

CHAPTER FIVE

Eating Better than Gods and Ancestors

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In late classical and early medieval China, practitioners developed dietary regimens that claimed to make them transcendents (*xian* 仙)—deathless, superhuman beings.¹ The question I wish to explore is simple, though the answer is not: it concerns not so much what seekers of transcendence ate (or were represented as eating) but what they did not eat; more, it concerns what their diet meant.

A culinary choice—especially when prescribed by a scripture or sanctioned by a tradition—may carry two kinds of meanings and functions. Those I call *internalist* explicitly explain them in terms of the intrinsic benefits of the foodstuffs they feature or the preparations they prescribe. Often such explanation invokes a larger theory, cosmology, or myth, maybe as simple as “We eat X because X makes us live long.” *Externalist* meanings or functions pertain to dietary choices that have the effect, whether by intention or not, of associating eaters with certain clusters of values and dissociating them from others. Here, culinary regimes amount to statements about a wide range of other matters (and other groups of eaters), whatever might be the intrinsic benefits claimed. Externalist meanings are inherently associative or contrastive, even if only implicitly: “We eat X, which is not Y, which those other people eat” (contrastive or dissociative) or “We eat X, which is what beings of class Z, too, eat” (associative). While they are rarely socially neutral, internalist meanings may or may not claim a hierarchy of eaters; externalist ones almost always do: “We who eat X are thereby in a position superior (in some respect) to those others who eat Y.”

My sensitivity to the externalist meanings of culinary choices is partly inspired by the work of Michael Puett, who has shown how choices made in a text acquire new significance when viewed, not in isolation, but as alternatives to competing ideas; they come to be seen not simply as assertions made in a vacuum, or reports of assumptions internal to the author’s own camp, but as arguments with interlocutors. To return to the culinary domain, a group’s favoring of food A may have more to do with the sheer fact that A is not food B than it does with any intrinsic benefits claimed for A or any claimed inadequacies of B.

This view of cultures sees them as contestational fields upon which agents assert claims and attempt to persuade others. Ideas, traditions, and bundles of practices are not imagined as “evolving” or “chang[ing]” glacially over time as the result of impersonal processes” (Lincoln 1999, 18) or solely according to their own internal, neutral logic. Nor are they understood as simply belonging to large bodies of impersonal, collective things like “mythology,” “popular religion,” or “Daoism” that essentially invent themselves (Campany 2003). Instead they are seen as claims advanced by particular agents against alternative positions and with significant stakes involved; they are “the sites of pointed and highly consequential semantic skirmishes fought between rival regimes of truth” (Lincoln 1999, 18) and of prestige. A culinary discipline is, among other things, a tactical deployment of taxonomies, and its contrast of higher with lower ways of eating is “not an idle play of categories but a social and political intervention” (Lincoln 1999, 118).

Although techniques such as those examined here have usually been labeled by modern scholars as “Daoist,” I avoid this practice. I am averse to reifying religions, to “tradition holism,” and to lumping together quite disparate things and asserting that they must somehow be organically related to one another, must share some essential “Daoist identity,” merely by virtue of a common label. It is unclear how lumping disparate practices and attitudes into a singular “Daoism” helps us understand them. I wager that particular texts and practices are better explicated on the basis of the terms they present as well as in relation to the other practices and attitudes to which they constituted alternatives.

The Symbolic and Social Significance of Grains, Meats, Agriculture, and Sacrifice

First, two caveats. (1) The following is a mere sketch, not an attempt to exhaustively survey the views on the subjects broached. Each text cited crystallizes the views of a circle of authors and readers, but I will not assume that any of them is the “expression” of some unitary “mythological tradition” or “school” or “ism.” Taken together, however, the texts selected represent a wide swath of viewpoints. (2) Each passage adduced below was also likely circulated as a response to some opposed view, yet it is impossible to do justice to each passage in its own argumentative setting here. I treat these passages as articulating some of the baseline views and practices to which cuisines of transcendence were crafted as alternatives.

The Consumption of Grains and the Cooking of Food as Key Marks of Civilization

In the “Royal Regulations” chapter of the *Liji* (Book of Rites), representing a Western Han or earlier viewpoint, we find the following discussion:

The people of the five regions—those of the central kingdoms, the Rong, the Yi [and so on]—each had their several natures, which they

could not be made to alter. Those of the east were called Yi; they wore their hair unbound and tattooed their bodies, and some of them ate their food without cooking it. [The people of] the south were called Man; they tattooed their foreheads and had their feet turned in toward each other, and some among them ate their food without cooking it. [The people of] the west were called Rong; they wore their hair unbound and wore skins, and some of them did not eat grain. [The people of] the north were called Di; they wore feathers and furs and lived in caves, and some of them did not eat grain.

The discussion ends by noting how, in ancient times, people were redistributed into walled towns and fields, “so that there was no unoccupied land and there were no people left wandering.”²

K. C. Chang astutely notes that, in this passage, not cooking and not eating grains are both markers of barbarism, but are different markers. “One could eat grain but also eat raw meat or one could eat his meat cooked but eat no grain. Neither was fully Chinese. A Chinese by definition ate grain and cooked his meat” (Chang 1977, 42)—and, we might add, lived in a settled agricultural community. Unlike Chang, I read this passage as reflecting the views of its late Warring States or Han author-redactors, seeing it less as Zhou ethnographic description than as ideology wrapped in the guise of description, and its message, hardly unique to this text, is that eating grains (the products of organized agriculture), cooking, and living in settled communities are among the traits possessed by human beings par excellence. Anything less counts as not fully human and should be modified by the instructive interventions of the paradigmatically human people whose norms fill the book’s pages.

Many texts relevant to our inquiry take the form of what Bruce Lincoln has termed *sitiogonies* (Lincoln 1986, 65), narratives of the nature and origin of food (from Greek *sitos* “food, bread, grain”—this term, like the analogous *gu* 穀 in Chinese, denotes both grain and grain-based staple foods in particular and, synecdochically, food in general).³ Consider, for example, the poem “Sheng min” 生民 in the *Shijing* (Book of Odes), a text of Zhou origin (ca. 1000–600 BCE). The poem opens by asking how Jiang Yuan 姜嫄 gave birth to “the people.” It recounts that, after making an offering and praying for a child, Jiang Yuan trod on the toe-print of Di (the sky god) and subsequently gave painless birth to Hou Ji or Lord Millet. For reasons unexplained, Hou Ji was thrice abandoned, but oxen and sheep, woodcutters, and birds successively rescued him. After the birds’ departure he began to wail and crawl, and then, “so as to receive food for his mouth,” he planted beans, hemp, wheat, gourds, and millet, and his crops flourished and fattened. With this produce he “created (or founded or commenced) the sacrifices.” Then follows a second question: “What are they, our sacrifices?” The answer lists processes for the preparation of the grains and meats used, then describes the divine response: “As soon as the fragrance rises, Di on high is very pleased.” The poem concludes by linking the textual present to this august

past: “Lord Millet founded the sacrifices, and without blemish or flaw they have been continued till now.”⁴ Much could be said of this text; I limit my comments to two:

- (1) The very origin and continued existence of the Zhou people is bound by the invention of agriculture, and the invention of agriculture with sacrifice. Agriculture and sacrifice have the same originator, Lord Millet (named for what is both a chief agricultural product and a chief class of grains offered in sacrifice), and although he plants crops to feed himself, the first thing he does with the produce is “found the sacrifices.” Agriculture and sacrifice link the Zhou people to Di in multiple ways, through repeated sacrificial ritual, through continuous sacred history, and through divine/human descent (Di is Hou Ji’s divine father, and Hou Ji is the father of the Zhou people). Furthermore, Hou Ji’s human mother gains procreative access to his divine father by means of sacrifice.
- (2) The poem sets up a hierarchy of eaters and foods: the semi-divine Hou Ji and his human successors eat grains and vegetables (and, implicitly, meats) here below on earth, via the mouth; the divine Di, above in the heavens, eats the rising fragrance of the cooked foods, via the nose:

	<i>Lower Position</i>	<i>Higher Position</i>
Eaters	Hou Ji; people of Zhou	Di
Station	Earth	Heaven
Foods eaten	Grains/vegetables and meats	Fragrances
Organ of consumption	Mouth	Nose

We find passages similar in this respect in later texts. In a seasonal schedule of activities laid out in the *Guanzi*, for example, we read that during the autumn, “the Son of Heaven issues orders commanding the officer in charge of sacrifices to select suitable animals and birds from their pens and suitable offerings of early ripening grains to present for use in ancestral temples and the five household sacrifices. Ghosts and spirits will consume their *qi*, while gentlemen ingest their savors.”⁵ Other such passages will be seen below.

