or ox, making the point that it is better to be a tortoise dragging its tail in the mud, free, safe, and unhonored than to live the stiff, artificial, and highly uncertain life of a courtier. In some cases, straw and pottery models were often substituted for the real animals, thus saving the latter. “Straw dogs” were also used as a metaphor for humans in the face of Heaven, which treats humans with the calm indifference of ritualists disposing of sacrificial straw dogs after the ceremony.

Finally, animals were also used as models for how to move in powerful, natural, spontaneous, and healthy ways. In a section of the Zhuangzi that probably dates from the Han dynasty, the anonymous commentator is a bit sarcastic about those who “huff and puff, exhale and inhale, . . . do the ‘bear-hang’ and the ‘bird-stretch.’” ⁶ As all of us know who have any acquaintance with Chinese martial arts and sexual yoga, the ways of the bear are still with us, along with the ways of the monkey, the crane, the snake, and many other animals whose motions offer salutary examples of how to move.

What Animals Did

Animals were not viewed simply as useful things. They had varying degrees of spiritual or numinous power. The most numinous were usually the most far from everyday experience—the dragons, phoenixes, and unicorns—but ordinary animals such as tortoises and snakes were also given numinous attributes. Cranes in particular were associated with magical and mystical experiences, and the image of a Daoist riding through the heavens on a crane eventually became an artistic cliche. Real-world Daoists kept tame cranes, until, alas, the birds became too rare to be available. ⁶ The crane retains its sacred status in Korea and Japan, where the few survivors are venerated and protected. However, significantly, the early Chinese texts devote very little attention to animal magic, except for purely imaginary creatures like dragons.
Real-world animals almost never have magical or spirit powers. This is in marked contrast to the shamanistic societies of North and Central Asia, whose animal cults were (and still are) spectacularly rich and complex.7

From the foregoing, it should already be clear that Daoist writers found animals especially important as a source of metaphors, similes, and subjects of teaching stories. However, we should not fall into the modern habit of reducing them to mere figures of speech. Zhuangzi’s wild horses are not simply metaphors of freedom; real horses, like people, want freedom and do best when free. Zhuangzi presumably thought that the tortoise and ox really did appreciate their lives and really preferred them to an honored death. In perhaps the most famous animal story in Chinese literature, Zhuangzi dreams he is a butterfly, and wakes up uncertain whether he is a butterfly dreaming of being Zhuang Zhou.8 A striking poetic image at the very least, it may also relate to shamanistic traditions in which the soul is a butterfly.9 Similarly, the deer dream story in the later Daoist text Liezi, in which real and dreamed deer become one, has thought-provoking similarities to beliefs about deer as magical or spiritual quarry among the Mongols of north China.10 These stories reflect a numinous aspect of the human-animal interface.

Analogy due to real homology is explicit in another famous Zhuangzi story, the happiness of fish. Standing on a bridge with his skeptical debate partner Huizi, Zhuangzi praises the free and easy action of the minnows. Huizi asks: “You are not a fish. Whence do you know that the fish are happy?” Zhuangzi replies that: “You aren’t me, whence do you know that I don’t know the fish are happy?” and adds that “you asked me the question already knowing that I knew.”11 Zhuangzi is saying that one intuitively knows the pleasure of fish. He implies that people and fish share enough basic similarity that humans can understand them.12

These stories often emphasize that animals live spontaneously and act according to their natures. This spontaneity and naturalness is also considered an ideal for human conduct. According to a comment in the wild-horses story: “In the age when Power [de, spiritual power or virtue] was at its utmost, men lived in sameness with the birds and animals, side by side as fellow clansmen with the myriad creatures.”13 Today, it adds, humans have lost the Way. They subject themselves to laws, to artificial habits, and to gratuitous and limiting mental constructs. There are countless variations on this theme— even individual thinkers like Zhuangzi were not always consistent. The question of whether (or how far) Zhuangzi and similarly minded Daoist philosophers were cultural relativists remains controversial. It does seem clear that the early Daoists criticized conventional ethical schemas of Benevolence, Duty, Ritual, and so forth, and their power to interfere with all the spontaneity and naturalness in life. Watching animals could help teach humans what really is and is not important and worthwhile. Some texts portray animals as able to detect humans. The Liezi describes how gulls came to play with a man but fled when he wanted to capture them.14 (This became a poetic cliché in later dynasties, even more in Korea than in China.) Here again, freedom is seen as a basic desideratum for people and animals alike.

