

HIST BC 3864
Fall 2021

Prof. Dorothy Ko
803 Milstein

FEAST AND FAMINE: FOOD AND ENVIRONMENT IN CHINESE HISTORY



Square cauldron with *taotie* (Glutton mask),
12th-11th century B.C.E., Metropolitan Museum of Art



PRC propaganda poster, 1956
Chinese posters.net

Do we know where our food comes from? The daily food that sustains us does not come from the supermarket, deli, neighborhood restaurant, let alone Doordash. Venture far enough from our comfort zone and we'd find that any food system is a co-production between the sun (or artificial light generated by fossil fuel), the earth, water, air, microbes, humans, and animals. Using the Chinese food system as a case study, this seminar has two aims: First, to retrieve the deep ecological connections--the black box--that the orderly display on supermarket shelves obfuscates, and second, to examine the centrality of food in the politics, economics, and philosophy of Chinese peoples in a long historical time frame.

On a system level, feast (abundance) and famine (scarcity) are both anomalies; the reality in most years for most people in most regions falls somewhere in between. The provisioning of minimal nourishment to all has been the basis of legitimacy of both the imperial and modern states in China. On a social level, the twin axis of feast and famine compels us to explore the relationship between the political economy of food and social inequality. On a personal level, the specter of the two extremes invites the eater to approach the question "what's for dinner?" as a question of food justice and moral choice. These are the salient themes of this course.

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will learn the methods and analytic rubrics current in the interdisciplinary field of food studies; the latter include: food system, food chain, sustainability, food security, environmental justice;

2. Students will learn the centrality of food provision, production, and consumption in Chinese history, politics, religion, and culture;
3. Students will hone their research, writing, and reading skills in the humanities and social sciences;
4. If all goes well, students will learn to eat well, derive more pleasures from eating, and enjoy improved health.

Prerequisites and Reference Tools:

There are no prerequisites; we welcome students from STEM, history, anthropology, environmental humanities, and other disciplines. Some assigned articles are intended for readers who command at least rudimentary knowledge of Chinese history, geography, and language. If you have not taken a class on Chinese studies before, you may want to read the appropriate chapters of an excellent textbook (Robert Marks' *China: Its Environment and History*.) You may also want to familiarize yourself with these reference tools:

Timeline of Chinese History and Dynasties:

http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/timelines/china_timeline.htm

Historical Maps of China:

<https://www.edmaps.com/html/china.html>

Pronouncing Chinese names in Pinyin:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXWjQ984zh4&ab_channel=UnderstandingChineseCharacters&fbclid=IwAR2S9ozvTvQo87MiuQkR2Hho8YmLqM297HYm5a0EN7zk6SoyWSgbi2Mn4N4

Other useful references:

The Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, v. 1 (the Spirit of Sustainability); v. 2 (the Business of Sustainability):

<https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/11006011>

<https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/11006012>

Requirements and Grading:

Class Participation (weekly postings on Canvas and attendance): 30%

Short Paper (report of “cooking lab,” about 3-5 pages): 30%

Final Paper (a mini-research paper, about 10-12 pages): 40%

The “cooking lab” is a project in which students, divided into groups of three, would cook one dish from one of the three historic recipe books assigned [Jia Sixie's *Qimin yaoshu* 齊民要術, translated by Francesca Bray, Hu Sihui's *Yinshan zhengyao* 飲膳正要 (translated as *A Soup for the Qan* by Buell and Anderson), or Yuan Mei's *Suiyuan shidan* 隨園食單 (translated as *The Way of Cooking* by Sean Chen). Each will report her findings and insights in a short paper supplemented by a video and/or photographs.

The mini-research paper, due on the day of our scheduled final exam, involves additional reading, experiments, and/or fieldwork on a topic introduced in the seminar.

Assigned Readings:

The readings are culled from multiple fields: archaeology, anthropology, sociology, medicine, history, and gender studies, along with business reports and policy papers. Most are available online or on Canvas.

The following books can be purchased from Book Culture:

1. Valerie Imbruce, *From Farm to Canal Street: Chinatown's Alternative Food Network in the Global Marketplace* (Cornell, 2015).
2. Robert B. Marks, *China: Its Environment and History* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).
3. Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (Penguin, 2006).
4. YUAN Mei, *The Way of Eating: Yuan Mei's Manual of Gastronomy*, tr. Sean J.S. Chen (Berkshire, 2019).