In the *Huainanzi* we find the following sitiogony:

In ancient times people ate vegetation and drank from streams; they picked fruit from trees and ate the flesh of shellfish and insects. In those times there was much illness and suffering, as well as injury from poisons. Thereupon the Divine Farmer (Shennong) for the first time taught the people to sow the five grains and diagnose the quality of soils—which were arid or wet, fertile or barren, highland or lowland.

He tasted the flavors of the hundred plants and the sweetness and brackishness of streams and springs, causing the people to know which were to be avoided and which used. In the process he himself would suffer poisonings seventy times a day.⁶

Here Shennong leads society from a gathering stage to one of agriculture. The narrative goes on to tell of how, subsequently, morality was first taught under Yao, how dwellings were first constructed under Shun so that people no longer had to live in caves, how Yu channeled the waters, and how Tang instituted regular hours of sleeping and waking and systems of caring for the dead, sick, and unfortunate. One argument implicit in this tale is that agriculture was a necessary condition for the flourishing of other aspects of civilization that, on this view, arose later. A similar narrative, focusing on Yao, appears in the *Mencius* (3A.4; Puett 2001, 108–09).

A passage in the *Liji* portrays aspects of the origins of sacrificial rites for ancestors and gods. At first people lived in caves and nests; “they knew not yet the transforming power of fire, but ate the fruits of plants and trees, and the flesh of birds and beasts, drinking their blood, swallowing also the hair and feathers. They knew not yet the use of flax and silk, but clothed themselves with feathers and skins.” Then came the use of fire, which allowed for the making of tools for advanced building arts and for specific cooking operations and the making of liquors. The burden of the passage is to argue that this development, along with textile work, allowed not only for better living but also for better care of the dead in ways that are perpetuated in rites performed down to the present; as the text puts it, “[the people] were thus able to nourish the living and send off the dead [properly], serving ghosts, spirits, and Di on high. In all these things we follow those beginnings.”⁷ Thanks to fire, cooking, and the fashioning of textiles, the dead may be properly housed in well-built tombs, clothed in fine garments, and fed with cooked foods and spirits—precisely what we find in excavated Han tombs.

In the *Han Feizi* we find the following sitiogony of cooked food:

In the earliest times . . . the people lived on fruit, berries, mussels, and clams—things that sometimes became so rank and fetid that they hurt people’s stomachs, and many became sick. Then a sage appeared who created the boring of wood to produce fire so as to transform the rank and putrid foods. The people were so delighted by this that they made him ruler of the world and called him the Fire-Drill Man (Suiren 燧人).⁸

In chapter sixteen of the *Zhuangzi*, perhaps datable to the third century BCE, Suiren is the first ruler mentioned in a series of what were usually taken to be civilizational advances but which are here portrayed as initiating the decline of Power and the ever-farther departure from the natural Dao into systems of social constraint, culture (here criticized), and information (Graham 1981, 171). Similar in spirit is a passage found in the fourth-century CE

Uncollected Records (*Shiyi ji* 拾遺記), which also features Suiren in this key role and also sees the use of fire as the beginnings of human descent into the balefulness of what passes for civilization (Campany 1996, 64–67). Such counter narratives agree with the above cited narratives that cooking and agriculture are key elements of the known social order and of ritual, and so they attack those points.

Not all sitiogonic passages are thus socio-mythic in character; a few are situated within five-phases, *qi*-based systematic cosmologies and cosmogonies, and here it is the exalted *qi* pedigree of grains, rather than their descent from the ministrations of an ancient culture hero, that is emphasized. Consider the opening passage of the “*Neiye*” 內業 (“Inner Training”) chapter of the *Guanzi* (assembled ca. 26 BCE from earlier materials; Rickett 1993, 244):

In all cases the essence (*jing* 精) of things is what gives them life.
 Below (or descending) it gives life to the five grains;
 Above (or ascending) it creates the arrayed stars.
 When it floats between the sky and earth, we call them ghosts or spirits;
 When it is stored in the breast, we call them sagely persons.⁹

Beginning with the first mentioned item, and then arranging the rest by degree of spatial elevation (with indentation marking the two subpairings, grains/stars and sages/spirits), we get the following hierarchical taxonomy:

<i>In This Station:</i>	<i>Essence Manifests as:</i>
Below (rooted in the earth)	Grains
In people's chests [stored state]	Sages
Between the sky and earth [flowing state]	Ghosts and spirits
Above (hung in the sky)	Stars

The text sets up analogies: grains are to the earth as the stars are to the heavens; grains are terrestrial stars, stars are celestial grains, each holding an analogous place in its own proper realm. Further, grains are to ordinary plants as sages are to ordinary people: just as sages have trained and cultivated themselves, carrying essence within their chests, so grains represent a form of plant life cultivated by human labor and thus harboring superior nourishment.

I know of no text that exalts grains more highly than the *Guanzi*. More than once we find it said that “The five grains and the eating of rice are the people's Director of Allotted Lifespans (*siming* 司命),”¹⁰ an extraordinary metaphor likening grains to the forbidding deity who already by the fourth and third centuries BCE was held to enforce predetermined limits on people's lifespans (Chard 1994; Campany 2005). Or again, in explaining why it is that “the altars to land and grain” (*sheji* 社稷) are “more to be valued than

parents”—a truly astounding statement—the text offers: “When city and suburban walls have been destroyed and the altars to Land and Grain no longer receive blood and food sacrifices, there will no longer be any live ministers. However, after the death of their parents, the children do not die. This is the reason the altars to Land and Grain are to be valued more than parents” (Rickett 1998, 438 [modified]).

Some of the human or quasi-divine progenitors of agriculture, cooking, and sacrifice were honored with sacrifices. The cursory *Liji* passage on the twelfth-month *zha* 蜡 festival suggests year-end harvest thank-offerings to the First Husbandman, the divine overseers of husbandry, and the hundred grains, as well as to the gods of the fields and apparently both domestic and wild animals; it was a calendrical moment in which due requital was paid—in sacrificial food—to the myriad things for their feeding and support of humanity.¹¹ Furthermore, from the Han onward the spring ceremony known simply as Plowing formed part of the imperial ritual system; it opened with an offering to Shennong, followed by the emperor and officials ritually breaking the ground in a sacred field used to grow the grains used in court sacrifices (*Hou Han shu*, 3106; Bodde 1975, 223–41). The founding Han emperor also instituted regular sacrifices to Hou Ji (*Shiji*, 28.1380; *Han shu*, 30.1211).