These texts also addressed cases where it was necessary to capture animals and remove them from their wild state; they make it clear that there was a right Way even to do that. These texts show how to focus on animals, understand exactly how they live and move, and enter into such harmony with them as to achieve anything. A fisherman catches a whale-sized fish with a single silk thread for a line and a wheat awn for a hook.15 A cicada-catcher succeeds by concentrating his mind so much that there is nothing in all the universe for him except the cicada’s wings.16 The point of the story, of course, is to teach us how to live, not how to catch cicadas!

The early Daoists also recognized the importance of the food chain, and they had no illusions about that side of animal life. A beautiful
naturalness is also conduct. Accord-horses story: "In-ual power or vir-ved in sameness : by side as fellow atures." Today, Way. They sub- official habits, and mental constructs. On this theme—huangzi were not 1 of whether (or- ly minded Dao- stativists remains ur that the early ethical schemas nd so forth, and the spontaneity g animals could s and is not im- exts portray ani- . The Liezi de- with a man but e them. (This dynasties, even ere again, free- tum for people ses where it was d remove them ke it clear that do that. These, understand and enter into hieve anything, sed fish with a wheat awn for ed by concen- vere is nothing pt the cicada’s of course, is to catch cicadas! zed the impor- ty had no illu- fe. A beautiful teaching story, used today in many an ecology class, finds Zhuangzi in a game park, trying to poach a bit of dinner. He trains his bow on a strange bird that is itself about to eat a mantis about to eat a cicada. He becomes so absorbed in this instructive tableau that he himself is almost caught by the warden. This is said to be the incident that turned his mind to Daoist philosophy—as well it might!

Transformation is another important aspect of animal life. The Chinese knew that caterpillars transformed into butterflies, grubs into wasps, and so forth. Zhuangzi provides a long string of transformations: the germ in a seed becomes the water-plantain, which turns into other plants and then to insects; eventually the horse is produced, and from the horse is born the human—a strange and still unexplained idea. Liezi considerably expands this account, adding several truly uncanny transformations: "Sheep's liver changes into the goblin sheep underground. The blood of horses and men become[s] the will-o'-the-wisp." Such change and evolution is part of nature. Everything changes; one can only resign oneself to the natural flow of things.

More seriously philosophical comments on death echo this account. A dying sage says his body may become a chariot and his spirit its horses. Such passages say something real about the world. Even when animals are used for purely literary purposes, we are never far from actual comments on nature. Swallows symbolize humble domesticity because they nest under eaves. Lao Dan (the apocryphal Laozi) is a dragon in Zhuangzi's metaphor. Daoist religious traditions developed moral charges that protected animal life, sometimes adopted verbatim from Confucian and Buddhist works.

The foundational Daoist texts are notably silent on these topics, beyond a general charter to leave animals in as natural a state as possible. The Daoists seem not to have conceived of a world in which animals were not used for food, clothing, traction, and medicine. They saw eating animals as a natural thing, and therefore appropriate for humans. Tigers, and even mosquitoes, eat humans; why should not humans eat other animals? Moreover, sacrifice was and still is critically important to Daoist ritual. Today, Daoist ceremonies observed by E. N. Anderson involve sacrifice and consumption of chickens and pigs, and sometimes other animals. It is thus clear that Daoists differ from Buddhists in their tolerance of slaughter and consumption of animals.

The Zhuangzi and Animal Minds

The Zhuangzi uses animals in a new set of ways that reflect both observation of (and interest in) their actual behavior, and a keen sense of metaphor.