The following books are available online:

HU Sihui, *A Soup for the Qan: Chinese Dietary Medicine of the Mongol Era As Seen in Hu Sihui's Yinshan Zhengyao*, tr. Paul Buell and Eugene N. Anderson, Second revised and expanded edition (Brill, 2010). [Clio. Do not use the first edition published by Taylor & Francis]

Angela Ki Che Leung and Melissa Caldwell, eds., *Moral Foods: The Construction of Nutrition and Health in Modern Asia* (Hawaii, 2019) [Clio]

Roel Sterckx, Martina Siebert, and Dagmar Schafer, eds., *Animals through Chinese History: Earliest Times to 1911* (Cambridge, 2019) [Canvas]

Course Schedule:**I. Introduction**

WEEK 1: "WHAT'S FOR DINNER?" A film by Jian Yi 簡藝 (29 min.)

- First seminar meeting; no readings
- Introduction of main themes by watching and discussing the film in class

<http://wfdinner.com/about/#:~:text=What's%20For%20Dinner%3F%20is%20directed,Susannah%20Ludwig%20of%20Snapdragon%20Films>

WEEK 2: FOOD SYSTEMS: THE INDUSTRIAL FOOD CHAIN AND ITS ALTERNATIVES

- The Industrial food system prevalent in the U.S. today
- Three alternative food systems: Organic, Beyond Organic, and Ethnic/Immigrant

Required Readings:

Option A:

Michael Pollan, *Omnivore's Dilemma*, pp. 1-262 (Industrial, Organic, and Beyond Organic)

Option B:

1. Michael Pollan, *Omnivore's Dilemma*, pp. 1-119 (Industrial)

2. Valerie Imbruce, *From Farm to Canal Street*, pp. 1-72, 154-160 (Ethnic/Immigrant)

Suggested Readings:

1. Michael Pollan, *Omnivore's Dilemma*, pp. 277-411 (on Foraging, Hunting, and a Perfect Meal)
2. Anna Tsing, "Sorting Out Commodities: How Capitalist Value is Made through Gifts," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* v. 3, no. 1 (2013): 21-43 (on "supply-chain capitalism" and mushrooms)

WEEK 3: FOOD SYSTEMS: LONG-TERM HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

- Factors of stability/sustainability of food systems through long periods of time
- Chinese concepts of "nature," conservation, and environmental management

Required Readings:

1. Sidney Mintz, "Food at Moderate Speed," in *Fast Food/Slow Food: the Cultural Economy of the Global Food System*, ed. Richard Wilk et al., pp. 3-11.
2. K.C. Chang, "Introduction," *Food in Chinese Culture*, ed. Chang, pp. 3-21.
3. Brain Lander et al., "A History of Pigs in China: From Curious Omnivores to Industrial Pork," *Journal of Asian Studies* (2020): 1-25.
4. E.N. Anderson, "The Development of China's Sustainability during the Zhou and Han," in *Food and Environment in Early and Medieval China*, pp. 91-114.

II. The Chinese Food System: A Deep History

WEEK 4: DOMESTICATION OF PLANTS AND ANIMALS IN EARLY CHINA (Neolithic to Bronze Age)

- Foundations of the Chinese food system
- Ecology and environment
- Close connections between food and thought/philosophy/religion

Required Readings:

1. Roel Sterckx, "Food and Philosophy in Early China," in *Of Tripod and Palate: Food, Politics, and Religion in Traditional China*, ed. Sterckx, pp. 34-61.
2. Roel Sterckx, "Animal to Edible: The Ritualization of Animals in Early China," in *Animals through Chinese History*, ed. Sterckx et al., pp. 46-63.
3. Xinyi LIU et al., "From People's Commune to Household Responsibility: Ethnoarchaeological Perspectives of Millet Production in Prehistoric Northeast China," *Archaeological Research in Asia* 11 (2017): 51-57.
4. [Martin Jones], "Millet: The Missing Piece in the Puzzle of Prehistoric Human's Transition from Hunter-Gatherers to Farmer," *EurekaAlert*, Dec. 13, 2015
https://www.eurekaalert.org/pub_releases/2015-12/uoc-mtm121115.php

Suggested Readings:

Hui-lin Li, "The Domestication of Plants in China: Ecogeographical Considerations," in *The Origins of Chinese Civilization*, ed. David Keightley, pp. 21-64.

WEEK 5: RECONSTRUCTING A SIXTH-CENTURY ESTATE

- The research of anthropologist Francesca Bray
- Knowledge required in managing the food system of a complex estate
- Concept of seasonality

Required Readings:

1. Francesca Bray, “The Craft of Mud-Making: Cropsapes, Time, and History,” *Technology and Culture* v. 61, no. 2 (2020): 645-661.
2. Françoise Sabban, “Follow the Seasons of the Heavens: Household Economy and the Management of Time in Sixth-Century China,” *Food and Foodways* v. 6, nos. 3-4 (1996): 329-349.
3. Jia Sixie, *Qimin yaoshu* 齊民要術, translations by Bray.

