

## AN AESTHETICS OF RICE

“It is necessary to build a hut to stay in while chasing birds. This duty falls on the women and children. If the birds alight they chase them away. One hears a cry of chasing away birds...drifting down the midday air; it is a peculiar lonely sound. If the birds do not come to eat the rice, they spin cotton and silk in order not to waste time at their work. The cotton that they spin is to be used for weaving monks' robes, in which they compete in craftsmanship on the day of presenting *kathin* robes...When the birds come they use a plummet made of a clump of earth with a long string to swing and throw far out. Children like this work, enjoying the task of throwing these at birds. If a younger woman goes to chase away birds she is usually accompanied by a younger brother. This is an opportunity for the young men to come and flirt, or if they are already sweethearts, they chase birds and eat together; this is a story of love in the fields.”

*Phya Anuman Rajadhon*  
*The Life of the Farmer in Thailand, 1948.*

The importance of rice in Southeast Asian societies is evident from the vast mythology and literature on rice. Early mythology deals with rice as a given, a miracle crop abundant and available to people year round, the only effort exerted by them involved the daily gathering of it. Due to their own greedy attitudes concerning rice, human beings fell from this condition and had to work for their daily rice.

The cycle of rice production (despite all of its hard work) is part of a Southeast Asian aesthetic, or “love in the fields.” The myth of the modern day “Green Revolution” is that the traditional myth of rice can (again?) become a reality. But as the “Green Revolution” attempts to make rice a miracle commodity, Asian farmers maintain their own ideas about an ideal rice crop—the plant and its kernel. These ideals often run counter to the new “miracle” varieties introduced by agricultural developers and extension workers. It is time to recognize an aesthetics of rice instead of seeing simply stubbornness on the part of the farmer. These aesthetic notions may go against the grain of the introduction of new miracle varieties. In the minds of certain developers, I am sure they even defy notions of “good sense” and good nutrition; they, however, do not run counter to important notions of proper hospitality, meritorious action and good taste in the minds of many farmers.

### The Greed of Humans and a "Fall" from Perennial Rice

It is not news that rice is fundamental to Southeast Asian culture. Archaeologists who have worked on sites like Ban Chiang are now suggesting that Southeast Asia may be one of the earliest homes of rice experimentation and cultivation, which continues up to the present.<sup>1</sup> Some of the earliest, often quoted, inscriptions of King Ramkamhaeng at Sukhothai (1279-1299) tout one of the main attractions of the kingdom: it had rice in the fields and fish in the stream. Modern essays on the subject of rice farming are pervasive and usually mention some variation on this theme. In an early publication containing essays on Thai culture, the following can be found: "Rice is coupled with the life of humans, as fish depend on water. Anywhere where there is rice, there are people; if there are people, then it follows that there is rice."<sup>2</sup> Creatures of all the elements are bound together in this picture of rice production: The fish abound in the paddy and streams, the people plant the rice and chase away the birds, while women weave the fabric of the religion.

The female spirit of the rice fields, Māe Phōsop, is still observed and respected by many Thai farmers. From early times up to the present, rice has been considered something high and sacred, and it was looked upon with gratefulness (*bunkhun*) due to its life-giving properties. Sometimes people pay respect to Māe Phōsop by paying respect (*wai*) to their plate of rice. While eating, it is considered improper to have any kernels fall on the ground. People are still very careful not to ever step on a sprouting rice plant; one of the stated purposes of the Buddhist rainy season retreat is to prevent monks from roaming around and stepping on aspiring young rice sprouts<sup>3</sup>. After a discussion of the Māe Phōsop myth, Tambiah concluded that "if human civilization owes its sustained existence to the domestication of rice, so is religion associated from the beginning with ordered human life."<sup>4</sup> I would like to add that just as religious literature describes the saying and actions of being embodying the highest ideals as an example of a proper life, so the mythology of rice also contains notions concerning ideal types of rice, the presentation of rice and its role in leading a meritorious existence.

