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Rice in the Discourse of Selves and Others

THROUGH historical processes rice and rice paddies have come to represent the collective self of a social group within Japanese society from the smallest unit, of a family, to Japan as a whole. The collective self of the Japanese has undergone historical changes, changes that are almost always intimately related to historical developments outside of Japan.

In anthropology, the classical formulation of the person/self by Mauss ([1938]1985) is quasi-evolutionary—the transformation of the *personnage* (role) in primitive holism into the *personne* (self) characterizing modern individualism, with the *moi* (awareness of self) as a human universal. Dumont's ([1966] 1970, 1986) argument rests on a complex comparison along the two axes of holism/individualism and the hierarchy/equalitarianism. A plethora of publications on the self and personhood includes an important collection edited by Carrithers, Collins, and Lukes (1985).

Of a number of approaches to a study of personhood, the tradition advocated by G. H. Mead, Charles Taylor, and others views the self as an agency. Scholars of postmodern persuasion have alerted to the importance of Bakhtin's "polyphony," which derives from a set of assumptions about the "negotiated realities" that is "multisubjective, power-laden, and incongruent" (Clifford and Marcus 1986:14–15). Kondo's work for Japan, most appropriately entitled *Crafting Selves* (1990), is an example of this approach. Kelly (1991) offers an extensive overview of publications on the personhood of the Japanese published in English. From the perspective of psychological anthropology, Shweder and his co-authors (Shweder and Miller 1985; Shweder and Sullivan 1990) have been influential.

My concern in this book is the self-identities of social groups. When a social group is juxtaposed against another, each group often constitutes a collective self. Here the "context" shifts to the "negotiation" between two social groups, often power laden whether the social groups are within a nation-state or comprise an entire population against another. Thus, various individual identities within a population become usually, although not necessarily always, irrelevant when they conceptualize themselves in relation to other peoples, as one has seen all too frequently in recent decades with the rise of nationalism and ethnic identity.

The two approaches to the self—an individual self in a given social context and the collective self of a social group defined in relation to another social group—are, needless to say, not contradictory or in conflict (see chap. 1, n. 4). The Japanese conceptualization of the person and humans has given a conceptual framework with which the Japanese have interpreted others in their historical encounters.

The Personhood in Japanese Culture: A Basic Framework

The Japanese conception of the person as a *socially* interdependent person is succinctly expressed in the two characters that form the word for *humans*—*ningen*. The character for *nin* means humans, and the character for *gen* means among. The *ningen* is relationally defined in reference to other persons in a social context and dialectically defined by both humans and a social group to which one belongs (Watsuji 1959).¹ In this view, a social group does *not* consist of atomized individuals, each making his or her own decisions.²

Some Japanese daily practices articulate the interdependency or, more accurately, relational definition of the self and other. For example, in daily discourse, personal pronouns and their possessive cases often are not used, but the inflections of verbs, auxiliary verbs, nouns, and so forth express the persons—both the speaker and the addressee—as they are *related* in the context of discourse. If, for example, someone says, *okuruma*, which consists of *o*, the honorific prefix for a noun, and *kuruma*, which means car, then without question the car belongs to the addressee who holds a higher social status than the speaker in this particular discourse context (for details, see Ohnuki-Tierney [in press]; see also Martin 1964; Miller 1967; Shibamoto 1987:269–272).³

Needless to say, Japanese are not always reverent toward the social other nor do they always interact harmoniously with each other and sacrifice themselves to the goals of their social groups. In fact, in a type of discourse that presupposes sensitivity and an understanding of finely tuned rules, they can effectively insult or ridicule their social superiors by strategically choosing inappropriate speech levels or transgressing other rules of discourse, without ever using curse words—very few exist in Japanese. Gilbert and Sullivan lyrics capture how an inappropriately used superpolite form can be devastatingly ridiculous.

The relational construction of self at the individual level in a given social context is paralleled by the construction of the Japanese identity in relation to other peoples. At this level, the important cosmological principle of the Stranger Deity comes into play. As noted, the Stranger Deity

who possesses dual natures and powers—the benevolent, pure energy of *nigutama* and the violent, destructive energy of *aratama*—constitutes the reflexive self of humans, who, likewise, have dual qualities. For humans to remain pure, they must harness the pure energy of the Stranger Deity.