The first representation of the "great knowledge" (da zhi 大智) that preoccupies the Inner Chapters of the Zhuangzi is as an animal, or rather the transformation with which the work begins: the transformation of the Kun fish into the Peng bird in the first chapter of the Zhuangzi. It is the Peng bird, neither a human or a divinity, that first represents the greater perspective. The distinction between large and small perspective is elaborated first in the contrast between the perspectives of the Peng Bird and the turtledove that hops from branch to branch. That distinction is elaborated in human terms in the "Qiwu lun" chapter of Book 2. In these passages, the Zhuangzi uses a mélange of real and imaginary animals to comment on, and recommend, human choices. Animal minds demonstrate the desirable attitudes of great perspective and detachment. This kind of metaphor extends to the political. In "Autumn Floods" (Zhuangzi 17), Zhuangzi himself uses the rhetorical example of the "turtle dragging its tail in the mud" to emphasize the priority of a natural and livable life over the demands and dangers of court life and high office.

The Zhuangzi also uses animal minds to show the limitations of attachment and loss of perspective. Zhuangzi’s quarry in the hunting park (see above) is a "strange magpie" whose wings
are huge but get it nowhere, and whose eyes
are huge, but don't see. For all its "uselessness"
—a theme of considerable importance in the
Zhuangzi—it escapes his attentions, because he
is distracted by the sight of the cicada stalked
by the mantis stalked by the magpie stalked by
Zhuangzi himself in Zhuangzi 20.

Animals, Gender, and Morality

The uses of animals in the arguments of the
two "Classical Daoist" texts and in early medi-
cal literature is even more striking if we contrast
the use of "birds and beasts" in the arguments
of other Warring States thinkers, sometimes
classed as "Huang-Lao" Daoism. The Guanzi
contrasts animals negatively with the prehuman
state before civilization. In this and other texts,
the distinction between men and women (nannü
zhi bei 男女之別) is taken as the defining fea-
ture of human, as opposed to animal, society.
They ascribe the incorrect mingling of the sexes,
among other things, to the prehuman behavior
of animals and to the quasi-bestial practices of
primitive society before the civilizing influence
of the sage-kings. According to the Guanzi, if
ministers are allowed to indulge themselves,
they will follow their desires and behave with
reckless abandon. Men and women will not be
kept separate, but revert to being animals. Con-
sequently the rules of propriety, righteous con-
duct, integrity and a sense of shame will not
be established and the prince of men will have
nothing with which to protect himself.

Part of the "protection" of the ruler is the
order of human, as opposed to animal, society.
The distinction between men and women is
one of the defining features of human society.
Beasts, by contrast, do not segregate males and
females.

The Shamanic Connection

An earlier generation of Sinologists often saw
connections between Daoism and shamanism.27
Shamanism, a form of religious and curing act-
ivity widespread in Asia, involves shamans who
send their souls to other realms in order to
search out the cause and cure of personal and
social ills and misfortunes. There is every rea-
son to pursue the issue, for the Han Chinese
world is surrounded by shamanistic societies.
The English word "shaman" is borrowed from
the Tungus languages. Many Tungus groups live
in China. One of the Tungus languages, Man-
chu, was the language of two Chinese dynasties
(the Jin and Qing, both ruled by Tungus con-
querors). It would be inconceivable that China
would not be influenced by shamanism. Indeed,
the Chinese word wu shen, which now covers a
range of spirit mediums, once clearly applied
to shamans very similar in their practices to the
Tungus and Mongol ones.28 Wu and Daoist
adepts could both send their souls to the heavens
and to the lands of the immortals, as is clearly
seen in the Songs of the South and in many later
Daoist writings.29 Daoist adepts live in a uni-
verse of meditation and inner travel, similar to
the shamanic one.

A clear link with shamanic animal lore is
the concern with transformations. The general
texts on transformation, noted above, presaged
a flood of animal tales in later literature. These
often turn on the proneness of animals to take
human shape, or vice versa; sometimes the trans-
formation becomes complete, but at other times
we are dealing with were-creatures. Statements
in Daoist texts about the flux and transforma-
tion of all things may have roots in shaman-
istic traditions as well as Chinese cosmological
knowledge and belief.

