

## Is That So?

By EUGENE BURNS  
Ranger-Naturalist

Hong Kong, with Japan Air Lines—When we think of China naturally we think of rice. However this grass seed is the basic food of many more lands including The Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, India, Pakistan and Japan.

Because of the density of their populations, this means that more than 1,250,000,000 people—half of the world's entire population—eat rice.

And unlike our western diet in which wheat plays a secondary role, here for these 1,250,000,000, rice is the main staple. Virtually the entire meal. This supplemented merely with vegetable oils such as soybeans, olives, and sesame, huge populations thrive with a minimum of animal food.

Unlike wheat which must be reduced to flour usually and baked, rice grains are almost everywhere boiled and served

"polishing" this outside brown layer was removed. In doing so, some of the most important vitamins were lost and unless this vitamin deficiency is corrected with other foods, beriberi often results. Yet today custom regards white "polished" rice as preferable — after all, isn't it more expensive?

Even in the U.S., where rice is planted by airplane, the weeds controlled by airplane "dusting" and the harvesting and threshing is done by powered machinery, this same ignorance holds: in fact, go to your grocer and just see if you can buy the tastier, more nourishing, and healthier unpolished brown rice. (Copyright, 1956, by Eugene Burns—Released by McClure Newspaper Syndicate)

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## Central Committee Passes Resolution

up in that form. (If you are a guest in the Far East it is poor manners to eat only one bowl of rice. Always be prepared to accept the second offering, or even a third, and then eat it to the last grain.)

The world acreage for rice, despite feeding half the world's population, is but a fifth of that used for the other two leading food crops, wheat and maize (corn).

Looking at a rice field in the distance, it does not look unlike wheat or rye but closer at hand, the loose drooping seed heads more nearly resemble oats.

Rice seems to have come from a wild rice species native to Indonesia's tropical, rainy, marshy areas. (Not to be confused with the black-grained wild rice, a distant cousin which grows in shallow lake water in north-eastern Canada and the U.S. and is prized by gourmets who fancy it with fowl and seafood and pay a good price. As for rice paper, that is made from the pith of a plant not even related to rice.)

Quite likely the cultivation of rice began in India about 6,000 years ago, about a thousand years after wheat was first domesticated in the Middle East. From there, the cultivation of rice went to China and Egypt. By 1,500 A. D. it was well established throughout southwestern Asia and west as far as Italy; by the mid-1600's it was introduced to America and it is grown extensively today in California, Texas, Arkansas and Louisiana.

To meet various growing conditions, many varieties have been developed—in India, alone, there are more than 1,000 suitable to conditions ranging from hot to cool summers, from marshy to comparatively dry soils. But the yield and the quality is still best in areas where the climate is hot and humid and the land marshy or flooded.

Basically, the growing of lowland swamp rice has not changed much throughout the Orient during the past thousands of years. Hours and hours of patient back-breaking toil go into the preparation of what is eaten in a few minutes.

In most areas, seeds are sown broadcast in specially prepared seed beds. Later these individual plants are transplanted into flat, dike-rimmed fields. These are then flooded and the water is kept at a five-inch level during the growing season. When weeding is necessary, the water is drained off and rows of men, women and small children, sometimes up to their knees in mire, weed out the offending plants.

Created on Hillsides  
Where swampy lowland is scarce, these conditions are artificially created on hillsides. The sides of low mountains are terraced and each terrace filled with loam and diked and flooded by crude but effective irrigation systems.

Just before the plant's leaves turn from green to yellow — from two to four months—depending upon local growing conditions—the fields are drained to make them ready for harvesting which is done with old-fashioned hand sickles.

Once harvested, the grain is threshed — a simple process of separating chaff from grain. The most primitive way, and still used throughout much of the Orient, is to tread barefoot the unhusked grain. Then the tramped mass is scooped into a shallow basket and tossed into the air above a mat. In the breeze, however gentle, the heavier grain falls straight down, the lighter chaff floats to one side.

Covered With Coat of Brown  
For the most part, the husked grains of rice are not white but covered with a coat of brown. This was good eating until the white man's "civilizing" influences came along—then it was considered "better taste" to rub or beat the grain and with this

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