

<b>Institution:</b> University of Cambridge
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA27
<b>Title of case study:</b> <i>Food and morality in ancient China</i>
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words) Professor Sterckx's monograph, <i>Food, Sacrifice and Sagehood in Early China</i> (Cambridge University Press 2011) has been covered extensively in media across China. A 2011 BBC article (in Chinese) summarizing the book's main findings was adapted and republished by China's national news agency Xinhua and the China State Council information office. Following this it was included in secondary school teaching materials and exams across China as well as in teaching materials for the training of civil servants in Xinjiang province.
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words) Roel Sterckx has been a member of the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Cambridge since 1 October 2002. He has held the position of Professor since 1 October 2007. The research for his monograph <i>Food, Sacrifice and Sagehood in Early China</i> was carried out between 2006 and 2011.
<p>The book offers a comprehensive analysis of the role of food and sacrificial food culture in early China (8<sup>th</sup> century BCE to 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. AD) based on a careful analysis of received textual sources of the period as well as recent archaeologically recovered manuscripts. The research involved a combination of text-critical and philological work combined with thematic enquiries inspired by theories that draw on anthropology and ritual studies. The monograph draws on information from across different types of sources, that is, its scope is not limited to a particular "genre" of text, such as medical or gastronomical texts. Sources included range from poetry, historiographical narrative and anecdotal literature to ritual compendia, administrative documents and the works of the masters of philosophy. By doing so, the book shows not only that the culinary metaphor was pervasive across early Chinese texts but, more importantly, that it served as a prime vehicle to convey ideas about self-cultivation and human character.</p> <p>The book demonstrates in great detail how food culture provided a lens through which the early Chinese conceived of moral and social categories and shows how culinary culture furnished models for ideas about political authority and successful communication with the spirit world. Among the topics discussed are narratives on meat consumption, banqueting, the figure of the butcher-cook as political adviser, and Chinese perceptions of sensory experience through flavour. This study argues that the ritual world where "table" and sacrificial altar met was a world marked by contending views on the ways in which the ruler should sense the world. Rather than seeking to distinguish secular or profane food culture from the world of ritual sacrifice, and rather than identifying a transcendent spirit realm divorced from the physical concerns of human society, early China's ritualists saw in sacrifice a practice that confronted humans with a fundamental paradox between moral and material values: How can humans engage with an ephemeral spirit world or pursue higher forms of self-cultivation through physical means, either through nutrition and other forms of bodily comfort, or through the presentation of ritualized offerings for the spirits? How can humans generate forms of intangible spirit power internally within the self, or communicate externally with a spirit world that lies beyond normal channels of sensory contact, while being physically anchored in and dependent on a material and physical world that constantly tempts their sensory desires? Or, put differently, how does the exemplary person distance him/herself from indulging in the physical delights of commensality and conviviality while acknowledging that both processes are necessary conduits to generate higher forms of authority both in the human world and in one's contact with higher powers?</p> <p>While scholars in the West and China had researched the history of gastronomy from a technical perspective, there existed no monograph that examined food culture in the world of ideas prior to Professor Sterckx's work. The latter no doubt explains why his analysis has stirred so much interest in China.</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

**3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

Roel Sterckx's (2011) *Food, Sacrifice and Sagehood in Early China* (Cambridge University Press).

(This can be supplied by the University of Cambridge on request.)

**Evidence of Quality**

The book was peer reviewed and has been widely and positively reviewed in academic journals. E.g.:

Erica Brindley *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (80.2; 2012)

Olivia Milburn *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 75.1 (2012)

Michael Hunter *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113.4 (2011)

Li Feng *American Historical Review* 117.5 (2012).

Poo Mu-chou, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 72.2 (2012)

All outputs can be supplied by the University of Cambridge on request.

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

On 31 March 2011 the BBC published an article (in Chinese) summarizing the book's main findings [1]. The article introduces Professor Sterckx's research into cooking and dining in ancient China and how cooking and dining in ancient China reveals philosophical, political and social thinking and practice both in ancient and contemporary China. The first section is entitled 'governing is like cooking' and stresses messages including harmony, fairness and equality. The second section refers to Professor Sterckx's work on dining etiquette in China and on the importance of dining in social life. The third section is entitled 'food affecting virtue' and focuses on how dining and food was believed to affect and/or reveal human character and personality.

On 6 April 2011 the BBC article was adapted and republished by China's national news agency Xinhua and the China State Council information office [2], [3]. From early May 2011, this article was adapted for mock exams and teaching materials for the Chinese University Entrance Examinations, starting with Henan province (7 May 2011), and then across all thirty-one provinces in China except Tibet. Instruction is mainly through the form of mock exams with teachers explaining the questions in the class room. The mock exams cover contents including etiquette in social interactions, virtues, food nutrition and civilized, healthy life styles. These are presented as assisting in the construction of Chinese citizenship among teenagers across China.