Another link between shamanism and Chi-
nese folk religion is the concern with sacrifices
and sacrificial animals. In modern Daoist prac-
tice, elaborate sacrifices involve special prepara-
tion and treatment of the animals; each cere-
mony has its own patterns, which vary from place to place. This is similar to the complex logic and structuring of sacrifice among the Daoists. \(^{30}\) However, the shamanistic bond with animals is not very visible in the Daoist writings surveyed here. Animals are not the sources of spiritual power, nor are they companions or guides in supernatural travel, as they are in shamanism. \(^{31}\) The nearest we come are the dragons and cranes used as mounts for travel to ephemeral realms. This is, indeed, no doubt connected with shamanism; shamans ride spirit horses, and sometimes birds. But the connection is not obviously close. The whole complex of animal religion that reaches such incredible heights in central Asia seems absent from Daoism, except in so far as it is related to general Chinese beliefs about sacrifice and about the magical significance of dragons, turtles, and the like. \(^{32}\) Even the tiger, so universally revered in folk cults throughout its range, gets no special treatment in Daoist texts. Nor does the fox, though we know that the incredibly rich folklore about foxes and fox spirits was already well established. \(^{33}\) The huge, uncanny, and imaginary animals of Zhuangzi’s and Liezi’s stories, with their strange powers, might hark back a visionary shamanistic cosmology, but they give no obvious evidence of it. Conversely, the bizarre imaginary animals of the Shan Hai Jing (“Classic of Mountains and Seas”) are almost certainly the visionary experiences of shamans traveling to the unreal “mountains and seas” in question, but the Shan Hai Jing never became a canonical Daoist text.

Most particularly, the early Daoist sources seem completely lacking in the strong moral component so prominent in shamanistic lore about hunting. Throughout most of northeast Asia and all of North America, myths, tales, and shamanic lore encode a very strong moral injunction not to take too many animals—usually, no more than one’s family immediately needs. This view, shored up by spiritual beliefs about the animals themselves, is well documented for Altaic peoples on China’s fringe. \(^{34}\) Animals and animal parts are to be treated with reverence. This view may well be latent behind Liezi’s deer story and several other Daoist stories, but it is not made explicit, nor do any such moral teachings occur in Daoist writings. Early Daoist teachings move us away from explicit moral rules, toward a meditative and aware state in which we can naturally act in an appropriate manner. Even shamanic moral rules may have smacked too much of propriety and self-righteousness for the early Daoists. Later Daoist religious communities adopted a variety of moral codes, including the animal-related ones noted above; but they came from Confucian and Buddhist teachings, not from shamanism. \(^{35}\)

These texts contain an implicit and sometimes explicitly moral view of animals. Animals have their own natures, their own dao, and humans should not interfere unless necessary. Such an attitude contains an implicit conservation ethic; obviously, Daoists do not like to see lavish and conspicuous consumption, nor do they like to see animals used for any purpose unless real necessity is involved. Destructive uses clearly violate the animals’ dao. Animals are spontaneous, able to live their good lives without worry about rites and ceremonies, morals and duties. They do all that they need to do, without thinking, and nothing more. We are better advised to learn from them than to kill or abuse them.

The Uses of Animals In Early Daoist Texts

THE WARRING STATES

Warring States quasi-Daoist accounts of animals vary widely, and they may contain a few surprises. Animals are almost completely absent from the Dao de jing, but, as we have seen, appear frequently in the Zhuangzi, as well as in the political rhetoric of the Guanzu and other Warring States texts associated with Huang-Lao
Daoism. In addition, they appear in recently excavated texts in contexts that range from recipes used to treat animal-inflicted injuries to metaphors for body movement in sexual arts literature.

**DAO AS INANIMATE IN THE DAO DE JING**

Animals are conspicuously absent from the many descriptions of dao in the *Dao de jing*. Its metaphors for dao are inanimate (water, the valley, the uncarved block) or not quite human (the unformed infant), and conspicuously do not include animals, either singly or collectively.

Animals are not used as positive metaphors for dao. Indeed, they are used as illustrations of the kind of negative happpenstance that Daoist self-cultivation protects against. Verse 55 begins:

One who embraces the fullness of Virtue
Can be compared to a newborn babe.
Wasps and scorpions, snakes and vipers do not sting him,
Birds of prey and fierce beasts do not seize him.  

