



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

Rice: More than a Meal

The Importance of Rice to the Japanese Society and Culture

B.A. Essay

Ólöf Eyjólfsdóttir

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University of Iceland
School of Humanities
Japanese Language and Culture

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Ólöf Eyjólfsdóttir

Kt.: 041191-2289

Supervisor: Gunnella Þorgeirsdóttir

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Summary

This essay discusses the influence rice has had on the Japanese society and culture. It explores how rice has, since its cultivation started in Japan, impacted the society and people's morals. The essay is divided into three chapters. The first chapter focuses on when rice arrived to Japan, leading to the start of a society formation. It discusses when and how rice became the staple of the Japanese people and how rice has led to Japan being a homogenous nation, discriminating those who are outside of their group.

The second chapter focuses on rice's cultural importance that can be found in everyday actions and speech. Rice's significant influence on Shinto, Japan's indigenous religious beliefs and practices, and the connection between rice, deities and men that clearly distributes how rice has come to be symbolized above any other food products, whereas it has even come to signify the Japanese self.

While the second chapter focuses on culture, the third and last chapter discusses the Japanese modern society and how the influence of early rice cultivation has affected people's morals and the society structure that we know today.

Through the information expressed in the main issue, the conclusion reveals how still today the Japanese relate to rice as a timeless part of Japan's history and culture and how rice serves as their identity, separating Japan from the outer world. As for rice cultivation, its influence on the society is still prominent but has unfortunately led to some negative aspects such as suppressed individuality. However, with the rise of modern pop-culture, this might be changing.

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Introduction

When I took my first class in Japanese Society and Culture, Toshiki Toma, a pastor for immigrants in Iceland and one of the lecturers, discussed rice cultivation and the effect it has had on the Japanese society. This is something I found extremely interesting and wanted to learn more about. Therefore I decided that same day that I wanted to write an essay on this topic. It is amazing how rice has come to affect the Japanese society to its very core, but it is not uncommon to find food affecting societies since everyone has to eat and different countries have different food sources. People have come to identify themselves with their food, seeing it as a part of who they are (Ohnuki-Tierney 1999, 244-246). In fact, most countries have their own staple food. Staple food can be grain, meat or any foodstuff that is the main energy source for a society. As for rice, it is a staple food for about half of the world's population (Ishige 2000), where more than one-third relies only on rice as staple food but the number increases with those who rely on rice along with other staples (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, 12). In Japan rice has for long been the staple of their traditional diet (Ishige 2000). However, globalization has led to a decrease in rice consumption in Japan, mostly replacing it with food from the Western world: America and Europe (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, 16). In her book, *Rice as Self*, Ohnuki-Tierney, an anthropologist, discusses the importance of rice and the changes its importance has gone through in recent years. As Western culture became constantly more popular in Japan and as Japan became more prosperous, rice consumption decreased, following the increase of side dishes (1993, 16). Even though it would seem as Japanese food culture is slowly replacing rice with other staple foods, its importance can't be overlooked in a historical, cultural, and social aspect. Therefore I ask: what is the importance of rice in Japanese history and culture and how important is it to the current, modern Japanese society?

1. Historical importance of rice – the formation of a society

“It’s impossible to overstate the importance of rice to the Japanese: the countries origins are rooted in the stuff” (McCurry 2011). This is a rather simplified image of rice’s importance in Japan. To understand the reason behind this statement there are many things that must be examined. It is important to keep in mind that rice must be cultivated before it can be accessed in supermarkets and before discussing the importance of rice agriculture for Japanese culture, it is necessary to possess minimal understanding of rice farming. The Japanese climate varies since the country is a string of islands located amid the North



Figure 1. Beautiful Oyama rice terraces.

Pacific Ocean and Sea of Japan. It stretches from the north to the south, towards the east of the Peninsula of Korea with exceptionally great latitude, spanning approximately the same length as the distance between the north end of England and the north end of Spain. The main islands are Hokkaidō, Honshū, Shikoku, and Kyūshū (Maps of World 2012). In areas such as Honshū and Kyūshū, it is quite warm and humid during the summer that comes after a rainy season, while in areas such as Hokkaidō, it is cooler¹. In the end of the summer and into the fall there is a tendency for typhoons to hit Japan (Web Japan 2011, 2-3) which can damage or ruin the crop. Between 1991 and 2007 an average of 9,6% of rice crops were damaged and if hurricanes in different areas of the world occur, it increases the chance of crops being damaged severely (Kalaugher 2012). The land is shaped by steep mountains, affecting the climate and causing seasonal rains in some areas. There are also many rivers in the mountains providing necessary hydration for cultivation (Sakaiya 1993, 66; Web Japan 2011, 2). These factors make paddy-based rice cultivation possible since it requires fields to be flooded which is done by an elaborate network of channels and pipelines that bring the water to the paddy fields. This forms a deep layer of soft mud which is leveled so that all parts get equal amount of water and nutrition (Chandler 2002). The advantages of this particular mode of cultivation is the constantly flowing water that carries nutrition, renewing the fields year after year, unlike corn and wheat fields that need to be rotated regularly (Hays 2011).

After harvesting the rice, it is polished. In modern day agriculture the polishing is done by machines however historically up until the 18th century when water wheel milling

¹ See map on figure 2.

practices were officially adopted by a sake brewer named Yamamura Tazaemon (Hakushika Sake 2011), it was generally done by hand turned stone mortars (Takeo 1999). This form of cultivation requires great labor in order to level the fields so they can be flooded and it also relies heavily on nature to provide rainwater, sunlight and calm weather since storms can ruin the crop. This paddy-based rice cultivation requires constant maintenance, and so, the amount of labor required calls for large communities to work together (Sakaiya 1993, 66-67). These communities had to rely on good cooperation when they first started to form by the arrival of the first rice grains outside of Japan.

1.1. Where, when and how?

The Jōmon period [ca. 11.000 BC – 400 BC] is believed to have come to an end around 400 – 300 BC largely due to a new cultural influence, the paddy based rice cultivation (Varley 2000, 3-4) as well as the influx of more complicated pottery and tools (Schirokauer 2009, 9-12). It is however quite possible that rice might have arrived to Japan prior to that time, or around 13.000 BC (International Rice Research Institution, IRRI, 2011). Where rice originated from exactly is still uncertain, however most scholars are in agreement that it came from China (IRRI 2011). Francesca Bray, a professor of Social Anthropology who has done research on the history of agriculture and science, discusses the route rice might



possibly have travelled before reaching Japan and concludes that there are three possible routes: “overland through North China to Korea and then by sea; by sea from the Yangzi Delta to Korea and thence to Japan; or by sea from the Yangzi Delta directly to Kyūshū” (1986, 10). The oldest dated evidence was found in Kyūshū, island that reaches furthest south, and therefore rice cultivation is believed to have spread from there (Bray 1986, 10). However, a news

article from 2001 states that according to the local authorities, the oldest remains of rice paddies found in Miyakonojo in Kyūshū date back to the 4th or 5th century BC (Kyodo News International 2001), which however still fits within the time frame Varley provided.

