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"Belonging"

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Belonging is something I have come to consider recently through my research on environmental histories of rice growing in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, located in south-central New South Wales, Australia. In general terms, I am interested in how historical and contemporary rice growing in Australia has been bound up with assumptions about biocultural belonging. Does a relatively high water-use crop like rice belong in Australia at all? Do ducks belong in rice paddies, where many farmers believe they destroy crops? In the early twentieth century, a Japanese migrant by the name of Isaburo Takasuka undertook rice growing experiments on the floodplains of the Murray River. Within the context of the White Australia Policy, in which the national government evaluated belonging on a hierarchy of birth place and skin colour, Takasuka needed to continue these activities in order for his family to stay in Australia; contributing to particular kinds of agricultural productivity was another path to belonging within this narrow nationalist framework. (...) These are just a few of the ways that diverse questions of belonging have appeared in the context of rice growing. (Excerpt)

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