The structure of self and other as defined in the cosmological scheme has been translated into historical discourse in which foreigners are symbolically equivalent to the Stranger Deity. Contrary to the stereotype of Japan as an isolated country tucked away in the northeast corner of the world, Japan's history actually comprises a series of conjunctures that have been interpreted through the lens of the Japanese structure of self and other, and they, in turn, have forced the Japanese to reconceptualize their notion of the self. Thus, the desire to reach for the other has propelled the Japanese to imitate and then surpass the superior qualities of the Chinese and Westerners, whether a writing system, the arts, or technology and science. In the flow of history, the Japanese collective self must be continuously redefined as Japan's position in relation to other nations undergoes changes.

Of all the conjunctures, the two that sent the most profound and lasting shock waves throughout the country were Japan's encounter with the highly developed civilization of Tang China between the fifth and seventh centuries and the encounter with Western civilization at the end of the nineteenth century. In both cases, the Japanese were overwhelmed by the civilizations "out there" and hurriedly and earnestly attempted to learn about and imitate them. The heretofore illiterate Japanese adopted the Chinese writing system in its entirety, even though the two spoken languages were totally unrelated and, thus, not transferable without considerable difficulty. Likewise, metallurgy, city planning, and a range of features of Chinese civilization were eagerly adopted by the Japanese, who, nonetheless, strenuously resisted Chinese civilization in a chauvinistic effort to protect their own culture and collective self as detailed in Pollack (1986).

When the country reopened at the end of the nineteenth century after three centuries of isolation, it again painfully encountered a "superior" civilization, this time the West, with its scientific and technological advances. Again, the Japanese avidly adopted aspects of this civilization while guarding their Japanese identity and self. By this time, China had suffered internal and external conflicts and had declined in international standing. The West thus replaced China as the transcendental other. As Pollack (1986:53) succinctly puts it, "During the last century and a half the West has been the antithetical term in the dialectic, and as always it has been in that 'other' that Japan has sought its own image, peering anxiously for signs of its own identity into the mirror of the rest of the world."

Although this view of Japanese history is, admittedly, oversimplified, it highlights how the internal developments in Japanese society resulted from Japan's interactions with the rest of the world. These interactions also had a significant impact on the Japanese concept of the collective self—who they are as a people—because the Japanese, or for that matter any other people's, concept of the self, individual or collective, is always defined in relation to the other.

In the discourse of self and other, rice has served as a powerful vehicle for the Japanese to think about themselves in relation to other peoples.

Domestic Rice as Self and Foreign Rice as the Other: Japanese versus Other Asians

Rice, the dominant metaphor for a social group within society, surfaces again and again in Japanese deliberations of self at crucial historical junctures. Rice has been a critical metaphor by which the Japanese have defined and redefined themselves through interaction with other peoples throughout history.

As noted in chapter 4, the two myth-histories of the eighth century and the imperial ritual represent a strenuous attempt to appropriate rice agriculture as the defining feature of Japanese culture in opposition to Chinese culture from which rice agriculture was, in fact, introduced. The Japanese, who had not previously developed a writing system of their own, adopted the Chinese writing system in its entirety and wrote down a Japanese version of the origin of rice agriculture, thus using another marker of Chinese "civilization." Furthermore, they adopted the Chinese designation for Japan, *Nihon* (the base where the sun rises); from the Chinese perspective Japan is situated at the base where the sun rises (Amino, personal communication). Although some people have adopted other people's religions, or even language, and the Japanese case is by no means unique, these are striking examples of how the Japanese concept of self was born in the encounter with the Chinese who were interpreted through the conceptual scheme of the Stranger Deity.

Despite the eagerness with which the Japanese adopted features of Chinese civilization, the Japanese self could not simply merge with that of the Chinese. In an effort to redefine the Japanese identity, in addition to appropriating rice agriculture and other features of Chinese civilization as their own, the Japanese distinguished items imported from China linguistically. Thus, objects with the prefix *kan* (Han) designated things from the Han, or Chinese, including *kanji* (Chinese characters) and *kanbun* (texts written in Chinese characters). Likewise, the character for Tang, read either as *kara* or *tō*, also signals a Chinese origin, *karafū*

(Chinese style), *karatoji* (a book bound in the Chinese style), and *karamono* (imported goods from China; imported goods in general).