Different varieties of rice are grown in different areas of Japan. Geographical factors and change in earth's climate and attempts of adopting rice breeds do harsh conditions also cause lots of varieties in Japanese rice and constant developing (McCurry 2011; Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, 13-15). The Asian domesticated rice, *Oryza sativa*, has two major subspecies: the *indica* type which is long-grained and *japonica* which is short-grained and becomes sticky when cooked (Garris et. al. 2005). China are the world's largest rice producers, there both types can be found² and there seems to be no standardized Chinese rice as such, with them being the world's largest rice producers (IndexMundi 2012). As for the Japanese rice, it falls under the group of *japonica* rice (Ohnki-Tierney 1993, 13). Japanese rice then falls into a few categories where two are the most common: *uruchi mai*, polished white rice and the most common Japanese rice today, and *mochigome*, glutinous rice (Sekiguchi 2010). Glutinous rice is the stickiest and is used for sweets (Yoshizuka 2013). This quality of the Japanese rice is used to make different sorts of Japanese food, like sushi or rice balls, where the rice must stick together. The past few years, Japan has produced around 7,6 million tons per year (*Oryza* 2013), or around 1,6% of global production (IndexMundi 2012). Although we can't know with any certainty when rice was first introduced to Japan, it is certain that rice cultivation did not originate in Japan but was instead something introduced by foreign influence. However, rice has been a part of Japanese society and culture for a long time and its presence has inevitably affected the Japanese society greatly.

1.2. Changes – society formation and hierarchy

As it is very labor intensive rice cultivation changed the way people lived first when it reached Japan (Sakaiya 1993, 66-67). "Even more than other cereals, rice has profoundly influenced the societies which live on it - that is, so long as they have co-existed for centuries [...]" (Toussaint-Samat 1993, 158). Before the introduction of modern technology, rice cultivation required considerable communal work and in spite of advances in technology it still requires intense labor (Sakaiya 1993, 77). Thus, communities or villages began to form, consisting of farming families. These villages became tightly organized groups which in turn turned out to be the basis of the Japanese societal structure that still survives on into modern times (Varley 2000, 5). Societies are formed when people

² When searching for Chinese rice, there were no typical rice breeds that came up. In China long, medium and short grained rice is used for cooking different dishes, however, the sources are not reliable since they come from people answering questions that anyone has access to (Talon8 2010; Hotfox745 2010). As for the medium grain rice that has not been mentioned in the essay, it has similar qualities to the short rice and can be used in dishes such as sushi (Rice: History and Types of Rice. (*The Nibble* 2007).

start to form large groups, or communities for example by families getting together to assist each other with cultivation (Dictionary.com Unabridged (2), 2013). Therefore, the formation of the Japanese society had begun and there is no doubt that the Yayoi period [ca.400 BC – 250 AD] laid the foundation for what later became the Japan of today (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, 31) which in turn evokes the question: what did this society consist of and how did it function?

Social structure began forming based on family structure as well as a structure formed from the dependence on the group effort in regards to the rice cultivation (Sugimoto 2010, 3). Social hierarchy became more prominent in Japan during the Tomb period [ca. 250 - 592 AD] where the chief's residence was notably built separately from the commoners (Niino 1993, 1-2). With the advent of agriculture there came more competition for resources in Japan. This called for greater organization, that resulted in this form of agriculture that had a clear division of labor and greater class stratification than had previously been known (Schirokauer, Lurie and Gay 2006, 11). Political units started to emerge, where chiefs met with chiefs from other villages and dealt with conflicts (Schirokauer et. al. 2006, 12) thus making hierarchy and society structure constantly clearer. During the Late Yayoi period there are even records of Japan being described by China as a highly class stratified society in which wealthy landholders ruled over common people (Kawagoe 2009).

Unfortunately there is not much known about the early family systems. However, women are believed to have not been ruled by men as they later came to be, which is quite common for farming societies (Toshiki Toma, personal communication April 1, 2013). Before the 6th century, women were even encouraged to rule since they were believed to bring peace and regulation due to the influence of Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess' myth (Silva-Grondin 2010). This can be understood since her myth claims that the Japanese imperial family is descended from her (Encyclopædia Britannica Online (1) 2013), whereas her grandson is Japan's legendary "first" emperor to whom she gave the first rice grains (Ohnuki-Tierney 1999, 247). This mythology based on femininity created a matriarchal antiquity in Japan and influenced a feminine allure that dictated a renowned attitude towards women (Silva-Grondin 2010). An interesting example of women's power is Himiko who was a "queen" during the Late Yayoi period, around 200 – 265 AD, who temporarily united the small "kingdoms" that had formed all over Japan (Schirokauer et. al. 2009, 12). This example gives the idea of a certain hierarchical structure; a factor that is still prominent in today's modern society (Hendry 2013, 91). The change in women's role

and power is believed to have changed with the introduction of Confucianism, Samurai³ based feudalism (Friedman 1992), and Buddhism from China (Silva-Grondin 2010).

With the introduction of Confucianism that emphasizes the supreme power of the male (Friedman 1992) and Buddhism that had fundamental convictions that women were evil in nature, eventually led women to assuming a submissive role in Japanese society. Later on during the Kamakura period [1192-1333], feudal Japan developed and women's influence increased. As the feudal era progressed, it began to outline the expectations of women who were expected to get married, stay at home and take care of their children and husband, leading to the household becoming based on patriarchy (Silva-Grondin 2010). What social hierarchical structures bring about are privileges for the one's placed higher in the structure. These privileges frequently involve luxury such as expensive food. Today rice is considered a very common food product and in Japan it's a part of people's daily diet. However, it hasn't always been so.

