Confucius and His Dog: Perspectives on Animal Ownership in Early Chinese Ritual and Philosophical Texts

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Abstract

This paper discusses the role of dogs in early Chinese society, as a source of food, in sacrifice, as tribute, for racing and hunting, and as companion animals for members of the ruling elite. As food items or sacrificial victims, dogs were the objects of the most elemental expression of power. As tribute, they were highly valuable property, representing the ruler's authority over distant regions. As companion animals, they occupied a liminal zone between objectification and individualized identity. These competing roles are reflected in the complex analysis of the role of dogs found within early Chinese ritual and philosophical texts. In addition to this, dogs were animals at all times closely associated with aristocratic privilege in early China. This ensured that the moral implications of ownership would be discussed at some length in philosophical and ritual texts. From at least the Warring States period onwards, the ownership of dogs came under sustained attack as part of a general growing assault on the wasteful and extravagant lifestyle of the ruling elite. Those philosophical schools noted for their advocacy

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of simplicity and frugality, such as the Mohists, did not approve of the ownership of dogs. Other philosophical schools, particularly those focusing on issues of statecraft and policy, did not approve of dog ownership either, but on practical grounds, since such animals distracted the ruler from his proper duties. However, the position adopted in this debate by the Ru 儒 is perhaps the most interesting. Confucian texts argue that there is nothing intrinsically unethical about keeping a dog and treating it well, even in so unequal a society as that of the Central States during the late Zhou dynasty, providing that the dog is still clearly considered differently from honored human beings, and that the expenditure served to demonstrate the owner’s ritual mastery.

**Keywords:** dogs, philosophy, ritual, ancient China, statecraft

### 1. Introduction

Confucius is one of the first people in Chinese history to be recorded as the owner of a pet dog. It is hardly surprising therefore that early Confucian thought would therefore contain references to the ethical problems posed by the ownership of a domesticated animal, in particular a dog, in ancient China. The terms in which this ethical problem was framed were determined by the cultural and historical circumstances of the time. Acquiring a dog in order to kill it and eat its meat was not regarded as an ethical issue. In fact, using dog meat for human consumption or for sacrifice was regarded as very much the proper end for such an animal. Moral and philosophical issues developed only when dogs interacted with humans in other capacities; in other words when people owned dogs for purposes other than meat consumption. It is at this stage that an ethical argument was created, for then ownership of an animal was seen to involve both the expenditure of resources and the creation of other obligations, including as will be seen below in the discussion of Confucius’ treatment of his pet dog when it died, proper burial. There are numerous ritual and philosophical texts which argue over the fundamental moral concern that underpins the whole debate: what right does a person have to keep and feed a dog
for any purpose other than slaughter when human beings are going hungry? Such a question not only presupposes a division between the manner in which one should treat members of one’s own species as opposed to other species, but also stresses the importance of dogs as a status symbol whose ownership marked out their master as a member of the ruling elite. The factors which most influenced the position of dogs in early China seem to have been their competing roles as a source of food for human consumption, sacrificial victims, tribute items, and companion animals—either as hunting-dogs or as guard-dogs. As food items or sacrificial victims, dogs were the objects of the most elemental expression of power. As tribute, they were highly valuable property, representing the ruler’s authority over distant regions. As companion animals, they came into particularly close contact with their owners and thus came to occupy a liminal zone between objectification and individualized identity. These competing roles are reflected in the complex analysis of the role of dogs found within early Chinese ritual and philosophical texts. However, regardless of whether they were used for food, as tribute, or companions, dogs were animals at all times closely associated with aristocratic privilege in early China. It should however be stressed that in many of the examples considered below, much the same ethical arguments were applied in ancient Chinese texts to other animals living in close proximity with humans, such as horses.

From at least the Warring States period onwards, the ownership of dogs came under sustained attack as part of a general growing assault on the wasteful and extravagant lifestyle of the ruling elite. As will be demonstrated below, virtually the only use of dogs that did not draw criticism is their role as a food-stuff, and owners were consistently commended for killing and eating their animals since it would seem that the right of aristocrats to eat meat was virtually the only privilege not to be called into question at this time. As a result of this intellectual trend, dogs came to be classed in early Chinese philosophical discourse with a whole variety of other expensive luxuries as a waste of time, resources, and emotion for aristocratic men. Although religiously sanctioned speciesism did not exist in Zhou dynasty or early imperial China, there is clearly a strong tendency in ritual and philosophical texts
to discuss dogs (together with a wide variety of other animals and indeed human beings owned by the ruling elite) as part of a separate servile category.\(^1\) Dogs were thus both an important adjunct of aristocratic life and—when the need arose—a dispensable one that could be used to demonstrate their owner’s appreciation of proper ritual principles.

2. Sacrificial Dogs, Eating Dogs, and Tribute Dogs

In early China, dogs were most important as a source of food for human consumption. There are numerous references in early Chinese texts to the eating of dog-meat, and dogs are often mentioned with other domesticated animals such as pigs, sheep, and cattle, as animals that were destined to be butchered for food. However, unlike other animals intended for food, dogs also fulfilled other roles in Zhou dynasty society; in particular they functioned as guardians of home and property (shougou 守狗), they were used in hunting (liegou 獵狗), they were used for racing (zougou 走狗), and they were pets and companion animals (xugou 畜狗). Had dogs just been raised for their meat, they would hardly have been mentioned at all in early Chinese ritual and philosophical texts.\(^2\) It is the fact that animals of the same species performed such contrasting roles within Zhou society, most particularly as they served as both potential food for and loved companions of members of the

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2 Many functions performed by dogs seem to be very poorly recorded. There are for example virtually no stories in either philosophical or historical texts which mention guard-dogs. One of the rare exceptions is a tale found in the Zuozhuan 左傳 (Zuo’s Tradition), which describes how Lord Ling of Jin 晉靈公 (r. 620-607 BCE) tried to murder Zhao Dun 趙盾. When it looked as though Zhao Dun would escape, Lord Ling sieced his guard-dog onto him. See Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), p. 660 [Xuan 2].
ruling elite, which resulted in dogs being so well recorded within Warring States era and early Han dynasty texts.