Although the phrase *wakan secchū* meant a combination of Japanese and Chinese ways, a most revealing expression for the relationship between self and other is *wakon kansai* (the Japanese soul and Chinese knowledge). Referring to the best of both worlds the phrase represents a Japanese effort to preserve their identity as “the Japanese soul.”⁴ As noted, in ancient Japan rice was symbolically equivalent to the soul, which, in turn, was conterminous with the deity. Highly important is that the phrase “the Japanese soul and Chinese knowledge” reveals Japanese insistence on their own identity in the soul cum rice introduced from China. Furthermore, in the Japanese concept, humans are distinguished from animals not through their rationality, as in the Western concept, but through the capacity for emotion, which is generated by the soul (Ohnuki-Tierney 1987:200). Therefore, a seemingly simple expression like *wakon kansai* is derived from one of the basic conceptual foundations of Japanese culture that has undergone significant transformations.

As long as the Chinese remained a well-defined other, the Japanese task of defining themselves vis-à-vis the Chinese was relatively easy. It became more difficult, however, when the world of the Japanese no longer consisted solely of the Japanese and Chinese. By the eighteenth century, the Japanese had become acutely aware of various Western civilizations. The Portuguese brought firearms, soap, and other goods while the Dutch impressed the Japanese with their medical system, which was, to some Japanese, more advanced than the Chinese medicine introduced to Japan earlier. The Germans, the English, and the Americans awed the Japanese with their science, medicine, and various technological skills. All were usually seen collectively as “Westerners” without distinguishing nationalities or individuals. By this time, Chinese civilization—once the mirror for the Japanese—was no longer at the apex of its power, culturally or politically. To further complicate the matter, the Japanese had to face the fact that Westerners lumped the Japanese indiscriminately as Orientals, just as, ironically, the Japanese lumped all Westerners together.

This more complex international scene required the Japanese to both distinguish themselves from the West, on the one hand, and to extricate themselves from other Asians, or “Orientals,” on the other. Although the distinction between Japanese and Westerners could be readily made and expressed as rice versus meat (or bread), the distinction between the Japanese and other Asians was more difficult to identify. In particular, the distinction could not be expressed as rice versus some other food item because other Asians also eat rice. The distinction, therefore, had to be made on the basis of domestic rice grown on Japanese soil versus foreign rice.

Domestic rice (*naichimai*) as a metaphor for the Japanese as contrasted with foreign rice (*gaimai*) as a metaphor for other Asians surfaced toward the end of the Early Modern period. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries nativist scholars striving to establish the Japanese identity chose agrarian ideology and rice agriculture as the pristine Japanese way. For Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843), one of the four major figures in the nativist movement, rice cultivation was a critical concern; rice production and consumption were equivalent to the worship of Shinto deities and the repayment of their blessings. In his search for an exclusive Japanese claim to divine rice, he degraded Chinese rice as “inferior” and “begun by the mandate of men,” and, therefore, “those who eat are weak and enervated” (Harootunian 1988:211–212). Since Hirata considered eating and working as religious acts, he demeaned other peoples who quarreled during meals “like dogs” and claimed that other peoples admired the Japanese because of their good table manners (Harootunian 1988:213). To Hirata, then, humans are to animals as Japanese are to other peoples. Most important, these “other peoples” who eat inferior rice and have bad table manners are non-Japanese Asians.

One of the ways in which nativist scholars of the late Early Modern period and Meiji scholars attempted to distinguish the Japanese from the Chinese was by objectifying China with the label *Shina*, a designation for China by other peoples. In Asia, the name *Shina* first appeared in an Indian sutra and was adopted by the Japanese during the mid-Early Modern period; it was used until the end of World War II. The Chinese designation for their country is *Chūgoku* (the Middle Kingdom, or, literally, the country at the center), which expresses the centrality of China (*chū* = center) in their view (cf. S. Tanaka n.d.). By adopting the label of *Shina*, the Japanese deliberately chose to ignore the significance that the Chinese placed on their own representation to the world.

