
REVIEWS

Roderich Ptak (ed.), *Marine Animals in Traditional China – Meerestiere im traditionellen China*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (Maritime Asia; 21), 2011, 154 pp.

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The present volume is a kind of follow-up to the proceedings of a 2008 München symposium that dealt with the cultural history of animals in traditional China, published in 2009 under the title of *Tiere im alten China. Studien zur Kulturgeschichte*. The range of topics is now narrower, but again the basis of the papers is the description of the respective animals in traditional Chinese literature. Almost needless to say the cultural aspect is again predominant, even if other facets are not neglected. Usually the Chinese texts do not allow the identification of individual species, but more often than not are pointers to genera, or even families.

The editor gives a summary of the five papers presented in his introduction. Then follow plates, several in full colour, the papers themselves with Chinese characters included, and last but not least an index (pp. 145-154!), a feature which has become less common nowadays with volumes of proceedings and therefore deserves special mention and praise.

The first paper, by Ralph Kauz and Beate Mittmann, is “Zum Pfeilschwanzkrebs (*Tachypleus tridentatus*) in der chinesischen Literatur, Medizin und Küche”. The horseshoe crab, sometimes called a living fossil as it has not changed much since the Jurassic period (as can be seen from a find in Solnhofen), belongs not to the Crustacea, as the English name might indicate, but to the Chelicerata, and is thus related to spiders. They live in shallow ocean waters, as scavengers. Their blue blood reacts to bacteria or their endotoxines by immediate coagulation, and this led to the development of the limulus test to check drugs for contaminations. So far the horseshoe crab has received little attention from the point of view of cultural history. It is briefly treated in *Biology of the Horseshoe Crab*, ed. by Sekiguchi Koichi (Tokyo: Science House 1988, 1-9); its first extant description seems to be found in the well-known Chinese materia medica *Jingshi zhenglei Dagan bencao* 經史證類大觀本草 of 1108. In Japan Naka-

mura Tekisai (1666) described and illustrated the animal in his *Kimmô zui* 訓蒙圖彙, an illustration which Engelbert Kaempfer copied into his *Geschichte und Beschreibung von Japan* (Lemgo 1777-79, 157-158, pl. 13, fig. 8). The first mention of the horseshoe crab seems to be in Liu Kui's 劉逵 notes on Zuo Si's 左思 (c. 250-c. 305 AD) *Wudu fu* 吳都賦 (Rhapsody on the capital of Wu).

As the Chinese name *hou* 鬻 is written with the fish radical, people sometimes believed the animal to be a kind of fish, which led to a rather fanciful illustration in the "encyclopedia" (*leishu*) *Sancai tuhui* 三才圖會 of 1608. The most common literary *topos* connected with the horseshoe crab is derived from the fact that during the mating season the male connects with the female often for a long time, and they move in tandem. Thus *hou* has become a synonym for lasting marriages.

As to the medical uses of the horseshoe crab, the authors give the text and a translation of Li Shizhen's description in his *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目. The culinary value of the animal is limited. As it has little meat it is mainly eaten by poor people, or used as a seasoning paste.

The second paper, by Chiara Bocci, is "On the Hetun (Pufferfish) in Ancient China: Too Delicious for Words" (pp. 21-61). This fish, in the West better known under its Japanese name *fugu*, contains a very strong poison (tetrodotoxin, much more effective than potassium cyanide) for which no antidote is known so far. The author aptly uses a motto by the Song poet Mei Yaochen 梅堯臣 (1002-1060): "... But in this fish, though so delicious, unlimited danger lies concealed." Some European travellers, like Pehr Osbeck, were delighted to see the fish (German ed. Rostock 1765, 294-295): "Kai-po-y ist einer der schönsten Fische, die ich je gesehen habe, aber so giftig, daß ein Mensch, der davon isset, in 2 Stunden des Todes seyn kann [...]." The author deals with the popularity of the fish as luxury food, the mortality rate of the customers, and describes the fish and explains the modern taxonomy. Not all puffers are toxic, and were therefore banned in China for consumption. In the meantime several species are farmed, but apparently these are not toxic, probably owing to the different diet. The ancient nomenclature of the *hetun* 河豚 (literally "river pig") is confusing and leads to many questions. Apparently the earliest mention of the *hetun*, under the name of *houtai* 鯀鮐, is in the already cited notes by Liu Kui on the *Wudu fu*. It seems to be mentioned in quite a number of further sources, e.g. in Wang Chong's 王充 works, where Alfred Forke was apparently misled in his translation (he translated dolphin, also called *haitun* 海豚). A very interesting section is on the pufferfish in Song poetry. Mei Yaochen and his circle (including Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修) were especially interested in the puffer, but also Fan Chengda 范成大 (1126-1193) contributed a "Lament

on the pufferfish" (*hetun tan* 河豚歎). In later times we find Bada Shanren 八大山人 (1626–1705) and Lu Xun 魯迅 among the aficionados. By the way, the author speaks of the *alleged* delicious taste of the fish, so we are left in the dark as to whether a scientifically trained palate would confirm the gourmets' statement.

