Special section
Rice domestication

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It is timely to publish a Special section of ANTIQUITY on the theme of Rice Domestication. There has been much research and activity under way, quietly making enormous strides in knowledge and new data on rice and its antecedents. Last year, the 2nd International Academic Conference on Agricultural Archaeology was held at Nanchang in China, and numerous papers presented new material, analysis and interpretation. For too long, the relative lack of secure evidence and analysis has meant that agricultural origins in East Asia have been considered as a footnote to the better-documented evidence and debate on West Asia and Mesoamerica. This new activity and dissemination of material provides a means to look again, with renewed interest and excitement, at East Asia as a major centre for plant domestication and subsistence intensification. We are pleased to publish a range of papers here, which have been specially written for us by researchers who attended the conference and, in some cases, discovered the new evidence.

Two papers (**Crawford & Shen** and **Higham & Lu**) provide overviews of the state of archaeological research throughout East Asia, and the dispersal of rice to south Asia and beyond. They introduce new material and discuss how research is moving towards finer chronologies, climatic studies, studies of phytoliths, dispersal patterns, other foodplants and the genetic origins of rice. Their splendid discussions provide a background for the additonal four papers, which include specific site studies presented by Chinese colleagues. **Pei Anping** describes the important discoveries in the Middle Yangtze River area at the sites of Bashidang and Pengtoushan. **Zhang Juzhong & Wang Xiangkun** report on their work at the site of Jiahu, which has also yielded evidence for very early rice cultivation and manipulation, and place it in its wider context. **Zhao Zhijun** reports on phytolith research at the cave site of Diaotonghuan, and debates the issues of rice domestication in the middle Yangtze river. Finally, Tracey Lie-Dan Lu presents her experimental work on the growth and harvesting of a related cereal grass, green foxtail (later to become millet), and the implications that this work has on the domestication process of cereals in China.

We are delighted to include this range of new information and research approaches from colleagues spaced across the globe. Indeed, this academic diversity is fitting, since rice is now one of the two or three most important staple foods of modern subsistence (one-third of the world's population depend upon it). Much work in the last two to three decades has been focused on the Old World crops of the Levant or the New World crops of Mesoamerica. It is appropriate that a balance is maintained in our knowledge of subsistence strategies across the world, and that important new material, and the archaeological discussions relating to it, reach a wide audience.

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