1.3. History of rice as staple food

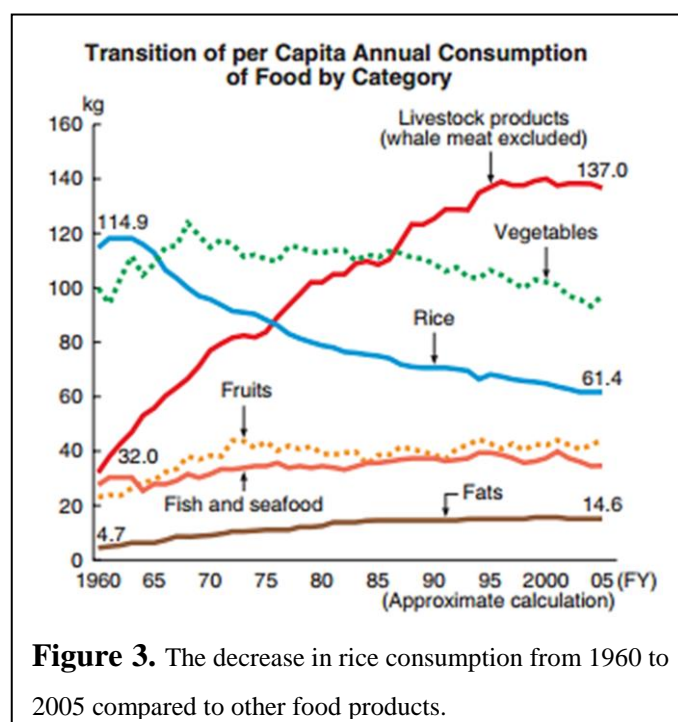
In 1582, rice's importance to the Japanese economy was demonstrated when Hideyoshi, a general who rose to great power in the 16th century, began his land survey, determining the value of land in terms of average annual productivity measured in *koku* of rice⁴ (Schirokauer et.al. 2006, 126). This led to rice becoming the staple of the Japanese economy and it also became a currency and the measure of wealth in Japanese society during the pre-modern period [Tokugawa period 1600-1868] (Varley 2000, 5-7). Rice is a staple food for nearly half of the world's population (Chang 2000). "The primacy of rice as a diet staple is echoed in the Japanese language. "*Gohan*" is both the word for "cooked rice" as well as "meal"" (Wojtan 1993). Contrary to common belief, rice has not always been the staple for all of Japan from the beginning of its cultivation in Japan, and scholars vary in their opinions as to when precisely rice became the staple (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, 32). There are many examples of rice farmers before and during the Meiji period [1868-1912] who did not consume the rice they cultivated but instead ate other grains and paid land taxes with the rice as well sold it. Rice was considered a luxury and reserved for special occasions (Yanagita 1957, 32-34). However, its consumption increased dramatically during the Meiji period since the country's economy developed and men who served in the Japanese military got accustomed to eating white rice, which was provided to

³ Japanese warriors that appeared in feudal Japan.

⁴ *Koku* was equal to 4,96 bushels of rice (Schirokauer et. al. 2006, 126).

them, and which they then brought back with them to all corners of the country (Yanagita 1957, 30-34). So increased rice consumption can somewhat be owed to the Meiji restoration, that happened during the Meiji period and brought Japan to the modern world, and the changes it brought about, such as a stronger military and navy (Schirokauer 2006, 185-186). However, as Ohnuki-Tierney has pointed out, this at first only affected the male population seeing as women could not join the army. Thus it was in 1939, when food rationing was adopted, that rice finally reached the point of being staple food for the Japanese (1993, 39). In 1938, after the government was given full control over the economy in order to increase weaponry production for a long war in China and to prepare for a probable conflict with the West, inflation negatively affected the supply of necessary consumer goods. Thus “the government started to control staple food commodities in 1939 when the “Rice Distribution Law” was passed” (Martin 1985, 194-195). So it is clear that rice didn’t become the staple food of Japanese culture until long after its cultivation started. Its importance was however prominent and exemplified in Japanese culture by the way it was only used on special occasions.

It would however seem as if rice consumption in Japan is generally in decline. In



1960, starches made up 69% of the 2290 calories eaten daily by the average Japanese or the average of 115 kilos of rice per person per year. In 1976 it had fallen to 85 kilos. Figure 3 provided by Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in Japan, shows clearly the annual decrease in rice consumption as for the changing dietary habits. This is believed to be largely caused by general changes in the Japanese diet, influenced of late by Western cuisine (Toussaint-Samat 1993, 159) and

increase in Japan’s national income (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries 2006, 13). In 2013, Japan’s rice production has been forecast to be 20.000 tons less than the previous year, seeing as different eating habits and decreasing population are causing demand for rice to continue dropping (Xinhua 2012). In spite of decreased consumption of rice and how late it became the staple of the Japanese, its importance cannot be overlooked.

Rice has had great cultural influence that still remains, as does the influence it has had on the Japanese society. So far we have focused on the main stream indigenous Japanese culture and had the impression that it is a homogenous society. However, there is another important indigenous group in Japan, the Ainu, who must be discussed in regards to culture and society.

1.4. Ainu – the outcasts

The Ainu race is an indigenous population of northern Japan, living mainly in Hokkaidō. They have suffered discrimination on behalf of the government for many centuries in the form of attempts to deprive them of their land and totally assimilate them culturally and linguistically. Unlike mainstream Japanese, their language has no written form and their culture differs from the culture of the majority of Japanese (Sugimoto 2010, 210). Some of their old traditional culture includes bear hunting, tattooing of lips and hands, and emphasize on living with nature, believing that everything in nature has a life of its own and can interact with humanity (Dubreuil 2007; Sugimoto 2009, 2011). The Ainu are believed to be of different ethnic origin than the people known as Japanese since they differ in physical appearance. Not much is known about their true origin though many speculations have been made on the subject and for long they were believed to be living remnants of the ancient Jōmon culture of Japan but there remains no certainty (Nielson 2009). Therefore some have claimed their different ethnic origin to be the reason why they are outcasts in the Japanese society, not unlike how the Native Americans suffered discrimination from the U.S. government (Hays 2013). However, interesting speculations have been made as to why they were and are still to some extent outcasts in the Japanese society.

The Japanese developed their society from rice cultivation, and therefore tend to homogenize everything, having seen themselves as a homogenous nation or a “natural state”, independent from international relations (Sakaiya 1993, 76-77) identifying themselves as *uchi*, inside one’s group opposite to *soto*, outside one’s group (Hendry 2013, 42). When rice cultivation came to Japan, it is believed that it didn’t reach some hunting-gathering populations in the north of Japan, the place where Ainu lived and still live. That might have led to them to become outsiders of the Japanese society since rice cultivation laid the foundation of the Japanese state (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, 31). “Ainu do not understand the way to cultivate grains, and would not even know a rice field if they saw one. [...] They eat only fish and animal flesh.” These words were written by Mogami

Tokunai, a shogun⁵ official around 1790 (Walker 2001, 86). These words show clear prejudice towards the Ainu race in terms of them being inferior since they ate meat and couldn't grow rice. Today, the meat eating no longer sets them apart since eating meat became more common in Japan during the 19th century (Ohnuki-Tierney 1999, 252-253). Eating meat was not a taboo in Japan until Emperor Temmu prohibited the eating of cattle, horses, dogs, monkeys, and chicken in 675 AD. This developed further when Shinto, one of Japan's religions, adopted similar philosophy as Buddhism. Still meat eating existed in the society but its consumption was very low (Ishige 2000). This might have led Japan who cultivated rice further away from the hunting-gathering society of the Ainu. In 1977 the government put into effect a law to promote the Ainu culture and spread knowledge about the Ainu tradition. This forced the Japanese public to recognize the existence of the Ainu community, but it wasn't until 2008 the Ainu were recognized as an indigenous people of Japan by the Japanese parliament and government. However, the Ainu are still facing discrimination and many things need to be done so that they gain equal status to the Japanese (Sugimoto 2010, 209-211). Even though it might seem as if the Ainu are completely different from the Japanese, they have a few things in common when examining Japan's culture and can easily be understood when thinking of Japan as a hunter-gathering nation prior to the start of rice cultivation (Schirokauer et. al. 2006, 7) that resulted in the starting of state formation. Then it is appropriate to ask, how has rice and rice cultivation contributed to the Japanese society and culture?

