

Growing Rice in China

Dr. James Cunningham, physician in the employ of the English East India Company, his observations about China, 1700 CE

In their agricultural operations, all their fields on which any thing is to be cultivated, whether high or low, are formed into such plots or beds as may admit of retaining water over them when the cultivator thinks proper. The lands are tilled by ploughs drawn by one cow or buffalo; and when it is intended to sow rice, the soil is remarkably well prepared and cleared from all weeds, after which it is moistened into the state of a pulp, and smoothed by a frame drawn across, when the rice is sown very thick, and covered over with water, only to the height of two or three inches. When the seedling plants are six or eight inches long, they are all pulled up, and transplanted in straight lines into other fields, which are overflowed with water; and, when weeds grow up, they destroy them by covering them up in the interstices between the rows of rice, turning the mud over them with their hands. When they are to sow wheat, barley, pulse, or other grain, they grub up the surface of the ground superficially, earth, grass, and rook, and mixing this with some straw, burn all together. This earth, being sifted fine, they mix with the seed, which they sow in holes made in straight lines, so that it grows in tufts or rows like the rice. The field is divided into regular beds, well harrowed both before and after the seed is sown, which makes them resemble gardens. The rice grounds are meliorated merely by letting water into them; but for the other grains, where the soil requires it, they use dung, night-soil, ashes, and the like. For watering their fields, they use the machine mentioned by Martini in the preface to his Atlas, being entirely constructed of wood, and the same in principle with the chain-pump.

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