From the Shang dynasty onwards, dogs were commonly sacrificed as part of the funerary practices of members of the ruling elite, and their bodies buried either in a waist-pit (yaokeng 腰坑) under the burial chamber or in a subsidiary pit. Although unmentioned in transmitted ancient Chinese historical and philosophical texts, it remained common for dogs to be sacrificed in this way until the Warring States era.³ While the sacrificial usage of dogs in burials was no doubt extremely significant and is certainly well-attested from many archaeological excavations, in terms of the textual record, the sacrifice of dogs in the context of food-offerings at temples was

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³ There is a truly massive literature on the discovery of sacrificial dogs in Shang dynasty and later burials. To quote just several of the most recent archaeological reports on the subject, in 2007, excavations at tomb M1 Rongshawan 榆樹灣, Anyang 安陽, revealed a well-preserved Shang dynasty burial including a waist pit containing a sacrificed dog; see Anyangshi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 安陽市文物考古研究所, "Henan Anyangshi Rongshuwang yihao Shangmu" 河南安陽市榆樹灣一號墓, Kaogu 考古 2009.5: 26-35. The excavation of an early Shang site in Wuhan similarly revealed a tomb containing a sacrificed dog; see Wuhan Huangpoqu wenguansuo 武漢黃陂區文管所, Wuanshi wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 武漢市文物考古研究所, Wuanshi Panlongcheng yizhi bowuguan 武漢市盤龍城遺址博物館, "Shangdai Panlongcheng yizhi Yangjiawan shisanshao mu qingli jianbao" 吳代盤龍城遺址楊家灣十三號墓清理簡報, Jianghan kaogu 江漢考古 2005.1: 19-23, 54. For an account of a much more lavish Shang dynasty aristocratic burial, featuring 15 human and 15 dog sacrificial victims, see the account of the 2001 excavation of tomb M54, Huayuan zhucun 花園莊村, discussed in He Yanjie 何燕傑, "Yinxu tong shouxingqi shishi" 興縣婦好甲實，Wenwu 文物 2003.2: 42-43, 53. For much later examples of similar burials, in 2000 following the robbery of a Spring and Autumn period pair of tombs associated with the cemetery of the ruling house of Qin, a sacrificed dog was excavated from the tomb 98LDM2; see Gansusheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 甘肅省文物考古研究所, Lixian bowuguan 禮縣博物館, "Gansu Lixian Yuandingshan 98LDM2, 2000LDM4 Chunqiu Qinmu" 甘肅禮縣縣陵山98LDM2, 2000LDM4 春秋秦墓, Wenwu 文物 2005.2: 4-27. For an analysis of dog sacrifices with a review of important examples discovered in Shandong province; see Zhang Qingjiu 張慶久 and Yang Hua 杨華, "Cong yaokeng zangsu de yanchuan guiji kan Dongyi-Huaxia wenming de ronghe guocheng: Jianlun Zhoudai Shandong diqu yaokeng zangsu" 從腰坑葬俗的延續軌跡看東夷—華夏文明的融合過程——兼論周代山東地區腰坑葬俗, Wenwu shijie 文物世界 2008.3: 25-32.
much more important. Dog meat was considered a suitable food for members of the ruling elite, including the Son of Heaven; according to the “Yueling” (月令 Monthly Ordinances) chapter of the Liji (禮記 Record of Ritual), dog meat was to be eaten in the autumn by the monarch.\(^4\) When dog meat was used for ritual sacrifices it was often turned into soup: indeed if dog meat was offered at the ancestral shrine the correct terminology to refer to such a ritual was gengxian (羹獻 soup offering), which is suggestive of the predominance of this method of cooking.\(^5\) In addition to being presented to the ancestors in the form of a soup, dogs also formed part of the offerings in the performance of a number of other sacrificial rites in early China. By the time of the Zhou dynasty, while dogs were not regarded as important enough to be eligible for inclusion as one of the sacrificial animals in the tailao 太牢 sacrifice (the highest grade), which involved offering a cow, a sheep, and a pig, they were still used in a number of other rituals.\(^6\) At a more mundane level, during the Spring and

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\(^4\) According to ritual texts, in the three months of autumn the ruler should eat sorghum and dog-meat; see Kong Yingda 孔穎達, Liji zhengyi 禮記正義 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990), pp. 322, 324, 336 [“Yueling”]; see also Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, Lishi chunqiu xin jiaoshi 吕氏春秋新校釋 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), p. 380 [“Mengqiu ji 孟秋紀”]; p. 426 [“Zhongqiu ji 仲秋紀”]; p. 473 [“Jiqiu ji 季秋紀”].

\(^5\) See Liji, p. 97 [“Quli xia 曲禮下”]. Dog meat soup (quangeng 大羹) is also mentioned as a foodstuff for ordinary human consumption in another chapter of the Liji; see p. 521 [“Neize 内則”]. It is not clear if there was any distinction between ritual and common practice in the cooking and consumption of dog-meat. See E. N. Anderson, The Food of China (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 39, for a discussion of the importance of dog meat in food and sacrifice in the Zhou dynasty.