*The Centrality of Agricultural Control and of
Sacrifice to the State*

It is clear that, for many authors in the late Warring States, Qin, and Han, a primary function and prerogative of the state was to assure a good agricultural harvest and then to manage it carefully. Legal documents found at Shuihudi dating to 217 BCE reveal the care taken by the Qin state to manage grain stores, even down to the local level, and provide insight into the way in which foods of the sacrificial system—here, wine and meat—bound participants in rituals together. Wine and meat consumed before the gods sealed legal bonds between parties (Yates 1995, 352–57, 359–60, 361). The *Liji* portrays the careful notation of annual grain harvests and the management of seed for the coming year as key functions of the state (Legge 1885, pt. 3, 221, 293, 308). Conversely, throughout the “Monthly Ordinances” chapter of the same text, one frequently mentioned effect of the ruler’s acting out of season is that the five grains do not germinate or mature properly. “Minister of fields” was a key high office in the standard accounts of governmental structure of the era. Additionally, state sacrifices required the gods for timely rains and abundant harvests (Wilson 2002, 251). Political authority, agricultural production, and state-sponsored sacrifice were inextricably interwoven.

Indicative of the importance of grains in the mainstream cuisine and of the centrality of the control of agriculture to the symbolic as well as economic capital of the state were the meanings attached to the “altars to

[the gods of] soil and grain” (*sheji* 社稷)—altars to gods who were the recipients of sacrifices “to requite them for the merit of having given birth to grains and living things,” as Wang Chong put it in the first-century CE (*Lunheng*, 25.1049; Forke 1962, vol. 1, 510). Along with the temple to the royal or imperial ancestors (*zongmiao* 宗廟), with which they were paired, these altars were the ritual and symbolic center of the realm, their safety synonymous with the state’s. A healthy state was one in which the *sheji* “feed on blood” (*Shiji*, 34.1562, 86.2536); the inability of a state’s *sheji* to feed on blood sacrifice constituted a national disaster (*Shiji*, 87.2549; *Han shu*, 2.53). Setting up a new dynasty required eliminating the *sheji* of the preceding dynasty and erecting one’s own (*Shiji*, 8.370); inheriting the *sheji* or setting up new ones was tantamount to rulership (Graham 1981, 207; 1990, 170). The destruction of a dynasty’s or kingdom’s *sheji* was a disaster tantamount to the end of its political reign, the cutting off of its people’s descent lines, or the overwhelming of its population (*Shiji*, 6.278, 79.2403, 89.2573; *Han shu*, 50.2007). To embark on a policy that endangered the *sheji* was to endanger the realm, so much so that the expression “to imperil the *sheji*” became a synecdoche for any calamitous undertaking (e.g., *Han shu*, 46.1910). In the *Liji*, two passages claim that important events in the realm should be announced to the gods and spirits of the *sheji*, *zongmiao*, and mountains and rivers; military expeditions began only once offerings had been made at the *sheji* and *zongmiao* and the commander had received his charge there.

Not only were the spirits of heaven, earth, mountains, rivers, soil, and grain fed in sacrifices orchestrated by the state. The human dead were also fed by the living: the royal/imperial dead by the state, others by their living descendants. This obligation to feed the ancestral dead—notably in offerings of grains, liquors (grain products), and meat—was of course nothing short of foundational to Chinese society and is voluminously attested both in transmitted texts and in archeologically recovered documents and grave goods, the latter including cooked meals laid out as if for a banquet and supplies of food and utensils for use by the dead in the tomb. The proper extent of this ritualized culinary service was perennially debated, with authors of various persuasions trying to curb excess—lavish offerings having become, among other things, a mode of conspicuous consumption and a status marker among the living¹²—but that the living were obliged to feed the dead was assumed by all parties, even those (such as the first-century CE Wang Chong) who argued that the dead lacked consciousness and could not therefore receive or be grateful for food offerings. In numerous stories preserved in late Warring States, Han, and early medieval texts, unfed ghosts complain about their lot or thank those non-kin who, out of compassion, offer to feed or rebury them (Campany 1991; 1996, 377–84). Sometimes the dead are represented as making specific requests and having particular preferences regarding their food and clothing (Forke 1962, vol. 1, 512; Harper 1994). The unquiet dead who went without normal food offerings were a special object of anxiety and received special ritual attentions and feedings (Kleeman 1994a, 195; Chard 1999, 241–42).

Feeding the ancestral dead was an emotionally charged event in which sensory and verbal as well as commensal contact between the living and the dead was briefly but powerfully reopened. At the banquet table, a living descendant acted as ritual impersonator (*shi* 尸) of the honored ancestor. Offerings were preceded by a period of seclusion, purification, and fasting. The *Liji* insists that only after completing this fasting for the full period of three days will the sacrificer be able to *see and hear* the beings he is feeding, a passage undoubtedly reflective of the often repeated yet misconstrued Confucian remark that one is to “sacrifice to the spirits as if the spirits are present.”¹³ Note that here one temporarily abstained from food in order to purify oneself to see the spirits of the dead when presenting food to them and eating with them.

The chronological, ideological, and generic variety of the texts I have juxtaposed—while it would be a liability in an attempt to do justice to any one of those texts taken separately—at least has one advantage for my purposes. It indicates the depth and breadth of cultural assumptions about the priority of grains, cooking, sacrifice (of meats and grains), agriculture and its products, and the extent to which these were central to political authority, social function, and cultural identity. With rare exceptions, the spirits of nature as well as the human dead were thought of as needing to eat, and it was the job of the living human community to feed them. What they were fed was “grains”—synecdochic for the products of agriculture—and meats. Grain was, in short, a symbol and summation of culture itself, or rather of nature acculturated, as well as of the fully human community. A natural locus of nutritive essence, grain nevertheless required cooperative, communal, differentiated stages of production to be transformed into food. Thus transformed, it was the most culturally celebrated food of humans (both living and dead) and of gods.

Alternate Cuisines for Superior Eaters

Many late Warring States, Qin, Han, and early medieval textual and visual representations depict or prescribe an array of culinary possibilities other than the mainstream (elite) diet. They do not offer these possibilities neutrally, as a simple expansion of the choices available to consumers of food and of texts, but rather they recommend them as superior and imply or state that those who practice them are superior.

Eating qi is Better than Eating Grains

I begin with the following well-known passage from the oldest portion of the *Zhuangzi*, written ca. 320 BCE:

Jian Wu put a question to Lian Shu: “I heard Jie Yu say something. . . . I was amazed and frightened by his words. . . .” “What did he say?”

“He said that on the distant mountain of Guyi a divine man dwells. His skin and flesh are like ice and snow. He is gentle as a virgin. He does not eat the five grains, but rather sucks wind and drinks dew. He rides the *qi* of clouds and mounts dragons, roaming beyond the four seas. When the spirits in him congeal, this causes creatures to be free from plagues and the year’s grain crops to ripen—I thought him crazy and did not believe him.”¹⁴

Now it would be a mistake to lump this strange figure into the ranks of those who would soon become known as transcendents. For one thing, his rhetorical function is to serve as one of a series of things beyond the ken of ordinary folk, and not as representative of a class of deathless beings. The passage does not suggest that readers should or can emulate the divine man (although he is clearly presented as admirable). And for all his remarkable properties there is no mention of long life or immortality. On the other hand, each of the properties that do mark him as different from ordinary humans will have become part of the repertoire of transcendents within the next two centuries: (1) Taxonomically he is neither a spirit nor a man, but something in between, a “divine man,” perhaps a hybrid or else one of a distinct class of beings. (2) As to his diet, he does not eat the five grains but subsists on wind and dew. We might infer that it is this diet that accounts for his wondrously refined body and also, since he is a “divine man,” that this diet is being claimed superior to one based on grains. (3) He dwells at a distant place, not in the central kingdom, and on a mountain, not on agricultural plains; he also roams beyond the known limits of the settled world. (4) He travels by riding *qi* and dragons, implying flight and ascension into the heavens. (5) Despite his extreme distance, by some unexplained mechanism his “spirit-congealing” activities benefit the people of the central kingdom, warding off illnesses and aiding their agricultural labors. This being who does not cultivate or consume grains somehow helps them grow by his self-cultivational disciplines.