It is impossible to quantify exact user numbers across China since schools have some freedom to select teaching resources. But we can establish that in Jilin [7], Jiangsu [10] and Shandong [11] provinces, the article was included in a mock exam paper issued as required materials for exams across the province. In 2011 the total number of students enrolled in higher education entrance exams in Jilin province was 165,761 [5]. In 2012 it was 162,208 [6]. This suggests that, in Jilin province alone, the number of students who have been exposed to the article in examinations may be as high as 160,000 per year. In Jiangsu province, the number of students enrolled in higher education enrolment examinations was around 475,000 (2012) and 500,000 (2011) [8]. In Shandong, that figure was 550,677 in 2012 and 620,000 in 2011 [9]. It may be useful to know that, in 2011, overall high school student numbers across China totalled 24,548,200 [12].

Keyword searches of Professor Sterckx's Chinese name 胡司德 combined with the Chinese terms for food 飲食 in standard search engines (e.g. Google) result in 53,900 hits (24 March 2013). The majority of these web entries appear to be adapted articles for mock exams and teaching materials in Chinese for secondary schools across China.

The same article published by Xinhua Net was also included among the official learning resources for the Civil Servants Examinations in Xinjiang province, published in 2011 [4], and continued to be used in 2012 and 2013. Candidates for the Civil Servants Examinations in Xinjiang province

## Impact case study (REF3b)

totalled approximately 223,195 in 2011 [13] and nearly 100,000 in 2012 [14]. Due to Xinjiang Province's multi-ethnicity, messages included in the article were applied to local settings and several key points in the article such as mutual respect between ethnicities and cultures, dealing with ethnicity-related matters in a fair, calm and measured manner, were elicited.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[1] BBC:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/ukchina/simp/mobile/uk\\_life/2011/03/110331\\_life\\_dietary\\_culture\\_cambridge.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ukchina/simp/mobile/uk_life/2011/03/110331_life_dietary_culture_cambridge.shtml) (31st March 2011)

[2] Xinhua Net: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2011-04/06/c\\_121272660.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2011-04/06/c_121272660.htm) (6th April 2011)

[3] China.com.cn: [http://www.china.com.cn/international/txt/2011-04/06/content\\_22300382.htm](http://www.china.com.cn/international/txt/2011-04/06/content_22300382.htm) (6th April 2011)

[4] Yi, D (2011). Official Textbook for Xinjiang Province Civil Servants Examination (2012): Administrative and professional capabilities. Jinhua Publishing House.

<http://www.amazon.cn/%E5%8D%8E%E5%9B%BE%E2%80%A2%E6%96%B0%E7%96%86%E5%85%AC%E5%8A%A1%E5%91%98%E5%BD%95%E7%94%A8%E8%80%83%E8%AF%95%E4%B8%93%E7%94%A8%E6%95%99%E6%9D%90-%E8%A1%8C%E6%94%BF%E8%81%8C%E4%B8%9A%E8%83%BD%E5%8A%9B%E6%B5%8B%E9%AA%8C/dp/product-description/B005OH04YG>

[5] [http://gaozhong.eol.cn/gao\\_kao\\_dong\\_tai\\_9216/20121018/t20121018\\_857891.shtml](http://gaozhong.eol.cn/gao_kao_dong_tai_9216/20121018/t20121018_857891.shtml)

[6] <http://gaokao.chsi.com.cn/z/2012gkbfslq/bmrs.jsp>

[7] [http://manfen5.com/sjshow/gz\\_yw/g2012051713183329684409/](http://manfen5.com/sjshow/gz_yw/g2012051713183329684409/)

[8] <http://gaokao.chsi.com.cn/z/2012gkbfslq/bmrs.jsp>

[9] <http://gaokao.chsi.com.cn/z/2012gkbfslq/bmrs.jsp>

[10] <http://gzyw.cooco.net.cn/dpaper/2515045/2/>

[11] [http://www.manfen5.com/sjshow/gz\\_yw/g2012062810490831252188/](http://www.manfen5.com/sjshow/gz_yw/g2012062810490831252188/)

[12] [http://www.moe.edu.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe\\_633/201208/141305.html](http://www.moe.edu.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe_633/201208/141305.html)

[13] <http://xj.huatu.com/news/2011/0408/81154.html>

[14] [http://www.ts.cn/xj/2012-09/16/content\\_7246372.htm](http://www.ts.cn/xj/2012-09/16/content_7246372.htm)