

## 9 Animals in Nineteenth-Century Eschatological Discourse

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The apocalypse might not seem the most obvious topic to feature in a volume devoted to animals in China, or indeed any society. Yet, during the nineteenth century, a significant number of books, presented as the result of divine inspiration, exhorted humans to stop killing animals because they claimed that this behaviour would bring about the end of the world. This particular moment in the history of Chinese religious writing about moral norms and human–animal relationships deserves attention in its own right. But it is also worth studying because it sheds light on how early modern Chinese elites (who produced and consumed such books) thought about life, as well as the intimately intertwined destinies of the animal realm and humanity.

I will explore this topic from a perspective of religious and social history. Following my earlier work on the history of the taboo on beef (*niujie* 牛戒) in China,<sup>1</sup> I have recently resumed studying the production of moral norms in Chinese history. Specifically, I have been examining the production of morality books (*shanshu* 善書) and other scriptures that were created through spirit-writing, from the Song period to the present day.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, I will explore how the large corpus of late imperial morality books discussed looking after animals and placed this within a larger normative construction of moral behaviour. I begin by studying the place that animals have held in the long tradition of morality books since the twelfth century, before focusing on a particular turn that this tradition took during the nineteenth century. I will draw attention to a series of little-studied texts produced by late Qing elites which attempted to articulate a renewed vision of moral order and love of life in the face of disorder, notably in the context of the Taiping war.

<sup>1</sup> Goossaert (2005a), (2005b). <sup>2</sup> Goossaert (2012), (2015).

### The Discourse on Animals in the Tradition of Morality Books

Morality books constitute a vast genre, with mutable boundaries. They include essays and tracts written by humans, along with texts revealed by gods through the technique of spirit-writing (*fujū* 扶乩, *fuluan* 扶鸞, *jiangbi* 降筆, *feiluan* 飛鸞).<sup>3</sup> Texts received from the gods carry more authority, and thus occupy the central place in the wider genre of morality books. Some of these gained the status of a classic, due both to the authority of the revealing gods and to their success with readers. Such classics were commented upon, illustrated, reprinted and anthologized in thousands of editions and canonized in various forms; they also served as inspiration for later revelations. The cumulative nature of morality books explains that, while the genre was ever-expanding and open-ended, it is a coherent entity, so it is possible to attempt to write a history of the ideas conveyed through this corpus of texts. Spirit-writing was also used to produce other types of texts, including hagiographies, liturgies, self-cultivation manuals and fully fledged scriptures – all of which often also contained discourses on moral norms. Historians generally agree that both morality books and spirit-writing appeared first in the Song period (tenth to thirteenth centuries CE), even though they have antecedents dating from earlier periods.<sup>4</sup>

From the genre's earliest days, respect for life was always a major injunction of morality books, along with social and familial relationships, care for the poor and the weak, honesty in business, and respect for the gods. This encompasses respect for all forms of life, from tiny insects right up to humans, in a graduated way; all lives are considered precious, but not to the same degree. Thus, morality books often propose vegetarianism as an ideal and not an obligation, but insist on protecting those animals closest to humans, notably bovines, equines and dogs, who are people's working companions.<sup>5</sup>

I have identified six themes related to animals in the tradition of morality books over the long term that will help to contextualize the nineteenth-century texts I discuss. These themes are not distinctly separated in the actual texts, but overlap and combine in all sorts of ways: they follow different logics, and are usually juxtaposed rather than seamlessly combined into a single unified thesis. Many elements in these arguments derive from either Confucian, Buddhist or Daoist moral teachings but, in the context of morality books, they are recycled and presented within a universal moral discourse that encompasses the Three Teachings. The main themes, from the most general to the most specific, are:

<sup>3</sup> In spirit-writing, one or two spirit mediums are possessed by a deity and write with an implement (often called *luan* 鸞 'phoenix') on sand, ashes or other material; this is noted down by an assistant and verified by the deity. Texts thus revealed range from simple answers to specific questions from devotees, to poetry and complex, long doctrinal works.

<sup>4</sup> Boltz (2009); Brokaw (1991). <sup>5</sup> Goossaert (2005a).

1. Respect for the natural cycles of life and the environment. This includes injunctions against killing young animals, disturbing hibernating animals, polluting rivers and starting fires in mountainous areas. These prescriptions derive from a very ancient tradition, documented in Han texts such as the *Yueling* 月令 (Monthly Ordinances)<sup>6</sup> and in the earliest Daoist precepts, such as the *Taishang laojun yibaibashi jie* 太上老君一百八十戒 (Hundred and Eighty Precepts of the Lord on High; probably second century CE).

2. Injunctions against direct involvement in killing animals for food or for fun (*jiesha* 戒殺). While scholars tend to associate this precept with Buddhism, morality books consistently support it with Confucian and Daoist, as well as Buddhist, references. Permanent vegetarianism is often described as very difficult to achieve, but morality book readers are enjoined to refrain from killing animals themselves, or ordering their servants to do so (i.e. buying a chunk of pork on the market is a lesser sin). Consuming meat (and thus directly or indirectly causing an animal to be killed) is tolerated for sacrifices to ancestors and deities, for nourishing aged or ill parents and, according to some texts (and within reasonable limits), for treating honoured guests. Killing (or causing others to kill) animals can be tolerated in certain cases (such as defending oneself against dangerous animals). The real crime is defined as killing, or obtaining meat ‘without a proper reason’ (*wu gu* 無故).

3. Exhortations to release live animals (*fangsheng* 放生). The practice of *fangsheng* consists of buying live animals at food markets and releasing them – either in the wild or in managed reserves (often within temples).<sup>7</sup> Once again, references are made to all Three Teachings to justify this meritorious practice that can, to some extent, offset the sin incurred by eating meat.