Here, animals are clearly viewed as sources of harm and injury. Early medical texts found in the same tomb as the oldest extant version of the *Dao de jing* “flesh out” this concern, and they also present a more positive and imaginative depiction of animals in metaphors for body movement.

**Cures for Animal-inflicted Injuries**

Before the second century, prevailing views (and methods of treatment) of disease treated illness as the invasive influence of external forces, including natural forces (wind, heat, cold), demonic entities and magical influence, and animal-inflicted injuries, including bites and the effects of parasites and insects. Recent excavations of tombs from Mawangdui and elsewhere have yielded valuable medical documents that provide new information about early Chinese medical theories. The premier medical document found at Mawangdui is the *Recipe for Fifty-two Ailments* (Wushier bingfang 吳十二病方). This late-third-century compendium is the oldest extant exemplar of a medical recipe manual, one of the oldest genres of medical literature. Its recipes are listed in fifty-two categories, which form the organizing principle of the text (each category contains up to thirty recipes). Animal bites and related injuries are included in several of these: recipes for mad dog bites (category 6), dog bites (category 7), crow’s beak poisoning (category 10), scorpions (category 11), leech bites (category 12), lizards (category 13), grain borer ailment (category 18), maggots (category 19), chewing by bugs (category 46), and gu poisoning (category 49).

**ANIMALS AS METAPHERS FOR WHOLE-BODY MOVEMENT**

The Mawangdui texts also present us with an equally early, and much friendlier, view of animals: the use of animal movements as metaphors to describe whole-body movements that do not otherwise lend themselves to clear description. The same kinds of metaphors appear in the later literature of Daoist-inspired martial arts, where the modes of movement of cranes, mantises, and other creatures are taken as models for the defense and attack of martial artists. These late examples of the use of the movements of animals may be the Chinese “animal” imagery most familiar to the nonspecialist.

The first known uses of these metaphors are in Daoist sexual technique literature, of which the earliest examples extant come from the tomb excavations at Mawangdui and Jiangjia. The Mawangdui texts “Uniting Yin and Yang” (*He yin yang* 和陰陽) and “Discussion of the Dao of Heaven” (*Tianxia zhi dao tan* 天下之道談) each contains a section that refers to the movements and postures of animals as whole-body metaphors for sexual techniques and postures:
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The first is called roaming tiger, the second cicada clinging, the third inchworm, the fourth roe deer butting, the fifth locust spreading, the sixth monkey squat, the seventh toad in the moon, the eighth rabbit startled, the ninth dragonflies and the tenth fish gobbling.40

Similar exercises described in the “Pulling Book” (Yinshu shuwen 引書釋文), a text found at Zhangjiashan in Jiangling, describes exercises that refer to or are named after animals, including: inchworms, snakes, mantises, wild ducks, owls, tigers, chickens, bears, frogs, deer, and dragons.41

Six Dynasties Daoism

Now let us turn to a few examples of the use of animals in Six Dynasties and Tang Daoist texts.

HUMAN-ANIMAL INTERACTIONS IN DAOIST HAGIOGRAPHIES

The Daoist hagiographies of the Six Dynasties are equally sparing in their use of animals. What marks the sages of the Liezi zhuan (列仙傳) are interactions with immortals, longevity, immortality, distinct dietary habits, and receipt of secret texts and techniques. In a few cases, the remarkable qualities of the sages are shown by visitation by animals. Every morning, yellow birds would appear at the door of the Jin recluse Jie Zitui (介子推) (LXZ 19). Zhu Qiweng (祝融) raised chickens and fish (LXZ 36); the gardener Yuan Ke (園客) was visited by five colored butterflies (LXZ 47).

Some do interact, in various ways, with the animal associated with immortality: the dragon. Ma Shihuang (馬師皇) (Horse Master Huang), the veterinarian of Huang Di, once cured a dragon who took him away on its back (LXZ 3). Shi Men (師門) lived on flowers, fish, and leaves, and was a master of dragons (LXZ 14). In two of these accounts, the human transforms into one of the immortal animals. Huang Di (黃帝) is described as “having the form of a dragon” (有龍形, LXZ 5).42 In other accounts, the appearance of the dragon is heralded by a more ordinary animal. A red bird appears over the forge of the blacksmith Tao Angong (陶安公) to tell him that a red dragon would come for him and carry him away on its back (LXZ 60). In a similar story, Zi Ying (子英) catches a carp and feeds it. It grows horns and wings; he mounts its back and flies away (LXZ 55).

