

Homework Reading

Cattle Ranching and Cattle Drives



A Cattle Drive in the Old West

In many ways what rice is to Japan, beef cattle are to America. Japanese still describe their meals as “morning rice, afternoon rice and evening rice” despite the fact that they might actually have bread for



breakfast! The culture of rice is deeply embedded in even the most sophisticated and urban Japanese. For more than two thousand years the main occupation of most Japanese was rice farmer. This is not to say that there were not fishermen, artisans, samurai, priests and dozens of other occupations. But the rice farmer

fed the country and was the foundation of the economy and the cornerstone of the culture.

When I say raising cattle in America was like growing rice in Japan, I do not mean that Americans depended on beef for their daily food in the same way Japanese depended on rice or that cattle were as important to the economy in America as rice was in Japan. What I mean is that just as rice and rice farming is central to *the idea* of what makes Japanese culture, so is raising cattle central to *the idea* of what makes



American culture. Just as Japanese have songs and dances associated with the planting and harvesting of rice, so do Americans have a rich tradition of music associated with the cowboys and their way of life.

These days most Japanese are not rice farmers, but they will joke about *thinking* like rice farmers. In America, most of us are not cowboys, but we also joke about people who *think* like cowboys. In some ways we mean to say that farmers and cowboys have old fashioned ideas about how things should be, but we also feel a certain nostalgia for how they think and if truth be told we sometimes feel jealous, too. What Japanese salaryman has not wondered whether he might be happier as a simple farmer in the countryside and what American businessmen has not dreamed of getting on a horse and leading the romantic life of the cowboy? It is *our tendency to romanticize rice farming and cattle ranching* that is similar. This is why The Western and the *Jidai Geki* have so much in common.

In fact, being a rice farmer and being a cowboy are vastly different. For one thing, rice farming has been going on for over two thousand years in Japan, but the cowboys emerged only in the nineteenth century in

America. Large-scale cattle ranching really only began in the state of Texas in the 1850s. The film we are going to study next tells the story of how cattle ranching began and it also tells the story of the great cattle drives which followed the Civil War (1861-1865).



The cattle drives serve as the basis for some the most romantic tales of the West and some of the greatest Western movies including our next film, *Red River* (1948).