This paper is followed by Marc Nürnberger's "Vom Krähenmeuchler und anderen Coleoidea: Erwähnungen von Tintenfischen in alten chinesischen Texten (Han bis Ming)" (pp. 63–92). The author starts, after some introductory musings based on Wang Yi's 王逸 comparison of a hedgehog and a squid, with the systematics and taxonomy of squids of which still a large number of genera and species are extant, even if in no way comparable to the about 10,000 fossil species. There are plenty of older names for these animals, like *wuzei* 烏賊, *zhangju* 章舉 and *rouyu* 柔魚; also the general term *moyu* 墨魚 exists. Some names appear as variants (different radicals to a character), and, as the author translates the historical and literary explanations, it seems that people tried to make some sense of the names and offered their own stories. The *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 gives *wuzei* 鷓鴣 as the name of a "fish" that experienced a slight popular transformation and became *wuzei*, "crow's assassin", confirmed by a suitable anecdote, and at any rate an imaginative explanation. Descriptions and anecdotes by Lin Rirui 林日瑞 (1586–1643), Feng Shike 馮時可 (*jinshi* 1571), Duan Chenshi 段成式 (d. 863) are given. Squid was not popular in Chinese materia medica, therefore there is not much information in Li Shizhen's *Bencao gangmu*. Squid was mainly eaten, and some authors waxed lyrical about it, like Mei Yaochen, while others, e.g. Han Yu 韓愈 exiled to the South, found it difficult to do justice to this delicacy. The author translates and discusses several poems in honour of the *wuze*, e.g. by Yue Ke 岳珂 (1183–1234), grandson of the famous general Yue Fei 岳飛 and Jiang Teli 姜特立 (twelfth century). The squid also became a literary *topos*. Its method of hiding often using its ink and then preying on harmless other animals made it a simile for persons insidiously attacking the unaware. On the other hand, it also showed that exactly by hiding (i.e. by ejecting its ink) it attracted the attention of fishermen, and was thus easily detected and caught. The paper covers a wide range of literary and cultural details and makes good reading.

"Whales in Ancient China", by James M. Hargett (pp. 93–119), has a mainly literary focus. The paper faces a special challenge: In historical times the Chinese hardly ever had an opportunity to see whales; whales were not hunted, or eaten and while a few fishermen especially on the South China coast may have been familiar with whales they were not the people to write about them. Nevertheless *jing* 鯨 or simply *dayu* 大魚

occurs in traditional texts, but these terms may refer to any sea monster, or big fish. The author examines the etymology of *jing* and finds that the character is not listed in the authoritative *Shuowen jiezi* (where another word is given for “big fish”); he notices a negative connotation for the word owing to the fact that already in the *Zuo zhuan* 左轉 it is used in a figurative sense, e.g. as “great criminals”, “unprincipled people” who, as sea monsters would swallow whole boats, might “swallow” the whole country. Dead whales which were occasionally washed ashore were considered bad omens. There has been some speculation about a stone whale which the First Emperor of China put in his palace lake. Was it to subdue and control the marine forces? The author devotes his attention also to huge waves, “whale waves”, and to ambergris, “dragon spittle” (which was not readily recognized as the product of the sperm whale). It was apparently due to the Arabs that the Chinese noticed it.

The last paper, by Roderich Ptak, “Riesenmuscheln: Notizen zur Bezeichnung *chequ*” (pp. 121-144) deals with giant clams. Early references, usually *dabei* 大貝 and/or *chequ* 磳磳, leave us in the dark as to the exact meaning—is it a stone (like jade), is it something from the ocean, or perhaps from Persia, Byzantium, or just the South China Sea. It must have designated something precious, anyhow. Only in Song sources and later are *chequ* defined as giant clams, and thus the later literature like the *Bencao gangmu* follows suit. While it is difficult, not to say impossible, to distinguish between species, the largest clam, *Tridacna gigas* is the exception—because of its large size it cannot be mistaken.

This volume was a pleasure to review—very interesting subject matter, careful work, good results and a nicely produced volume (as mentioned, with index!). It is rare that the border zone of sinology and biology is so well covered. In contrast, the reviewer remembers a recent publication with the promising subject of British naturalists in China in the nineteenth century: It turned out that a large part of the people treated were not British at all, that many of the quotes of the heroes’ activities were (understandably) just about bad roads, and the tribulations of the travel, and the difficulty of scientific work, and there were few pages without the term “imperialism” flashing. It remained without a convincing explanation why all these (amateur) scientists represented imperialism after it was confirmed that almost hundred per cent of them rode their hobby horses—natural history research was not their professional mission. The scholarly result of that formidable study was meagre.