ABSTRACT
Archeological evidence has shown that cannabis was used as a fiber plant in northeastern Asia in neolithic times — about 6,000 years ago. The Chinese character for hemp, ma, dates to about 3,000 years ago and was derived from an ideogram depicting the plant's fiber producing character. In early writings separate characters were assigned to male and female hemp plants, its seeds, fruits, etc. This differentiation indicates the antiquity of its cultivation as it points to an enduring and varied relationship of man to the plant.

The cannabis plant had multitudinal uses in ancient times in China, another fact attesting to its antiquity as a cultivated species. Besides its importance as a plant fiber, cannabis was an important food plant, being listed as one of the five major "grains."

The medicinal properties of the plant were first recorded in the classical herbal Pen Ts'ao Ching, first compiled in the second century A. D. but undoubtedly based on traditions passed down from prehistoric times. The stupefying nature of cannabis and its hallucinogenic effect were clearly described. The drug was used as a cure for various diseases and as an effective pain killer. Later pharmacopoeias repeated or confirmed these properties but indicated that the plant was rarely used, and then only by necromancers for its hallucinogenic effect.

The original character ma in later usage assumed two additional connotations. One connotation meant numerous or chaotic, derived from the nature of the plants' fibers. The second connotation was one of numbness or senselessness, apparently derived from the stupefying effect of the fruits and leaves. Ma was used in these ways as a radical for many other characters.

It is suggested that the drug use of the plant was widely known to the neolithic peoples of northeastern Asia and that it played an important part in the practice of shamanism — widespread in that northern area. The great mobility of these nomadic tribes apparently carried the plant to western Asia and from there into India, where its use proliferated. While cannabis use and shamanism in general were on the upswing in these other Asian locales, its hallucinogenic practices slowly declined in China from the age of Confucius onwards. Only in sporadic small areas did the shamanistic traditions continue.
The discontinuation of cannabis in China as a "drug" apparently had its reasons. The Chinese were not averse to taking drugs to alter states of consciousness. "Wu shih," a mineral drug, was used in the third century by certain of the intelligentsia. In more recent times tobacco has been accepted with the same enthusiasm it has met in other parts of the world. Opium, first introduced from western Asia in about the 8th century as a drug, gradually became adopted as a narcotic. In the nineteenth century, under pressure from foreign powers, its use became common throughout China. The adoption of the introduced opium, a euphorica, and the non-adoption of the indigenous cannabis, a phantastica, is explained herein with its cultural implications.

Cannabis sativa is one of man's oldest cultivated plants. Botanically it is distinct from all other plants and readily recognized. Yet among individual plants it is extremely variable. It now grows spontaneously in great abundance and ubiquity. While most botanists consider the plant mono-typic, some regard it as consisting of more than one species and a number of varieties, and so propose several different systems of classification. The systematics of this plant still awaits classification by further botanical studies.

Cannabis is generally believed to be an Asiatic plant. There is no concerted agreement among botanists as to where the plant originally grew wild and where its cultivation first began. Estimates range within the wide span of temperate Asia from the Caucasus Mountains and the Caspian Sea through western and central Asia to eastern Asia. There is no easy way to distinguish between wild and spontaneous or adventitious, and semi-cultivated or cultivated plants. And so much remains to be done in determining the geographical origin of the plant.

These difficulties in classification and origin arise from the long and close association of cannabis with man. Man has caused its extreme variations and wide dispersion. It will no longer suffice to study the plant itself alone. The influence of man must be considered side by side with the botanical fact in order to unveil the complex nature of this plant.

Historically, the oldest records in existence seem to place the origin of cultivation in northeastern Asia, a portion of which falls in present northern China where the early Chinese civilization began. Cannabis has left a continuous record of its presence in this area from Neolithic times down to the present and its uses were closely integrated with the life and culture of the people throughout all periods.
The Origin and Use of Cannabis in Eastern Asia: Their Linguistic-Cultural Implications

Written by Hui-Lin Li

As a cultivated plant, cannabis had multitudinous uses in ancient times in China, another fact attesting to its antiquity as a cultivated species. Besides its importance as a fiber plant, it was also an important food plant, one of the major "grains" of the ancients. And it was an important medicinal plant.