⁵ Chief military commanders in feudal Japan (Dictionary.com Unabridged (1) 2013).

2. Cultural importance of rice

Up until now the focus has been on the formation of the Japanese society therefore an important part remains to be discussed, culture. Its definition varies between people since it is a concept that reaches all areas of our daily lives. It is defined in the Oxford Dictionary Online as the “arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively and the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society” (2013). Rice’s influence on Japan is clearly distributed if religion, customs, and arts are examined. As for the importance of rice for the Japanese self, it has been discussed to great extent by Ohnuki-Tierney. The influence Buddhism, introduced in the 6th century, and Confucianism, presumably introduced in the 3rd century, had on the Japanese society have been slightly mentioned but Shinto, Japan’s oldest and perhaps most important religion, remains to be discussed.

2.1. Shinto

Another notable thing that society formation brought about was a more organized form of religion and at that time, “[...] the religion of the Japanese was an unorganized, undifferentiated, and unnamed complex of agricultural cult, nature worship, ancestor worship, and shamanism. The social unit of this worship complex was a hereditary group known as the *uji* (Hori, 1981: 13)“. This soon became known as Shinto, the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of Japan (Encyclopædia Britannica Online (4) 2013). Why did we create religion? Some might say that religion was created to explain the unknown, why things are the way they are or even to explain or accept what happens in nature. It might even have come about as humans evolved from small hunter-gatherer tribes into large agrarian cultures as means to encourage cooperation and tolerance among relative strangers, serving as a cultural adaptation to these challenges (Herbert 2011).

In the basic agricultural society of early Japan as for most, if not all other societies, water and fire were necessary and cooperation was the fundamental for their existence. These elements were also mysterious and could cause destruction. Thus it was believed by the early Japanese people, that they had spirits that had to be compensated. Religious and political leaders emerged in the agricultural villages and religion centered around the *kami*⁶, which in the ancient folk religion of Japan and later Shinto could be anything from a rock to

⁶ Translates roughly as god.

a heavenly being, and their gifts and protection from the elemental forces of nature. Eventually, the life of the villagers depended upon the cooperation within the group and the goodwill of the *kami*, received by offerings and compensations. From these earliest forms of communal religious worshiping, Shintoism and the offering rituals known today developed (Moriarty 1972, 91). Broadly speaking, Shinto has no founder nor a prophet since its religion has been passed down from generation to generation, exhibiting a deep respect for their ancestors. When the Japanese people and Japanese culture became aware of themselves, Shinto was already there and still is (Moriarty 1972, 92; Encyclopædia Britannica Online (4) 2013).

Shinto, which means the way of the *kami*, gained its name to distinguish it from Buddhism. Today, when thinking of Shintoism, shrines, such as in figure 4, frequently come to mind. Originally, Shinto had no shrine buildings but with time they became common. The Ise shrine is a famous shrine from the Yayoi period [ca. 400 BC – 250 AD],



Figure 4. Gates to an Inari shrine guarded by foxes dressed in red bib. Located inside Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine in Kamakura City.

and around the 10th century 3.000 shrines were receiving state offerings which distributes how early shrine building were built. Now shrines are a large part of Japanese culture (Encyclopædia Britannica Online (4) 2013). After the Meiji Restoration in 1868 throughout World War II, Shinto, or State Shinto, remained the official religion of Japan (Encyclopædia Britannica Online (5) 2013). To this day, Shinto still remains strong in Japan and is believed to have around 85% followers, though many follow both Shintoism and Buddhism but

sources disagree on the exact percentage (Hays 2012). Shinto has many gods or *kami*, and the term can refer to Japanese mythological deities, but can also mean divinity manifested in natural objects, places, animals, and human beings (Rujivacharakul 2000; Encyclopædia Britannica Online (4) 2013). One of those gods is Inari, primarily known as the protector of rice cultivation (Encyclopædia Britannica Online (3) 2013) or the god of rice, prosperity, and plenty and is one of the most popular deities in Japanese mythology. In traditional artwork, Inari is depicted accompanied by a pair of foxes but in modern times he has become one with the fox who is Inari's messengers and a magical shape-shifting being or

deity known as *kitsune* (Schumacher 2011). Inari is a part of the pantheon of gods in Shinto and his shrines are recognizable by their bright red gates which all Shinto shrines are adorned with as you walk the way of the gods, and statues of foxes, frequently dressed in red bib for good fortune, as can be seen on figure 4 (Ashkenazi 2003, 170). The fox also serves a greater role since he is associated with the term *kimon*, demon gate or a demon gate to the northeast, which generally means ominous direction, or taboo direction. The fox is able to ward off evil *kimon* so he serves as a guardian. Other Shinto shrines also have animal figures but they are not limited to foxes (Schumacher 2011). Inari's usual name refers to *ine*, the rice seedling, and may be read as "rice carrier" (Ashkenazi 2003, 170). However, in some Shinto shrines he is at times associated with the goddess of food or even depicted as a woman (Encyclopædia Britannica (3) 2013). A common gift to the Inari god is Inari sushi, where sushi rice is filled into deep fried tofu bags or wrappings, soaked in sweet rice liquor. Those who wish to ask for Inari's goodwill, often leave this sushi as an offering (Ashkenazi 2003, 172). The metaphor behind this sushi can easily be understood if the concept of Inari being the carrier of rice is examined, since the tofu bag holds the rice.

