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## **Nutritional contribution of plant foods to human diet in evolution**

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# Nutritional Contribution of Plant Foods to Human Diet in Evolution

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# PREFACE

Diet and food are an indisputably core facet in all human societies. In the not too distant past, before industrialization, rise of the middle class, and market economies, procuring and preparing enough food to feed oneself and one's family occupied a significant portion of daily labor. In modern unindustrialized small-scale societies, this is still largely the case. Appropriately, anthropologists take great interest in the role that food and diet have had in the genesis of human biological and social variation (Messer, 1984). The old proverbs, “you are what you eat” and “tell me what you eat and I'll tell you what you are” speak about food not only as a physical embodiment of the environment, but also as a means of social identity and symbolic construction of community culture (Messer, 1984). Naturally, these are anthropological dialogues, but to have substance for discussion, they require the collective conversations between historical, social, biomedical, and nutritional researchers. Each field certainly has more to say than what can feasibly enter cross-discipline communication, but it is worth the effort of maintaining a comprehensive approach that recognizes how humans are uniquely cultivated by their social culture and are yet still bound by the biological consequences of millions of years of natural selection. What follows is a summarized history of the field of human nutrition, which has its formal origins with the “chemical revolution” and quantitative science, in France at the end of the eighteenth century (Carpenter, 2003). This background is facile but relevant to understand how once non-overlapping domains of science – anthropology and clinical nutrition – are united through the common foci of human diet and physiology under the umbrella of evolution. Since the subject material of my thesis research embodies the shared nature of these two disciplines, both how foods contribute to the maintenance of human health and how this is dictated by and informative of human evolution, this historical perspective is important contextual information for why this work is meaningful to anthropology, and to me.

