

Blood Red

By Gonduo Huang

“Red is a popular color in Chinese culture, symbolizing luck, joy, and happiness.” —
Wikipedia, 2023.

The first thing you will realize after you wake up on the morning of Chinese New Year is that the color red is everywhere. The clothes people wear are red, the envelope that contains the lucky money is red, the fireworks are red, Spring Festival couplets are red. This kind of red is special, it's not like the color of wine or vermilion, which is too dark to give people a strong nerve of the excitement of the festival, too dark to add to the atmosphere of celebration. It has to be brighter, it has to be as red as blood, it has to be as red as the blood that comes out of arteries.

In the beginning, there is red, the red was with blood, the red was blood.

In the Chinese New Year I've experienced, killing was always involved. On the day of the Chinese New Year, especially when I was walking at the local fair in the village, the smell changed. In the morning, it's the nasty smell of livestock, pig, chicken, goat. And the smell of the mix of mud and the waste of that livestock on the street of the fair. Later in the day, besides the smell of gunpowder (fireworks), there was also the smell of firewood, and people are preparing hot water (for plucking the chicken's feathers). And then, one sense other than smelling becomes so overwhelming. It's the screaming of animals. Across the nasty street, I hear the electric motors and the sound of chains colliding, a pig is lifted up, upside-down. Obviously, this pig doesn't like this position but doesn't that matter since this is not only the first time but also the last time, seeing the world from a 180-degree angle.

Eyes were bloodshot, looking down, both of the butcher and the pig.

Probably, this pig might be confused because in its limited expansion of life, things used to drop down instead of moving up, as it is seeing a few seconds later from its perspective. That's its blood from the arteries, which makes the speed of blood much faster than dropping (or rising from

its angle). Most of the spraying blood is collected successfully by the partner of the butcher. It seems obvious that it's not his first time doing this. When I was this pot of blood and some of it on his arms, it is indeed brighter than the usual blood we see. I, apparently, don't know what this is the feeling of this pig, but I reckon it's not something enjoyable, at least, the pig is not as happy as those two-footed animals around it. Being the same species as two-footed animals, the human being, gives me a chance to peek at what kind of mindset is behind this behavior.

I was told, killing adds to the festive atmosphere.

It is probably true because, most of the human beings around this scene, look happy watching it. Except for several children, among whom there are some enjoying it, encouraged by their parents, crowned as "getting mature", until some of the blood flow to their feet on the cement floor, like a red snake, crawling. They stepped back.

"Don't waste the blood! That's also a tasty part" The butcher yelled at his partner. His partner tried to hold the pot closer to collect the blood. But his job is hard, partially because the pot is getting heavier as blood fills in, partially because it was not bleeding but spraying, from arteries, and partially because the pig was hung upside down.

I noticed one teenager, who doesn't belong to any of those groups of people. He is not celebrating like other adults or shocked like kids. He looks about 18 years old, standing in the corner, looking at his feet, like a dead person with no movement, no blinks, no expression, and even no obvious breathing on that miserable white face, whiter than the blood-drained pig.

I guess he raised that pig.

In fact, I believe he did because the way he was standing there was exactly the same as I did two years ago when the goat I raised for one year became another contribution to another Chinese New Year atmosphere. That's why I understand the reason he is looking at his feet—compared to the bright blood, what is scarier is looking at the eye of the dead, staring at you now, haunting you for the rest of your life.

I know that at his age in a rural area in China, he was no longer a boy but had to be a man already, taking care of his family. This pig might be the main income for his family for this year. In front of him, was the dead body of the pig that he had raised for several years, hanging over a pot of blood, less bright as it was, with eyes still open. Behind him, his family, waiting for this income. Above him, his friend's soul, gone with his childhood's naive, fairytale-like imagination about the world and human beings. Blow him, the gravitational pull of reality, heavy enough to make humanity out of reach.

How beautiful the world, how harsh the life.

My goat was luckier, he was not lifted up, at least the direction of his spraying blood is the way that he was used to. Did this herbivore even know the red liquid that came out of his neck is called blood? I don't know. Different from what others think or what they were taught by this culture, I can't distinguish the meanings of the color red in this festival. Is it something intangible like luck? Or is it something horrific like blood?

"Don't become food, don't put emotion into something that will become food." I guess this was what he was trying to convince himself. At least that's what I was telling myself on the dinner table, with different parts of my goat in the bowls and plates. The blood was part of the dish, but at this time, it was dark red.

I was sickened. In my limited life experience, I was only sickened twice. Another time is watching the documentary of the Normandy landing. Fortunately, the document is black and white, in which the whole beach and near shore are black.

"Should we be sad about this killing?" That's a question that a more mature friend asked me. That's also the question that I asked myself. Just because you saw lions dragging organs out of a baby deer that was just born, can you assert that nature is cruel? In fact, we should think that's the beauty of nature since the presence of predators ensures the continuation of good genes in deer. Even if there is no lion, the population of deer might still collapse due to limited resources.

But Lions are not smiling while killing.

“Happy New Year!” Quite ironically, I received these words in a text message when I was writing this story. After 10 years, I never had red items, yet I still can’t run away from this nightmare. Each time, these holiday greetings often come as red or with a red background. It is not normal red. It has to be as red as the blood that comes out of arteries in order to “add a strong nerve of the excitement of the festival.” I deleted that text message and can’t help asking myself: Behind the bright red, how many animals are hanging upside-down this year? How many pots of blood are there this year? How many boys have to be men this year?