\(^6\) See for example Sun Yirang 孫詒讓, Zhouli zhengyi 周禮正義 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), p. 2758 [Qiuguan 秋官: “Da Sikou 大司寇”]; p. 2777 [Qiuguan 秋官: “Xiao Sikou 小司寇”]. The use of dogs in minor rituals seems to have begun during the Shang dynasty, at early Shang sites dogs and pigs were the most important sacrificial animals, but by the mid-Shang cattle had begun to predominate, and in the late Shang dynasty, cattle and horses were used as the most prestigious sacrificial animals; see Yuan Jing and Rowan Flad, “New Zooarchaeological Evidence for Changes in Shang Dynasty Animal Sacrifice,” Journal of Anthropological Archaeology 24.3(2005): 252-270. A number of Warring States era ritual texts have been excavated which refer to the sacrifice of dogs; see Hubeisheng Jing-Sha tielu kaogudui 湖北省荆州鐵路考古隊, Baoshan Chu jian 包山楚簡 (Hubei: Wenwu chubanshe, 1991), pp. 33, 34,
Autumn period dog meat was regarded as a suitable food for women who had just given birth. According to the *Guoyu* (國語 Stories of the States), during the reign of King Goujian of Yue 越王勾踐 (r. 496-465 BCE), a woman who had just given birth to a son would be presented with two pots of wine and a dog, while a woman who had given birth to a daughter would receive two pots of wine and a pig. Except for references in the ritual context, not much is known about how early Chinese cooks prepared dog meat. The two cooking methods most consistently mentioned are *geng* (羹 soup) and *peng* (烹 stewing). Either way, the presence of a thick sauce when dog meat was being served could cause ambiguity:

[There was a man in] the kingdom of Chu 楚 who stewed a monkey and summoned his neighbour who thought that it was dog meat soup and found it delicious. Later on when he heard that it was monkey, he lay on the ground and threw up, until he had got rid of all that he had eaten. This is a person who has not even begun to understand flavor.  

In this early Han dynasty story, dog meat is presented as a standard food item, in contrast to exotic monkey-meat. The fate of many dogs, including those which had once hunted or raced for their masters, was to be turned into food. As a result, the term “the racing dog has been cooked” (*zougou peng* 走狗烹) became a common metaphor in ancient Chinese texts for the obsolescence of advisors once useful to the ruler. This metaphor derives its power from the fact that for many
members of the ruling elite in early China who had lost favor with their ruler, their ultimate fate was death. The development of this expression is interesting, because of the implicit ingratitude of the dog’s owner, who at one point treats the animal as a valued possession, at another as a source of sustenance. The implication of ingratitude seems to derive from the fact that this expression was used consistently as a metaphor for human interaction between male members of the ruling elite—the ruler and his ministers—and the ministers are inappropriately treated as though they belonged to a servile and expendable category. There are no other references to the treatment of dogs in early China which provide any criticism of their owners for dealing with their companion animals in this utilitarian manner and indeed in all other instances owners are praised for killing and eating them. For example, the *Zuo zhuan* (左傳 Zuo’s Tradition) records the tale of the fate of Shusun Chuo’s 叔孫婼 dog, which he killed and gave to one of his jailers to eat in an act of generosity, once he was released from house-arrest:

One of the officials who was living with Shusun [Chuo] in Qi 齊 asked for his guard-dog (literally: barking dog), but he would not give it away. When he was about to go home, he killed it and gave it to [the official] to eat.¹⁰

The implication of generosity in the present (particularly given that the gift is made at a time when the donor had already been released from captivity and hence could not be interpreted as a bribe) is enhanced by the anecdote which follows, which describes how when Shusun Chuo was travelling he always ordered repairs to the places where he stayed so that they should be as good as new when he moved on. Though it is not clear from this brief vignette whether the official in Qi wanted to be given the live dog or was indeed expecting to eat its meat, this does not detract from Shusun Chuo’s sensitivity in giving the gift in circumstances where his motives

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¹⁰ *Zuo zhuan*, p. 1443 [Zhao 23].
cannot be suspected.

The fact that one of the primary purposes of dogs was to provide meat for human consumption gave an extra level of horror to descriptions in early Chinese texts of events such as famines which resulted in dogs eating corpses; this was part of a rhetoric developed to describe an inversion of the natural order of things. People should be buried after death; they should not serve as food for animals. It is possible that this tale referred to human corpses being eaten by wild dogs, but it is more likely that the intention was to stress the horror of a situation in which owners were being eaten by their property.\(^\text{11}\) References to such terrible overturnings of proper social norms are however extremely rare in the discourse found in ancient Chinese texts about animal ownership. A much more common trope concerns the perceived extravagance of owning a companion animal, which would form part of an extensive discourse on ethical behavior within a highly unequal society which is one of the hallmarks of early Chinese philosophical debate. One of the single most common arguments set up against the possession of a companion animal from the time of the Zhou dynasty onwards is that it is unethical to feed a dog when human beings are suffering from starvation. Indeed the expression “dogs eat food that should have been given to people” (\textit{gou shi renshi 狗食人食}), seems to have become virtually proverbial in Warring States era China, and expresses the profound disgust and concern felt by many people at the inequalities of contemporary society.\(^\text{12}\) This ethical debate has many aspects, of which the right to own and feed a dog is only one. There are numerous surviving ancient Chinese philosophical texts which encourage rulers to consider cutting down their expenses by economizing on their

\(^\text{11}\) See \textit{Hanshu}, 72: 3070.

dogs and other expensive and unnecessary animals. For example, the *Mozi* 墨子 criticizes royal and aristocratic dog owners for their failure to maintain the standards of their predecessors. Spending scant resources on dogs was an ignoble purpose, particularly given that so many much more pressing concerns confronted the ruling elite of Warring States era China, and this was indicative of the way in which contemporary rulers failed to measure up to the rulers of old who were said to have had much more sensible priorities:

[The sage-kings of antiquity] got rid of all such distractions as pearls and jade, birds and beasts, dogs and horses, that they might thereby increase their holdings of clothing, palaces and chambers, armor and shields, the five weapons, boats and chariots. And these were multiplied several times!  