Even the story of Mao Nü (毛女), who grows animal-like hair, involves no extended human-animal interaction. Seen by hunters over several generations, the “Furry Woman” fled the palace of Qin Shi Huang Di at the end of the Qin dynasty. According to the hagiography, she was taught by a Daoist to live on pine nuts, and spontaneously grew a coat of hair (LXZ 54).

In summary, on the basis of this evidence, we can make a few speculative observations about the presence and absence of animals in so-called Lao-Zhuang and Six Dynasties Daoist texts.

Despite the considerable prevalence of animals (like plants) in early Chinese texts, special interactions with animals are not an ingredient of the hagiographies of the Liezi zhuan — the topos of the lifesaving nurture of abandoned or refugee infants, children, or women by wild animals. Even the “Furry Woman” of the Liezi zhuan learns to survive by the instruction of a Daoist, not by imitating wild beasts. Animals do appear in these stories as vehicles for humans who cross the boundary between Heaven and Earth, mortality and immortality, usually by mounting to heaven on the back of a dragon. But, as in earlier texts, animals seem largely to be used as examples of living naturally.
"STRANGE" ANIMALS IN THE ZHIGUAI GENRE

Several texts within the genre of zhiguai (志怪), or "anomaly" literature, contain extensive accounts of animal anomalies, as well as contrasting accounts of animal "norms."43 The Bowuzhi (博物志) or Treatise on Curiosities of Zhang Hua (張華) (232–300) is organized by thirty-nine subject headings, of which four concern animal anomalies. These are: Marvelous beasts (異獸 yi shou), Marvelous birds (異鳥 yi niao), Marvelous insects (異蟲 yi chong), and Marvelous fish (異魚 yi yu).

The Soushen ji (搜神記) or Records of an Inquest into the Spirit Realm by Gan Bao (干寶) (335–349) also contains five very different chapters that bear on animals: monstrous creatures, transformation of humans into plants and animals, spirits of mammals, snake and fish spirits, and accounts of rewards and retribution by animals. The third juan of the Yi Yuan (異苑) or Garden of Marvels by Liu Jingshu (顧敘) (fl. early 5c) is devoted to fifty-seven items of anomalies involving animals: birds (1–12), tigers (13–17), dragons and snakes (33–47), turtles and fish (48–52), and shellfish and insects (53–57). The Soushen houji (搜神後記), or Further Records of an Inquest into the Spirit Realm (late Song or early Qi), contains a section (10) of tales involving dragons, krakens, and large snakes. Of these, we explore the account in the Soushen ji at some length.

EXPLANATION FOR POSSESSIONS AND ANOMALIES

As Rob Campany as pointed out in his study of anomaly literature, the animal anomaly stories in the Soushen ji portray several different modes of anomaly, of which most involve crossing the animal-human boundary. These include: a variety of human-animal hybrids and a range of transformations among individual species, genders within species, humans, animals, and spirits, both human and animal.44

The sixth chapter of the Soushen ji begins by explaining the occurrence of possessions and anomalies:

Possessions and anomalies (yao guai) prevail over a thing’s essential qi (jing qi) and reconfigure it (妖怪者，蓋精氣之依物者也). Internally the qi is disordered; externally the thing is transformed.50 if we rely on prognostication of good and malauspice (休咎之徵), in all these cases, it is possible to delimit and discuss them.49

Some cases are partial transformations, where an animal or human grows an extra or inappropriate body parts: a tortoise growing hair and a hare horns,50 cows, horses or birds with extra legs,51 and horses, dogs, and men growing horns.52 In other cases the transformation is complete, and an animal (or human) changes entirely into another, for example, a horse to a fox,53 or bears offspring of another species. Cases of cross-species matings and anomalous births include: a horse bearing a human child,54 a dog mating with a pig,55 swallows hatching sparrows,56 falcons,57 and the birth of two-headed children.58 In one case, a cow bears a chicken with four feet.59 Sometimes the transformation is of gender: a woman turning into a man, marrying and siring children,60 a man turning into a woman, marrying and bearing children,61 and a hen becoming a cock.62 All these anomalies are ascribed to rulers of the Han and Later Han dynasties and the Three Kingdoms period. Again, the fascination with the bizarre and surreal continues from Warring States times and traditions. It and the longevity cult rather undercut the naturalistic side of Daoism, a point noted by Chinese scholars as well as modern readers.