The influence of rice in Shinto, the Japanese religion that has such strong roots in the society, is a great cultural part of Japan. The emergence of rice cultivation societies contributed to a more organized form of Shinto as has been argued, since religious and political leaders emerged in the agricultural villages and religion centered around the *kami*, eventually leading to the life of the villagers depending upon the cooperation within the group and the goodwill of the *kami*. (Moriarty 1972, 91). Shinto then brought shrines that can be found all over Japan. The Fushimi Inari Shrine in Kyoto is a good representation (Japan-guide.com 2012) and is a great example of the cultural importance of rice in Japan. Shintoism and the significant role of rice in Shinto has had great effects on the modern day society that can be seen in the habits of the modern Japanese.

2.2. Symbolic meanings and superstitions

"*Ta mo yarō aze mo yarō*" is a saying that means: "I'll give away rice fields and footpaths" and is said by a man who will give everything to get a woman he falls in love with (Buchanan 1965, 14). For an extended period in Japan's history, rice was the principle standard of wealth (Varley 2000, 7). It also served the role of currency in trade at times (Wojtan 1993), and it was the chief item in land tax during the Meiji period [1868-1912]. During that time after paying their tax as well as selling it, farmers had very little rice left for themselves and therefore it was reserved for special occasions (Yanagita 1957, 32).

Rice has always been a food for ritual occasions in Japan. In her book, *Rice as Self*, Ohnuki-Tierney discusses folklorist Yanagita's thoughts on rice as the only grain believed to have a soul (as cited in Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, 44). When rice is eaten for festivals, it often processed a lot more than for other days and this was especially done during the Meiji period [1868-1912]. The rice was ground into flour which required more labor but made it seem more important. From this, *shitogi*, cakes made from rice flour, shaped into various form, were made. Modern forms of this are cakes called *mochi*, made of steamed glutinous rice (Yanagita 1957, 31).

In the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, first written documents of Japan by the command of Tenmu emperor, who sought to establish a Japanese identity distinct from China in the 8th century, rice itself is referred to as deity. This was done in the attempt to accept rice as a foreign innovation and led to rice and rice products being the single most important food for commensality between human beings and deities. By consuming the rice, they internalized the divine power embodied in each grain (Ohnuki-Tierney year, 247). In festivals dedicated to tutelary deities there were ceremonies in which the celebrants received portions of the food presented to the god or *kami*, signifying that sharing the gods food, an invisible bond was established between them (Yanagita 1957, 31). Still, rice does not only serve as a connection between man and deities but also between men themselves.

Ohnuki-Tierney has discussed the importance of rice to the Japanese to great extent:

“In the daily lives of the Japanese, rice and rice products play a crucial role in commensal activities, as an offering in the family ancestral alcove and as the only food shared at meals and served by the female head of the household, while other dishes are placed in individual containers” (1999, 247).

From this we can see that rice was an important offering to the ancestors, who are considered *kami*, and is an important part of uniting the family. Thus, rice stands for the *uchi*, the social group one belongs to that contrast to *soto*, that is outside of the group. (Ohnuki-Tierney 1999, 247).

As for rice being an important connection between humans and deities, it also serves as metaphor for the Japanese self. Throughout the Meiji period, when Japan went through drastic changes leading to its modernization, the military government's construction of Japanese national identity involved the use of food products, especially rice. The purity of white rice, or pure rice, became a metaphor for the purity of the Japanese self (Ohnuki-Tierney 1999, 249). Including that, its significance is also distributed in daily speech. Persons who were particularly intimate during the Meiji period,

according to Yanagita Kunio, were described “as friends who ate rice from the same pot” (1957, 31). However, an important rice product, *sake*, remains to be discussed.

Sake is a rice wine and is thought of as to be enjoyed in company, especially among men. People take turns in pouring the *sake* into each other’s cups (Ohnuki-Tierney 1999, 248). At first, sake was only served on festive days when everyone drank from the same jug but with time its consumption rose and occasions for drinking became more frequent. During those festivals, it served the same role as rice, establishing a bond with the god or *kami*. That custom can still be observed at the Imperial Household and at some old shrines, even though it is now more common to establish a bond with the *kami* by drinking *sake* after festivals (Britannica Encyclopædia Online (4) 2013). Now *sake* serves as an ice breaker and it is sometimes said that two people cannot talk freely unless they have gotten drunken together (Yanagita 1957, 34). From this importance of rice it can easily be understood that many superstitions came to be.

Food culture in modern day Japan is riddled with customs, etiquette, and superstitions. Rice is served in a separate bowl and soy sauce should never be poured directly over it. Sticking your chopsticks into the rice is a famous Japanese faux pas based on superstition that symbolizes death, since it is an action done at funerals whereby the rice is offered to the deceased relatives. It is also considered proper to finish of your plate, even down to the last grain of rice, otherwise the diner will go blind (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, 88-89; Rodgers 2011). A common saying: *hiyameshi o kuu*, to eat cold rice, and *tanin no meshi*, to eat someone else’s rice, refer to a situation in which people are no longer surrounded by the warm comfort of their families (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, 96). These everyday rules and phrases demonstrate the importance rice has on the daily life. Rice cultivation brought Japan the rice which has become a symbol of unification between humans and even deities. It has contributed greatly to Shinto traditions which in turn enrich Japanese culture. Therefore it can be said that rice is a symbol of the nation’s spiritual connection with nature, the gods and the community (Demetriou 2011), and these connections, as for the connections between ancient Japan and modern Japan, can be found presented in the arts

2.3. Art and popular culture

The importance of rice to the Japanese people is reflected in the arts. Rice and rice cultivation along with Japan’s beloved cherry blossoms has remained a topic in Matsuo Bashō’s, Japan’s greatest haiku master, poems. *Karikakeshi / tazura no tsuru ya / sato no*

aki. Translates as; in the half harvested / rice paddies, a crane— / autumn in the village (Bashō 2004, 60). However, the way rice fields began to represent Japan is clearly expressed in the traditional Japanese woodblock prints (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, 89). Famous woodblock print artists, Hiroshige [1797-1858] and Hokusai [1760-1849], portrayed them

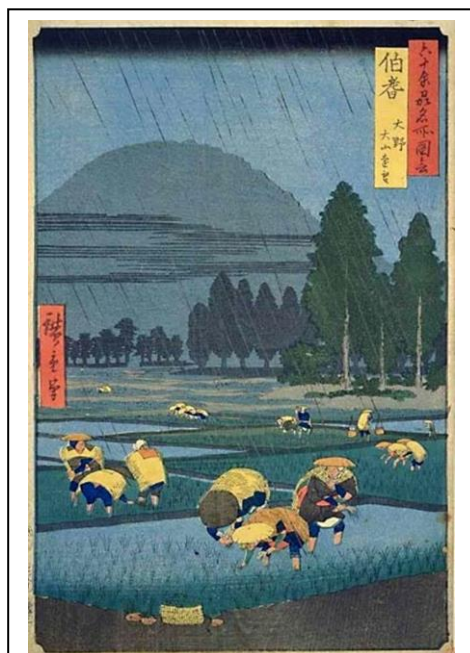


Figure 5. Hoki Province, peasants transplanting rice in a rain storm. Woodblock print by Hiroshige.

in their work as can be seen on figure 5 where farmers work hard planting rice in a rainstorm. Some of these artworks have been transferred onto T-shirts and cups, bringing them back to life in the modern world⁷. It is however not only in older artwork and poems that the importance of rice cultivation can be seen. There is a more modern form of art that portrays the influence and importance rice agriculture has had on Japanese society.