The issue of how much members of the ruling elite were spending on their menageries continued to constitute an ethical problem long after the unification of China. Han dynasty texts, such as the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, follow the *Mozi* in attempting to persuade members of the ruling elite to devote the resources that would have gone to their animals to what were perceived as more worthy pursuits:

If you use the resources which would have gone to feed dogs, horses, wild swans, and geese, to recruit knights [instead], then your reputation will certainly be glorious.  

The argument against animal ownership seems to have been equally ineffective whether the ruler was being encouraged to spend his savings on improving his armaments or on recruiting knights. While bolstering an ethical argument with the suggestion that savings achieved in this way could be employed with much greater advantage made the terms of the debate more interesting, it was not any more successful. The reasons for this failure are no doubt complex, but may be presumed to lie at least partially with the dichotomy between the concrete fact of a ruler’s

14 *Huainanzi*, p. 1422 [“Taizu xun 泰族訓”].
enjoyment of the possession of his dogs as opposed to the supposition that he will
at some point in the future need the weapons and knights that he has acquired by
depriving himself of his animals. Another problem is that such ethical arguments
failed entirely to take into consideration the fact that in early China dog ownership
was in some circumstances a matter of prestige rather than personal interest. Dogs
were among the items presented to the Zhou court as tribute, and hence represented
the ruler’s prestige, the extension of his authority over distant territories, and the
submission of foreign peoples.\footnote{See for example Kong Chao 孔見, Yi Zhou shu zhu 逸周書注 (Sibu beiyao 四部備要 edition), 7: 11b ["Wanghui jie 王會解"]).}
Dog ownership in such circumstances was not
necessarily simply a matter of personal choice, but a manifestation of royal authority.
On occasion, dogs were also presented to a powerful enemy as a kind of bribe. This
usage is recorded in texts such as the Zhuangzi 莊子, though in the case cited below
the presentation was not successful in achieving its object:

The Great King Danfu 大王亶父 was living in Fen 鄭, and the Di 狄 people attacked
him. He presented them with furs and silk, but they would not accept them; he
presented them with dogs and horses, but they would not accept them; he presented
them with pearls and jade, but they would not accept them. What the Di people
wanted was his land.\footnote{Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, Zhuangzi jishi 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, [1961] 2008), p. 967 ["Rangwang 讀王"]).}
other people would be sure to take advantage of that fact. There is a considerable moral gulf here, but it is not between human and non-human, but between noble (gui 貴) and base (jian 賤). It is therefore quite acceptable in texts which articulate this gulf to compare the position of a dog or a horse owned by the ruler with that of his boon companions and sexual partners. This also made an association with dogs a particularly strong insult in early China, for it implied ownership by another and hence servile status. In some cases, dogs and servants are lumped together in the category of expendable lives, whose duty it is to die to protect their master. This can be seen in the story of the “attempted murder” of Lord Xian of Jin 晉獻公 (r. 676-651 BCE) recorded in the Zuozhuan 左傳, orchestrated by his wife Lady Liji 驪姬 in an attempt to discredit his heir apparent in favour of her own son. Once suspicions were aroused that the Heir Apparent Shensheng 太子申生 was guilty of having introduced poison into the wine that his father was to drink, it was given first to a dog to try, then to a servant, and both died. The progression in this story, whereby first the poison was tried on a dog then on a person, might suggest that dogs were regarded as less important than human beings. However other versions of these events would suggest that both dogs and servants were actually placed in a similarly servile and expendable category:

[Shensheng] performed a sacrifice in Quwo 曲沃, and then took the offerings home to Jiang 晋. The lord was hunting, and so Lady Liji received the sacrificial offerings and then put poison in the wine and protoanemonin in the meat. The

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17 For example, when Yanzi acted as an ambassador to the kingdom of Chu, he refused to enter the palace by a side-entrance, with a pointed insult: “The envoy to a dog-state may enter by the dog’s gate, but I am an ambassador to Chu, and cannot enter by this sort of door.” See Wu Zeyu 吳則虞, Yanzi chungiu jishi 晉子春秋集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), p. 163 [“Za xia 際下”].