The song “Far Roaming” in the *Chuci* maps out a cosmic journey and a path of self-cultivation toward a specific sort of transcendence. For our purposes it suffices to focus on two clusters of lines. The first reads:

I shall follow, then, Wang Qiao 王喬 for my pleasure and amusement
 Sup on the six *qi* and drink Drifting Flow ?
 Rinse my mouth with True Yang and swallow Dawn Aurora
 Conserve the limpid clarity of spirit illumination ?
 As essence and *qi* enter in, pollution and filth are expelled.¹⁵

Here, the poet, following the example of the noted transcendent Wang Qiao, begins a culinary regime based on *qi* and, by implication, no longer on grain food. By the final verse, the purifying effects of this regime begin to be noted. As Harper explains, the three types of *qi* named in the second and third lines are the beneficial *qi* of midnight, midday, and dawn respectively.

The beneficial six types of *qi*, mentioned here as a class, correspond spatially to the four quarters, heaven above, and earth below, and temporally to the seasons, and later texts specify seasonal schedules by which to ingest them; there are also five types of *qi* to be avoided, already mentioned in some Mawangdui manuscripts (see below).

After receiving instruction from Wang Qiao, the poet flies on “to the Feathered Persons [transcendents] at the Cinnabar Mound, loitering in the long-standing land where death is not,” and proceeds to bathe at other mythic destinations in the cardinal directions till he “sucks in the dark liquor of the Flying Springs” (a site located at the western Mt. Kunlun). He then declares:

My essence, becoming whole and unmixed, now took on strength.
As my body, weakening and wasting, turned tender and listless;
And my spirit, growing fine and subtle, was released, unrestrained.

The transformation of *qi* into sustenance sufficient to support life, rendering ordinary foods obsolete, is described with metaphors grounded in the processing of agricultural products and the smelting of metallic ores. The poet’s body is denominated as if it were the raw material of a smelting process in which the essence is purified and strengthened, the bodily form is melted away, and the spirit is released. This conception of what it means to transcend—that one’s “essence” and “spirit” are released from the dross of the “bodily form”—is merely one conception, by no means the only or even the predominant one, and is sharply at odds, as noted below, with others that prioritize the preservation and strengthening of the body. Yet it is congruent with passages elsewhere that hierarchize the pair “spirit”/body.

A silk manuscript found at Mawangdui titled “Eliminating Grain and Eating Qi” (*Quegu shiqi* 却穀食氣; Harper 1998, 305–09) outlines a method for avoiding “grains” by ingesting *qi* according to scheduled procedures and by consuming the herb pyrrosia, used here as a drug to treat urine retention when not eating. Modes of exhalation are prescribed, and seasonal and age-based guidelines for the practitioner’s ingestion of the various types of beneficial *qi* are laid out along with the five types of harmful *qi* to be avoided. The brief text twice posits a hierarchy of eaters, those who eat grain versus those who eat *qi*; in the first passage the basis for this hierarchy is not made clear, but in the second we read: “Those who eat grain eat what is square; those who eat *qi* eat what is round. Round is heaven; square is earth.” No specific benefits of this regimen are promised—perhaps details on them are lost in the several lacunae—but the hierarchy is clear: eating grain is to eating *qi* as earth is to heaven.

Similarly, the Heshanggong 河上公 commentary to the second line of chapter six (in the received ordering of chapters) of the *Daodejing*, which reads “This is called the mysterious female,” informs us:

“Mysterious” refers to heaven; in people it is the nose. “Female” refers to earth; in people it is the mouth. Heaven feeds people with the

five types of *qi*, which enter through the nose and are deposited in the heart. The five *qi* are pure and subtle and they constitute [in people] the essence, spirit, intelligence, voice, hearing, and the five natures. Their ghosts are termed cloudsouls. The cloudsouls are male and come and go through the nose; they course through the way of heaven; this is why the nose is the Mysterious. Earth feeds people with the five saps, which enter through the mouth and are deposited in the stomach. The five saps are impure and turbid and they constitute the form, skeleton, bones, blood, vessels, and the six emotions. Their ghosts are termed whitesouls. The whitesouls are female and come and go through the mouth; they course through earth; this is why the mouth is the Female.¹⁶

Here a hierarchy of foods is correlated with other hierarchies:

<i>In this Domain</i>	<i>The Higher Position Is</i>	<i>The Lower Position Is</i>
Cosmos	Heaven	Earth
Human facial apertures	Nose	Mouth
Foods	The five types of <i>qi</i>	The five saps
Components of the self	Spirit, essence, etc.	Body, bones, etc.
"Ghosts"	Cloudsouls	Whitesouls
Gender	Male	Female

The Mawangdui bamboo strip manuscript known as "Ten Questions" (*Shi wen* 十問), copied between 180 and 168 BCE (Harper 1998, 28–29), reveals diverse techniques for the intake, circulation, and cultivation of *qi* utilizing breathing, stretching, and sexual intercourse. Here there is no mention of a need to avoid grains, and one passage implies that the method outlined for "eating Yin" prepares the body for the maximally advantageous intake of "drink and food"—although that food may be the otherwise unspecified "diet of elemental stuff" mentioned earlier in the text and perhaps synonymous with the expression *su shi* 素食, used in the *Mozi* to indicate a diet of uncultivated plants gathered from the wild.¹⁷ But a dialogue in this text sets up a hierarchy in which being "signless," "formless," and "bodiless" are pronounced superior to their alternatives; it is in these states that the "culminant essence of heaven and earth" is said to be born and it is "signlessness" that the practitioner is said to accumulate when he "cultivates *qi* and concentrates essence." As Harper points out, the *Huainanzi* uses "formless" as an epithet for Dao or One and terms the person who cultivates the Dao "bodiless" as well as formless; the *Guanzi* attests to the notion that the Dao is "signless" and gives the oldest statement that obtaining the Dao is the key to life and losing it means death (Harper 1998, 394 n.1). We see these tropes again below. Methods for eating *qi* and sucking "sweet dew" are then outlined, and the text closes by explicitly promising deathlessness to those who practice its methods. Successful practitioners will

become a spirit, achieve “release of the form” (*xingjie* 形解), ascend on high, and become as constant as heaven and earth, not dying (Harper 1998, 392–99).¹⁸

In the *Huainanzi* treatise on topography (second-century BCE) we find a series of correlations between the types of soils prevalent in people’s habitats and their dispositions, followed by a list of correlations between diets and dispositions. The last four items read as follows: “Those who eat flesh are brave and daring but fierce. Those who eat *qi* are spirit-illuminated and live long. Those who eat grains are knowledgeable and clever but short-lived. Those who do not eat do not die; they are (or become) spirits.”¹⁹ Rearranging the order of the passage to reflect the ascending hierarchy it entails, we see that:

Those Who Eat	Have the Following Properties	
	Positive +	Negative –
Flesh	Brave, daring	Fierce
Grains	Knowledgeable, clever	Short-lived
<i>qi</i>	Spirit-illuminated, long-lived	[None]
Nothing	Deathless; are spirits	[None]

Feeding on *qi*, then, is clearly superior to eating flesh and grains and confers longevity. Even better is to eat nothing at all, which confers deathlessness and is a property of spirits. This claim that spirits need not eat seems novel for its time and implies a new class of beings who would, it is implied, require no sacrificial ministrations from the human community.