4. Taboos against killing or eating bovines and dogs (*jie niu quan* 戒牛犬). As I have argued elsewhere, this taboo formed gradually during the early Song period and quickly became a major element of a moral discourse that only partially disappeared during the twentieth century. The origins of this taboo are multifaceted, including changes in the ecology and pastoral economy (the disappearance of great estates with herds of bovines), changes in sacrificial practices, and the role of new deities that imposed precise taboos.

5. Other specific taboos (serpents, turtles, eels, wild geese, frogs, etc.). Whereas some of these taboos existed from medieval times on, none acquired the same level of significance as the taboo on bovines and dogs. Many of these developed as the discourse on useful animals (*yougong* 有功) and, thus, taboo-versus-edible animals gained ever more currency. By the late imperial period, dozens of items of meat were listed as taboo, with acceptable meat increasingly

<sup>6</sup> For more on the genre of Monthly Ordinances, see Chapter 11. <sup>7</sup> Handlin Smith (1999).

becoming limited to pork, poultry and fish (which became the new, modern *sansheng* 三牲 ‘three sacrificial victims’).<sup>8</sup>

6. Injunctions to love and care for living animals, especially draught and other domestic animals. The question of animal welfare is also present in the morality books tradition, with numerous accounts of divine punishments being incurred by those who mistreat their animals. One of the early classics of the genre, the *Taiwei xianjun gongguoge* 太微仙君功過格 (Ledger of Merits and Demerits Revealed by the Immortal Lord of the Taiwei Star; revealed around 1120),<sup>9</sup> lists divine punishments for those who treat their animals brutally or cruelly, as well as rewards for those who take care of sick or wounded animals. This text also instructs people to bury dead animals, just as they would do humans. Some morality books even tell readers not to keep animals, whether as pets or for other purposes. This, again, follows rules found in early Daoist texts such as the aforementioned *Hundred and Eighty Precepts*, which discouraged animal keeping for reasons that were not stated explicitly but were probably related to both valuing austere lifestyles and condemning the practice of subordinating animals to human will.

These six themes are deployed in morality books in all sorts of ways, with more than one of them featuring in many of the genre’s classics. Consider, for instance, the *Taishang ganyingpian* 太上感應篇 (Verses on Action and Consequence Revealed by the Lord on High; probably revealed during the twelfth century), the most influential, commented upon and reprinted morality book. This short, dense tract includes injunctions relevant to themes 1, 2 and 5 set out above:

[Evil people] hunt all animals that fly or walk; they unearth hibernating animals and take fledglings from their nest; they fill up burrows and destroy nests, catch pregnant females and destroy eggs (射飛逐走, 發蟄驚棲; 填穴覆巢, 傷胎破卵).

They slaughter and cook animals in circumstances other than those where this is a ritual prescription (非禮烹宰).

During spring, they hunt by setting the woods on fire; they curse facing the north, and they kill turtles and serpents without a good reason (春月燎獵, 對北惡罵, 無故殺龜打蛇).

The fourth theme identified above – the taboo on beef and dog meat – first appears in slightly later morality books, the most influential being the *Wudangshan*

<sup>8</sup> In classical texts, and in practice until Song times, the three victims were a bovine, an ovine and a pig. See also Chapter 2 in this volume.

<sup>9</sup> This morality book was revealed through a dream rather than spirit-writing; the preface by its human editor clearly explains the circumstances and dates it reliably to the period around 1120. It later became the model for a major subgenre of the morality books, the so-called ledgers of merits and demerits that flourished from the sixteenth century onward.

*Xuantian shangdi chuixunwen* 武當山玄天上帝垂訓文 (Instructions Handed Down to Humans by the Supreme Emperor of Dark Heaven, on Wudangshan; revealed in 1302). Even later texts, such as the *Wenchang dijun yinzhuwen* 文昌帝君陰騭文 (Tract on Hidden Retribution, by the Imperial Lord Wenchang; shortly after 1600) and the *Guansheng dijun jueshi zhenjing* 關聖帝君覺世真經 (True Scripture to Awaken Humanity, by the Imperial Lord Saint Guan; c. 1660s), also begin urging readers to release living beings (my third theme). So, all six themes were abundantly present in the ever-growing corpus of morality books by the Qing period. A good overview of various sinners being punished in the dreary realms of the underworld is provided by the *Yuli baochao* 玉歷寶鈔 (Precious Manuscript of the Jade Calendar; most probably compiled in the early nineteenth century). This text's extremely popular description of hells portrays people who had killed animals, including children who tormented insects (and their parents who let them indulge in such cruel games); those who kept donkeys and horses without a good reason (that is, without any genuine need for transport or work in the fields); people who had poisoned rivers and fished with nets; those who ploughed their fields in winter (when insects are hibernating); people who had used animal parts to make drugs and, naturally, those who had eaten beef or dog meat.

### Animals and Eschatology

The production of spirit-written texts accelerated during the late Qing. Huge compendiums were edited and repeatedly republished. Both the spirit-writing techniques and the ideas conveyed through such revelations became mainstream in elite society and, over the course of the nineteenth century, were adopted by all sorts of popular religious groups. Animal life remains a prevalent preoccupation of these revealed texts; the six themes outlined above are developed further, while new ideas are explored. The most important of these new ideas is the connection of animal life to eschatology. This suggests not only that taking animal life has dire consequences for the individual concerned, but that the collective behaviour of humanity towards animals plays a crucial role in the destiny of the world at large. The connection between killing animals and killing humans had existed for some time in Buddhist texts, morality books and literati writings, which stated that people who chose to kill animals for no reason would be killed themselves. Yet, by applying this logic to humanity as a whole, this eschatological discourse introduces the different concept that all (or the vast majority) of humans would have to be slaughtered – not just the most flagrant sinners – as a consequence of their general disrespect for animal life.