18 See Zuozhuan, p. 297 [Xi 孝 4].

19 The poison introduced into the wine is named as jin 草. According to the commentary by Wei Zhao 魏昭 (204-273), jin is the same as the plant named wutou 鳥頭, now known as jincao 草 (leptopterygium). See Guoyu, p. 290, note 4 [“Jinyu 草語 2†]. The leptopterygium family is part of the genus ranunculum, all of which are more or less toxic to animals and humans, given that they all contain protoanemonin, which causes damage to the nervous system resulting in convulsions
lord arrived and summoned Shensheng to make the formal presentation, and the lord poured a libation upon the ground, and the ground bubbled. Shensheng was frightened and left. Lady Liji then gave the meat to a dog, and the dog died; she gave the wine to a servant, who also died.20

This tale provides tangential evidence of a way of conceptualizing society in which scant distinction is made between servile humans and servile animals. As noted by Yang Bojun 楊伯俊 in his commentary on the earliest surviving version of this story, the term xiaochen (小臣 literally: little servant) applied to the person who died might be supposed to indicate exceptionally menial status, in fact this seems not to have been the case. Other instances of the use of this term suggest that it was the title of one of the most senior of the ruler’s body-servants. However in this instance, both dogs and servants are accounted as suitably expendable food-tasters for victuals known to be poisoned. The distinction between master and possession is even more clearly articulated in late Warring States era texts, particularly in arguments concerning the problems caused by ignoring the chasm between the noble and the base. For example in the Han Feizi 韓非子, reckless spending on dogs is listed among the fourth of the eight calamities which can overtake an incautious ruler:

What is meant by fostering disaster? I say: The ruler enjoys beautifying his palace, chambers, towers, and lakes, and he delights in ornamenting young men, women, dogs, and horses in order to amuse himself; this is a disaster for the ruler. His ministers will exhaust the people in order to beautify his palace, chambers, towers, and lakes, they will increase taxes and levies in order to ornament young men, women, dogs, and horses, that thereby they may amuse their ruler and bring disorder to his heart, leading him astray through his desires, while reaping their own profits from these circumstances. This is what is called fostering disaster.21

20 Guoyu, p. 289 ["Jinyu 2"].
21 Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, Han Feizi jishi 韓非子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), p. 152
In this case, archaeological evidence suggests that when Han Feizi speaks of the expense of ornamenting dogs, this comment should be taken entirely literally. Excavations at the tomb of the king of Zhongshan 中山 revealed a pit containing chariots, horses, and the remains of a tent, as well as two dogs wearing golden necklaces. 22 These dogs, which may be presumed to have been used for hunting together with all the other equipment found at the same site, were not only an expensive luxury in themselves but also wore the evidence of their owner’s wealth and status. An argument related to that found in the Han Feizi concerning the importance of maintaining distinctions between noble and base is made in the following story from the Zhanguo ce (戰國策 Stratagems of the Warring States), entitled “Xiansheng Wang Dou zao men er you jian Qi Xuanwang” (先生王斗造門而欲見齊宣王 Master Wang Dou went to the gate and wanted to have audience with King Xuan of Qi). This tale develops the themes found in earlier discussions of the ethics of animal ownership by suggesting that only when knights are given due priority in the ruler’s life can the possession of animals and beautiful women be acceptable. The parable is reinforced in this case by a comparison with Lord Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (r. 685-643 BCE), who was the most powerful aristocrat of his time but also a man with a bad personal reputation. 23 Lord Huan’s self-indulgence could


23 This reputation seems to stem largely from the belief that Lord Huan of Qi had innumerable wives. This is derived from one interpretation of a phrase found in the Lunyu, where it says that Guan Zhong “san gui 三歸;” see Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, Lunyu yizhu 論語譯注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), p. 31 [3.22 “Bayi 八佾”]. This has caused huge problems of interpretation, from the Warring States period onwards. Some ancient texts understand this as meaning that Guan Zhong established three storehouses in the capital at Qi; see for example Han Feizi, p. 702 ["Waichu zuoxia 外髪左下”]; p. 814 ["Nan 1"]: However other texts interpreted this phrase as meaning that Guan Zhong married three wives of different surnames, and that he did so to
however be forgiven, in the light of the priority he gave to the knights under his command:

Wang Dou said: “In the past, thanks to the loves of our former ruler, Lord Huan [of Qi], he brought together the feudal lords nine times, and united the world, and the Son of Heaven presented him with the documents which established him as the Great Hegemon. Now your majesty has four of these [loves].” King Xuan was pleased, and said: “I am stupid and vulgar, and having inherited the kingdom of Qi my only fear is that I will lose it; how can I have four of these things?” Wang Dou said: “You are wrong. Our former ruler loved horses and your majesty also loves horses. Our former ruler loved dogs and your majesty also loves dogs. Our former ruler loved wine and your majesty also loves wine. Our former ruler loved women and your majesty also loves women. Our former ruler loved knights, but your majesty does not love knights.” King Xuan said: “But in the present generation there are no true knights, so whom should I love?” Wang Dou said: “In this world there are no [horses as fine as] Qilin 麒麟 or Luer 马耳 but your majesty still has a full team. In this world there are no dogs like those of Dongguo Jun 東郭俊 or Mr. Lu 盧氏, but your majesty still has a complete complement of racing dogs. In this world there are no [beauties like] Mao Qiang 毛嫱 and Xi Shi 西施, but your harem is still full. Your majesty simply does not love knights, why do you complain that there are no true knights?” 24

The fact that the ownership of dogs was generally seen as something which encouraged a ruler to neglect his proper duties resulted in these animals being mentioned with some approbation in texts on statecraft as a tool for disrupting the
draw opprobrium away from his master; see for example Liu Xiang 劉向, Zhanguo ce 戰國策 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, [1978] 1995), p. 15 [Dong Zhou 東周: “Zhou Wenjun 潘文君免工師籍”), which says: “Lord Huan of Qi’s palace contained seven markets, and [his harem] contained seven hundred women, and the people of the capital thought this was wrong. Guan Zhong therefore married three wives to draw attention from Lord Huan.” For studies of this story; see Hu Yujin 胡玉瑾, Xuqing xuelin 許驗學林 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), pp. 107-108; and Yu Zhengxie 俞正燮, Guisi leigao 義已類稿 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1965), pp. 117-118.