In the Thai cosmology *The Three Worlds According to King Ruang (Trai Phūm*, attributed to Phya Lithai, c. 1345), the people of Uttarakuru are beings in the "Realm of Men" for whom everything is just right.

The Uttarakuru people have a kind of rice called the rice that grows by itself. They do not have to grow this rice in the fields, because it produces shoots and grows by itself, and these heads produce the grains of rice entirely on their own. This rice is white and has a pleasing smell; since it has no chaff or bran, there is no need to pound and sift it—from the beginning it is already like the rice that has been hulled and cleaned. The people are always suggesting to one another that they eat this rice....They never have fever, pain, numbness of the limbs, or tiredness—none of these maladies ever at any time affect the

Uttarakuru people. If they are eating, and someone comes to visit, they take the rice to the new arrival and happily invite him to eat; and they do this without ever giving it any thought.<sup>5</sup>

Men of great merit—such as the rich man Jotika—had, along with great castles and jewels, bottomless pots of the best of this rice for their own use and to bestow upon others.<sup>6</sup> Their possession of this rice was a reflection of their previous and continued meritorious behavior in accordance with the Dhamma. In fact, if there is a “fall from grace” in Southeast Asia (and in some South Asian cultures as well), it is described in terms of a decline in proper behavior and suffering the loss of this prized rice that grows on its own.

...From whatever place we took this rice that grows by itself in the evening, in the morning we still saw that rice growing in the same place as before; and from whatever place we went to take it in the morning, when it was evening again we saw that rice, full and beautiful, just as it had been before—and the mark made by our sickle could not be found. *Now we have hastened to do what is opposed to the Dhamma*, even more so than before; thus the rice that grows by itself has become ordinary paddy, and in the place where the rice is cut with the sickle the rice disappears and only the stubble and empty straw remain to be seen—the ears of rice no longer grow back for us as they had done before. From now on into the future all of us ought to divide the places and regions with one another so that we can all grow and cultivate for our living; that is the appropriate thing to do<sup>7</sup>. (My emphasis.)

Enter greed and hoarding, private property and the necessity of a king, the Great Elect (Mahāsammata), to keep peace in the nation. Perhaps this old idyllic myth/dream passes through the mind of some farmers at their most weary moments, but few of them would ever be so presumptuous to believe that their merit is sufficient for their plight to be otherwise.

Jane Hanks has pointed out that “A fine crop of rice is viewed by the farmer as indirect evidence of his merit.”<sup>8</sup> But what is meant by “fine” here? Certainly, it is not simply abundance. If this were the case, then any agricultural extension worker spinning stories about a new miracle variety of rice would probably have more takers.

The distinction must be made between quantity and quality here, and attention must be focussed on aesthetic factors of certain kinds of ideal rice types in Asia. Certain rice varieties, though they do not grow on their own, are still known for their association with the highest merit, the best friendships, and the greatest beauty and palatability. The loss of this self-generating rice is not to say, therefore, that even though human labor is now required in the production of rice, there does not exist a type of rice with at least the aesthetic qualities associated with the mythological rice. The dream may be over, but ideals surrounding rice sharing and consumption go on.

A brief glance at some of the literature can show us that the countries of

Southeast Asia are proud of their rice crops. In the Javanese market in the fifties and sixties there were several kinds of rice available: *Beras Siam*, Saigon, Burma and even American. The local Javanese rice was, of course, considered the best and American rice was the cheapest and considered "tasteless and sticky" (its cheap price may, however, reflect subsidies). Thailand seems to be well known for its superior rice, and Thais have not wanted it confused with other inferior kinds in Southeast Asia. We are told that "Siam rice is characterized by having a long, thin grain. The best qualities (sic) are more or less translucent, while lower qualities have a more or less opaque white spot on the belly of the grain. Burmah rice has a short, thick grain, and it is all white and opaque. Cochinchina rice is not so thick and white as Burmah rice, but it is not so translucent as Siamese."<sup>9</sup> And that "All the rice going out of Bangkok was very white. The term "Siam No.1" had become synonymous with excellence in white rice."<sup>10</sup>