However, a closer review of these writings reveals that this was not a sudden innovation. One idea in morality books and other related spirit-written scriptures that endured throughout their history is the eschatological notion that

humankind is facing annihilation as a consequence of its sins and general moral failure. In this narrative, the focus is less on individual retribution, punishment and salvation (the habitual focus of morality books) than on the collective fate of humanity and, indeed, life in general, as humans and animals are ruled by the same non-negotiable rules of moral retribution.<sup>10</sup> This discourse became ever more articulate and dominant by the late eighteenth century and developed further during the nineteenth century. During this same period, people's lack of respect for animal life grew into a major cause of anxiety about the end of the world. A number of revealed texts from the nineteenth century explicitly express this anxiety, for instance the *Jieshawen* 戒殺文 (Tract on Non-Killing) revealed by Patriarch Lü (Lüzü 呂祖, i.e. Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓) sometime during the eighteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Lü was at the centre of one of the earliest and most important spirit-writing cults. In this tract, Patriarch Lü explains that killing animals is a direct cause of warfare and more general killing of humans so, if people stopped slaughtering animals, warfare would cease entirely:

The killing *qi* 氣 and the radiance of spilled blood rise up and obscure the sun. Heaven loves lives but humans love killing. Such misery keeps accumulating and eventually causes people to be attacked, tortured, assaulted and killed by weapons. Humans get killed like trampled grass, collectively caught in this evil kalpa.<sup>12</sup>

Far more developed than this short text (and others similar to it) is a slightly later complete scripture entirely devoted to the topic. The *Jiuhuang Doumu jiesha yansheng zhenjing* 九皇斗姥戒殺延生真經 (True Scripture on Extending Life through Non-killing [preached by] Doumu, Mother of the Nine Emperors [of Ursa Major]) was revealed sometime between 1798 and 1804 at the Jueyuantan 覺源壇 spirit-writing altar, which was operated in Peking by high-ranking officials led by Jiang Yupu 蔣予蒲 (*zi* Yuanting 元庭, 1755–1819) – at that time, the Vice-minister of War. The text was eventually included in the major collection *Daozang jiyao* 道藏輯要 (Essentials of the Daoist Canon), published in 1806 by the Jueyuantan group.<sup>13</sup> Although this is not the only eschatological text produced by this group, it articulates the discourses on animal life and the apocalypse in particularly explicit and striking ways, as well as providing a graphic description of the imminent annihilation of

<sup>10</sup> Goossaert (2014).

<sup>11</sup> This text is part of a larger set of moral tracts, *Xunshiwén* 訓世文 (Tracts to Exhort the World), revealed at an academy in Yuejun 越郡, i.e. modern-day Shaoxing, Zhejiang. It does not feature in the first edition (1743) of the *Lüzü quanshu* 全書 (Lüzü Canon) but was added as *juan* 25 of the 1774 enlarged Lüzü Canon. It was also included (as part of the *Lüdi wenji* 呂帝文集) in the *Daozang jiyao* 道藏輯要 (1806).

<sup>12</sup> Kalpa (*jie* 劫) originally meant a cosmic era, and can refer particularly to the cataclysmic changes between two such eras. In late imperial Chinese, it refers most often to the idea of an imminent apocalypse.

<sup>13</sup> An international project, created by Monica Esposito (1962–2011) and now led by Lai Chi-tim, is producing a detailed description and analysis of this canon. See Esposito (2014).

humanity that would be caused by the accumulated butchering of animals. Doumu asserts in this text that only a radical and immediate change of attitude towards life could bring humans back from the brink, and even calculates the most cost-efficient way to accumulate merits in the little time available, thereby maximizing the chances of avoiding obliteration. Although this text does not seem to have been widely diffused (before the *Daozang jiyao* was reprinted in 1906) and is not explicitly quoted by the later texts discussed below, it is nonetheless worth providing a detailed account of its contents here, as it constitutes a particularly well-developed, early illustration of the ideas that thrived during the nineteenth century and, as we will see, reverberated in many texts.

The scripture's narrative runs as follows. Section 1 (4a–6b): a description of Doumu as she lectures to assembled deities in her heavenly palace. A stellar deity asks about her vow to save humanity, and the current miserable conditions on earth. She replies by explaining that this misery is caused by human sins, chief of which is killing animals. She debunks the idea that humans and animals are different and states that taking any life has dire consequences for the whole universe. Section 2 (7a–9a): Doumu continues by detailing three reasons why humans are blind to the sin of taking life: their unrestrained appetite for meat (including exotic delicacies), tradition, and the erroneous notion that humans and animals are fundamentally different. Section 3 (10a–12a): Doumu explains that ordinary humans cannot give up eating meat in one go, and offers a 'gradual method' successively to reduce their sins related to meat-eating. For this, she classifies animals in a complicated grading scheme, using seven categories of animals which have different values, and several more sub-categories. At the top of this hierarchy are mammals that have 'great merit', i.e. bovines (because they plough the fields) and dogs (because they guard houses). As these two are thousands of times more valuable than ordinary animals, saving them produces enough merit to avert disasters for the time being. Section 4 (13–15a): Doumu further elaborates on the importance of protecting bovines and dogs, details their contributions to humanity, and recounts the horrors that befall those who commit the heinous crime of butchering or eating them. Section 5 (16a–18a): as a second step in her gradual method, Doumu encourages humans not only to protect bovines and dogs, but also to extend this practice to other animals. She discusses the predicament of people who try, but lapse, because they do not see vegetarians being favoured by Heaven or meat-eaters being punished, and those who despair because they think one individual alone cannot make any difference. She then details her understanding of *jiesha* (non-killing) in five points. Section 6 (19a–21a): Doumu extols the practice of releasing animals (*fangsheng*) as the most efficient and powerful way of accumulating merit and averting disasters, again through a computation of merits accrued.