24 Zhanguo ce, p. 414 [Qi 齊 4: “Xiansheng Wang Dou zao men er yu jian Qi Xuanwang 先生王斗造門而欲見齊宣王”].
government of enemy states. That dogs could be a powerful distraction is attested to in numerous early Chinese philosophical texts, for example the *Lūshi chunqiu* (呂氏 春秋 Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Lù) suggests that after King Wen of Chu 楚文王 (r. 689-677 BCE) obtained a golden dog from Ru 蘇, he promptly spent the next three months in hunting. The damage caused by a dog to the government of a state could therefore be considerable, and it took serious remonstrance before King Wen of Chu was prepared to kill the dog that had caused such trouble to his ministers. Naturally in a parable of this kind King Wen had to be rewarded for his austerity, and the kingdom of Chu is said to have captured thirty-nine other states after he began paying attention to the government again.25 The theory that a dog could be used as an unwitting agent of damage to an enemy state can also be seen in military texts such as the *Liutao* (六韜 The Six Strategies). In the “Wutao” (武韜 Martial Strategies) chapter, twelve methods are described for civil attacks (wenfa 文伐) on an enemy state. Of these the twelfth involves encouraging the ruler to neglect his duties by introducing corrupt officials into his court, and by presenting him with women, musicians, dogs and horses.26 This type of discourse is also found in other military texts, and is clearly closely related to the common rhetoric on the pernicious effects of extravagance, indulgence, and debauchery found in Warring States and Han dynasty philosophical texts concerning issues of statecraft.

3. Dogs as Companion Animals in Early China

The presence of companion animals in the lives of members of the ruling elite during the Zhou dynasty ensured that ritual texts would mention the correct manner to behave towards them. The “Quli” (曲禮 Summary of the Rules of Propriety)

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25 See *Lūshi chunqiu*, p. 1555 (“Zhijian 直諫”). The same story is also given in the *Shuoyuan* (說苑 Garden of Stories); see Xiang Zonglu 向宗魯, *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 說苑校證 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), pp. 221-223 (“Zhengjian 正諫”).
chapter of the *Liji* provides perhaps the richest source of dog-related etiquette. This text articulates certain concerns about the behavior of dog-owners, noting that it is rude to throw bones to your dog in the presence of guests, and likewise that you should not shout at your dog in public.\(^\text{27}\) The only aspect of human-dog interaction mentioned in the “Quli” which obviously intersects with the concerns described in philosophical texts is the injunction that dogs should not be discussed at court.\(^\text{28}\) This type of prohibition is clearly linked to the belief that dogs distracted members of the ruling elite from their proper duties. However other sections of the *Liji* throw a very different light on the perception of dogs in ancient China, in particular the “Tan Gong” 禮弓 chapter, which describes the burial which Confucius arranged for his pet. This chapter of the *Liji* has been dated to the mid-Warring States period, and hence constitutes an extremely important source for understanding the development of early *Ru* 儒 doctrine.\(^\text{29}\) The “Tan Gong” chapter therefore serves as an early indication of the Confucian position on the ownership of companion animals, which is influenced by the criticisms of dogs found in other Warring States era philosophical schools, but which also incorporates some distinctive aspects.

The “Tan Gong” chapter provides the most extensive prescriptive discussion in any ancient Chinese text of the procedures governing funerary rites. In addition to general directions for ritually correct behavior on such occasions, and more specific discussions of the funerary rites appropriate to different states of the Zhou confederacy, the funerals of fifty-seven named or otherwise identified individuals are mentioned in detail. Of these fifty-seven funerals, twenty-one concern Confucius and his family, or the family and friends of his disciples. Eighteen concern the dukes of Lu 魯, their relatives, and other members of the ruling elite of this state. Two concern scions of the Central States aristocracy who happened to be buried

\(^{27}\) See *Liji*, pp. 34, 40 [“Quli shang”].

\(^{28}\) See *Liji*, p. 99 [“Quli xia”].

within the borders of Lu, one an exile from the Wei 衛 ruling house, the other the son of Prince Jizha of Wu 吳王子季札 who died during one of his father’s diplomatic missions. In addition to these references, all of which are clearly related to funerary practices in the state of Lu during the late Spring and Autumn period and early Warring States era, there are twelve further funerals mentioned, which describe ceremonies performed for members of the ruling elite in the states of Qi, Wei, Teng 滕, Zhulü 鄒婁, and Jin 晉. The burial of King Kang of Chu 楚康王 (r. 550-545 BCE) is also described, since it was attended by Lord Xiang of Lu 魯襄公 (r. 572-542 BCE), and his unwilling presence at the funerary rites necessitated the performance of an exorcism ritual. Three individuals whose funerals are commented on in the “Tan Gong” chapter have never been satisfactorily identified. However, towards the end of this extensive discussion of funerary rites, there is a reference to one funeral which has received little scholarly attention. This is the only passage in the whole “Tan Gong” chapter which does not refer to the burial of a human, but instead talks of the rites performed when Confucius buried his pet dog:

Zhongni’s 仲尼 pet dog died, and he got Zigong 子貢 to bury it. He said: “I have heard that a worn-out curtain is not thrown away but used to bury a horse in; cloth from a worn-out umbrella is not thrown away but used to bury a dog in. I am poor and have no such cloth, but when you bury it, you can use my seating-mat. Do not let its head be exposed to the earth.”