*Anime*⁸ and *manga*⁹ are well known concepts in the Western world, having been introduced through the television medium as well as the internet and books. One of the most influential of these is *Pokémon*, an *anime* built on the popular *Pokémon manga* series by Satoshi Tajirin, created in 1997 and is still running, with colorful monsters that are captured and trained to battle with their special elemental powers or simply kept as pets. Throughout this *anime*, a feeling of team spirit is present and great emphasis is on cooperation and friendship. Traditional Japanese culture appears in between, with traditional and bittersweet scenes from festivals and scenic rice fields, praising Japan's ancient culture. This strongly resembles the cooperation focus of the Japanese society where benefit of the group is believed to be more important than the benefit of the individual (Haitani 1990). The manga series *Fairy Tail*, created by Hiro Mashima, has also been made into *anime*, in 2006 to 2013, and captures the group focus of the Japanese society, that is believed to be uniquely Japanese (Sugimoto 2010, 4), and how strongly Japanese relate with their group. The story is about mages who are a part of a guild. They have many encounters with evil forces and mages from other guilds. *Fairy Tail* emphasizes cooperation and never giving up for the sake of your group. The characters receive powers from their comrades to defeat evil and they never give up or sacrifice their own lives, since

⁷ It is possible to buy various merchandise decorated with some of the most famous woodblock prints online (Zazzle 2013).

⁸ Japanese cartoons.

⁹ Japanese comics.

there is always a way to conquer the problem. This resembles the group thinking of the Japanese society, that is, how strongly they relate to their group and how hard they fight for its honor and benefit (Haitani 1990). However, individuality is encouraged but that is perhaps a sign of a new road Japan is headed for.

This emphasis on the importance of living might be seen as an attempt to encourage people to value their own lives, since there are many cases of suicides in Japan among students who have been victims of bullying in school (Hendry 2013, 81). There is also a close relation between unemployment and suicide rates, perhaps among people who might find it hard to fit into the society as Azusa Hayano geologist discussed in a short documentary on Japan's suicide forest, Aokigahara, (Stelley 2010; Traphagan 2013). Thus it seems as if *anime* is encouraging people to head for a direction of individuality that has had to step aside for harmony and "groupism" that is very prominent in Japan's modern society (Haitani 1990), even though the spirit of cooperation still remains. In the education system children are taught to fit into their group whereas children who don't follow the flow of the group and seem unhappy are considered strange (Hendry 2013, 47). This doesn't encourage individuality and perhaps results in bullying. This brings us to the question: how has rice cultivation affected cooperation and "groupism" way of thinking in the Japanese society?

3. Rice and the modern Japanese society

It would seem clear from the above that rice cultivation was something that brought about changes in Japanese society. People got together and formed societies that soon gained hierarchical structure that still remains. Even though rice hasn't been the staple of the Japanese until recently, it has always been important to Japan as can be seen in Japanese culture. In the modern world, the influence rice cultivation has had on the society can be seen in different areas of the Japanese society such as in business and the way people think. Some of the most prominent features that remain and are clearly distributed in the education system (Hendry 2013, 74-75), are the group-orientation of the Japanese society that is thought to be uniquely Japanese (Sugimoto 2010, 4), and the cooperation focus since these features are closely related. It must remain clear that when discussing the concept of society structure and how early society formation has remain through the years, the reason lies within rice cultivation and thus, rice and its influence is the main subject.

3.1. Family, hierarchy, "groupism," and education in modern Japan

A child's first experience of the world is through its interaction with its family. There, children build up a picture of the world, through the values they learn from family members. One of the most interesting elements of Japanese society is distinct social hierarchy. Children are made aware of their relative ages early on, especially when concerning siblings. The younger sibling should always listen to the older one, reflecting the most prominent part when it comes to Japanese hierarchy that is used to maintain harmony within the group: listen to your elders (Hendry 2013, 23; 45-46). It is probable that this way of thinking derives from the first political units and class stratifications that were formed after rice cultivation emerged where the elders served an important role in informing the young of rice cultivation. After all, they remember the harvests of previous years and of the members of the village they have cultivated rice the longest (Becker 1983, 141). However, Confucianism, introduced to Japan possibly in the 3rd or the 6th century (Tucker 2012), is a Chinese philosophy where social hierarchy is believed to be the natural order and that harmony lies in submission (Keating 1, 2004; Tucker 2012). These ideas affected the Japanese society and are believed to be the reason for the strong hierarchical structures within the society (Dolan and Worden 1994). However, Japan previously had some of those hierarchical values which might have contributed to why Confucianism was adopted. Confucianism also values the importance of the group over the individual, but as

has been discussed previously, this is something that has existed in the Japanese society from the beginning of rice cultivation. Comparing Japan and China, where Confucianism originates, this becomes clearer since the Chinese society is not as group oriented as the Japanese society even though they are family oriented. Constant competition makes it appear more individualistic (Fukuyama 1995, 26). What can be concluded from this is that Japan already had some basic social values, such as cooperation, and social structure.

As has been mentioned, rice cultivation influenced the forming of societies by forcing family units to cooperate and live in close proximity to each other. In the Japanese society, the individual is seen as a member of a group, especially their family. The principles of the biological family form the basic unit of the Japanese society. This is something Haitani, a professor of International Economics, called “collectivism familistic groupism” (1990). This focus on hierarchy and looking at you as a part of a family unit rather than an individual can be something that derives from the communal work and the village communities, where families got together to make rice cultivation easier (Sakaiya 1993, 67) which is a prominent feature of the society today.

The Japanese people emphasize communal work or being a part of a group since the society is very group oriented. People relate closely with the group they belong to that can be their family, their class at school, or the company they work for (Haitani 1990). In Japan, the benefit of the group is commonly believed to be more important than the benefit of the individual. The individual draws a sense of identity and security from the membership in the group and their sense of emotional fulfillment is satisfied by contributing to the welfare of the group (Haitani 1990). Loyalty to the group is a primary value and harmony within the group is extremely important. These traits are believed by many to be uniquely Japanese (Sugimoto 2010, 3-4). This attitude of wanting to be a part of the group and its relation to rice cultivation is reflected in Nobel Prize winner Hideki Shirakawa's words:

Fundamentally, Japanese culture is based on rice farming. Rice cultivation requires a lot of water, and water must be shared evenly by everyone. Planting rice also required teams of people walking from row to row, at the same speed. And all of this has meant that uniqueness had to be suppressed“ (French 2001; par. 3).