At one point in the massive *Scripture of Great Peace* (*Taiping jing*), assembled in the second century CE but incorporating older material,²⁰ we find an interlocutor posing the question: “What are the functions or offices of the nine grades of persons?” The Celestial Tutor gives an answer summarizable in the following table, where left-hand entries are the types of persons mentioned and right-hand entries are what they are assigned to manage (*Taiping jing*, 88–91):

Formless Divine Persons of Fine <i>qi</i>	Primordial <i>qi</i>
Greater divine persons	Heaven
Perfected persons	Earth
Transcendent persons	The four seasons
Persons of the great Dao	The five phases
Sages	Yin and Yang
Worthies	Writings, books, and transmitted speech
Ordinary people	Plants, trees, and the five grains
Servants and slaves	Material goods

Key for our purposes is the hierarchical opposition between two bundles of things: at the top, divinity, formlessness, and “primordial *qi*” (with other

modes of divinity, perfected ones, transcendents, and “persons of the Dao” also in high echelons); second from the bottom, ordinary humanity, vegetation, and the five grains. Next we are told that when each of the nine types of people controls (or harmonizes) the corresponding type of *qi*, then the nine types of *qi* and yin and yang will be harmonized and the “inherited burden” from previous generations will be eliminated, and this brings about the coming of the eponymous Great Peace. Linked to this hierarchy is the directive that superior practitioners “must begin by not eating what has form but rather eating *qi* so as to unite with the primordial *qi*.” To do this they shut themselves inside a thatch hut, fasting, not looking upon anything evil or defiled—language clearly echoing the *Liji*’s accounts of fasting before ancestral sacrifices—daily refining their forms and not grasping after what they desire, until they ascend to assist the transcendents and perfected ones in celestial rule based on primordial *qi*.

Elsewhere in this text one is enjoined to eat moderately, gradually replacing foods with *qi* and medicinals until one consumes only things without bodily form (*Taiping jing*, 684, 466). Or again:

The question was asked: “What do the higher, middle, and lower beings who have obtained the way and surpassed the world (or crossed the ages) eat?” The reply: “The uppermost rank eat wind and *qi*, the second rank eat medicinal saps, and the third rank eat little [food], reducing what passes through their stomach and intestines.” It was said further: “Heaven is extremely distant and knows no bounds. If one does not eat wind and *qi*, how can one travel quickly enough to circuit completely through the courses of heaven? Further, if one is to work alongside the spirit-envoys and be associated with them, one must eat wind and *qi*. At the next [lower] level, if one is to match the essences of earth in one’s powers, harmonize the five types of soil, look down from above on mountains and rivers, follow mountain chains and enter waterways, so as to have commerce with the changings of earth and eat and work together with [others of this level], then one cannot eat grains; one drinks water and practices [medicinal formulas]. At the next [and lowest] level, eating in moderation is the way. Although one does not thus firmly establish one’s form, one [eats] less than ordinary people and is thus slightly different from them. Therefore even those who [merely] eat little so as to pass little through their intestines, are people who are in the process of achieving the way.” (*Taiping jing*, 716–17)

In other passages the *Scripture* provides instructions for specific methods of “eating wind and *qi*” to maximum advantage (*Taiping jing*, 259, 699–700).

By the first-century BCE, the idea that some practitioners were abstaining from grains while practicing methods for consuming, directing, and cultivating *qi* as alternate nourishment was ubiquitous, whether we find authors advocating or criticizing it. In the *Shiji* biography of Zhang Liang 張良, for

example, we read that late in his life, having reached remarkable social heights, he declared himself ready to abandon the affairs of the human world and “simply follow Master Redpine [like Wang Qiao, an exemplary ancient transcendent] and go roaming,” whereupon “he practiced grain avoidance, guiding and pulling, and lightening the body.” But later the Han empress pressured him to eat (or force-fed him?), leaving Zhang “no recourse but to submit to compulsion and eat”—and the next thing we learn is that he died eight years later (*Shiji*, 55.2048). Around 70–80 CE, Wang Chong also documented that grain avoidance was widely claimed to be a route to transcendence, a claim he disputed:

There are many who take people who avoid grains and do not eat to be persons with *dao* arts. They speak of Wangzi Qiao and the like, who, in not eating grains and in eating differently than ordinary people, therefore also achieved a different longevity than that of ordinary people, exceeding a hundred [years of age], surpassing the world, and thus becoming transcendent persons. This too is false.

Wang proceeds to argue that it is natural for people to eat since they were given mouths and teeth for the intake of food and alimentary canals for its digestion and the elimination of waste. He then continues:

People, when alive, use food as [the source of] their *qi*, just as plants and trees when alive draw *qi* from the soil. Pull up the roots of a plant or tree, separate them from the soil, and they will wither and soon die. Shut up a person’s mouth so that he cannot eat and he will starve and not live long. Masters of *dao* boast to others, saying, “The perfected man consumes *qi*” and making *qi* their food. Thus it is handed down that “those who eat *qi* live long and do not die”²¹ [and that] although it is not on grains that they become full, they nevertheless fill themselves by means of *qi*. This too is false. (*Lunheng*, 7.335–36; cf. Forke 1962, vol. 1, 347–49)

The somber conclusion of Zhang Liang’s story is reminiscent of the following poignant tale found in the Han work *Arrayed Traditions of Transcendents* (*Liexian zhuan* 列仙傳) but reworked by Ge Hong 葛洪 (282–343 CE) or some intermediate redactor:

During the reign of Emperor Cheng of the Han, hunters in the Zhongnan Mountains saw a person who wore no clothes, his body covered with black hair. Upon seeing this person, the hunters wanted to pursue and capture him, but the person leapt over gullies and valleys as if in flight, and so could not be overtaken. The hunters then stealthily observed where the person dwelled, surrounded and captured him, whereupon they determined that the person was a woman.

Upon questioning, she said, “I was originally a woman of the Qin palace. When I heard that invaders from the east had arrived, that the King of Qin would go out and surrender, and that the palace buildings would be burned, I fled in fright into the mountains. Famished, I was on the verge of dying by starvation when an old man taught me to eat the resin and nuts of pines. At first they were bitter, but gradually I grew accustomed to them. They enabled me to feel neither hunger nor thirst; in winter I was not cold, in summer I was not hot.” Calculation showed that the woman . . . must be more than two hundred years old. . . .

The hunters took the woman back in. They offered her grain to eat. When she first smelled the stink of the grain, she vomited, and only after several days could she tolerate it. After little more than two years of this [diet], her body hair fell out; she turned old and died. Had she not been caught by men, she would have become a transcendent. (*Baopuzi neipian*, 207)

Few narratives more succinctly summarize the argument that ordinary foods or “grains” prevent transcendence. Often avoidance of grains, is assisted by ingesting a simple plant product gathered in the wilds; whether this regimen helps by virtue of its appetite-suppressing properties or its provision of superior nourishment is here unclear. Elsewhere pine resin is said to transform in the ground into a marvelous, longevity-conferring herb (Campany 2002, 25).

In *Arrayed Traditions of Transcendents*, one adept is said to have avoided the five grains and fed on the flowers of various herbs instead; another, to have avoided grains, absorbed dew, and fed on pine nuts, asparagus root (on which more later), and “stony fat”; and still another to have subsisted on sesame, which was still an exotic import (Kaltenmark 1953, 48–50, 65–67, 135–37). “Grain avoidance,” the shunning of ordinary agriculture-based foods, continued to be a key marker of a person engaged in the pursuit of transcendence in Ge Hong’s time and beyond, for he writes of contemporary practitioners he regards as charlatans who announce that they have “cut off [the ingestion of] grains” so as to attract followers (*Baopuzi neipian*, 346). Many of the adepts he regards as successful transcendents included grain avoidance and *qi* ingestion among their methods, though none of them gain transcendence by these means alone (for the reason that Ge Hong polemically favored alchemy above other methods). In some contexts—such as in the opening pages of the fifteenth of Ge Hong’s *Baopuzi neipian*—it becomes clear that “avoiding grains” is tantamount to not eating food at all, merely swallowing saliva and *qi* and ingesting medicinal preparations to suppress appetite and strengthen the body. A number of adepts, including Dong Jing 董京, are said to have accomplished this (Campany 2002, 24, 300). As a test of his arts, Zuo Ci 左慈 was reportedly enclosed in a room by Cao Cao 曹操, denied food, and permitted only water for one whole year; he emerged looking just as he had when he went in. Elsewhere a method for

surviving famine years by not eating is attributed to this same master, and other methods for not eating are attributed to other transcendents-in-the-making, such as Gan Shi 甘始, who also was reported to have gone a whole year without eating food (Campany 2002, 150, 279–80, 284, 151–52).