These six sections constitute a first round of elucidations. A second round begins with section 7 (22a–24b): after Doumu has finished her preaching, Heaven fills up with auspicious omens and assembled deities entreat her for more instructions. Doumu begins to expound on the virtue of compassion (*ren* 仁), which is the root of life, explaining that humans who kill animals lose their *ren* and, as a result, bring death upon themselves and their kin. Section 8 (25a–27a): Doumu expands on her sharp distinction between acceptable and prohibited meat (beef, dog, horse, etc.), and details how everyone – rich or poor – should enforce a prohibition, according to their individual circumstances. In Section 9 (28a–30b), Doumu lists various types of killing that should be resisted: by cruelty or teasing, because of an appetite for unusual fare, by wanton destruction of natural habitats, etc. Section 10 (31a–33a): Doumu explains how the retribution for humans who kill animals works, and asserts its ineluctability, even though this might not be immediately apparent to those concerned. Section 11 (34a–36a): Doumu expands on how killing animals causes disasters, using a Five Phases (*wuxing* 五行) scheme to explain the advent of various disasters such as fires, wars and epidemics, then returning to the importance of each person doing their part to avert collective disasters. Section 12 (37a–38b): all the assembled deities applaud, and Doumu solemnly restates her vow to assist everyone who promises to observe *jiesha* (non-killing), and the practice of *fangsheng* (releasing animals).

Several dominant themes emerge from this scripture. First, the idea of impending disaster (*jieyun* 劫運) permeates the whole text. Doumu repeatedly insists that calamities – from personal misfortunes to global tragedies (wars, epidemics, droughts, etc.) – are automatically brought about by acts of killing animals.

If one man practises this [non-killing] he can avoid disasters for himself; if the whole of humanity practises this, it can avoid the end of the kalpa (20b).

[Killing living beings] causes disasters to befall the culprits on an even larger scale, and the end of all mankind to arrive even sooner (28a).

Doumu develops a naturalistic theory whereby people who kill animals cause the world's *qi* to become imbalanced, attract disasters, and are eventually reborn as animals themselves. According to this concept, black *qi* (*heiqi* 黑氣) or killing *qi* (*shaqi* 殺氣), which emanates from humans killing animals or doing other bad deeds, accumulates through time and eventually clogs up the universe. This theory is also found in other texts from this period, as we have seen in the Lüzu tract.<sup>14</sup> Although it seems akin to Buddhist theories of *karma*

<sup>14</sup> It informs a scripture revealed in 1707 by Patriarch Lü, *Lüzu xingxin zhenjing* 呂祖醒心真經 (Authentic Classic on the Revelation of the Heart-mind by Ancestor Lü). See Goossaert (2012), 77–98. For mid-nineteenth-century examples, see *Guandi quanshu*, 23.463 and 24.688.



and retribution as natural phenomena (resonance, *ganying* 感應), and of violence automatically nurturing violence, it is embedded here (and in other nineteenth-century texts) in an eschatological framework. Doumu explains that she cannot help to avert disasters herself except by convincing people to repent and stop killing, and by supporting those who do so. Doumu presents herself as a model for her devotees, urging them ‘to be like her healers of the world’ (*rudeng tong wei tiandi zhi yi* 汝等同為天地之醫).

The second overarching theme is the scripture’s attempt to balance two contradictory positions – first, the principle that all lives are valuable and therefore all living beings must be protected and, second, the pragmatic concern for individuals to achieve maximum merit by focusing their efforts on the most valuable animals. As a result, the scripture is not entirely coherent – in fact, some passages actually contradict each other. While the consumption of pork, poultry and fish is at times described as a sin (less severe than the sin of butchering bovines and dogs but a sin nonetheless), other passages imply that eating such everyday meat (*changshi zhi wu* 常食之物, 29b) is natural and unavoidable. The second argument, as we have seen, directly echoes a discourse that was commonplace in Daoist texts and in society at large from the thirteenth to the late nineteenth century. As a result, certain meats (pork, poultry and most species of fish) were considered completely acceptable, while beef, dog meat, horse meat and a few others were prohibited by the gods. Along the same line of thinking, the Jueyuantan scripture (18a) also accepts the consumption of meat for social banquets and sacrifices as unavoidable and acceptable, since such consumption ultimately causes the death of only a few animals.

The scripture attempts to reconcile these divergent views by taking a highly quantitative approach to sin. It painstakingly counts the merits and demerits accrued by killing or saving various types of animals, exactly like the well-known ‘ledgers’ (*gongguoge* 功過格).<sup>15</sup> The text’s quantification of differing lives’ moral values proposes that one human life is worth ten lives of ‘useful’ animals. In brief, the scripture attempts to weave together various divergent pre-existing ethical discourses on meat eating and animal life, including Daoist prohibitions on beef and other meats, ‘sectarian’ full vegetarianism (*changzhai* 長齋), Buddhist and Confucian calls to compassion and measured abstinence, and the practice of *fangsheng*, by integrating them all in a theologically ambitious salvational scheme.