Milton Barnett has pointed out that in the late sixties in the Perlis area of Malaysia, some people were making more money smuggling rice from Thailand than they did growing their own in Malaysia. One man he knew smuggled in two sacks of "Siam No.1" a day by bicycle and this, he claimed, brought him more money than maintaining four acres of his own rice.<sup>11</sup> Attempts to defame the name of Siamese rice and pass of tainted mixtures also seems to be common. One writer said that "the mixing of Siam rice with other cheaper grains, as much as 50 per cent, but still sold as Siam rice, can be seen in W.T. Welisch's Rice Market Report of San Francisco, where 'No.2 Siam Usual' is admitted to be a mixture of Siam-Saigon, 50 per cent of each. The retailer and consumer most probably do not know this, and are under the impression that they are selling and consuming pure Siam rice."<sup>12</sup> In another case, Siamese rice was accused of causing beriberi until a Medical Congress of 1923 in Singapore pointed out that there happened to be only a few grains of rice from Siam in this so-called Siamese rice.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Beauty of Rice and a Hope of "Salvation"**

Aside from these concerns about the integrity of generic Siamese rice, Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries have come to favor their own particular national varieties of rice which stand out above the rest as being the most delicious and prestigious. We can say that these rice types have established themselves as a reference against which all other types are judged. If failure to act in accordance with the Dhamma constitutes a "fall" from the grace of the ubiquitous, perennial rice in the mythology, then part of any hope of "salvation" in many Southeast Asian countries constitutes selecting, growing, sharing and serving the proper rice which has the most aesthetically pleasing characteristics (associated with the mythological rice). In Thailand, rice is broken into two basic categories which also appear in the Māe Phōsop story.<sup>14</sup> These are *khāo chāo* (ordinary rice) and *khāo nīeo* (sticky rice). There are different varieties of rice under each of these categories: *khāo krungthēp* (Bangkok

rice) is a favorite of many people in the south of Thailand; there is also “five-percent” and “ten-percent” rice, so named because of the supposed ratio of broken kernels to whole ones; and various types of sticky rice are usually referred to by color. There is one rice, however, that has come to stand above all others in the *khāo chāo* category known as *khāo hōm mali* (or “rice with the scent of jasmine”) which allegedly has all of its kernels intact and unbroken.

This “jasmine rice”, as one can tell from its name, has superior fragrance, the best consistency (not too wet or sticky), is associated with the most gracious hospitality, the most meritorious giving, and, in turn commands the highest price. Its association with the jasmine flower is not accidental. The jasmine flower is also offered when paying respect to monks or a Buddha image. The jasmine rice is, therefore, one special gift that is often given to monks on their daily alms rounds. Even if a family would not normally consume this kind of rice, it would be desirable to have some on hand for special guests or religious occasions. Jasmine is also associated with purity and cleanliness and was often put into washing bowls used for cleaning one’s face in the morning upon arising. Jasmine can still be found as a decoration on some of the finest foods, especially sweet dishes. The association of jasmine with this type of rice puts it almost in a category of “food for the gods”, that is to say, a dish of the highest order. In these terms, we may understand a bit better what is meant by “fine” rice.

A similar case can be found in Java.<sup>15</sup> A rice known as *rajalele* (meaning “king of the catfish”) is used as a common referent, against which all other varieties are judged. (Here I must admit that I am at a bit of a loss to explain the meaning of the name, except that it has been suggested that the shape of the grain bears some similarity to the body of the catfish itself, and that the catfish, like this rice, is also considered a delicacy). The *rajalele* rice is also likened to the smell of flowers. It has a translucent, white color and is firm when cooked. Other kinds of rice from the medium-grade *bengawan* (“river”) to the lower grades *sinta* (Sita-Rama’s wife) and *gadis* (“girl”) and all the other new varieties are considered cloudy and less tasty by comparison.