The extant *Scripture of the Five Numinous Treasure Talismans* (*Lingbao wufu jing* 靈寶五符經), a text assembled ca. 280 CE, features an exercise in which the cosmic “sprouts” of the pentacolored *qi* of the five directions are systematically ingested, leading to transcendence (HY 388, 3.12a–b). Following an outline of this method, which is embedded within a narrative of its own initial revelation, the scripture continues with the following lines:

The three transcendent kings further declared to the Thearch:
 “We formerly fed according to this method and thereby attained transcendence. Our former teacher had us increase the sweet spring within our mouths and then swallow to the following twenty-two word incantation: ‘The white stones, craggy, proceed in order;²² the spring, bubbling and pervading, becomes a perfected juice; drinking it, I obtain long life, my long life span becoming even longer!’ You, too, can practice this. If you are able to continuously ingest the perfected One without ceasing, swallow the floriate pond without resting, and keep your *qi* shut within you without flagging, then you will forthwith attain the Dao and you will have cut off grains; you need no longer follow the changes of the moon for completion.²³ The people of primordial antiquity lived long because they remained in leisure and did not eat grains. The Verse of Great Existence says: ‘The five grains are bores that gouge out life span; they rot and befoul the five viscera [lit. the five storehouses] and shorten the allotted life span. Once this food enters the mouth there is no further hope of great longevity. If you wish not to die, you must keep your intestines free of sediment. If you wish to live long, you must make the *qi* of your viscera/storehouses clean and pure²⁴ [by] decanting the floriate juice into the body. You will then meet heaven with the jade liquid in your mouth, and you and heaven will reach the same longevity.’ ”²⁵

We note once again how metaphors drawn from mainstream cuisine are wielded to describe a discipline which overturns that cuisine. To my knowledge, this is one of the earliest passages in which grains are attacked based on what we might call negative internalist reasons—that is, on the grounds that they harm the body in specific, theorized ways. Again we should beware of the sort of lumping that would read this passage as the implicit rationale underlying all of the passages on grain avoidance adduced above. In those earlier passages, there is no hint of the notion that grains (i.e., mainstream foods) actually harm the body;²⁶ the argument is rather that *qi* and other more refined substances, when ingested and circulated in esoterically prescribed ways, give superior, longevity-inducing nourishment. This argument in turn rested on a view of the body as a self-sufficient microcosm that

could imbibe beneficial essences from the cosmos and then close itself off like a sealed reaction-vessel to further refine and recycle them, periodically “exhaling the old and inhaling the new” but otherwise drastically minimizing contact with the surrounding sensory, cultural, and social world. From the same view of the body came ideas and practices of “embryonic breathing” or “breathing like a fetus” (*taixi* 胎息) found in many early texts (Campany 2002, 365, n. 23).

Another theory of the body might be related to early internalist rationales for the avoidance of grain. I refer to the theory that the body from its conception harbors biospiritual parasites known alternately as the “three worms” (*san chong* 三蟲) or “three corpses” (*san shi* 三尸; Campany 2002, 49–52). Various early weft texts and scriptures portray these beings in both zoomorphic and bureaucratic terms. They were said to appear as maggots in excrement and lack organs of sight and hearing, suggestive of tapeworms, but also to ascend monthly to report to register-keeping officials of their human hosts’ misdeeds so as to hasten their hosts’ deaths, leaving the corpses/worms free to roam about stealing offering foods. In fourth century CE and earlier texts are preserved dozens of methods for expelling these baleful parasites (Lévi 1983, 1989). An as yet unanswered question, however, is whether, in early texts, it is claimed that these beings feed on grains or are a byproduct of their digestion. One finds this notion in certain texts anthologized in the compendium *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤, compiled ca. 1028 CE,²⁷ but these texts, of uncertain provenance, seem by their content and wording to postdate the fourth century. At the time of writing I am unaware of any clear linkage between the three worms or corpses and the five grains in texts datable to ca. 320 CE or earlier.

Feeding on Exotic Delicacies of the Cosmos

The idea that strange locales on the distant horizons of the known world harbor longevity- or transcendence-inducing substances is as old in China as the goal of transcendence itself. We find numerous references to the hope of finding these mysterious realms, penetrating their veil of mystery and ingesting their marvelous, potent products. In general, these products seem to fall into three sometimes fuzzy categories: (1) naturally occurring trees, herbs, or fungi, ready for gathering and consumption; (2) naturally found minerals; and (3) “elixirs” of one or another sort, implying some degree of prior human or divine processing of natural ingredients.

To the east, there were Penglai 蓬萊, Yingzhou 瀛洲, and other ocean isles, where transcendents and their herbs or elixirs of deathlessness were thought to lurk; Qin and Han rulers famously sent expeditions to search for them, and there were reports of sightings—but no successful imperially sponsored retrievals—of these island paradises’ herbs and drugs. To the west, there were Mount Kunlun 崑崙 and the divine Queen Mother of the West, each of them associated with immortality-inducing products (and other paradisaic delights) before becoming associated with each other.

The lore concerning these exotic locales and their products is well known (Loewe 1979). For our purposes, three features are significant. One is that these strange realms, distant from the agricultural heartland, are imagined as the sources of ingestible substances that are longevity-producing alternatives to ordinary food. A second feature is that both Kunlun and the eastern isles are uniformly described in texts—and pictured in visual iconography and in functional objects such as censers—as mountains. This facet again emphasizes their difference from the topography of the agrarian plains and river valleys of the Chinese heartland: mountains were places where grains and other mainstream crops could not be grown, but where other life-prolonging products grew naturally without need of cultivation. The third feature that these locations all share is difficulty of access. Their spatial distance is a code for other sorts of barriers. To obtain the wondrous ingestible products they harbor requires initiation and training in esoteric arts, a fact which itself announces these products' superiority to domestic foods.

Closer to home—removed from the agrarian lowlands not horizontally but vertically—were the mountains of China, seen as dangerous zones where wild animals, semi-barbaric ethnic groups, and aggressive spirits lurked and where humans from the plains fled to escape centralized bureaucratic control (Kleeman 1994b). These nearer (though hardly domesticated) mountains, too, were portrayed as sources of exotic edibles with longevity-inducing, healing powers, capable of replacing grains, and also as restricted, perilous areas requiring mantic protection for safe entry. Both of these aspects of mountains are the sole subject of an entire essay by Ge Hong, and the second fascicle of the *Scripture of the Five Numinous Treasure Talismans* is devoted to scores of transcendence-arts recipes employing mountain herbs.²⁸ In this scripture and elsewhere, some of these herbs are explicitly recommended, among their other benefits, as replacements for grain food (e.g., HY 388, 2.15a–b).

Transcendents, then, were said to feed on exotic, longevity-enhancing substitutes for what in China was ordinary food, substances located only in zones removed (horizontally or vertically) by geographic distance and by barriers to access from the heartland of Chinese civilization. It is no wonder that transcendents were often represented in verbal description and iconic depiction as winged beings able to fly, and that the ability to travel long distances rapidly was one mantic art often mentioned as having been practiced by adepts (Campany 2002, 125–46; 2004). One of the marvelous arts often attributed to adepts in hagiographies and prescribed in scriptures is the ability to summon the “traveling kitchen” to deliver exotic, longevity-inducing foodstuffs to the adept rather than the adept's needing to travel outward to the limits of the world to secure them. Such banquets near home displayed the exotic cuisine of the cosmic periphery and of the heavens, and hagiographies record audiences' amazement at them (e.g., Campany 2002, 327).