The earliest or primary use of the plant was probably for its fibers. It was the only fiber plant (hemp) known to ancient peoples in northern and northeastern China, and eastern Siberia. In China its use was so extensive and important that from the earliest times the phrase, "land of mulberry and hemp," was used as a synonym for cultivated fields. Mulberry trees were planted for their leaves used to feed silkworms. These, in turn, produced the unique product, silk, that made China famous in other lands. Silk fabrics were used by the wealthy while hemp cloth was the textile of the masses.

Textile fibers are next to cereal grains in social and cultural importance to early man. From the standpoint of textile fibers, three centers can be recognized in the ancient Old World; the linen culture in the Mediterranean region, the cotton culture in India, and the hemp culture in eastern Asia. Each of these seems to have developed independently and their uses were unknown to each other for quite a long time.'

Evidence of the use of hemp fibers has been found in Neolithic records in northern China. This evidence appears as paintings of or impressions of ropes and woven cloth on pottery, as well as stone or pottery instruments of weaving: spinning-whorls and bone needles. Andersson?, first discovered the Neolithic culture in Honan province. It has become known as the Yang-shao culture and is characterized by painting pottery; Andersson believed that these traces pertained to hemp. Relics of this culture are now dated by the carbon-14 method as around 5,200 to 6,200 years ago.3 Many subsequent excavations have revealed that this culture extended along the Yellow River Valley to northeastern China. The presence of hemp has been supported by the findings of several other workers. Hemp was also found in discoveries of later Neolithic cultures such as the Lung-shan culture of about 3,200 to 4,200 years ago. Archeological records have shown that hemp was continuously present in northern China from Neolithic times through all historic time down to the present.4

The ancient use of hemp as a fiber is substantiated by written records. Ancient literature indicates that hemp fibers were used since time immemorial for making ropes and fishing nets. Knots were tied in ropes as a means of record keeping before written language. Fishing is believed to have preceded the domestication of animals.
The great cultural importance attached to hemp as a textile fiber is clearly indicated by the practice, since Confucian times, of wearing hemp fabric clothes while mourning the death of a parent or parents. The practice was prescribed in the Li Chi (Book of Rites) of the second century B.C. and was meticulously followed through all ages down to recent times. The great emphasis on filial piety in Chinese culture indicates the significance of such a long tradition.

A further distinctly important contribution of hemp fiber to Chinese culture, as well as to the culture of mankind as a whole, is the role it played in the invention of paper. Paper originated in China in the late Han dynasty. According to the dynastic history Hou-Han shu, the Marquis Ts'ai Lun used old fish nets, ragged cloth, hemp fibers, and tree bark in making paper and presented his new invention to the throne in 105 A.D. Fish nets and cloth were also made of hemp fibers. Ts'ai Lun probably perfected a technique that had been in use for some time. The oldest existing paper made of hemp was recently discovered in a grave in Shensi province that dates before the reign of Emperor Wu (104-87 B.C.) of the Early Han dynasty.5

There is also linguistic evidence for original and primary use of cannabis as a fiber plant. The character ma, in the ancient chuan script, was derived from ideographic components representing fibers hanging on a rack and placed under a roofed shack. Having evolved from the ancient to the later styles, it remains the character for hemp (Fig. 1). When other fiber plants from the warmer regions of the south, as well as introduced plants from foreign countries became known, the character ma developed into a generic name for fiber, and hemp itself was known as ta-ma (great ma), or sometimes as Han-ma (Chinese ma), or hou-ma (fire-ma).