Hanks has said that “Rice itself is considered drearily tasteless, and the hot spicy fish and vegetables are only to add flavor to help one consume as much rice as possible.”<sup>16</sup> I, however, have not gotten this impression. Rice alone is certainly not considered a meal, however, no matter how good any side dishes may be, they are of little value if they are accompanied by poor quality rice. Javanese friends tell me that the growing of *rajalele* is not officially encouraged by the government since it has a long growing period and is, therefore, difficult to double-crop, and is susceptible to disease. I was told that “the people are encouraged to grow IR-25 or whatever it is called, but its taste is no good.” With the new varieties of rice, the people also believe that you must eat more side dishes.

Almost all farmers, however, grow some of the *rajalele* rice—much of it being grown on the sly—because, I was told, it is “essential to good Indonesian gastronomy;

there is always a market for it to some of the finest restaurants in Indonesia, who, somehow, never run out of it." And one always wants to have some on hand for special occasions and ceremonies. A *Slametan* ceremony, which takes various forms and serves various purposes, such as feasting a success, offering food to spirits or ancestors, celebrating a birthday or, more recently, even a graduation, would not be complete without this rice.<sup>17</sup> If it were not served, it is certain that people would consider the ceremony to have been handled improperly and "others would be sure to talk."

Milton Barnett, in an exemplary article with the somewhat misleading title "Subsistence and Transition in Agricultural Development among the Ibaloi in the Philippines," discusses aspects of an aesthetics of rice and its bearing on rice production in some detail. He, however, never came to employ the term "aesthetics." Barnett mentions that the case of the Ibaloi is similar to that mentioned above for the Thai. Rice plays a significant role in their folktales, in addition there is a detailed phraseology and lexicon to describe rice and efforts put forth towards its production. Even though tubers provide for their daily fare, rice remains the center of Ibaloi interests and beliefs.<sup>18</sup> The detail with which Barnett has examined rice in this culture is admirable. He mentions different views towards various types of rice in the culture from *bayabas* rice which is hard to digest, delays hunger and is, therefore, good for feeding ravenous young men, to glutinous *betalka* and *balatinaw* which are favored by toothless older folks because of the softness of the grains. He considers factors in the harvesting of various varieties, concluding that "varieties having short distances between panicle and flagleaf cause blistering and soreness of the fingers, especially the thumb. Harvesting is quicker and easier (not to mention less painful) when this problem does not exist."<sup>19</sup>

Most important, Barnett states that one-fourth the total land area devoted to rice was given over to glutinous varieties, even though these varieties were low-yielding.<sup>20</sup> And here, he says that the "factor of softness satisfying the dentally inadequate" did not account for this. The primary motivation for the planting of this rice, in the case of the Ibaloi, is religious. For any farmer who anticipates offering a memorial ceremony for a deceased relative will plant more sticky rice.

The intense respect for ancestors and the lively role the ancestral spirits play in influencing daily behavior and thought of their descendents is a major theme continually evidenced in Ibaloi life.<sup>21</sup>

Again, there exists this inseparable connection between life, belief, and rice, which, in turn, affects choices and production. Barnett even mentions that the whims of cooperative harvesters of rice in the village are such that "they may not appear on a day when a field with a less popular variety is being harvested but descend *en masse* on the day when a favored rice is desired as payment."<sup>22</sup>

Even though the "Green Revolution" is attempting to change the production

of rice in Southeast Asia, certain notions of aesthetics and the quality of rice are set against it. Barnett has also mentioned another case, that of the Muda River project in Malaysia, where several rice varieties were tried out on the people, often prematurely. Billboards were erected saying "YOU ARE HERE" to reorient the people to the new area and the new planting schedule: it told them when to plough, broadcast, puddle, etc. A high-yield variety called IR-5 was tested and turned out to be a commercial bust. Another variety, IR-8 was a mixture of IR-5 and a more "palatable" variety. It was sold in Penang and Alor Star markets as "Siam No.2" and turned out to have a taste like "homogeneous library paste." Even the water buffalos had trouble with these varieties of rice and did not find the stems from the IR-5 or IR-8 palatable at all because they were too thick and hard to chew—a serious problem in areas where there is a shortage of fodder. Barnett said that some scientists seemed to be working under the assumption that if people were hungry enough they would eat anything.