The Japanese effort to extricate themselves from other Asians during the Meiji period continued to be expressed in the metaphorical uses of rice. For example, in the *Kōfu* (The miners), a novel by Natsume Sōseki, one of the best known writers of the period, a nineteen-year-old son from a “good family” runs away from home in Tokyo and is led by a dubious character to a mine. The miner’s occupation is described: to ask if there is an occupation more inferior (*katō*) than mining is like asking if there are any days in the year after December 31. The novel, written as a first-person narrative, recounts the young man’s experiences in a lead mine. When his first meal at the mine is served, he notices a rice container (*meshibitsu*). He has not drunk a drop of water or eaten rice for two days and two nights. Although he is depressed (“the soul has shrunk”), the sight of a rice container immediately awakens an enormous appetite. He scoops the rice into his rice bowl and proceeds to eat with his chopsticks.

To his surprise, however, the rice is too slippery to manage. After trying three times unsuccessfully, he pauses to figure out why; in his nineteen years of life, such an experience has never happened. As he pauses, the other miners, who have been watching this newcomer, burst into laughter. One of the miners shouts, “Look what he is doing” while another says, “He thinks the rice is ‘the silver rice (ginshari)’ even though today is not a festival.” Yet another says, “Without tasting the Chinese rice (*nankinmai*), how can he assume he can be a miner!” (Natsume Sōseki 1984:560–561). He hurriedly shoves the rice into his mouth and finds that it does not taste like rice; it tastes like the mud used to build a wall. In another passage, a miner explains to the protagonist that he had gone to school, but his misbehavior resulted in “eating rice meals (*meshi*) in the mines” (Natsume Sōseki 1984:556).

Another index of his miserable living conditions is the presence of innumerable bed bugs, called *nankinmushi* (Chinese bugs) in Japanese. The novel ends with the young man summing up his experiences at the mine as eating Chinese rice and being eaten by Chinese bugs (Natsume Sōseki 1984:674).

An educated miner, who also had “fallen,” urges the young man, “You are a Japanese, aren’t you? If you are a Japanese, get out of the mine and find an occupation that is good for Japan.”

The dismal life at the mine is symbolized by Chinese rice and Chinese bugs, whereas life outside is the proper life for Japanese. The symbolic opposition of /domestic rice: Chinese rice :: silver: mud/ represent the basic opposition of /Japanese self: *marginalized external other*,” which the Chinese have become by this time in the Japanese view. Modernizing Japan faced a double process of identification to distinguish themselves both from the West and from other Asians.

Rice as Self and Meat as the Other: Japanese versus Westerners

Toward the end of the Early Modern period, the Japanese were becoming acutely aware of the presence of Western civilization outside their closed country. Nativist scholars summoned “agriculture” and “the countryside” in their efforts to redefine and represent the pristine Japanese self. The valorization of agriculture, especially rice agriculture, was not confined to these scholars. The Japanese seasons and, even more, the Japanese landscape were represented by symbols of rice agriculture such as rice sheaves, sometimes with Mt. Fuji in the background, in woodblock prints.⁵

This pattern continued through the Meiji to the present. The transfor-

mation of the “common people” of Yanagita and other scholars from mountain people to farmers occurred during the Russo-Japanese War when Japan, for the first time, was pitched against a Western nation. At this time, the Japanese engaged in seemingly contradictory efforts to simultaneously “modernize/industrialize” their country while redefining themselves in terms of the rice agriculture of the distant past.

Not surprisingly, rice as a metaphor of the Japanese people surfaced conspicuously during the Meiji period, the period immediately after the opening of the country to the outside. Agrarian ideology was an important tool used by the Meiji government to unify the people, who were acutely aware that their country’s “progress” in science and technology was far behind that of Western countries. They were in awe of the Western science and technology that had developed during the three centuries when the country was closed to most outsiders.

