

# Cambridge Elements

Elements in the Archaeology of Food

edited by

Katheryn C. Twiss

*Stony Brook University, New York*

Alexandra Livarda

*Catalan Institute of Classical Archaeology*

## FOOD IN ANCIENT CHINA

Yitzchak Jaffe  
*University of Haifa*



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477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
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## Food in Ancient China

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Yitzchak Jaffe  
*University of Haifa*

**Author for correspondence:** Yitzchak Jaffe, [yjaffe@univ.haifa.ac.il](mailto:yjaffe@univ.haifa.ac.il)

**Abstract:** This Element provides an overview of food and foodways in Ancient China, from *Homo sapiens* (around 50 KYA) up to its historical beginnings: the foundation of the Zhou dynasty (at the start of the first millennium BCE). While textual data provide insights on food and diet during China's historical periods, archaeological data are the main source for studying the deep past and reconstructing what people ate, how they ate and with whom. This Element introduces the plants and animals that formed the building blocks of ancient diets and cuisines, as well as how they created localized lifeways and unifying constructs across Ancient China. Foodways – how food is grown, prepared and consumed – were central in the development of differing social, economic and political realities, as they shaped ritual and burial practices, differentiated ethnic groups, solidified community ties and deepened or assuaged social inequalities.

**Keywords:** food, China, ancient, archaeology, Chinese

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