For the politicians, prestige seems to come from the announcement of the introduction of a new variety of rice, while the farmers, once again, have their own ideas about the quality of rice. A Minister of Agriculture in a Southeast Asian country (which cannot be identified here), had not been in the papers recently, so he called some agricultural developers wanting a new variety of rice for a press release. No new variety had been completely tested, so they could not offer him one. The Minister told them to come up with something anyway. The developers, against their better judgement, followed orders. The Minister announced it, giving it the name of the hotel he had stayed at in the largest town near the development area; never having left the hotel, he was treated royally there and thought he would immortalize the name. Fortunately, since the seed had not multiplied properly and testing was incomplete, the variety was never released despite anticipation on the part of the farmers. It turned out to be disease susceptible, had poor yields and a bad taste. These kinds of activities on the part of politicians and developers result in the farmers putting little or no stock in their latest discoveries. They can put no hope in the use of these inferior rices on special occasions and in ritually crucial situations. It is not difficult to see that there is also a "politics of rice."

Furthermore, in Thailand, one of the few surviving Brahmanical rituals, *Phiti Rāek Nā Khwan*, involves the king and his Brahman assistants in insuring the successful planting and harvest of rice. The rice kernels scattered about at this ritual are generally gathered up by the people and mixed with their rice seed in hopes of a better harvest. Those kernels, having been blessed by the king and in close proximity to the ritual, are believed to be more pregnant with spirit and as a result should make one's crop more fruitful. In 1987, I called the Ministry of Agriculture to find out what kind of rice was used in this ritual ceremony. One person in the Bangkok office said that their own newly developed varieties were used—*krom kām khāo* numbers 21, 15, 23, 27, 10, 13 and 25 (in that order). When I asked if they used any *khāo hōm mali* in the

ceremony, he answered, "No." It was admittedly the most popular, but it was not being promoted. Then he added it was not of "high quality"; in other words, in their minds it was not as "efficient" or nutritious as some of the other rice varieties on their current list. Once again, the villagers sense of aesthetics ran counter to their promotions and data on nutrition.

### ***Ram Mī Khāi*: The Other Side of an Aesthetics of Rice**

A monk and I were standing near a village rice mill, which are now widespread in village Thailand. A number of villagers were sitting on bulging sacks trading stories while waiting for their turn. While we watched the German machinery spin around, the farmer who owned the mill put his hand under the chute where the milled rice was streaming out. He showed it to the woman. It had flecks of red on it. The monk said, "Oh, that's good enough, there'll be more vitamins in it for everyone." She frowned at the handful of rice, waited a respectful moment, and told the farmer he better mill it again—it was not yet white enough.

White is best. This is evident from the Southeast Asian woman walking with her umbrella in the sun, the fuss made over *farang* skin tones, the coveting of white elephants or a white Mercedes Benz, and the extent to which rice is milled. There are nutritious varieties of a red-tinted "hill rice" being introduced in the north of Thailand to replace opium cultivation, but these are usually served to guests with an apology or a rationalization that they are supposed to be better for you (*mī prayōt*). In the market, one can *try* to buy "red rice," if the vendors will sell it to you. You will be told that it is for pigs, and you will have to sift the rocks out of it yourself.

Why do the pigs end up with all of the goodness? Mechai's population control organization has a saying "Let the next pregnancy go to the pig," and they will inseminate villagers' pigs as an incentive to "free" sterilization for humans. In the case of the rice miller, the benefit again is related to the pig. He does not charge for milling people's rice, but he takes the bran and fattens his pigs with it or turns around and sells it (*ram mī khāi*). That pig tied to a stake in the backyard amounts to many a farmer's bank account, its fat, his interest. And, in many cases, the farmers unwittingly (or possibly willingly?) sacrifice some of their own nutrition to it. In addition, it should be remembered that the consumption and sharing of pork is often even more prestigious in non-Muslim parts of Southeast Asia than rice.

