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## The World of Rice

Let us talk about the most important food in the world. Rice. It is tradition. It is survival. It is culture. Because rice can be used for a myriad of things, rice takes the lead in overall food production and consumption in the world.

Asians love their rice. They use it for so many things, but they have had many years to find many uses of this amazing product. About 12,000 years ago, rice cultivation started in the Yangtze River valley region in China. Indica and japonica -- two main subspecies of rice -- began to be widely grown in Central China after the domestication of rice. After that, rice cultivation rapidly expanded in mainland Southeast Asia and across India and Nepal. Africa grew a variety of rice, unoriginally called African rice, which originated around the Niger River delta, but it never popularized outside its region ("History of Cultivation"). Now there are several varieties of rice consumed around the world.

For many countries, rice is their main food staple. For some, it is a commodity. For others, it is a necessity. Rice can be found everywhere and in everything in Asia. Rice cakes, rice balls, rice noodles, rice dumplings, rice crackers, rice vinegar, rice bran oil, rice alcoholic drinks. And the list continues. The Chinese eat rice stems. The Japanese enjoy fermented rice ("Other

Rice Products"). The Vietnamese use edible rice paper in their cuisine ("Non-edible Rice Products"). Even McDonald's accommodates to the Asians' love for rice by serving the McRice where fried rice patties replace the burger's buns (Cummings). Asians love their rice. However, Asia is not the only place that serves rice. Much of Tanzania makes rice bread. West Africa also has rice cakes and rice porridge (Maclean, Hardy, and Hettel 25). America carries puffed rice products -- one of the popular brands being Rice Krispies. Rice milk can also be found in America ("Other Rice Products"). Cajun cuisine requires rice in many of its dishes. Many poor Latin American countries rely on rice in order to survive ("Latin America and the Caribbean"). In other words, nearly every country in the world relies on rice to feed their families whether it be a fancy dish or a staple; however, rice is an important part of everyone's culture.

Rice, however, is not good for just food. It can be useful for other things. West Africa use rice products in funeral and wedding ceremonies and in religious rituals. In other cultures, rice plant parts are made into decorations or ritual objects. Traditional medicines and remedies, made from certain parts of some rice varieties, are used to treat illnesses, mainly of skin and gastrointestinal conditions. Scientific studies show rice products may have anti-cancer products. Rice cultivation does not just produce edible products but also non-edible products. Nevertheless, the non-edible parts prove to be useful. Rice straw has several uses. It can be used as fuel for cooking and material for roofing. Rice paper used to be made from rice straw. Rice

paper can be used to write on and made into room dividers. From fuel to ceramics to food products, the husks of rice grains also can be utilize for several things. Since the compounds in rice grains promote shiny hair and good skin, products such as face washes and hair products are made from rice ("Non-edible Rice Products").

Rice: a poor man's feast, a rich man's delicacy, a child's sweet treat, an adult's savory snack. Rice can be enjoyed by everyone, everywhere -- and not just as a food. It can be utilized for other things such beauty products, medicines, and ceremonies. Nevertheless, rice is more than food, more than its other uses. It is tradition. It is survival. It is culture. But also more than those things. It is a connection between countries and cuisines and people.

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