NATURAL AND ANOMALOUS ANIMAL TRANSFORMATIONS

The nineteen items of Book 12 of the Soushen ji describe both "natural" and anomalous transformations of animals. The first item in Book 12 ex-
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plains how the myriad creatures (wun wu) were
formed from the five qi of heaven (wood, fire,
metal, water and earth). Its premise is that ani-
mals made of one kind of qi will display similar
forms and similar natures. Thus: eaters of
grain (human society) have intelligence and cul-
ture; eaters of grass have great strength and little
mind; creatures that eat mulberry leaves pro-
duce silk and become caterpillars; eaters of meat
are courageous, fierce, and high-spirited; things
that eat mud lack mind and breath. Now the
passage returns to human beings; those that feed
on primal energies become sages and enjoy long
lives; those that do not eat at all do not die and
become numinous immortals (shen).59

It goes on to classify the “natures” of ani-
mals in several other ways. One is “cock and hen
mode” (雄雉 ci xiong), that is, to classify them
by their “male” and “female” characteristics.60
Creatures that lack “cock mode” must mate with
other creatures to reproduce; creatures that lack
“hen mode” need the nurturing of other crea-
tures to reproduce. It proceeds to an account
of how animals of one kind naturally transform
one into another; the principle of these transfor-
mations is that “creatures of the heavenly sort
have upward affinities; those with earthly origins
list downwards. Each thing follows its kind” (各
從其類也).61

The text goes on to explain that transforma-
tions within category are normal and “too many
to be counted.”

The movement of things in response to change
follows constant ways, and it is only when things
take a wrong direction that injurious anomalies
appear... If a human gives birth to a beast (shou)
or a beast to a human it is case of qi in disorder
(氣之亂者). When a man becomes a woman or a
woman becomes a man, it is a case of transposi-
tion of qi.62

Other chapters go on to record animal and
other anomalies without further explanation, in-
cluding: transformations of humans into plants
and animals (SSJ 14), accounts of the spirits
of mammals (SSJ 18), accounts of snake and
fish spirits (SSJ 19) and accounts of reward and
retribution by animals (SSJ 20). These human-
animal transformations include: a horse into a
silkworm,63 women to birds,64 and women into
turtles (3 cases).65 In the first of the seven fox
or fox spirit stories in the eighteenth chapter of
the Sōshen ji, a man turns to a fox in the pres-
ence of the Han dynasty Confucian philoso-
pher and anomaly specialist Dong Zhongshu.66
Other stories in this chapter involve deer, sow,
and dog spirits, and a rat. Chapter 19 contains
six stories of snake, fish, and turtle spirits.