The monks, according to Vinaya rules, cannot eat after noon, but they usually do take a fruit, cocoa or soybean powder drink around sunset. At this time, I was living at a temple as a layman and observing the same dietary restrictions. I mentioned to one monk that it would not be a bad idea if we asked for some of this bran (*ram*) and mixed it with our drinks in the late afternoon. He said he thought it would be worthwhile and that I could do as I pleased. I went to ask the villager for some of this bran and the monk followed along. I was not refused a bag of bran, but I was asked several times if I

really wanted it and what I was going to do with it. I told them I would put it in the monk's drinks because it was so high in vitamins. A couple of people recoiled slightly, but we were already on our way, and a gift is a gift. I asked the monk more about this later. He said that it was a "good lesson" for the people. It seems he wanted to come along to watch their reaction. Normally, the monk told me, the eating of rice bran is associated with "hippies" and drug addicts who cannot afford good food, and prisoners who are fed bran for its (obvious?) benefits—not to mention the pigs again. The *ram* is not considered a meritorious gift, but the well-milled rice certainly would be.

The value placed on very white rice supplies enough surplus bran to feed the miller's pigs and allows him to mill the villagers' rice for "free." The darker side of the aesthetics of white rice is, then, the poverty of even some of the most expensive and prestigious types of rice, poverty in terms of a lack of nutritional value. In this sense, good taste may not always be good for you.

When mechanized rice mills were first introduced into parts of Southeast Asia, people suffered from the over-milling of rice and there were outbreaks of beriberi, as mentioned above. Partially this was attributed to the changing tastes of Asian people and the growing popularity of less nutritious foods, but most of it was related to the efficiency of the mechanized milling of rice. One doctor noticed a rise beriberi around the turn of the century in Bangkok. People who milled their rice by hand did not fall prey to the disease; however, those who had access to the rice milled in Bangkok were susceptible. He concluded that "the whole idea of prevention, then, would be that rice, however milled, which retains a considerable proportion of the pericarp does not cause beriberi, but the removal of the outer layers of the grain takes away a prophylactic agent...The practical method of combating beriberi is therefore to encourage the consumption of under-milled rice."<sup>23</sup> Even in one of the studies (Kinney and Follis, 1958) presented at a Princeton conference, it was found that in one area of Thailand, 24 per cent of the people "exhibited neuropathies attributable to beriberi." And furthermore, new cases have usually been reported within three to four months after a new mill replaced the hand-pounding of rice formerly done in that area.<sup>24</sup> Certain public health workers (and even monks) have attempted to change people's ideas about the whiteness of rice, but these suggestions usually go unheeded (and even in the south more urban tastes have shifted from the more nutritious "red" palm sugar (*namtān dāēng*), to the refined white cane sugar). Further investigations might be made as to differences that could exist between how farmers mill rice for their own consumption and for the market.

Another doctor noticed cases of beriberi due to changing tastes and urbanization. He found that many police recruits suffer from beriberi within a month after joining the force. He said the recruits come from upcountry where they live in a state of near starvation and then they come to Bangkok where they can get whatever they want

“but prefer to spend their odd pence on ice-creams or rice-cakes of all sorts.”<sup>25</sup> So much for an aesthetics of rice.

### **Perennial Plants, Perennial Ideals, Perennial People: Summing Up**

Any attempt to glean an aesthetics of rice from farmers' ideals surrounding their total involvement in the cycle of rice production will find itself inextricably bound up with notions of practicality and beauty. So far I have mentioned considerations related to:

- a) the importance of the height of the stalk during harvesting;
- b) the palatability of the remaining stalks for grazing animals;
- c) how the rice kernel shatters during threshing and how it breaks up under the blows of a pestle;
- d) the size, color and shape and length of the grain;
- f) aroma and consistency when cooked;
- g) taste;
- e) nutrition (or lack of it);
- f) and its social and religious function.