<sup>15</sup> The *Taiwei xianjun gongguoge* (twelfth century) discussed above classified animals into useful (those who work for humans) or useless and lesser animals (mostly insects). The *gongguoge* tradition gradually developed ever more complex systems for attributing moral value to animals. See in particular the early Qing *Huizuan gongguoge* 彙纂功過格 (Comprehensive Compilation of Ledgers of Merits and Demerits), where *juan* 8 is entirely devoted to counting merits and demerits in relation to animals.

The scripture of Doumu's preaching on non-killing was produced and edited by high-ranking officials in the Qing administration. Far from being the ideas on animal life of 'vegetarian millenarian sects' – as the devotional lay movements that practised comprehensive vegetarianism are often described in the scholarly literature – it represents elite ideas in reaction to such 'sects'. Indeed, one of the most fascinating aspects of this text is that it was produced and printed at the same time as, and thus within the larger political context of, the White Lotus rebellion (1796–1804), an uprising of people who were described as millenarian vegetarians.

### Guandi's Teachings on Animal Life

The ideas expressed in Doumu's teachings of an elite version of eschatology and care for animal life had apparently already gained, or did rapidly gain, wide currency and were echoed in many early and mid-nineteenth-century revelations, notably those by Guandi 關帝 (Emperor Guan, the title of the divinized Guan Yu 關羽 since the early seventeenth century). Indeed, some of Guandi's teachings on the subject make their opposition to millenarian vegetarianism very clear. I will draw on the examples of two tracts revealed by him that discuss the history of spirit-writing, whilst simultaneously denouncing the 'sects' (*jiaofei* 教匪, *xiejiao* 邪教) explicitly described as vegetarian (with several mentions of the 1796–1804 White Lotus rebellion), which he believed deluded people and rejected spirit-writing.<sup>16</sup> They thus document how Guandi's spirit-writing groups saw their place in the broader religious landscape, contrasting their moral vision of life with that of the 'vegetarian millenarian sects'.

Guandi did not become a dominant deity in the world of spirit-writing until the turn of the nineteenth century, when his revelations multiplied and he assumed a leading role in elite spirit-writing circles.<sup>17</sup> He became one of the saviour deities who directed efforts to help humanity reform and avert the apocalypse. The *Taoyuan mingshengjing* 桃園明聖經 (Scripture on Illuminating Saintliness, from the Peach Garden), which was apparently revealed during the first years of the nineteenth century, had become the most revered and important Guandi scripture by the mid-nineteenth century. The process of textual canonization of Guandi's revelations reached its full maturity with the publication of the *Guandi quanshu* 關帝全書 in 1858, a massive canon of forty *juan*. This canon contained scriptures and litanies of

<sup>16</sup> *Guandi quanshu*, 22.402–5 ('Chu yiduan wen' 黜異端文); *Guandi quanshu*, 23.546–50 ('Bianduan wuji wen' 辨端誣乩文).

<sup>17</sup> Goossaert (2017). The *Guansheng dijun jueshi zhenjing* 關聖帝君覺世真經, an early Qing Guandi scripture, already instructed readers to observe the beef taboo and refrain from killing animals.

the Guandi cult, along with a remarkable number of shorter tracts on moral instructions (*xunwen* 訓文) which were produced in the first half of the nineteenth century. The 1858 *Guandi quanshu* features 144 such texts (*juan* 22–4), comprising some four hundred pages in the modern reprint.

One common feature of all these Guandi texts is the outright rejection of vegetarianism and vegetarian ‘sects’. Guandi himself writes in the concluding lines of the *Taoyuan mingshengjing*, ‘I am not a vegetarian 喫長齋’ – and members of the Guandi spirit-writing groups also make similar statements about themselves. Nevertheless, Guandi’s revelations (as included in *Taoyuan mingshengjing* and the *xunwen* tracts) consistently argue against killing animals, and strongly promote the beef and dog taboos.<sup>18</sup> Killing bovines and dogs is listed among the sins in most tracts;<sup>19</sup> in some cases, frogs are also included among the tabooed animals.<sup>20</sup> Several texts berate people who kill insects, collect eggs, set forests on fire and pollute rivers.<sup>21</sup> They claim that, when people eat beef or dog meat and poison the rivers, the killing *qi* rises up to Heaven and Shangdi 上帝, ‘Lord of Heaven’ or ‘Jade Emperor’, becomes so angry that he wants to destroy humanity.<sup>22</sup>

Many of the short tracts are devoted to the eschatological themes that became prominent in the Guandi texts of that period. In the most common scenario, the Jade Emperor or Lord of Heaven decides that humanity is too sinful to be redeemed and must be annihilated by demons bringing catastrophes (wars, floods, famines, epidemics, etc.), from which only a few virtuous people will be saved. Guandi then leads a group of gods to plead with the Jade Emperor and obtain a reprieve, during which they attempt to convert and save as many humans as possible through spirit-writing revelations. These tracts thus represent a continuation of the discourse of morality books in general, and the eschatological programme exposed in the Doumu scripture – even though the Doumu text describes the apocalypse as a natural phenomenon instigated by the workings of *qi*, rather than a bureaucratic decision, as in the Guandi texts. The historical context was also new, since the *Guandi quanshu* was compiled in Hunan in the middle of the Taiping war (1851–64).<sup>23</sup> Hunan was both a major battlefield during the first phase of the war and the cradle of the army that eventually defeated the Taiping; after 1853, large sections of the province were mobilized in the loyalist ‘Hunan army’ (Xiangjun 湘軍). Being the result of a well-established Guandi spirit-writing cult in central Hunan, the canon’s compilation was given increased significance by the war, which several of its

<sup>18</sup> *Guandi quanshu*, 23.514–18.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, *Guandi quanshu*, 22.342–7, 22.415–17, 23.441–5, 24.568–71.

