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Rice is an integral part of Chinese culture; not only is it the staple food, but it is also a fundamental ingredient in a variety of other goods. Rice is grown in many regions of China, regardless of the terrain. Rice terraces, fields like large steps up the sides of the mountains, are found in abundance—especially in the mountains of southern China where the milder, subtropical climate facilitates the growth of rice.

Starting Points

1. What do all of these things have in common: a bowl of rice, the wall in Xi’an [she-an] (see Geography & Climate Visual 1), rice glue (see Information section), rice noodles, and rice paper? Brainstorm and make a list of the common characteristics of these items. (Answer: They are all made of rice.)

2. How often do you eat rice (i.e., every day, once a week, once a month, or more often)? What kinds of food do you eat at every meal? Discuss how climate affects what types of products people grow and eat.

3. Make rice using the recipe in the Information section below. Write the recipe down and then share it with your family.

Information

Rice and the Chinese

When people think of China or Chinese food, they often think of rice. Rice is an essential part of the Chinese diet: not only is it the foundation of almost every Chinese meal, but it is also used in desserts, drinks, and other types of food.

Rice can be eaten in many different ways. Aside from being boiled, rice can be made into a porridge or cooked with other ingredients to make fried rice or sticky, flavored rice dishes. Rice can also be ground into a flour and used in bread, dough, noodles, candy, cookies, and other sweets. Other edible rice products include rice wine and puffed rice.

Rice Recipe

You will need:
- water
- rice

Preparation
1. Place twice as much water as dry rice in a pot and bring to a boil.
2. Simmer for 15 minutes.
3. Let sit for 5 minutes.
4. Fluff, serve, and enjoy!

Note: One-half cup of dry rice is equivalent to one cup of cooked rice.
**Rice Etiquette**

There are certain customs and rules of etiquette associated with eating rice in China. The amount of rice eaten and when it is eaten vary depending on the setting and situation. Most meals include a large portion of rice served first, with other dishes (vegetables or meats or both) placed on top of it. In casual family settings, rice is the main component of the meal. It is best to eat every grain of rice served to show appreciation for the bounty of the earth and for the blessing of having food to eat.

There are times, however, when rice becomes the “extra” item, such as when treating someone to a nice meal. At these times the other dishes are the basis of the meal and rice should only be eaten as a filler. In such situations it is considered rude to eat too much rice because doing so is seen as saying the other foods were not good or that there was not enough food, which made it necessary to eat a lot of rice. To avoid this kind of embarrassment, expensive restaurants or the host of a meal will serve rice at the end of the meal. In this situation, it is okay to leave some rice in the bowl as a signal that there was plenty to eat and that the host should not worry about having served too little.

**Growing Rice**

Rice is grown in the southern, middle, and eastern regions of China. These regions are good for growing rice because they have fairly temperate climates. Rice is best grown in tropical and subtropical regions with lots of rainfall, humidity, and warm temperatures. These areas in China—especially the southern parts of China—are all within subtropic and tropic regions and have all the climatic elements necessary to grow rice effectively.

Geographical obstacles in some regions make growing rice difficult. Rice fields, also known as rice paddies (see Geography and Climate Visual 2), must be maintained with a large supply of water, making good irrigation necessary. Although rice is often grown where there is an adequate amount of rainfall, there is still a need to transfer water from local streams or water reserves to the rice fields. This can be done by hand (carrying buckets of water) or by pipelines (which are sometimes made out of bamboo). Rice terraces are necessary because rice must be grown in flat, flooded fields where there are six to twelve inches of standing water.

Many rice terraces are found in Long Sheng, Yunnan [yun-nan] Province. The English translation of the name Long Sheng is “Devil’s Backbone Rice Terraces” (see Geography & Climate Visual 3). The rice terraces are carved into the mountain-sides and are intermixed with village houses on stilts. The village income and sustenance come from rice crops. Every day, villagers go to their rice fields to work and return to their homes at night.

Rice is grown in stages. A farmer will start with four fields; in one of those fields the farmer will plant rice seeds and will leave the other three empty. The rice grows for a few weeks until it is about eight inches higher than the water level (about sixteen inches in total height). Then the farmer, along with family or fellow workers, uproots the rice and ties the plants together in bunches. Some of the rice from the first field is then replanted in the first field and some of it is planted in the second
field (see Geography & Climate Visual 4). Once again, the farmer lets the rice grow for a time and then thins the fields out. Using the same process as before, the farmer replants the rice in all four fields and lets it grow to maturity.

In the areas where rice is grown, the process of planting, thinning, and harvesting is part of the culture and involves both the family and the village. This aspect of China’s culture reflects the importance of community roles and the bonds that form as the members of the village work side by side in the rice paddies.

**Rice Products**

Rice can be used for many purposes. When the Xi’an Wall was built, yellow soil and rice paste were used in the core of the wall to make it strong. People in China use rice glue to seal their envelopes; post offices in China commonly have a jar of rice glue in the office that people can use. The rice grain, as well as other parts of the rice plant, can also be used to make paper. Rice paper is often used in China as an alternative to paper made from wood pulp.

**Rice Glue Recipe**

**You will need:**
- 2 C water
- 1 C dry rice

**Preparation**
1. Place 2 C water in a medium saucepan.
2. Add 1 C dry rice.
3. Bring to a boil and continue boiling for 10 minutes.
4. Let sit for at least 10 minutes.
5. Put cooked rice in blender.
7. Add more water, 1 T at a time until mixture reaches desired consistency (thick, but still liquid).
8. Put rice glue in a container and use as an adhesive.
9. Spread rice glue with a chopstick, paintbrush, popsicle stick, or something similar.

Because of the favorable growing climate the country provides, rice is a staple food in China and is used for many other products. Even though mountain ranges could have prevented the Chinese from growing this crop extensively, they used their ingenuity to overcome the challenge presented by the mountains. China’s unique geography and climate have provided an opportunity for them to use creative techniques to meet their daily needs.

**Activities**

1. Using the provided recipe, make rice glue. Use the rice glue and popsicle sticks to make a diagram of a Chinese house on stilts or another Chinese scene.
2. Write a skit showing the difference between good and bad rice etiquette. Be creative and take into account different economical backgrounds (poor or rich) and different settings (fancy restaurant or casual family setting).
3. Create a commercial or door-to-door sales pitch for a bag of rice. Make sure to advertise the variety of uses for rice (rice paper, rice glue, sticky rice, etc.). Take into consideration different audiences (young, old, poor, rich, and country or city people).

4. Interview someone who is or has been associated with farm life (if no one is available, do research on American farm life). Compare and contrast the differences between the lifestyles of Chinese and American farmers.

Discussion Questions

1. What is beneficial about a plant that can be used in many different products? Why? Are there any materials you use that are also used in other products?

2. Why is rice grown on terraces in some regions? What are the benefits and challenges of growing crops on terraces?

3. Other than on terraces, how else could rice be grown in mountainous areas? How could rice be grown in areas with geographical elements such as rivers?

4. Which regions of China grow the most rice? Why? Is the amount of rice grown reflected in the culture? How?
Geography & Climate Visual 1: The Wall of Xi’an
Geography & Climate Visual 4: Planting Rice