This short vignette is followed by a line which provides further clarification of the rituals concerning animal ownership in early China, for it is stated that when one of the ruler’s carriage-horses died, it was buried in a curtain which had not been used. (Luma si, mai zhi yi wei 路馬死, 埋之以帷). This implies that the determining factor for how an animal should be treated in death was the status of its owner.

30 See Liji, pp. 196-197 [“Tan Gong xia”]. The same story is given with only minor variations in the Kongzi jiayu 孔子家語 (Family Sayings from the School of Confucius), though the animal concerned is identified as a guard-dog rather than a pet; see Chen Shike 陳士珂, Kongzi jiayu shuzheng 孔子家語疏證 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), p. 287 [“Quli Zixia wen 曲禮子夏問”].
suggesting that for the Ru it was ritually correct for a ruler to bury a companion animal with some lavishness; such expenditure being concomitant to his social position and hence not qualifying as extravagance.\(^{31}\) From comments on this story that survive from Han dynasty texts, the relationship between animals and their owners subsequently seems to have been viewed as constituting almost a contract. Animals provide labour for their owners, and the owners requite that labour with an appropriate burial in which the dog or horse is given a suitable covering to protect it from contact with the bare earth. This can be seen in the memorial to the emperor recorded in the Hanshu (漢書 History of the Han dynasty) which stated: “Dogs and horses work for people, so they deserve the requital of curtain and cloth” (Quanma you lao yu ren, shang jia weigai zhi bao 犬馬有勞於人, 報加帷蓋之報).\(^{32}\) This interpretation clearly views the burial rituals described in the Liji as bao (報 requital) of the animals’ lao (勞 labour), and was highly influential on later discussions of the correct way to bury animals.\(^{33}\) This passage also became important as the source of a common rhetorical device in memorials, where the expression “the kindness of curtain and cloth” (weigai zhi en 帷蓋之恩) represented the ruler’s generosity to his ministers, which had to be requited by labour.\(^{34}\) It is clearly the position within Confucian discourse on animal ownership that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with possessing a pet and in certain circumstances it may be appropriate to use one’s

\(^{31}\) The Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200) commentary on the Liji certainly regards the status of the dog’s owner as crucial for the circumstances in which it was buried, suggesting that anyone other than a member of the ruling elite could not spare even the cloth from an old umbrella. Quoted in Sun Xidan 孫希旦, Liji jijie 禮記集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, [1989] 2007), p. 299 [“Tan Gong xia”]. This interpretation runs somewhat counter to the spirit of the Liji passage, since Confucius demanded that his dog be buried properly, even though he could not afford to own an umbrella which suitable cloth might have been taken from.

\(^{32}\) Hanshu, 70: 3021.

\(^{33}\) See for example Fan Zuyu 范祖禹, Fan Taishi ji 范太史集 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), 6: 20a.

\(^{34}\) See for example Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, Jinshu 興書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 48: 1348; and Xu Mengxin 徐夢莘, Sanchao beimeng huibian 三朝北盟會編 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 222: 1605.
resources in treating it properly (and in this Confucian rhetoric is distinct from that of other ancient Chinese philosophical schools), but there was concern that animals should be differentiated from humans. This can also be seen in the Lunyu (論語 Anal ects of Confucius), where Confucius pronounced on the nature of filial piety:

Ziyou 子游 asked about filial piety. The master said: “Filial piety today is really just what one might call providing nourishment. When it comes to dogs and horses, anyone can nourish them, and performed without respect, what is the difference [between nourishing an animal and nourishing your parents]?”

In early China, the Ru were noted for their mastery of ritual knowledge, and in particular for their performance of funerals. This gave the Ru in early China a professional specialization, which they guarded jealously, and which also gave rise to considerable criticism, since they were regularly accused of taking advantage of the bereaved to enrich themselves. The modesty of the funerary rites described in the “Tan Gong” chapter has been much remarked upon, and this characteristic is also observable in the burial accorded to Confucius’ pet dog. The description given in the Liji of the proper way to bury animals provides an important reference for understanding the story of Lord Jing of Qi’s 齊景公 (r. 547-490 BCE) announcement that he intended to hold a lavish funeral for his dead dog. This tale, entitled: “Lord Jing Wanted to Bury His Hunting Dog According to the Funerary Rites of a Person. Master Yan Remonstrated” (Jinggong yu yi renli zang zou gou. Yanzi jian 景公欲以人禮葬走狗晏子諫), is found in the Yanzi chunqiu (晏子春秋 Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Yan):

Lord Jing’s racing dog died, and his lordship ordered that it should both be given a coffin, and that sacrificial offerings should be supplied. Master Yan heard about

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this and remonstrated. The lord said: “It is just a minor matter; I am doing this specially as a joke for my companions.” Master Yan said: “Your lordship is wrong! You have increased taxation and levies without dispersing [your gains] among the people, and you waste your cash in order to make your companions laugh. You don’t take seriously the worries of your people, but you value entertaining your companions. When young and old are suffering from hunger and cold, a dead dog receives sacrificial offerings; when widows and orphans go without succor, a dead dog is given a coffin. If you behave in such a perverse way, and the people hear about it, they are sure to hate you, and if the feudal lords hear about it, they are sure to disrespect our country. [Are you prepared to see] hatred build up among the populace and your authority disregarded by the feudal lords, for the sake of a minor matter? Your lordship ought to think about this.” The lord said: “Good.” He hurried to the kitchens to fix the dog and then had it served at a meeting of his ministers.37