<sup>20</sup> *Guandi quanshu*, 24.565. <sup>21</sup> *Guandi quanshu*, 22.417–20.

<sup>22</sup> *Guandi quanshu*, 23.522–6 (‘Ciyi chiyu wen’ 慈邑敕諭文).

<sup>23</sup> The *Guandi quanshu* merely states that its compiler, Huang Qishu 黃啟曙 (n.d.), hailed from Xiangtan 湘潭 in central Hunan.

texts clearly allude to as an apocalyptic disaster sent by the gods.<sup>24</sup> As we will see, the Guandi texts are far from an isolated case. In the context of the Taiping war, numerous elite loyalist groups throughout the empire (some with close connections to loyalist armies) produced revealed eschatological texts, with prominent animal themes. Again, many of these groups were situated in Hunan.

### Revelations during the Taiping War

The Taiping war remains the bloodiest civil war in human history, with casualties estimated to number between 20 and 100 million people. This traumatic event was perceived by all actors as an apocalypse, with gods widely considered to be playing an active role in the battles. It is well known that the Taiping rebels were moved by a messianic vision of annihilating the Manchu demons in order to establish their Heavenly Kingdom, but historiography has so far underestimated the extent to which loyalist forces, and the vast majority of people who just wanted to save their own lives, also understood the events in eschatological terms.<sup>25</sup> Trying to make sense of the chaos around them, they expressed their ideas in essays, diaries, poetry and, most articulately, divine revelations.

Many loyalist elites understood the apocalyptic events and the descent of demon-kings (the Taiping generals) to earth as a heavenly reaction to humanity's moral decadence. When explaining precisely which sins had convinced the Jade Emperor to unleash the demons of apocalypse, these groups called upon classical themes from morality books. They believed that humans were being murdered because they lacked filial piety, loyalty to their lord, honesty in their trade, compassion towards the weak and the poor, respect for life and sexual morality. The last two points were given a particular emphasis in the flurry of apocalyptic texts produced in the context of the Taiping war.<sup>26</sup> Several morality books devoted entirely to either of these two themes were produced between 1850 and 1864, showing their special relevance to those literati who were caught up in the war situation.

Numerous texts revealed by the gods, or written and compiled during the Taiping war, posit a very explicit and direct link between the number of animal lives taken by humans and the advent of a savage war that was taking human lives on an unprecedented scale. This link was hinted at in the Guandi tracts discussed above; it was then clearly developed in a variety of texts. An illuminating example, brilliantly discussed by Tobie Meyer-Fong in her book on the Taiping war, is the *Pangong mianzai baojuan* 潘公免災寶卷

<sup>24</sup> Ter Haar (2013).

<sup>25</sup> This section on the Taiping period draws and expands on Goossaert (2016). For a more general history of the Taiping, see Platt (2012).

<sup>26</sup> On sexual morality in late imperial spirit-writing texts, see Goossaert (2013).

(Precious Scroll on Avoiding Catastrophes, Revealed by Mr Pan), which was published in 1855. This *baojuan* was certainly written by Yu Zhi 余治 (1809–74), a Jiangnan scholar famous for his activist philanthropism. Yu's brother committed suicide when their city of Wuxi 無錫 was conquered by the Taiping in 1860, after which Yu Zhi lived as a refugee, collecting funds for the loyalist armies and militia, organizing anti-Taiping propaganda, and relentlessly preaching in public that people must repent and engage in moral reform so that the gods would be appeased and peace could return to China.<sup>27</sup>

The protagonist of *Pangong mianzai baojuan*, Pan Zengyi 潘曾沂 (a historical figure linked to Yu Zhi, who died shortly before the Taiping invaded Nanjing in 1853), is described as a saint (and a vegetarian) beloved by the gods, who was promoted to general comptroller of the register of the living and the dead in the administration of the Eastern Peak immediately after his death. Pan then appears in a dream to his relatives, telling them that the Jade Emperor, furious at humanity's moral decadence, had sent down an apocalyptic disaster in the form of the Taiping, and planned the death of all Nanjing's inhabitants. But, thanks to Pan's negotiations, 30 per cent of them would be saved, on the condition that they swore a twelve-point oath of repentance. These twelve points included not killing baby girls (no. 5) and other interdictions related to human affairs, the familiar prohibition on killing animals (no. 9), and eating beef or dog meat (no. 12). Indeed, a substantial section of the *Pangong mianzai baojuan* narrative recounts how the gods helped those who swore to abstain from meat and stop killing animals to escape Nanjing as it fell to the Taiping army, while those who did not were massacred by the rebels. Each of these twelve points was discussed in great detail in *Pangong mianzai baojuan*, but they were also disseminated separately as part of a different scripture – the *Xinchu xianchuan liyuan baojuan* 新出仙傳立願寶卷 (Precious Scroll on Making a Vow, Newly Revealed by the Immortals) – which continued to circulate after the war and expanded this oath to contain fourteen points, including the same three discussed above.<sup>28</sup>

The idea that killing animals was one of the direct causes of the Taiping war seems to have been very widespread. For instance, it features in a large compilation of spirit-written revelations by one group in Sichuan that spans most of the war's duration – the *Jiushengchuan* 救生船 (the four *juan* have prefaces ranging from 1860 to 1863).<sup>29</sup> The title of this compilation – *The Boat*

<sup>27</sup> Meyer-Fong (2013), chapter 2. Yu Zhi also wrote a play about the beef taboo, telling the story of a butchered ox who takes revenge. See Goossaert (2005a), 201–3.

<sup>28</sup> We know the *Liyuan baojuan* from a 1913 reprint of an 1897 edition, but it contains a 1692 preface, so it is possible (if the 1692 preface is authentic) that Yu Zhi used an earlier text as a basis for his own set of vows.