Conclusion

Why did those in quest of transcendence, from the very earliest mention of any transcendent-like figures in texts, reject grains and other everyday foods? Why did they shun the totality of agricultural products in favor of *qi* or exotic flora and minerals, things not normally considered food at all? Why do we see such insistence on this point, across texts spanning six centuries and several ideologies and teaching widely variant methods and conceptions of transcendence?

The texts we have reviewed offer very little by way of an internalist critique of grains or other everyday foods. They all recommend avoiding grains and offer what they tout as superior alternatives, but on the question of precisely *why* grains are such inferior nourishment they have little or nothing to say. What little internalist critique we do find comes quite late—Eastern Han at the earliest—and does not seem well developed: ordinary foods, described as rotten and smelly, impurify a body that ought to be brought into *qi*-based resonance with heaven. We find an echo of this notion in Ge Hong's writings, but elsewhere we also find Ge Hong averring that "even the five grains can sustain people; when people get them they live, if cut off from them they die. How much the more, then, in the case of divine medicines of superior grade: how could their benefits to humans not be a myriad times that of the five grains?" (*Baopuzi neipian*, 71). In most discussions, then, it is not that prescribers and practitioners of transcendence arts portrayed ordinary food as harmful; it is rather that they had what they considered superior alternatives.

On the positive side, we do find some internalist justifications for ingesting *qi*: notions concerning the benefits of its circulation and cultivation in the body, grounded in wider views of the microcosmic self and in cosmogonies and cosmologies. And we find many promises of the spectacular benefits of ingesting one or another herb. Usually, however, *why* diets of *qi* or rare herbs and minerals should be regarded as better than ordinary food is a question that remains unanswered; we are merely told, but told repeatedly, *that* they are superior.

Take, for instance, the Heshanggong commentary passage and the Mawangdui text on avoiding grains adduced above, or the assertion, seen in several texts, that it is better to eat what has no form than to eat "formed" food. For these texts, eating *qi* surpasses eating food because the binary pair *qi*/food correlates with a series of other pairs in which one member outranks or bests the other. Eating *qi* is better than eating food in the same way that heaven outranks earth or the formless outranks form; the superiority of eating *qi*, once placed among these other asymmetrical pairs, is self-evident. Without a grain-based cuisine, the proposed *qi*-based cuisine would have no rhetorical or ideological traction; the prestige of eating *qi* is a function of the contrast with its culinary other. Similarly, a major reason for the claim (and belief) that certain wild herbs from distant lands had such longevity-bestowing power may have been simply that they were exotic.

Why did the gaze of these writers and practitioners stay so powerfully fixed on the cuisine to which they were constructing alternatives? I want to suggest that “grains” were, to echo a passage from Lévi-Strauss, “good to oppose” rather than being seen as intrinsically “bad to eat” (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 89) and that they were good to oppose because of all that they expressed, symbolized, and implied, all of the other cultural values and institutions to which they were attached. Providing an alternative to eating grains meant providing an alternative to all that eating grains entailed, invoked, and had been linked to.

If cultivating and eating grains, cooking, and dwelling in settled agricultural communities were seen by some as quintessential marks of human civilization, then it is perhaps no coincidence that cuisines of transcendence exhibit precisely the antitheses of these three traits: they are (1) based on something other than grains (whether inhaled *qi* or *qi* as found in exotic foodstuffs gathered from the periphery); (2) ingested raw (already “cooked” by the action of heaven and earth) or else prepared according to secret methods different from the standard cooking techniques; and (3) consumed as part of a disciplined life partially lived in the mountains and roaming through the barrens of the cosmos, resulting in a feathered, flying, deathless being that was no longer human. If the advent of agriculture was a necessary condition for the flourishing of key cultural values and arts, the rejection of agriculture’s products entailed a rejection of those values often couched in terms of a return to natural simplicity. That grain cultivation was often featured (by its proponents) more than the cooking of meat as a marker of proper civilization perhaps explains why grains were singled out for replacement by the creators of transcendence paths; later, the Celestial Master movements would focus on meat and blood as the key avoidances and would develop different contrastive ideologies based in part on the valuation of life.

If the divine progenitors and overseers of the annual agricultural cycle were thanked with elaborate, society-wide, imperially sponsored sacrifices, then adepts able to thrive without consuming the products of this cycle were, in effect, absenting themselves from this entire sacrificial system. Even more momentously, to the extent that these sacrifices implied that these gods needed or wanted to eat the products of the agricultural system they created and sponsored, transcendence-quest adepts were implicitly but unmistakably portrayed as superior to them in their ability to eschew agricultural products. If adepts required no ordinary foods, all the more did successful transcendents require no sacrificial food offerings, unlike the gods and spirits against whom they were constructed as a distinct category of suprahuman beings.²⁹ To no great surprise adepts are repeatedly portrayed as uniquely having the prerogative to command spirits and gods and to ignore their demands for sacrifice—demands that pressed ominously upon farmers and merchants but that the adept could afford to dismiss as overweening impudence.

To the extent that political authority was inextricably associated with the management of agriculture, and to the extent that the altars and sacrifices to

the gods of grain and soil were the symbolic and ritual center of the state, abstainers from agricultural products and from sacrificial foods transcended these structures of authority as well. No wonder, then, that they are repeatedly depicted, in texts both sympathetic and hostile to their claims, as refusing the importunities of rulers and officials, occasionally making a theatrically elaborate mockery of their attempts at coercion. Adepts repeatedly claimed exemption from rulers' sphere of command and asserted their right to deference from officials who wished to learn their secret arts, just as they claimed a higher place in the cosmic hierarchy than the gods to whom rulers and their administrations were obliged to perform sacrifice.

What, then, of the ancestor cult, that bedrock of civilization perhaps even older and certainly more ideologically freighted than agriculture? Ancestors needed to eat, unlike transcendents; more urgently, departed transcendents were no longer available to continue ancestral offerings. The patrilineal family and the core rites that sustained it depended for their continued existence not only on the uninterrupted generation of male descendants and their sacrifices but also on the continued death of ancestors. Large numbers of successful transcendents would undermine society in all three of these ways, removing people from the lineage system and disrupting its transgenerational continuity in pursuit of what others deemed a purely selfish goal. Opponents of the quest for transcendence were quick to attack it on these grounds. Lu Jia 陸賈 (fl. 200–180 BCE) criticized those who, hoping to achieve divine transcendence, abstained from the five grains, strained their bodies, cast aside the *Odes* and *Documents*, and exhausted their physiques while abandoning their parents and families (*Xinyu*, 6.10–11). Even the *Huainanzi* weighed in (HY 1176, 27.10a). In his *Master Who Embraces Simplicity: Inner Chapters*, Ge Hong has an interlocutor pose the problem sharply: "If upon examination it turned out that divine transcendence could be achieved by study, that people could thus fly upwards into the empyrean, would they not turn their backs on ordinary life and quit this world, so that no one any longer perform the rites of offering food? And then would not the ghosts of the ancestors, who possess consciousness, go hungry?"