The discourse on the Japanese self vis-à-vis Westerners as “the other” took the form of rice versus meat. From a Japanese perspective, meat was the distinguishing characteristic of the Western diet. Shortly after the introduction of Buddhism in the sixth century, its doctrine of mercy for all living beings was translated into a legal prohibition against the consumption of land animal meat. The “official” diet of the Japanese since consisted of fish and vegetables.⁶

Some people favored unabashed imitation of the West and advocated the abandonment of rice agriculture and the adoption of animal husbandry. They argued that as long as the Japanese continued to eat only rice, fish, and vegetables, their bodies would never become strong enough to compete with the bodies of meat-eating Westerners (Tsukuba 1986:109–112). They also associated a diet dominated by rice with country bumpkins and uncivilized habits (Tsukuba 1986:113).⁷

Others opposed imitating the West and emphasized the importance of rice agriculture and the superiority of a rice diet. Thus, proponents of a rice diet staged an event in which *sumō* wrestlers were asked to lift heavy sacks of rice (komedawara) in front of foreign delegates, one of whom asked why “the Japanese” were strong. One of the wrestlers, Hitachiyama, replied that the Japanese were strong because they ate rice grown on Japanese soil (Tsukuba 1986:109–112).

Since the Early Modern period, but most dramatically during World War II, domestic rice came to stand symbolically for the collective self of the Japanese. More specifically, the *purity* of white rice (*hakumai*) or “pure rice” (*junmai*) became a powerful metaphor for the purity of the Japanese self. During World War II, white rice—symbolically the most powerful but nutritionally the most deficient—was saved for the most precious sector of the population—the soldiers. The rest of the popula-

tion was motivated by the lack of Japanese rice to work hard for Japan's victory, which promised to bring back good times with plenty of white rice, that is, "Japanese rice," rather than foreign rice (*gaimai*).

Just as Japanese objects are distinguished from Chinese objects by prefixes, certain prefixes designate objects of Japanese rather than Western origin: *wa*, *hō*, or *nihon* designate Japanese origin and *yō* signify Western origin. Some examples are:

| <i>Japanese</i> | <i>Western</i> |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| <i>washoku</i> (Japanese cuisine) | <i>yōshoku</i> (Western cuisine) |
| <i>wagashi</i> (Japanese sweets) | <i>yōgashi</i> (pastries and cakes) |
| <i>washi</i> (Japanese paper, so-called rice paper) | <i>yōshi</i> (Western paper) |
| <i>wafuku</i> (Japanese kimono) | <i>yōfuku</i> (Western dress) |
| <i>nihonshu</i> (sake wine) | <i>yōshu</i> (wine) |
| <i>nihonkan</i> (Japanese-style house) | <i>yōkan</i> (Western-style house) |

At times foreign words are retained to distinguish them from the Japanese counterparts: *wain* (wine) refers to Western wines and not to Japanese *sake* (rice wine).

Although some expressions are self-explanatory, others, such as "*yokomeshi o kuu*" (to eat a horizontal meal), require some explanation. This particular phrase is a reference to the Western alphabet as horizontal writing; Chinese and Japanese writing is vertical. People often say, "I am poor at the horizontal writing (*yokomoji wa nigateda*)," meaning "I am not good at English." Thus, to eat a horizontal meal refers to the Western diet, which, in turn, means an adjustment to a Western life-style.

Today, Japan is inundated with foreign foods. Not only Big Macs, pizza, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Dairy Queen ice cream, A & W root beer, and bagels but also haute cuisine from every culture of the world is available and eagerly sought. In addition to, or, more precisely, because of the profusion of Western foods, Japanese cuisine, *washoku*, has made a phenomenal comeback. Streetcars and newspapers are full of advertisements by restaurants and inns featuring numerous courses of Japanese dishes.

Japanese cuisine, whose prototype is the cuisine for the tea ceremony (*kaiseki ryōri*) in Kyoto, is a conspicuous contemporary "construction" or "invention" of Japanese culture. From pictures of these colorful and aesthetically arranged dishes, contemporary Japanese "learn" what Japanese cuisine is about, even though these dishes are by no means a faithful reconstruction of the traditional cuisine for the tea ceremony. There never was a prototypical traditional Japanese cuisine in the first place. Ironically, Japan now imports most of the ingredients for these "Japa-

nese dishes.” Amid a flood of Western foods, contemporary Japanese continue to reaffirm their collective self by constructing their own foodway.