Again, as with the story from the Han Feizi mentioned above, archaeological excavations provide evidence that some dogs were indeed given lavish funerals, reflecting their close association with wealthy and high status owners. In the tomb of Zeng Hou Yi 曾侯乙, eight young women were encoffined and buried in the same chamber as the marquis, as was a dog, interred in its own coffin with two jade discs and a bone object.38 While it was no doubt highly desirable in the terms of Warring States era discourse that a deceased racing dog should be turned into food for the consumption of wise and respected male members of the ruling elite, this story represents a parable rather than a statement of fact. Just as dogs were often grouped together with the ruler’s sexual partners, his treasures, and his horses, as potent sources of distraction, there was a weighty discourse on the obligations of a member of the ruling elite to demonstrate his indifference to such attachments. The story of the fate of Lord Jing of Qi’s dog is entirely consistent with this tradition. By arranging that his former racing dog should be eaten by his ministers, Lord Jing

37 Yanzi chungu, p. 163 [“Jian xia 諫下”].
demonstrated a utilitarian spirit highly prized in early Chinese philosophical texts, and showed his appreciation of his senior advisors. In this case, in the competition for the ruler’s attention and affection, his dog and his ignoble human companions lost.

4. Conclusion

The debates found in early Chinese ritual and philosophical texts concerning the ethics of animal ownership are fundamentally centered upon the issue of whether it is morally justified to feed a companion animal when human beings are going hungry. Possession of a dog with the intent to eat it was morally unproblematic, possession of a dog for any other reason raised serious issues concerning the role played by the animal in its owner’s life and the nature of the obligations created by this relationship. The tenor of these discussions was heavily influenced by the fact that dog-ownership was apparently not widespread, but that dogs functioned as a status symbol, marking out their owner as a member of the ruling elite. This ensured that the pampered lives of racing and hunting dogs drew enormous criticism, as not only were these animals fed at the expense of human beings, but could also be accused of distracting their owner from the pressing concerns of government. The philosophers of Warring States era China seem to have been unsuccessful in making the ruling elite perceive dog-ownership as an unacceptable extravagance. However, in the philosophical texts of the time, a position was articulated whereby dogs joined horses, women, and men of servile status on the far side of the gulf separating noble from base, and hence the debate often focused on the issue of how much time, love, and resources a member of the ruling elite in early China could justifiably lavish on objects seen by his peers as unworthy of serious attention. This argument was particularly potent in late Spring and Autumn period and Warring States era China, as political crises became more acute. The ever-worsening warfare and tension of the times ensured the presence of a significant body of polemical literature on this subject in the philosophical and ethical works that survive from early China.
Dogs served in numerous different capacities in early China, from animals raised for food to valued companions, and this range of roles ensured their presence in the philosophical debates of the day. Those philosophical schools noted for their advocacy of simplicity and frugality, such as the Mohists, did not approve of the ownership of dogs. Other philosophical schools, particularly those focusing on issues of statecraft and policy, did not approve of dog ownership either, but on practical rather than ethical grounds, since such animals distracted the ruler from his proper duties, which in the cutthroat world of late Zhou politics was potentially extremely dangerous. However, the position adopted in this debate by the Ru is perhaps the most interesting, for they seem not to have accepted the ethical argument against the ownership of companion animals. The position articulated in Confucian texts seems to argue that there is nothing intrinsically unethical about keeping a dog and treating it well, even in so unequal a society as that which pertained in the Central States during the late Zhou dynasty, providing that the dog is still clearly considered differently from honored human beings, and that the expenditure served to demonstrate the status of the owner and his ritual mastery. In this, the position of dogs within Zhou society is similar in both Ru and other philosophical schools, in that these companion animals are regarded as objects unworthy of too much attention. The distinction made is one of degree, not of kind. Where texts such as the Han Feizi and Mozi are particularly concerned with the division being maintained between male members of the ruling elite and the rest of the human and animal world in the context of the court, Confucian discourse relates much more to the domestic sphere, arguing for a distinction between the treatment of respected parents and other members of the family, including the dogs. In early Chinese ritual and philosophical texts, the division is consistently made between noble and base, rather than between animal and human, and this gives the terms of the debate their highly distinctive tenor.
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孔子之狗
——中國古代典籍文獻對於畜犬意涵的探討

米 歐 敏*

摘要

在中國周代社會裡，狗有許多角色，譬如說食品、祭品、貢品、賽犬、獵狗、貴族家庭的寵物。作為食品或者祭品的時侯，狗是人類展現權勢的表徵。當貢品的時侯，狗是昂貴的東西，它們代表國王的權威。當寵物的時侯，狗受到主人的關愛。狗有多重的角色，所以在中國古代哲學與禮儀文獻中也有很多關於它們真正的角色的分析。在周代社會裡，狗代表貴族家庭的特權。從戰國時代開始，很多古代哲學家批評養狗（或者其他寵物）的主人，因為這關係到統治精英浪費和奢侈的生活方式。所以提倡節儉的哲學家，譬如說墨家，完全禁止養狗。其他的哲學家，尤其是關心治國之道的，也不允許寵物的存在。對他們來說養狗不是一個道德問題而是一個實際問題；如果國王喜歡寵物他很可能無法兼顧政治適當的職責。在這個爭論裡，儒家的立論是獨特的。儒家文獻認為養狗是合乎道德的，但是主人必須分明狗與人類的賤貴，還有所有與寵物有關的開支必須反映主人的社會地位並合於禮。

關鍵詞：狗、哲學、禮儀、古代中國、治國之道

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