This was a most serious charge. Ge Hong's response, anticipating what would soon become a standard Buddhist reply to the same challenge, was to argue that the adept's religious goal constituted not a lack of filiality but a higher form of it. And, characteristically, this higher filial path included the extension of the opportunity to eat superior foods to the adept's entire family:

I have heard that preserving one's body free of injury is the ultimate in filiality. Does not the attainment of the way of transcendence, long life and everlasting vision, coming to an end only when Heaven and Earth do, surpass by far the returning intact to one's ancestral lineage that which one had received whole? For one could thereby ascend into the void, tread amidst phosphors, ride in a cloud-chariot with a rainbow canopy, *sup on mist from the aurora of dawn, inhale the purified essence of "mystic yellow."* What one drinks there is liquor of jade and juice of gold; what

*one eats is excrescences of blue and efflorescence of vermilion; one dwells in halls of agate and chambers of jasper; for travel, one roams aimlessly in Grand Purity. If the ghosts of the ancestors have consciousness, then they would share in one's glory, perhaps serving as advisers to the Five Thearchs, perhaps overseeing the hundred numina. They would receive such stations without requesting them. For food, they would dine on floriate rarities; for position, they would oversee [the dead in] Luofeng. . . . None among them would go hungry.*³⁰

Underlying this passage is the ancient view that merit, guilt, and fortune were not only matters for individuals but were also collectively shared by the family, both its living and its dead members. Hence, although in the short run from the family's point of view there might appear to be grave costs in one of its members' neglecting filial duty by cultivating himself in the hills, the benefits of his attaining transcendence would spread to all members of the patriline, even the dead, whose afterlife lot in both of the major categories of concern—food and otherworld office—would thus markedly improve. The claim is striking. We are not accustomed to linking the search for transcendence with a concern for aiding the familial dead, but Ge Hong is clearly claiming a sort of transfer of merit from the transcendent to his ancestors. No special mechanism or explanation is required, unlike the Buddhist system for transfer of merit; the distribution of benefits in the other world works just as it would in this one: all relatives share in the honor of a court appointment, whether the court be celestial or terrestrial, and in both cases the benefits are in part, quite characteristically, culinary.

I believe we do not understand cuisines of transcendence if we consider only their internalist meanings and functions. Those cuisines were at least as profoundly shaped by everything they appear to have been exquisitely crafted not to be. What they were not, and how they were not what they were not, figures importantly in assessing what they were and what they meant. Zhuangzi's aphorism—"Without an other, there is no self"—applies as much to the collective creation of traditions of discourse and practice as to individual epistemology and metaphysics.³¹

Notes

1. This essay is a shortened version of the paper presented at the Trinity College conference; an expanded version will be published elsewhere. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated; when quoting Western-language texts, I have converted all romanizations of Chinese into Pinyin. Dynastic histories are cited by fascicle and page number in the modern Zhonghua shuju editions. I am grateful to Roel Sterckx for inviting me to the conference, and to the participants, especially Robert Chard (respondent to my paper), for stimulating discussion; I also thank Julianna Lipschutz and Victor Mair for their comments on a draft. This essay was initially stimulated by a reading of Lévi (1983), from which I have learned much.
2. *Liji* ("Wang zhi"), 246–47, consulting Legge (1885), pt. 3, 228–30.
3. For evidence that "abstention from grains" meant the avoidance of normal food in general, and not simply of the five specific grains normally listed as comprised in the group (i.e., two kinds of millet, hemp, rice, and beans, or, in a common alternate list, two kinds of millet, rice, wheat, and pulse), see Campany (2002), 23–24, 190.

4. Consulting Waley (1960), 241–43, in rendering *Shijing*, 6.129–31; cf. Bodde (1975), 247.
5. Rickett (1998), 126; my translation differs. Wang Chong's discussion of sacrifices in the *Lunheng* also attends to the idea that spirits might absorb them through smell and through the nose. See *Lunheng*, 4.1047–55, and Forke (1962), vol. 1, 509–15.
6. HY 1176, 26.1a–b, consulting Birrell (1993), 49. A similar account in Lu Jia's *Xinyu* was possibly a source for this *Huainanzi* text; see *Xinyu*, 1.1; and Puett (2001), 153. On Shennong, see Graham (1986), 67–110.
7. *Liji*, 21.416, consulting Legge (1885), pt. 3, 369–70.
8. *Han Feizi*, 49.339, consulting Puett (2001), 77; and Knoblock (1988–94), vol. 3, 29.
9. Consulting Rickett (1998), 39; and Roth (1999), 46.
10. Tr. Rickett 1998, 377 [modified]; note 6 gives a list of other loci where the same statement appears.
11. See *Liji*, 26.499, 34.749a; Legge (1885), pt. 3, 431, pt. 4, 167; Bodde (1975), 68–74.
12. *Mozi*, 6.156–172; Knoblock and Riegel (2000), 227–33; Riegel (1995); Forke (1962), vol. 2, 369–75.
13. For example, *Liji*, 27.507, 49.830, and, most explicit, 47.805 ff. (cf. Legge 1885, pt. 4, 210–15): “During the days of vigil and purification [the mourner] thinks on the place where [the departed] sat, thinks on how they smiled and spoke, thinks on their aims and views, thinks on what they delighted in, thinks on what they enjoyed. On the third day of such vigil and purification he will see those for whom he has been keeping vigil and purifying himself.”
14. *Zhuangzi*, ch. 1, lines 26–31 (HY ed.), consulting Graham (1981), 46. A similar and clearly derivative passage occurs in the much later *Liezi*. See *Liezi*, 2.44–46; Graham (1990), 35.
15. *Chuci*, 5.2b–3b (“Yuan you”), consulting Kroll (1996), 159–60; and Harper (1998), 307, n.1. This composition may date to the late fourth century BCE at the earliest or to the early Han at the latest.
16. *Daode zhenjing zhu* (HY 682), 1.5a–b. Heshanggong was assimilated by some into the ranks of transcendents. See Campamy (2002), 305–7.
17. See Harper (1998), 385–87; *Mozi*, 1.38, and commentaries; Rickett (1998), 223.
18. I concur with Harper that this *xingjie* should not be equated with the *shijie* 尸解 of somewhat later techniques.
19. HY 1176, 7.8b; consulting Major (1993), 172.
20. The dating of the various strata of the *Taiping jing* has been the subject of much scholarly discussion, most recently in Hendrichske (2000), 143–45.
21. Wang is here quoting the *Huainanzi* passage discussed earlier.
22. This line refers to the teeth, which are to be ground together or pressed by the tongue in precise sequences throughout the ingesting of the sprouts (cf. 3.21a–b).
23. That is, one need not depend on the lunar cycle for planting and harvesting grains; one is freed from the strictures of the agricultural year.
24. Compare with a passage in *Baopuzi neipian*, 18. See also a passage in Mei Cheng's 枚乘 (d. 141 BCE) “Seven Stimuli” in which rich foods (literally “things sweet, crisp, oily, and syrupy”) are warned against as being “rot–gut reagents.” See Mair (1988), 26–27. I thank Victor Mair for bringing this passage to my attention.
25. HY 388, 3.21b–22a, departing from Kohn (1995), 101. As indicative of how inadequate it would be to speak of a single “Daoist” stance on grains, consider the passage quoted from the *Scripture on the Conversion of the Barbarians* in the Buddhist polemical tract *In Mockery of the Dao* (570 CE; see Kohn 1995, 100–01). Consider also the narrative in the early sixth-century CE *Taishang Laojun kaitian jing* 太上老君開天經 (preserved in HY 1425 and anthologized in HY 1026, 2.9a ff.; tr. in Schafer 1997), in which the divine Laozi descends and instructs Shennong on agriculture so that he may teach the people to sow the five grains as an improvement over hunting and slaughtering, and then again descends to show Suiren how to make fire for cooking.
26. The single line in Mei Cheng's “Seven Stimuli” is an exception, but the thrust of that passage seems to be that overly rich foods excessively consumed do harm, not that mainstream foods per se harm the body.
27. See, for instance, the texts cited in HY 1026 at 83.2b and 10b.
28. *Baopuzi neipian*, ch. 17; HY 388, fasc. 2; for a typical passage, see Campamy (2002), 26.

29. This did not prevent offerings to transcendents in shrines and temples; but this practice represents an appropriation of transcendents by practitioners of sacrificial religion and was not something that advocates of transcendence arts approved (see, for instance, Ge Hong's attacks on sacrifice in the ninth chapter of his *Baopuzi neipian*).
30. *Baopuzi neipian*, 51–52; terms explained in Campany (2002), 35 and 88–89.
31. *Zhuangzi* (HY), ch. 2, line 14; Graham (1981), 51.

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