Rice is the defining feature of “traditional Japanese cuisine” but the amount used is usually small. The more *haute* a meal is, the more numerous are the side dishes and the less rice is included. Thus, although rice continues to be referred to as the main food (*shushoku*) and other dishes as auxiliary side dishes (*fukushoku*), the quantitative balance is reversed in haute cuisine, which emphasizes the side dishes and not the rice. What makes any dish *washoku*, however, whether *haute* or not, is the presence of rice, no matter how small. “Japanese style steak” (*washokushiki suteiki*)—a popular menu item in contemporary Japan—means steak served with cooked white rice. The symbolic hierarchy established by the words used, rice as *shushoku* (*main* dish) as opposed to *fukushoku* (*side* dish), expresses the importance of rice as far more than a staple food.

Rice that accompanies a Western dish such as steak is often referred to as *raisu*, that is, rice, as in “rice hamburger” (*raisu hanbāgā*), which is a hamburger sandwiched between two layers of bun-shaped rice. Variations of “rice burgers” include those with *teriyaki*, salmon, *kinpira* (cooked burdocks), and so forth. Many Western dishes, such as pork cutlets, hamburgers, steaks, and omelets are served with rice. At restaurants, a waiter or a waitress usually asks, “Would you like *raisu* or *pan* (from the Portuguese word for bread, *pão*, adopted by the Japanese) with it?” The code switch from *gohan* (the Japanese word for rice) to *raisu* (the English word *rice* in Japanese pronunciation) is a significant semiotic marker; the use of *raisu* signifies that the dish belongs to a different culinary system and is not, to a Japanese, *washoku*.

In contemporary Japan, the food for the poor continues to be envisioned as a large amount of rice accompanied by a pickled plum (*umeboshi*) or pickles (*takuwan*), just as the poor in bread-eating countries rely on bread with soup or salt pork. But regardless of quantity, rice remains “the king-pin of any meal’s architecture” in Japan (Dore 1978:86).

Western Short-Grain Rice versus Japanese Short-Grain Rice

When the United States, a powerful other, pressured Japan to import rice from California, the Japanese immediately defended domestic rice and Japanese agriculture. Scarcely any contemporary Japanese would hold, even as a collective representation without individual belief, that rice has a soul or that rice is a deity. Many are unaware of the connection be-

tween rice and the emperor system, which has very little to do with the Japanese identity today.

Furthermore, this is not the only time that Japan has faced the importation of foreign rice. Earlier, Japan imported rice from time to time and even cultivated “foreign rice”:

In the thirteenth century a strain of rice from Indo-China (Champa) was introduced by way of China. It was appreciated by growers because of its early ripening and its resistance to cold and to pests, and by the end of the fourteenth century it was widely grown in the western provinces. According to the records of the Daigoji manors in Sanuki and Harima, about one-third of their tax rice was this strain. It was a low-grade rice in colour and flavour, but it was consumed in quantity by the poorer classes. (Sansom 1961:183)

The domestic rice today, which contemporary Japanese identify as *the* Japanese rice, is, in fact, an “invention of a tradition” in that the original species of rice was radically different from any of the many species cultivated today. Furthermore, no single species of rice ever constituted *the* Japanese rice in the past. As we saw, each farm household cultivated its own version of “the Japanese rice.”

In contrast to other rice that had been imported to Japan, California rice is identical with domestic rice. Unlike long-grain rice from China and other rice-consuming countries, short-grain California rice was cultivated from seeds originally brought from Japan and resembles Japanese rice. Yet symbolically it is just as different as any other food that represents the other because California rice is grown on foreign soil.

The powerful agricultural union, Zenchū, pointing out that Japan imports from the United States 77.1 percent of its corn, 88.5 percent of its soybeans, 58.7 percent of its wheat, and 53.7 percent of its grain sorghum (*Zenchū Farm News*, no.5, January 1987:2), issued the following statement:

In Japanese agriculture, rice carries incalculable weight compared with other crops. It is no exaggeration whatsoever to say that the maintenance of complete rice *self-sufficiency* is the sole guarantee to agriculture and farming households in Japan. Rice farming in Japan, with a history of 2,300 years behind it, has greatly influenced all areas of *national life*, including social order, religious worship, festivals, food, clothings and housing, thus molding *the prototype of Japanese culture*. In addition, Japanese agriculture and its farming household economy have traditionally developed around rice, and other sectors of agriculture, such as livestock farming and horticulture, are actually based on rice. (Italics added)