<sup>29</sup> On this text, see Wang Chien-ch'uan (2015).

to *Save Lives* – primarily refers to saving the lives of people destined for an apocalyptic death, but it also includes discussions on saving animal lives, containing tracts on various taboos (including one on eels).<sup>30</sup> Sometimes, death by war is explained as a direct consequence of killing animals. Patriarch Lü says: ‘If you want to understand the catastrophes of war and killing at the present, just listen to the sounds coming out of butchers’ shops at night.’<sup>31</sup> This is actually a quotation from a poem by the Song dynasty Buddhist monk Yuanyun 願雲 (n.d.),<sup>32</sup> but the verse took on a new meaning from this reuse in a war context.

This idea was the driving theme of one volume, the *Haosheng jiujiu bian* 好生救劫編 (An Anthology of Loving Life, and Averting the Apocalypse). Compiled in 1854 by the education commissioner for the province of Guizhou named Bao 鮑, the book is entirely devoted to respect for animal life.<sup>33</sup> The five-juan work is a compilation of quotes from earlier morality books, essays and anecdotes, amply documenting all the six themes discussed above. While excerpts from Buddhist and Daoist texts are included, the main thrust is essays by literati from the Song to the mid-Qing, who discuss both the rationale of non-killing and vegetarianism, and the practical compromises they entail in elite lives. Only one text broaches the eschatological discourse: the tract produced by Lüzu which was discussed earlier in this chapter.<sup>34</sup> In a later addition to the 1901 reprint of Bao’s anthology, one text explains that previous bloody revolts and massacres in Chinese history, such as the fall of Chang’an and Luoyang during the Tang and Hangzhou during the Song, were all caused by the decadence of urbanites indulging in meat.<sup>35</sup> Yet, in his introduction, Bao graphically describes the massacres that were taking place at the time he was writing, explaining them as punishments from the gods for killing animals. So here an official, steeped in the long-standing literati discourse of compassion for living beings and utmost moderation in eating meat, recasts this tradition in the light of the immediate context of savage war. By adopting this eschatological reading, he was following many other officials already mentioned, including those who produced the Doumu scripture and those who participated in the Guandi cult.

<sup>30</sup> *Jiushengchuan*, 3.54b–55a. The eel taboo issues from the worship of Xuantian shangdi 玄天上帝.

<sup>31</sup> *Jiushengchuan*, 2.4b–5a.

<sup>32</sup> *Lianxiu qixinlu*, 6 (‘Jiesha shi’ 戒殺詩); see also [www.sutrapearls.org/hushen/hs04.htm#sthash.pXnDLzXe.dpuf](http://www.sutrapearls.org/hushen/hs04.htm#sthash.pXnDLzXe.dpuf) (accessed on 19 January 2016).

<sup>33</sup> I have seen three different versions of this work; only one (the 1892 edition) gives the author’s identity as Education Commissioner Bao. But I have been unable to trace him in local gazetteers.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted *in toto* in *Haosheng jiujiu bian*, 1.8a–9a.

<sup>35</sup> *Haosheng jiujiu bian*, 6.9a (‘Jieshashuo’ 戒殺說).

### The Divine Code

One of the most remarkable texts produced by spirit-writing during the war is the *Yuding jinke jiyao* 玉定金科輯要 (Compilation of the Golden Rules, on Order of the Jade Emperor), a huge divine law code that lists in excruciating detail the punishments (expressed in years of life and various disasters) for every imaginable sin, as well as rewards for do-gooders.<sup>36</sup> The thousand-odd pages of this penal code were revealed in Hunan between 1856 and 1859 by Wenchang, who was given authorization to reveal it to humans from the Jade Emperor. An introduction explains that the Jade Emperor had decided to inflict an apocalypse as early as 1816, then proceeded to ask the gods to compile a precise code so as to decide rationally who should die, when and how. This code was eventually promulgated in Heaven in 1848, but it took several supplications from Wenchang before the Jade Emperor allowed this information to be made available to humanity, so that at least some people could repent and save themselves. Numerous texts from this period (including the aforementioned *Pangong mianzai baojuan*) asserted that gods did not cause human deaths in the war randomly or arbitrarily but, in fact, were strictly enforcing a celestial law code (*tianlü* 天律). The revelation of the *Yuding jinke jiyao* is just the most developed expression of this idea. The very existence of this code, which binds gods as well as humans, provides a solution to the conundrum created by the idea that the war was a response to animal killing. It was a Chinese version of the theodicy problem: how can the gods who are supposed to ‘love life’ (*haosheng* 好生) engage in such mass slaughter? In a preface to the aforementioned *Jiushengchuan*, revealed in 1863, Zhang Fei 張飛 explains that, as a god in the Ministry of Thunder, he loves life and loathes having to kill humans, but he is bound by the code to punish sinners and dutifully does so.<sup>37</sup>

The *Yuding jinke jiyao* is organized around the eight virtues (*ba de* 八德), a framework for theorizing morality that had emerged during the first half of the nineteenth century and remained prevalent until the mid-twentieth century.<sup>38</sup> Animal life is discussed as part of the chapter on justice (*yi* 義), in the rewards section of the code. Surprisingly, it is not found in the section on punishments. Articles on animals do not form an individual sub-chapter but are intermixed with articles on helping the poor through charity. Animals were not treated as a separate issue but were included among those weak forms of life that people should take pity on, in a continuum with infants, the sick and the unfit. The section on rewards states that people will accrue precisely quantified merits

<sup>36</sup> This code, and several sequels revealed in subsequent decades, was adopted and widely diffused during the Republican period by a redemptive society, the Tongshanshe 同善社. On this society, see Goossaert and Palmer (2011), chapter 4.

