

6. What do you think about the use of hemp within Shinto practices?

The use of hemp in Shinto practice is historically rooted and has significant cultural and practical implications. Hemp, as an agricultural crop, has been utilized by the Japanese people for over 10,000 years, even predating rice cultivation. Historical uses of hemp included cloth and fishnet manufacturing from hemp fibers, roofing materials from hemp stems, the consumption of hemp seeds for food, and medicine production from hemp leaves.

In Shinto practice, hemp took on symbolic and practical roles. One such example is the "Nusa(麻)," a tool used for purification in Shinto rituals. "Nusa(麻)" is the ancient name for Cannabis and is most commonly made from hemp cloth. These were offered to the Kami(s) and used in various ceremonies, as a means to purify from sin and impurity.

Moreover, in the mythology of Amaterasu, the Shinto sun goddess, hemp offerings, denoted as "Ihotsumasakaki," were made. The tradition of hemp offerings resonated in the "Nihonshoki," where each family was ordered to give a piece of hemp as a purification fee in a national purification ceremony. This illustrates the central role hemp played in the cultural and religious practices of the Japanese people, particularly in Shinto rituals.

The enactment of the Cannabis Control Law and the pressures from international conventions led to a decline in the cultivation of hemp and a reinterpretation of its uses in Japan. Despite this, its historical use in Shinto practice remains significant.

After World War II, the occupation government issued a ban on the cultivation of Cannabis(麻) as part of its attempt to crack down on narcotics. A distinction had to be made between marijuana with high THC content (大麻 pronounced Taima) and hemp(麻 pronounced Asa). The crackdown can be interpreted as a means to separate the

Japanese people from their historical roots and values. While the Japanese people believed that 麻 (Asa) as an agricultural crop had nothing to do with marijuana(Taima), they were initially unsuccessful in convincing the occupying forces. Despite this, in 1947, after much negotiation, the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces issued a memorandum that authorized the cultivation of Cannabis under certain restrictions for the purpose of fiber harvesting. This allowed the continuation of the cultivation of hemp for practical uses. At that time, its cultural and religious significance was overshadowed by the crackdown on marijuana(大麻 - Taima) usage.

As synthetic materials replaced traditional ones, the use of hemp in everyday life declined, shifting the cultural perception of hemp as an agricultural commodity to a substance associated with drug use. This shift was also influenced by international conventions, specifically the "Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs" adopted by the United Nations in 1961. Nonetheless, the importance of hemp in Shinto practices is proof of the enduring cultural significance of this plant, despite the changing socio-political landscape.

Today, Cannabis(麻)'s symbolic role continues to be significant in Shinto rituals, especially in "Nusa" for purification ceremonies. However, shifting societal views and legal constraints have influenced the cultivation and usage of hemp(麻) in Japan, inevitably affecting its role in Shinto practice. In essence, while hemp(麻) use in Shinto practice has deep historical roots, its traditional usage and significance have been complicated by societal shifts and contemporary laws.