Okabe Saburō, director of the Science and Technology Division of the Liberal Democratic party and a member of the House of Councilors, ex-

presses a similar view about the role of rice agriculture in Japan.⁸ To explain the benefits of rice agriculture, he calls attention to the frequent flooding of the Kanda River in Tokyo caused by the transformation of rice paddies along its upper banks into urban space. When rice paddies were there, 60 percent of the rainfall was absorbed by the paddies; without them 90 percent of the rainfall pours into the river, causing flooding. He argues that the role of rice agriculture goes far beyond the production of food. It contributes to flood control, soil conservation, preservation of underground water, purification of water, and land beautification. He concludes that rice agriculture is the best use of the land for every rice-producing country in monsoon Asia.

The statements by Zenchū or an LDP Diet member may be quite predictable, and if they were alone in expressing this sentiment, one could dismiss its significance. Of note, however, is that people in other sectors of Japanese society, including consumers, also use similar expressions that link rice with the Japanese self. In its editorial column, the *Asahi* newspaper (*Asahi Shinbun* June 13, 1990)—the most liberal major newspaper in Japan—reports that in 1988, of the 2,629 calories a day consumed by typical Japanese, only 49 percent comes from food produced in Japan. Of the 49 percent, 54 percent comes from rice. Based on the calculation of calories, then, Japan has the lowest self-sufficiency in the world. Therefore, according to this editorial, if domestic rice is threatened, the self-sufficiency of the Japanese diet is in severe danger.

Similarly, H. Inoue (1988) emphasizes how, according to estimates by the Agricultural Department of Iwate Prefecture, rice paddies function as dams which in northeastern Japan alone would cost ¥ 200 trillion to build (see also Shimogaito 1986:13–15). Rice production literally preserves the soil, the Japanese land. Not only the soil but also the vegetation and air of Japan benefit directly from rice production. Inoue echoes a common sentiment expressed in newspapers and other mass media, “American rice would not clear the air, nor would it adorn the scenery with beautiful green” (H. Inoue 1988:103). In these arguments, rice symbolizes *Japan itself*, its land, water, and air.

While opponents emphasize the positive features of domestic rice and rice paddies, they also stress the negative aspects of California rice. A frequently voiced charge against foreign rice is the extensive use of chemicals on agricultural products in the United States. Shimogaito (1988:76–78) lists a number of chemicals, both insecticides and postharvest preservatives, and stresses the benefits of chemical-free Japanese rice. The farm union (Zenchū) picked up on this fear and produced a video exaggerating the harm to people who consume chemically treated agricultural products. This extreme tactic was criticized even in Japan (*Asahi Shin-*

bun April 1, 1988; August 3, 1988), especially when not all Japanese products are chemical free. They discontinued the campaign.

At a symbolic level, the accusation about the chemicals on rice relates to the aforementioned structure of reflexivity in which the principle of purity and impurity is the single most important principle both cognitively and affectively. Chemicals symbolize *the impurity of foreign rice* and, thus, constitute a threat to *the purity of the Japanese self*.

The controversy over California rice clearly demonstrates that domestic rice serves as a metaphor of self for the Japanese and their land, water, and air, for all of which purity is the essential quality. Equating self-sufficiency (*jikyū jisoku*) with domestic rice is the most frequent expression in the discourse (see also Ōshima 1984:2–4). Other metaphors of self include lifeblood crop (I. Yamaguchi 1987:40); the life line (*seimeisen*); the last sacred realm (*saigo no seiiki*) (*Kobe Shinbun*, July 6, 1990); and the last citadel (used by the minister of Agriculture and Fishing, *Asahi Shinbun*, evening ed., June 27, 1990). The last two phrases express the Japanese fear that if they make concessions on the rice issue, they may have to concede to other impositions from the United States, such as nuclear weapons.

Historical Conjunctures and Changing Identities

Contrary to the stereotype of Japan as an isolated country and of the Japanese as chauvinists with closed minds, the Japanese identity has been formulated and reformulated through their dialogue with outsiders. The Japanese, thus, adopted rice and rice paddies, introduced from outside, as the marks of their identity during the eighth century. Remarkably, these dominant metaphors continue to have symbolic power even today.