WEEK 6: MONGOL-CHINESE COOKING AND ETHNIC IDENTITIES IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

- Reconstructing the “fusion” court cuisine of the Mongol empire
- Connection between food and the construction of ethnic identities

Required Reading:

1. Françoise Sabban, “Court Cuisine in Fourteenth-Century Imperial China: Some Culinary Aspects of Hu Sihui’s *Yinshan zhengyao*,” *Food and Foodways* v. 1 (1986): 161-196.
2. HU Sihui, *A Soup for the Qan*, tr. Buell and Anderson, selections.

WEEK 7: YUAN MEI, AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY GOURMET

- Gendered knowledge of a gourmet
- Imported exotic ingredients and elite male identities
- Connection between eating and “nourishing life”

Required Reading:

YUAN Mei, *The Way of Eating: Yuan Mei’s Manual of Gastronomy*, tr. Sean J. S. Chen, “Essential Knowledge,” “Objectionables,” and selection of recipes.

[Chinese original texts and translation, along with the dishes cooked by Chen, are available on Chen’s blog:]

<https://wayoftheeating.wordpress.com/about/>

WEEK 8: BREATHING SPACE (Readings TBA)

WEEK 9: FOOD AND HEALTH (18th to 20th Centuries)

- Food as medicine in traditional medical thinking
- Modern transformations with the introduction of Western concepts of hygiene and biomedicine in the 19th and 20th centuries

Required Readings:

1. Vivienne Lo, “Pleasure, Prohibition, and Pain: Food and Medicine in Traditional China,” in *Of Tripod and Palate*, ed. Roel Sterckx, pp. 163-185.

2. Robert Peckham, “Bad Meat: Food and the Medicine of Modern Hygiene in Colonial Hong Kong,” in *Moral Foods*, ed. Angela Leung and Melissa Caldwell, pp. 173-198.
3. Lawrence Zhang, “Becoming Healthy: Changing Perceptions of Tea’s Effects on the Body,” in *Moral Foods*, ed. Angela Leung and Melissa Caldwell, pp. 201-220.
4. Sean Hsiang-lin Lei, “Housewives as Kitchen Pharmacists: Dr. Chuang Shu Chih, Gendered Identity, and Traditional Medicine in East Asia,” in *Gender Health and History in Modern East Asia*, ed. Angela Ki Che Leung and Izumi Nakayama, pp. 166-192.

Suggested Readings:

1. He BIAN, “Eating Exotica,” in *Know Your Remedies*, pp. 153-178.
2. Xiaorong Li, “Eating, Cooking, and Meaning Making: Ming-Qing Women’s Poetry on Food,” *Journal of Oriental Studies* v. 45, no. 1/2 (2012): 27-44.

III. PRC (1949-present): Food Security; Food Justice

WEEK 10: COLLECTIVE AGRICULTURE (1952-59) AND THE GREAT LEAP FAMINE (1959-61)

- Brief history of the collectivization of agriculture (Cooperatives to Communes)
- Who/what is to blame for the Great Leap famine?

Required Readings:

1. [For the early history of the PRC, including the First Five-Year Plans, Land Reforms, Collectivization of agriculture, and the People’s Commune movement, view the propaganda posters and the succinct annotations on Chinese posters.net:]

a. First Five-Year Plans, 1953-57 (parts 1-5):

- <https://chinese posters.net/themes/first-five-year-plan>
- <https://chinese posters.net/themes/first-five-year-plan-2>
- <https://chinese posters.net/themes/first-five-year-plan-3>
- <https://chinese posters.net/themes/first-five-year-plan-4>
- <https://chinese posters.net/themes/first-five-year-plan-5>

b. Land Reform and Collectivization, 1950-53:

<https://chinese posters.net/themes/land-reform>

c. Great Leap Forward, 1958-61:

<https://chinese posters.net/themes/great-leap-forward>

d. Mao’s “Eight-Point Charter of Agriculture”:

<https://chinese posters.net/themes/eight-point-charter-agriculture>

2. Felix Wemheuer, “Dealing with Responsibility for the Great Leap Famine in the People’s Republic of China,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 201 (March 2010): 176-194.
3. Sigrid Schmalzer, “China’s Great Leap Famine: Malthus, Marx, Mao and Material Scarcity,” in *Scarcity in the Modern World: History, Politics, Society, and Sustainability*, ed. John Brewer et al., pp. 173-191.