All of these, and I am certain that there must be more, help us to get a more complete picture as to how the farmer sees rice. These are some of the considerations that go into determining a “fine” and beautiful rice plant, one that may reflect or make one's merit.

In summary, the development of new varieties of rice has yet to supersede the merit and aesthetic notions surrounding growing, consumption and giving of certain traditional types of rice. As long as developers of rice fail to consider an aesthetics of rice existing among farmers (and do not take into account the logic behind it), their job will be especially difficult. This paper has noted some major, well-known types of rice in different countries of Southeast Asia, but it must also be mentioned the even within the various parts of these countries there must surely exist regional or even, to use Wolter's terms, “localized” preferences and tastes. There may even be distinct mythologies surrounding the origin and production of these “localized” types of rice. The job of those ushering in the Green Revolution will be difficult at any rate; it remains to be seen whether a balance can be struck between aesthetic factors and nutritional considerations in the development and production of rice. The religious and aesthetic associations connected with special types of rice in Southeast Asia lend meaning to its consumption and exchange, regardless of the fact that its rich whiteness may, in many cases, mean greater nutritional poverty.

Rice no longer rejuvenates itself all year long, as the old myth claims it once did; perhaps it is believed by those who are fortunate enough to grow and share the finest rice that they are, in part, making the right effort towards living up to the ideals they have come to associate with it. This effort can also be seen as a response to the

reason given for the self-generating rice disappearing in the first place. In this way, the “love in the fields” is woven into the fabric of religious aspiration. By giving the best they have to offer, the finest ideals, as well as the finest people, are perpetuated. So, these people of Asia hope that, if not the rice, then perhaps due to their own merits, at least they will be perennial.

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## ENDNOTES :

1. See: John Dennis, “Farmer Management of Rice Variety Diversity in Northern Thailand”, PhD dissertation, Department of Rural Sociology, August 1987, Cornell University, 367 pages.
2. Phicit Prichakon, Prince, “Rūang Thamná” *Latthithamniām Tāng-Tāng*, Pt. 3, (1919), p3. It is also interesting to note the number of funeral volumes that deal with the subject of rice and rice farming (beyond the two cited above by Phya Anuman Rajadhon and Prince Phicit). See for example:

Also cited in this paper is a volume by Suwaphan Sanitwong, M.R.W., *The Rice of Siam* (in English) which was translated into Thai by Prince Damrong Rajanubhab for a cremation volume, (Bangkok 1927).

Puey Ungphakon, *Suntharaphot Lae Khōkhian*, Bangkok 1970), Cremation volume for Phrayarajawaraiyakan.

Sala Thatsanon, *Bot Khwām Kieokhap Rūang Khāo Khōsamphan Rawāng Thai-Denmark*. (Bangkok 1964), Cremation volume for Nai Khosit Wetchachiwa.

Krom Kasikam (Department of Agriculture and Fisheries), *Khamnaenam Lae Khōsakit Chai Nai Kānthamná* (Bangkok 1936), Cremation volume for Nai Śiang Phanomyong.

...just to mention a few contained in the Wason-Echols collection at Cornell University, which has made a conscious effort to collect these valuable and informative volumes.

It might be interesting to compile the topics chosen for essays in these cremation volumes and do a structural analysis of their themes in an attempt to see what topics have been popular at various times, and those which are “timeless”. My guess would be that rice may be a candidate for the timeless category.