After all, if you don't follow the flow of you group, you get left behind since the group effectively uses peer pressure to hold back spontaneous expressions of individuality (Haitani 1990). Therefore it can be logically derived that rice cultivation is the reason for why Japanese people focus more on good cooperation rather than the individual, since the early years of rice cultivation, it was very labor intensive and the Japanese people saw benefit in

working together, installing a spirit of cooperation. This differs from the hunting-gathering oriented societies where cooperation is not as necessary (Sakaiya, 66-67; 77).

Early on, cooperation is encouraged among Japanese children (Hendry 2013, 48) who are looked over by the neighborhood. Neighborly relations are strong in Japanese communities, something that might have derived from rice cultivation. The neighborhood is a community where everyone works together and is a part of a group, formed by families, closely related to the villages formed in the early years of rice cultivation (Hendry 2013, 60-61).

Japan is in many senses a village society writ large. The Japanese people feel that they all belong to the same cultural and linguistic community, linked by a distinctive set of shared values. Within this village, the bonds of inclusion are most strongly applied to those who are members of one's in-group (*uchi*), in clear distinction to those who exist in the out-group (*soto*). In terms of personal relations, all of the people who live in the village try to get along by being polite to each other and by avoiding unpleasant topics (Suleski 1999, par. 19).

To understand this paragraph the two concepts, *uchi* (inside or home) and *soto* (outside), must be examined closely. It is used as a system of classification associated with notions of dirt and cleanliness. These words apply both to the inside and outside of one's house and members of an individual's group, be it, family, school or workplace, opposed to the outside of the group (Hendry 2013, 42-43). Suleski's quote applies well to the village communities formed early on, that is, taking care of your society or group so that everything goes smoothly. There is still one important topic that has yet to be discussed; education.

Education serves an important role in raising the children and teaching them the values of the society. From the time children enter school, they will identify themselves with their class where they are with their peers and learn about hierarchical relations. In their first year classes, the children are divided into small groups and made responsible for certain tasks. Order is maintained by peer pressure since the overall ability of the group is decided by the contribution of each member. In this way, children learn to help each other (Hendry 2013, 74-76). However, as previously mentioned, this has some negative affects since a child that does not behave is considered strange (Hendry 2013, 47). This cooperation is clearly a deeply rooted value system imprinted into the Japanese people from early on. It also teaches children the necessity of controlling themselves so that the group can work more efficiently. Even though it might seem that this doesn't help with the development of the individual that is not the case since the children gain that attention at home. The focus on the individual also increases when education turns into competition for

the best universities when children enter high school (Hendry 2013, 49; Sugimoto 2009, 129).

This change in attitude and emphasis is by most people considered a bad thing since this leads high school students to become under a lot of pressure. Their studies consist mainly of memorizing facts that do not encourage creative thinking. Values such as diligence and self-control are highly prized when it comes to enduring the less enthralling environment of school where you might have views but are discouraged to express them (Hendry 2013, 84). This is strikingly similar to Shirakawa's quote where the roots of the society suppress the individual and shape him after values considered good by the society. Changing the system is difficult since everything has been done the same way for so long. Everyone is doing their best in raising their children and nobody wants to step outside of the "comfort zone" in fear of being left behind. This is perhaps the worst part of the group orientation of Japan. One might say that the Japanese are cooperation focused today since cooperation worked well for them for so long. However, this way of thinking is one of the most interesting parts of modern Japanese society and is something that has been discussed to great extent in relation to business, since the business world is greatly connected to the education system and the basic values of Japanese society.

3.2. Business in Japan

The Japanese business structure is very famous and has been discussed by many scholars. This system is known for its cooperation focus, loyalty to companies and long working hours where employees chose to stay longer than required (Haitani 1990; Sugimoto 2010, 3). However, when Japanese business system is discussed it must be done in two separate parts: before the economic bubble burst in the 1990s and the subsequent to the bubble burst. The reason for this is the supposed change in the Japanese management system.

After World War II, Japan went from being a state that Westerners found themselves compelled to educate, to being an empire that Western countries should learn from (Sugimoto 2010, 16-19). This rapid recovery has been called the Japanese Miracle. Japan took advantage of certain factors ingrained in the Japanese society so that this recovery could take place. The system of lifetime employment and controlled competition among businesses allowed employees to accept lower pay and put in long hours of work for their future. They worked for themselves and for the sake of their company, which worked well because of Japan's group oriented society. Everyone desired a stable society. This however, led to a protectionist economy (Suleski 1999). This speedy recovery started

campaigns in 1970 where the Japanese model was praised and other countries were encouraged to learn from Japan. In the mid-1980s and continuously into the 1990s, a revision began, seeing the Japanese social system as a possible threat to the welfare of the international community since Japan was believed to have a national policy for Japan's interests only, as prof. Chalmers A. Johnson discussed (as cited in Sugimoto 2010, 18-19). As previously mentioned, the Japanese developed their society from rice cultivation, and therefore tend to homogenize everything, having seen themselves as a homogenous nation or a "natural state", independent from international relations (Sakaiya 1993, 76-77). This is presumably caused by the group orientation rice cultivation installed and brings us back to Suleski's quote, where he discussed Japan as a village society where the *uchi* and *soto* has strong roots in the culture, seeing themselves as a part of Japan, separate from the outer world. Nonetheless, the Japanese "bubble economy" soon burst due to rise in land prices and amounts of high loans to developers (Suleski 1999), leading us to the more modern Japanese business environment.

After the bubble burst, people lost interest in the Japanese economy and the "Japanese model". Globalization of Japanese society was considered necessary, including the restoration of the Japanese image from serious business men to a more playful side by introducing *anime*¹⁰ and *manga*¹¹ to the world (Sugimoto 2010, 20). Prior to the bubble, the Japanese industry consisted of "loyalty relationships" between companies, where small retailers had secure business relations with larger companies. This could have been experienced as secure business where they took care of each other, all a part of the same group. Decision making was also a lengthy process where many approvals were needed before changes could be put into action, sometimes holding back progress. Group work and hierarchy were also prominent features as for the lifetime employment (Jón Þrándur Stefánsson, fall lectures 2012; Duerr 2003, 67-68). After the bubble, there were plans to convert the Japanese management system to the Western style model which is known to be more individualistic and decision making is faster (Duerr 2003, 63). However, transforming the Japanese management into the Western is very slow and changes necessary for economic progress are believed to be held back by poor management or the failure to introduce new technology (Corbett 2012) that could be traced to the constantly aging population or even the lengthy progress of decision making. The life-time employment is still very resilient (Kambayashi and Kato 2009, 26) and overall, there seem to have been few changes since the Japanese model still has the same features now as it did

¹⁰ Japanese cartoons.