Suggested Reading:

Susan Brownell, “Food, Hunger, and the State,” in *Cultural Politics of Food and Eating*, ed. James L. Watson and Melissa Caldwell, pp. 251-258.

WEEK 11: MARKET REFORMS AND THE URBAN-RURAL GAP (1980s-1990s)

- A new food system under Deng Xiaoping’s Market reforms and implications on people’s health and diet
- Industrial food system in China--how does it compare with that in the U.S. (cf. Week 2)?

Required Readings:

1. [For the history of “Four Modernizations” or “Reform-and-Opening-Up,” view:]

<https://chinese posters.net/themes/special-economic-zones>

2. Jun JING, “Introduction: Food, Children and Social Change in Contemporary China,” in *Feeding China’s Little Emperors*, pp. 1-26.

3. Maris Boyd Gillette, “Islamic Food and Children’s Diet in Xi’an,” in *Cultural Politics of Food and Eating*, ed. James L. Watson and Melissa Caldwell, pp. 106-120.

4. Mindi Schneider and Shefali Sharma, “China’s Pork Miracle: Agribusiness and Development in China’s Pork Industry,” Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy paper, Feb. 2014, pp. 1-36.

5. Thomas DuBois, “Milk from the Butterfly Spring: State and Enterprise in the Yunnan Dairy Industry,” *Rural China* v. 17, no. 1 (2020): 87-110.

Suggested Readings:

1. James L. Watson, “China’s Big Mac Attacks,” *Foreign Affairs* v. 79, no. 3 (2000): 120-134.

2. Mindi Schneider, “Feeding China’s Pigs: Implications for the Environment, China’s Smallholder Farmers and Food Security,” Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy paper, May 2011.

3. Megan Tracy, “Pasteurizing China’s Grasslands and Sealing in *Terroir*,” *American Anthropologist* v. 115, no. 3 (2013): 437-451.

4. Thomas DuBois and Alisha Gao, “Big Meat: The Rise and Impact of Mega-Farming in China’s Beef, Sheep, and Dairy Industries,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal* v. 15, no. 17-1 (2017): 1-20.

WEEK 12: FOOD SAFETY AND ALTERNATIVE FOOD SYSTEMS IN POST-SOCIALIST CHINA (1990s-2021)

- Key concepts of food safety: social risk, transparency, and trust
- Alternative food systems in China--how do they compare with those in the U.S. (cf. Week 2)?

Required Readings:

1. Yunxiang Yan, “Food Safety and Social Risks in Contemporary China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* v. 71, no. 3 (2012): 705-729.

2. Caroline Merrifield, “Seeing and Knowing: Sourcing Safe Food in Zhejiang,” *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, v. 48, no. 3 (2020): 281-300.

3. Yan SHI et al., “Safe Food, Green Food, Good Food: Chinese Community Supported Agriculture and the Rising Middle Class,” *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability* v. 9, no. 4 (2011): 551-558.

4. Sigrid Schmalzer, “Epilogue,” in *Red Revolution, Green Revolution*, pp. 207-227 (on the New Rural Reconstruction movement and model villages in post-socialist China).

Suggested Readings

A. On nostalgia for a rural utopia:

1. Wen Tiejun, “Four Stories in One: Environmental Protection and Rural Reconstruction in China,” *positions* v. 16, no. 3 (2008): 491-505 (Wen is an outspoken agricultural activist)

2. The blogs of Li Ziqi, holder of Guinness World Record with 14.1 million YouTube subscribers:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoC47do520os_4DBMEFGg4A

B. On debates over GMO crops in France:

Caia Heller, “Techne versus Technoscience: Divergent (and Ambiguous) Notions of Food ‘Quality’ in the French Debate over GM Crops,” *American Anthropologist*, New Series, v. 109 no. 4 (2007): 603-615.

WEEKS 13-14: PRESENTATIONS OF FINAL PROJECTS

The Barnard Honor Code:

We, the students of Barnard College, resolve to uphold the honor of the College by engaging with integrity in all of our academic pursuits. We affirm that academic integrity is the honorable creation and presentation of our own work. We acknowledge that it is our responsibility to seek clarification of proper forms of collaboration and use of academic resources in all assignments or exams. We consider academic integrity to include the proper use and care for all print, electronic, or other academic resources. We will respect the rights of others to engage in pursuit of learning in order to uphold our commitment to honor. We pledge to do all that is in our power to create a spirit of honesty and honor for its own sake.