

Transformations of nutritional knowledge in East Asian history
Panel organizer: Hilary A. Smith, Meredith College

Many scholars have written about food in Chinese history, but they have usually done so from a culinary or symbolic perspective, focused on defining regional foodways or discussing the symbolic meanings of foods in different contexts. Comparatively few have examined Chinese dietary customs and beliefs as nutritional knowledge. That is what this panel seeks to do. The four papers here examine what observers in East Asia in very different periods, from fifth-century Daoist adepts to British treaty-port residents in the nineteenth century, espoused as the ideal diet for health, and how they perceived its relationship with what they saw as the typical Chinese diet. We will ask what these writers based their knowledge on. Whose diets were they imitating or reacting against? And how does the nutritional knowledge of literate Chinese in the past resonate with or diverge from nutritional knowledge today?

The Religious, Social, and Medical Significance of Early Medieval Daoist Food Choices

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The second chapter of the 5th century Daoist text, *Taishang Lingbao Wufuxu* □□□□ □□□ (The Preface to the Five Most High Numinous Treasure Talismans), contains seventy recipes for improving health and extending life. Many of these recipes require grain avoidance (*bigu* □□) regimens combined with supplemental vegetal substances such as sesame, asparagus root, rehmannia, poke, and pine. Each of the text's main herbal ingredients is described according to the effects their prolonged ingestion is meant to have on the adept. Based on an overlap between medical and religious ideologies, these claims are presented as a natural continuum from improving the health, to gaining extra-ordinary powers, to achieving immortality. Critical reflection on these claims indicates that adepts were meant to choose a particular dietary regimen to best fit their social circumstances, geographical locations, states of health, and overall religious goals. This presentation will introduce the range of herbal ingredients advocated in the text, as well as the ascetic dietary regimens themselves, to better understand the context of Daoist health ideals and their critique of typical dietary practices. Brief analysis of the medical and nutritional claims made about a few of these substances will illustrate how Daoists applied Chinese materia medica knowledge in their religious practices – which, interestingly, has

resonance with modern Western pharmacological knowledge. Finally, I will explain how self-cultivation oriented Daoists likely understood the importance and religious significance of nutrition.

Nutritional ideas in Ming dynasty *leishu*

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During the Ming and Qing periods reading *Leishu* 方書 [compendia of everyday popular knowledge], previously an indulgence of the wealthy and noble, became relatively widespread practice. This paper will ask to what extent these books reflect everyday practice of the literati of that time. By analysing the structure and content of the *Leishu* with particular attention to chapters that are concerned with dietary ideas and prohibitions it is possible to make some preliminary remarks about their function. Some elements suggest that they are a kind of household manual for daily use, others that they are a collection of curiosities compiled for leisure reading. Given the relatively eclectic culture within which *Leishu* flourished they prove a good source for appreciating the multiplicity of influences on the imagination of how and what to eat. Through a comparison between theoretical notions of the proper nourishment of the elderly, the different genders or in the care of infants, with commentaries on the potencies of specific foods and recipes, and their religious and ritual meanings, this paper will tease out what this genre can tell us about the nature of commonly held nutritional ideas in late imperial China.

How China's gout became Japan's beriberi: changing the definition of a dietary disease

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In the late nineteenth century, a fearsome disease ravaged the Japanese army and navy. The doctors attempting to control this scourge called it *kakke* (脚氣), a name (pronounced *jiaoqi* in Chinese) inherited from classical Chinese medicine. But the *kakke* of late nineteenth-century Japan, identified with the vitamin B1 deficiency

disease beriberi, differed in important ways from the disease of the same name in medieval and late imperial China. In particular, the *jiaoqi* of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century China was a disorder of the wealthy and sedentary, acquired, many classical physicians believed, by excess consumption of rich foods and alcohol. Physicians of this period described a disorder that sounds very much like the gout that European physicians were writing about in roughly the same period. By contrast, the *kakke* of late nineteenth-century Japan afflicted a more marginal population—ordinary sailors and soldiers, leaving their commanding officers untouched. This example of a classical disease transformed from a dietary disorder of excess to one of deficiency highlights the difference between the way classical physicians understood healthy and unhealthy eating and the way physicians trained in Western medicine did, at least when Western medicine began to look recognizably modern. The characteristic dietary concerns of these two quite different groups of practitioners in two different periods, I suggest, reflect not only the epidemiology of pathogenic diets that actually surrounded them, but also the broader social, political, and economic contexts in which they were working.

Discovering ‘the secrets of long and healthy life’:

John Dudgeon on Chinese Dietetics

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John Dudgeon was a Scottish medical man who practiced in Beijing in the second half of the nineteenth century. During his long medical career in China, Dudgeon wrote extensively on the diet, dress, residences, and social customs of the Chinese, particularly in terms of their implications for health. At the time, western medical men in China were highly critical of the sanitary conditions of Chinese towns and the personal hygiene of the Chinese people. Dudgeon, however, held the unconventional view that the Chinese lifestyle was far more salubrious than that of the Europeans and that the environmental conditions in Chinese cities were superior to those in their European counterparts. He particularly admired Chinese dietetics and even argued that Europeans ought to emulate Chinese customs and hygiene practices. This article argues that Dudgeon’s observations in China, which contradicted contemporary sanitary

ideas, prompted his criticism European industrial civilization. Deteriorating economic conditions and heightened social tensions in Scotland in the late nineteenth century also contributed to Dudgeon's critical reflections on British metropolitan culture and lifestyle. His admiration of Chinese diet and his concept of disease of civilisation were closely connected to his nostalgic vision of a rural, paternalistic society. It is the contention of this work that Dudgeon's eccentric medical ideas manifested the interplay and tension between metropolitan medical theories and his Chinese experience.