Chapter 20 presents a different kind of ani-
mal account, sixteen stories of rewards and retri-
bution involving animals. In some cases, hu-
mans extend “human” compassion to animals,
and are rewarded. Several of these stories spec-
ically involve medical knowledge. One Sun
Deng of Wei perceived that a dragon was ill; it
transformed into a man, he cured it, and it
rewarded the district with rains.67 In another
story, a tiger abducts a midwife named Su Yi
to its lair, where she delivers the tigress of a
breach birth. The tiger returns her home, and re-
wards her with gifts of game.68 In other cases,
a black crane, an oriole, a serpent, and a turtle re-
turn and reward the humans that cure and free
them.69 In other stories, humans show compas-
sion to fish, ants, and a snake.70 In one case, a
man is saved from false imprisonment and death by
a mole cricket he feeds.71 In these cases, humans
extend the benefits of “human” morality to ani-
mals, who react in kind. In other cases, animals
spontaneously act with human qualities. Two
such stories involve dogs.72 Other stories involve
misbehaving humans and animals who act “hu-
manely.” A mother gibbon suicides when a man
catches, and then kills, her baby.73 A (talking)
deer and a serpent bring retribution in the form
of sudden illness on hunters who kill them.74
tinction between men and women also occurs at Guanzi XI 31:1a (Rickett, Guanzi, p. 412).
27. For example, see Arthur Waley, The Nine Songs: A Study of Shamanism in Ancient China (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1955).
28. See, e.g., ibid.
29. See: David Hawkes, Ch’u T’zu, The Songs of the South (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959); Waley, Nine Songs; Schafer, Pacing the Void.
30. Humphrey, Shamen.
32. Roux, Faune, passim.
33. Han texts tell us, for instance, of the nine-tailed fox, a frightening supernatural being. In Chinese popular and literary traditions, fox spirits are often malevolent and insidious.
34. See, for instance, Kenin-Lopsan, Shamanic Songs; and also the famous tale of the Nisan Shama; the conservation message is latent in the well-known Nowak and Durrant version (Margaret Nowak and Stephen Durrant, The Tale of the Nisan Shama; A Manchu Folk Epic, [Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977]), but explicit in a version recorded by Caroline Humphrey (Shamen, p. 306).
35. Still further is the complete prohibition on killing animals, at least in sacred localities, that characterizes Buddhism. Such prohibition came to China and added itself to mountain cults, as in Tibet (Toni Huber, The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
38. Harper, Early Chinese Medical Literature, pp. 22–22. Gu 兒 poisoning, an affliction of demonic origins, was sometimes attributed to the pernicious activities of women, who were believed to cultivate gu, and pass it down for generations.
41. Maishu shiwen 脉书释文 [Channel book], Yinshu shiwen 引书释文 [Pulling book]. Reported in ZhangjiaShan Hanmu shuzhuang zhengli xiaozuo, Jiangling ZhangjiaShan Hanmu guishu 江陵张家山漢簡

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60. Somewhat misleadingly described by DeWoskin and Crump as "virility" and "mothering spirit." For more on cock and hen, see Raphals, *Sharing the Light*, ch. 6.

61. SSJ 14:9-10.
62. SSJ 14:9-10.
63. SSJ 14:93.
64. SSJ 14:9-4.
65. SSJ 14:9-4-95.
66. SSJ 18:122.
67. SSJ 20:133.
68. SSJ 20:133.
69. SSJ 20:133-34.
70. SSJ 20:134 and 136.
71. SSJ 20:135.
72. SSJ 20:134-35.
73. SSJ 20:135-36.
74. SSJ 20:136. For further discussion see Campany, *Strange Writings*, pp. 384–93.

75. The Baopuzi neipsan [Esoteric Chapters of the Book of the Preservation-of-Solidity Master] Ge Hong describes the preparation of alchemical elixirs; the Daoist scholar Tao Hongjing also authored the Shen Nong bencao [Collected Commentaries on Shen Nong’s Classic of Materia Medica]; the Taiping danyang yaojue [Taiping Elixir Classic Oral Digest] of Sun Simiao contains elixir recipes.

76. For example, one recipe for lizard bites includes the instruction to “Seal it with one yang sheaf of jin. Then incinerate deer antler. Drink it with urine.” Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, p. 54.

77. In fact, taboos and restrictions, so characteristic of many religions, were and are sparse in Daoism. Unlike Judaism and Islam, it provides no list of taboo animals and animal uses (though some Daoist sects do have taboos). Unlike Hinduism and Buddhism, it does not enjoin nonviolence (though, again, some Daoist sects do, having probably picked up the idea from Buddhism). Unlike many religions (including early Judaism, most “animistic” traditions, and even Confucianism), it did not origi-
nally provide specific directions for animal conservation. Still less were animals worshiped as gods (as in Egypt) or as persons who were human in mythic time and still have human and divine attributes (as in most of Native America). Joseph Needham saw Daoism as the key ideology underlying early science in China, but only in medicine does Daoism take a scientific attitude toward animals, and here animals are considered only as sources for drugs. The animal management conspicuous in early Confucian and syncretist texts (Anderson, “Flowering Apricot”), based on empirical observation, finds no echo in Daoism (except in obvious borrowings).