3. Sombat Phlainoi, *Phruksāniyāi*, (Bangkok: Phrāēpitayā, 1972), p. 113. Tylor, in his *Religions in Primitive Cultures*, also discusses ideas of “spirits of the paddy” and mentions that “There is reason to believe that the doctrine of the spirits of plants lay deep in the intellectual history of South-East Asia, but was in great measure superseded under Buddhist influence”. (Part II, “Primitive Culture”. New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 59. This is certainly debatable. Ironically, it may be the “Green revolution” and other related “Innovations” which play the role Tylor ascribed to Buddhism.
4. S.J. Tambiah, *Buddhism and Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 356-7; also see Phya Anuman Rajadhon, “Me Posop, The Rice Mother” *Popular Buddhism in Siam and Other Essays on Thai Studies*, (Bangkok: Thai Inter-religious Commission on Development and Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, 1986) pp. 135-42.
5. Frank E. and Mani B. Reynolds, Trans., *Three Worlds of King Rūang: A Thai Cosmology* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1982), pp. 127-8
6. Reynolds, 1982, p.193.
7. Reynolds, 1982, p. 324.
8. Jane R. Hanks, “Reflections on the Ontology of Rice”, in *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*, edited by Stanley Diamond, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 300.

9. Suwaphan Sanitwong, M.R.W., *Ruang Khão Khòng Prathèt Sayàm*, (Bangkok: Sopōpipatanakōn, 1927), p. 8.
10. Robert R. Williams, *Toward the Conquest of Beriberi*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 242.

Also in the course of writing this paper and trying to use rice, in Lévi-Strauss's terms, as something "good to think", I noticed that there is an elegance to the two Thai words ข้าวขาว forming a "symbiotic" noun-adjective pair. The Thai language employs many words or particles to enhance the beauty of the language. It is grating to the ears, emotionally cold or impolite to speak without these. This is the reason, for example, that so many statements are ended with the following: ครັบ, ค่ะ, จ๊ะ, จั๊. Notice that these tones are usually high or falling. Let me call these "finishing tones" here. Also an-adjective may have an adverb added to it for intensification but also so that the final tone will not end with a deadening low tone, such as with หนักหนัก In this example, we can see a pleasing pattern of mirror-image tones, going from a low tone to a high tone, or a rising to a falling tone (we could even speak of reduplication of words on a linear mid to mid tone, although in this case the meaning of the individual words is the same, and they do not compliment each other). It is interesting to note that the case of ข้าวขาว is quite elegant and unique in these terms. Not only are the tones mirror images of each other forming a complete sphere, but both of the words are written identically (apart from the tone marker). In addition, each word is the epitome of the other: rice means white, and white means rice. Furthermore, it is also hard to mention eating without mentioning rice. I would like to suggest, therefore, that even the Thai words for "white rice" are aesthetically pleasing.

11. I thank Dr. Milton Barnett for allowing me to use information from lectures and discussions, and for taking the time to review this paper. This kind of smuggling is, of course, still going on and was the subject of recent award-winning Thai movie entitled "The Butterfly and the Flower (Phīsūa kap dokmai)."
12. Sanitwong, 1927, p. 8.
13. Sanitwong, 1927, pp. 7-8.
14. Tambiah, 1970, pp. 354-5.
15. I want to thank Suwanna Kriengkraipetch and Budi Susanto, graduate students in Anthropology at Cornell University, for their helpful suggestions about Thailand and Indonesia, respectively.
16. Hanks, 1961, p. 298.
17. For more on *Slametan*, see: Clifford Geertz, "Religious Beliefs and Economic Behavior in a Central Javanese Town", in J. McAlister, ed., *Southeast Asia: The Politics of National Integration* (Toronto: Random House, 1973), pp. 160-1.
18. Milton L. Barnett, in *Subsistence Agriculture and Economic Development* Clifton Wharton, ed., (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), p. 286. It would be interesting to explore this language and lexicon of rice further across cultures.
19. Barnett, 1969, p. 287.
20. Barnett, 1969, p. 288.
21. Barnett, 1969, p. 288.
22. Barnett, 1969, p. 290.
23. Williams, 1961, p. 241-2.
24. Williams, 1961, p. 243-4.
25. W. Leonard Braddon, *The Cause and Prevention of Beriberi*, (New York: Rebman Company, 1907), p. 271.