ABSTRACT

Like many religions of the world, a contradictory attitude toward blood can be observed in Chinese religion and culture: Blood is perceived as being simultaneously sacred and profane. This contradictory attitude towards blood sometimes may even be observed from a single ritual. This makes one wonders: Why is this so?

This paper aims to find the symbolism of blood, and to explain the contradictory attitudes towards blood in Chinese religion and culture. Chapter Two and Three will focus on the beliefs which perceive blood as sacred and that which perceive blood as profane respectively. The image and function, as well as the symbolism of blood, in the two types of beliefs are examined in these two chapters. It is found that although the image of blood perceived in the two types of beliefs are different, blood basically symbolizes life and death in both of them.
Next, Chinese beliefs with contradictory attitudes towards blood as described in chapter Two and Three is studied more closely as a whole in Chapter Four. The study will show that in Chinese religion and culture, blood is generally perceived as profane and is, thus, undesirable. However, under special circumstances, namely rituals, blood can be “purified” and, in turn seen as sacred. Thus, practically, there is no contradictory attitude towards blood, but is, in fact, a matter of different perspectives under different situations.