<sup>37</sup> *Jiushengchuan*, 3.1a–b (‘Huanhou dadi xu’ 桓侯大帝序). <sup>38</sup> Fan Chunwu (2015).

if they financially support butchers to change their trade, along with those who pay for *fangsheng*.<sup>39</sup> Another group of quantified merits lists those who constantly keep an eye open for animals in danger – however small – and save them; people who do not cause animals to be killed by ordering meat except in circumstances when ritual prescribes it, such as at sacrifices, their parents' birthdays, weddings and funerals, formal receptions for guests, and nourishing a sick parent; individuals who observe the beef and dog taboo and convince others to do so; people who do not kill tortoises and serpents; those who convince farmers not to sell their old oxen, dogs, horses and donkeys to butchers but keep them on the farm and bury them when they die; those who release live fish and birds; those who abstain from eating small fishes and fish roe because it saves countless lives from being cut short; people who bury dead mammals; those who do not engage in and prevent others from poisoning rivers, fishing with nets, setting woods and prairies on fire, hunting and filling up burrows; and people who feed wild animals during particularly harsh winters.<sup>40</sup>

After an article on the beef and dog taboo, the code contains a commentary that refers to the causal connection between animal killing and war. It reads: 'In the world, when wars or famines occur, this is caused by the fact that humans are unable to refrain from killing [animals]. The *qi* produced by such killing naturally causes such disasters.'<sup>41</sup>

### Conclusion

All the texts discussed above draw a close connection between animal life and human death which is based on caring for and loving life – or failing to do so. This notion originates from a passage in the venerable *Shangshu* 尚書 (Book of Documents), one of the Five Confucian Classics, which refers primarily to humans and states that the sovereign cares for life and thus protects his subjects.<sup>42</sup> But, since the Han period, it was continuously used to refer to life in general. By the nineteenth century, the term 'the virtue of caring for life' (*haosheng zhi de* 好生之德) had come to characterize both gods and rulers – even though they were authorizing or even directly perpetrating massacres on a gigantic scale – and thus became accepted as a model that humans should emulate. This fixation on caring for life in an era of massacres reflects the deep ambiguities and anxieties of late imperial Chinese society, which reached their apex during the Taiping war, yet continued far beyond that time. Indeed, all the texts discussed above were reprinted and continued to circulate after the war and, in most cases, until the present day.

<sup>39</sup> *Yuding jinke jiyao*, 535. <sup>40</sup> *Yuding jinke jiyao*, 541–3. <sup>41</sup> *Yuding jinke jiyao*, 542.

<sup>42</sup> *Shangshu*, 'Dayu mo' 大禹謨.



I have shown that the lives gods and humans were expected to care for extended along a continuum from the worthiest humans to the tiniest insects, and the boundaries between humans and animals seem blurred and unfixed. While some animals – especially bovines – were endowed with quasi-human qualities and feelings,<sup>43</sup> certain humans were to be pitied just like animals. One major issue that attracted much attention in the same context was that of infanticide. The killing of infants, especially girls, developed into a key theme of Qing morality books in general, and of the revelations and tracts of the Taiping period in particular.<sup>44</sup> The practice of infanticide had existed before the nineteenth century and had, at times, resulted in severely imbalanced sex ratios, which fed violence and rebellions. It is difficult to prove whether it became more prevalent during the nineteenth century, but the discourse in morality books and other genres certainly grew. Some of the texts introduced above make an explicit connection between killing baby girls and killing animals,<sup>45</sup> quantifying the values of life that were already clearly listed in the *Jieshajing* revealed by Doumu and other texts. One of the tracts in the Guandi canon argues that the life of a baby girl is worth that of ten animals.<sup>46</sup>

Viewing the eschatological texts on animal life as reflecting an anxiety about the fragility of life, and the ease with which humans (and gods) could take it away, raises the question: what does it have to do with how real animals were treated? Are the animals in these texts not simply metaphors about human life and the way that war, and late imperial society in general, treated humans like livestock ready for slaughter? This is true to a certain extent. These are not texts by animal lovers as pet-keeping is discouraged. But animals in these revealed texts not only function as foils; they are also actual animals which require attention. Their detailed discussions about the sufferings of butchered oxen or mistreated dogs betray a real care for animals, not just a projection of human concern over a ‘hypothetical creature’ or paper animal.

If the late Qing eschatological discourse is indeed about actual animals, to what extent does it relate to changes in the larger ecological systems that affected human–animal relationships? This is hard to ascertain, as the texts’ strong focus on moral reform and human agency leave other factors of change entirely in the background. Morality books have a lot to tell us about social, political and economic issues, but always from the perspective of what humans can do to improve themselves and the world. Earlier meat

<sup>43</sup> On bovines being treated like humans, see Goossaert (2005a), 186–90, 196–8.

<sup>44</sup> On the late imperial discourse on infanticide in general, see King (2014).

<sup>45</sup> *Haosheng jiuji bian*, 6.1a–2a (‘Funü jiesha bian’ 婦女戒殺編). This last *juan* of the book was likely added in the 1901 reprint.

<sup>46</sup> *Guandi quanshu*, 25.497–9 (‘Yu yingnü’ 育嬰女).

taboos were (albeit by no means solely) powered by mutations in the pastoral economy; similarly, the fast-paced demographic growth and attendant pressure on land and wildlife that characterized the three centuries preceding the Taiping war certainly contributed to the growing anxiety about human cohabitation with animals. On the other hand, as I have shown in this chapter, this discourse was also driven by its own religious logic regarding the value of life in general.