Contemporary Japan is a postindustrial nation that is a far cry from a rice-paddy agrarian society. Government subsidies to farmers have been under attack from urbanites who now make up the majority of the population. With an increase in the use of side dishes, the amount of rice consumed by contemporary Japanese has been drastically reduced. Yet rice continues to be a dominant metaphor of the Japanese self. Many, but by no means all, Japanese view the California rice importation as a threat to their identity and its autonomy. Urbanites, many of whom resent the farm subsidies provided by the government and are antagonistic toward farmers, are still willing to pay for the *symbolic* value of domestic rice.

The rice issue has become the rallying point to defend *the self* when *the other* threatens it. Intriguingly, the California rice issue that coincided

with the illness and death of the Shōwa emperor scarcely involves the emperor, whose symbolic relationship to rice has been almost forgotten and whose symbolic power to represent the Japanese has been radically eroded. Secularized rice, as it were, remains a dominant symbol of the self with a strong emotive resonance that surfaced dramatically when the United States, a powerful other, pressured Japan to open the rice market.

Why is there such a strong surge in support of agriculture and rice as metaphors *at this time in history* when Japan has achieved a so-called economic miracle? Japan's economic achievement has prompted an intense discourse on the self in relation to the other (Ohnuki-Tierney 1990a). Technology defined the superiority of Western civilization in the eyes of the Japanese when the country was reopened near the end of the nineteenth century. The native concept of the Stranger Deity provided the model for perceiving foreigners as superior to the self, offering an ideal mirror for the Japanese to emulate. The Japanese effort to excel in technology is explained by the symbolic position that technology occupied. By superseding Western technology, at least in some ways, the Japanese no longer feel inferior to the *other*. Their "conquest," as many Japanese see it, of the world market in high technology, the auto industry, and other economic-technological spheres should not be seen simply as an economic success. As a symbol of the superior other, technology and industry motivated the Japanese to excel in these areas. Their achievements, in turn, have had a profound impact on their concept of their collective self. It is a complex picture in which the internal logic of symbolic structure provides symbolic meaning to "external" phenomena, such as foreigners. The symbolic meaning of technology was partially responsible for the Japanese effort in technological advancement, which, in turn, has affected the structure of reflexivity.

From the perspective of the structure of reflexivity, therefore, the present is a new era for the Japanese who feel for the first time in their history that they have "mastered" the outside, the *other*, whose negative power devastated the country in 1945. The hierarchy between the *self* and *other* has been inverted. This inversion is a drastic change happening for the first time for the Japanese over whom the Chinese and Westerners had always claimed superiority.

The Japanese, however, are aware of how they were and still are placed within the Oriental framework. Dan Rather, a news commentator, went all the way to Japan to announce that 150 foreign delegates attended the emperor's funeral when there were 163.⁹ Every delegate counted because to the Japanese the number of foreign delegates reflected Japan's newly gained stature in the world. To some Japanese his carelessness expressed that Japan had not, after all, achieved the recognition sought. They are also acutely aware of the resurgence of a great deal of

anti-Japanese feelings and attitudes in the United States. It is time to re-define themselves. They summoned, as it were, rice agriculture, which has been on native soil long enough since its introduction from outside to become the defining feature of themselves; the Western origin of science and technology is too recent to claim as their own. The Japanese insistence on domestic rice is part of the process of redefining the endangered self of the Japanese.

What emerges from this picture is that although the Stranger Deity provided the Japanese with a model to conceptualize the superiority of the other, their view of the other could never be simple adoration. It has always been double-edged because the superiority of the other has brought ambivalence about themselves. To understand the Japanese relation with the other, especially toward Western peoples, one must keep in mind the ambivalence that many peoples—those politically and/or culturally colonized—must wrestle with in their relationships with the West (see chap. 9). The ambivalence toward the other may be responsible for an amazing chauvinism, on the one hand, and the historical continuity of the Japanese national identity, on the other. Eisenstadt (1978:144) points out that a structural and organizational pluralism—one not unlike the European pattern—has developed in Japan, but it did so only within the framework of the historical continuity of the national identity.

Throughout this complex dialogue with various others, then, rice and rice paddies have served as the metaphor, always representing the Japanese self, a self that nonetheless has transformed into various selves in Japanese encounters with others.