¹¹ Japanese comics.

before as can be seen in Duerr's article on page 67. Declining population is also causing trouble for the economy since there is no labor input to replace the labor output. Repeatedly it has been suggested that this situation could be rectified by allowing and increasing immigration (Corbett 2012) but the Japanese are unwilling to open up the country (Hockstader 2010) since, as previously mentioned, they see themselves as a homogenous society; we, the *uchi*, opposed to them, the *soto*.

Looking at the Japanese business environment and the economic bubble burst a few things spring up to the forefront. The Japanese group mentality is strongly reflected in the business environment which suppresses individuality as can be understood from Shirakawa's words on Japanese suppressed individuality, since rice cultivation needed people to work in harmony. It is of interest for instance to note that Japanese people typically identify themselves with the organization they work for, unlike the American view where people identify themselves with their occupation (Powell 2009). This group mentality affects many other things such as lifetime employment, hierarchy, slow decision making, and perhaps a dislike for immigrants. The typical white collar Japanese employee is hard working and ready to make sacrifices for the sake of the group since his future is connected to the success of the company (Duerr 2003, 66-68). These values of loyalty, duty and honor, however, are very likely to have derived from *bushidō*, the way of the samurai. Bushido consists of seven moral codes and was made the basis of ethnical training for the Japanese society in the 19th century. The bushido values developed in the Kamakura period [1192 - 1333] (Encyclopædia Britannica Online (2) 2013) and as for the modern business ethics in Japan, they first developed as the Confucian work ethic after the model of Bushido in the Edo period (Kobayashi 1993, 215). Yet, as has been discussed, rice cultivation has influenced the basic cooperative and group structure of the Japanese society that influences these values and thus still remains the fundamental reason for the modern business structure.

Hierarchy is also a part of the cooperation management where knowing your position helps you keep harmony within the group (Hendry 2013, 45-46). However, this hierarchy also slows down decision making progress since an idea needs the approval of many people higher in position at a company (Duerr 2003, 67-68). This slow decision making progress and lack of leadership, that the education system is somewhat responsible for, can also be seen in politics where Japan lacks strong leaders, ready to make quick and difficult decisions. Sakaiya traces this lack in leadership to Japanese geography that didn't allow for systems in which strong leaders had to make difficult decisions to protect the country from foreign invasions since Japan was protected by the seas for hundreds of years

(1993, 97). Yet, as can be concluded, the demand that everyone should work cooperatively suppresses individuality and is therefore not in favor of strong leadership development and creative thinking. As for the opposition towards increased immigration, that can also be traced to cooperation since an outsider is not familiar with the Japanese social hierarchical structure and can therefore interrupt the harmony in the group. As a foreigner, and therefore a part of the *soto*, he can't easily adapt to the homogenous society, not so unlike like the Ainu.

Children learn about the values of group work, hierarchy, and maintaining harmony within the group from their family and at school. These values are then carried on into the workplace, so it's only natural that it shapes the society. The Japanese business management is known for its focus on cooperation that makes it unique on a global scale. This cooperation, as has been discussed, derives from the early stages of Japan's society formation, brought about as has been argued, by rice cultivation.

Conclusion

The Idea of rice being the Japanese self has been widely discussed and remains the core subject in Ohnuki-Tierney's book, *Rice as Self* (1993). There she discusses how rice went from being a foreign influence to being the symbol of the Japanese nation, or that is, the rice fields as the Japanese land. For many of the Japanese today, the rice fields are fascinating since they represent a timeless part of Japan's landscape, history and culture. Its importance can be understood when thinking of the great transformation Japan has gone through in recent years from the Meiji restoration, when Japan opened up to foreign influence (Tochikubo 2009). Japan's written history starts with imported rice being taken in as Japan's own by the order of emperor Tenmu, who sought to establish a Japanese identity distinct from China in the 8th century. There rice is referred to as deities, where the first rice grains were given to Japan's legendary "first" emperor by his grandmother the sun goddess Amaterasu. This was written as an attempt to accept rice as a foreign innovation (Ohnuki-Tierney 1999, 247).

Today, rice fields are seen as the ideal Japanese landscape, Japan's ancestral land their culture derives from. In his search for the original pure Japanese culture, Yanagita studied the "common people" that were considered outcasts by the society. His searches for the original Japanese culture however lead him to the rice farmers (as cited in Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, 92-98). After all, he was convinced that the Japanese were a people indivisible from rice (as cited in Hudson 1999, 17) and farmers are the ones who cultivate this national symbol. Just as rice has been used to identify the Japanese self, it has also been used to separate Japan from the outer world, making it an even stronger national symbol.

Rice has often been used to contrast the Japanese from the bread and meat eating Westerners. However, separating Japan from China where people also ate rice was done by contrasting domestic rice with foreign rice, considered inferior by the Japanese (Ohnuki-Tierney 1999, 248-249). This issue with foreign rice and domestic rice evolved into a debate whether or not to import rice to Japan, since the Japanese market had been closed for foreign import until 1993, when it was opened up partially (APBN 1999, 202). Japanese rice is expensive but surprisingly the majority of the Japanese were against foreign import even though other food products were being imported without any problems. This suggests the cultural importance rice has in Japan and how strongly the Japanese relate to it (Ohnuki-Tierney 1993, 25-29). Rice does not only serve as a metaphor for the Japanese self

but it also has greater influence on their daily life reflected in the societies' way of thinking.

From what has been argued it can be concluded that the fundamentals of the Japanese societies are based on these two factors: cooperation and hierarchy. Cooperation leads the focus from the individual to maintaining harmony in the group which in turn doesn't emphasis individuality (Hendry 2013, 47-48), leading to the society that Japan is known for: hardworking people who identify themselves with their group instead of themselves and their individual skills and work (Powell 2009). These previously discussed factors are perhaps not many but their influence and significance is prominent and has contributed in shaping the Japanese society to its modern structure where some of them are negative and suppress individuality. Changing the Japanese system towards increased individuality to create productive individuals is difficult since it requires changes in the society. Things have been the same for so long and the fear of stepping out of the box in fear of being left behind seems to be overwhelming. However with the emergence of *anime* and *manga* that aims for Japan's younger generation and praises individuality alongside cooperation it might as well be that Japan is headed towards a new direction. Even though people are afraid to transform their ordinary habits, it's still appropriate to ask: Is Japanese's society structure that has been influenced strongly by rice cultivation changing?

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