Great work!

In today’s highly Americanized society (this is too vague…perhaps say either “in American society” or “in modern capitalist societies” or something like that), it is extremely difficult for many people to envision a culture of simplicity, of frugality. We (who?) constantly find ourselves taking unnecessary food surpluses and throwing away valuable portions of food that many other cultural groups would simply not take for granted (another reason to remove “Americanized society” which implies you are talking about many cultural groups in the first place). Most would be taken aback by the fact that there are people who place high value on items such as bread, rice, alcohol, and meat. Most…Americans? Its an odd statement because Americans place a high value on alcohol (e.g. fine wines or liquor) and meat. Or do you mean most non-Americans would be taken aback by American food values… I’m totally confused! More specifically, there are certain tribes in Southeast Asia who place great face value on these domestic products. For various reasons, these societies hold belief in utilizing domestic plants and animals as a source of luxurious feasting (Hayden 2003c). This paragraph need to be reworked to be much more specific about who you are talking about.

Southeast Asia can be classified as a “transegalitarian society,” one with significant socio-economic inequalities but that lacks true classes (Hayden 2003c:459) remove the c after the date throughout. a,b,c etc are only needed when you are citing multiple article by the same author from the same year. A large value is placed on private ownership of all forms of resources (Hayden 2003c). Within this society, there are tightly knit communities and tribes that demonstrate religion, ritualistic and celebratory ceremonies, and crucial family ties and relationships. As ethnoarchaeologist, Brian Hayden, drastically researched this culture it was he found that “feasting is fundamental to structuring powerful relationships within communities” (Clarke 2001; Hayden 2003c:460). Because you have cited Clarke 2001 you should include the reference in a References Cited section at the end. Alternatively don’t cite Clarke.

Not only are domestic animals and plants used in feasting and harvest rituals, they are also used to broker alliances, obtain marriage partners, solicit favors, and create debts (Hayden 2003c). Thus they clearly are a staple to this type of culture. Hayden particularly describes two important products in the culture: rice and animal flesh. It is quite peculiar because many Americans would not consider these two items to be a luxury in the sense that these items are consumed daily for many. However, in Southeast Asian society, domestic animals are killed only in the context of feasts and sacrifices. Additionally, there is a great amount of pressure on presentation and an “impression” factor. Shockingly enough, expressing shock is simply ethnocentrism. Americans go into huge debt for weddings, cars etc. to impress people. Many families will go into serious debt for competitive feast displays: a tradition that is highly important in these cultures (Hayden 2003). Whereas, from our perspective, spending a sufficient amount of money on food is a weekly occurrence and something that is not thought twice about (this is a bit insensitive given how many American are currently hungry, need food banks/assistance). In this way, contrasting cultural values are clearly shown. I don’t think an interest in luxury goods is that odd to Americans. The values are the same its just that the goods vary. Furthermore, it is absolutely fascinating how the most basic necessities of life can hold such diverse views and impressions among two different cultures.

Within the article, one point of particular interest was the influence of rice in Southeast Asia. There were many factors that accounted for its high status and outlook upon the tribes of people. Reasons included its positive nutrition, its limited supply, the difficulty associated with its labor, and the importance of rice in ritual and ideological life. In fact, in technical terms, A strong emic value is put on the consumption of rice (Hayden 2003). On the other hand, in American culture, there consistently seems to be an etic outlook on staple foods such as rice. You are not using etic correctly here—perhaps just say that most Americans don’t value staple foods like rice that highly. Because domestic products in the United States are so commonplace and can be easily accessed, we do not find ourselves having any more than a constrained outlook on it. Constrained does not make sense here. And, again, given the real problems many Americans have accessing food your analysis seems optimistic or naive. Perhaps just note that you are discussing middle class and wealthy Americans.

Yet, despite the strong differences in definitions of luxury foods, one point of strength that the author cleanly conveys is the importance of cultural relativism. Even though this American author is accustomed to basic American society (actually I think he is Canadian, he teaches in British Columbia), customs, and traditions, he does not let his cultural perspective hinder his viewpoint and story of Southeast Asia. This point of strength justifies the author’s discussion and creates common ground for anthropologists and other readers of interest.

I’m still not sure from your summary what this article is about. Try to streamline your writing.