At a very early period the Chinese recognized the cannabis plant as dioecious. While the name ma was applied to the plant in general, the male and female plants were accorded distinct names. The male plant, called i or hsi, yields the superior fiber. The female plant, known as tsez or chii, yields edible seeds and inferior fibers from the stem. Furthermore, the male flower clusters were called p'o, the fruiting clusters fin or pen, and the seeds ma-TM (Fig. 2). This ancient differentiation reflects the antiquity of the cultivation of the plant in the same way that it points to an enduring and varied relationship between man and plant.
This differentiation also suggests that the use of cannabis as a food plant had a very early beginning. Hemp seeds were considered, along with millet, rice, barley and the soybean, as one of the major grains of ancient China. Its use as a fiber as well as a grain was mentioned in such classical literature as the Shi Ching (Book of Odes), and Li Chi (Book of Rites), both of about the first and second centuries B.C. or earlier. Detailed instructions on the cultivation of hemp as both a fiber and a grain crop were given in the most ancient works on agriculture in existence.

The use of oil from hemp seeds was a later development since it involved the more complicated process of extraction. As grains, the seeds were used until at least the 6th century A.D. In later times the grain was completely forgotten, due apparently to its replacement by other, superior, cereal grains.

As ancient man used hemp seeds for food, it was quite natural for him to also discover the medicinal properties of the plant. The edible seeds are enclosed in fruit-coverings which contain a toxic resinous substance. In the earliest medical literature this differentiation was clearly noted.

Definitive records of the medicinal and physiological effect of cannabis are found in the earliest pharmacopoeia in existence. The famous Pen-ts'ao Ching, attributed to the legendary Emperor Shen-flung of about 2,000 B.C., was compiled in the first or second centuries A.D., but was undoubtedly based on traditions passed down from earlier — even prehistoric — times. It states that "ma-fen (the fruits of hemp)... if taken in excess will produce hallucinations (literally "seeing devils"). If taken over a long term, it makes one communicate with spirits and lightens one's body."

The famous physician Hua T'o (110-207 A.D.) lived at about this time. The dynastic history, Hou-Han shu, records that Hua T'o used mafei-san (hemp boiling compound), to be taken with wine, to anesthetize his patients during surgical operations on abdominal organs. After the operation magical balm was applied, and the patient recovered in due time. Wu Pu, a disciple of Hua T'o, wrote an herbal in 200 A.D. in which he made a clear distinction between the toxic hemp fruits (ma-fen) and the non-poisonous seeds or kernels.

Worthy of note is the work of the famous physician, T'ao Hung-ching, of the 5th century A.D. In his Ming-i pieh-lu, he noted the difference between the non-poisonous seeds (ma-tze) and the poisonous fruits (ma-fen). Of the latter he said, "Ma-fen is not much used in prescriptions [now a days]. Necromancers use it in combination with ginseng to set forward time in order to reveal future events."

In addition to the above statement about the temporal distortion caused by cannabis, there is a similar passage in the later work Cheng-lei pen-ts'ao by T'ang Shen-wei of the 10th century A.D. He stated that "Ma-fen has a spicy taste; it is toxic; it is used for waste diseases and injuries; it clears blood and cools temperature; it relieves fluxes; it undoes rheumatism; it discharges pus. If taken in excess it produces hallucinations and a staggering gait. If taken over a long term, it causes one to communicate with spirits and lightens one's body."

That the stupefying effect of the hemp plant was commonly known from extremely early times is also indicated linguistically. The character ma very early assumed two connotations. One meaning was, "numerous or chaotic," derived from the nature of the plant's fibers. The second connotation was one of numbness or senselessness, apparently derived from the properties of the fruits and leaves which were used as infusions for medicinal purposes.

As a radical, ma combines with many other radicals to form such characters as mo, demon (combining ma with "devil"), mo, grind (combining ma with "stone"), mi, waste (combining ma with "negative"), mo, rub (combining ma with "hand"), mi, porridge (combining ma with "rice"") (Fig. 3). As a character it combines with other characters to form such bisyllabic words as ma-tsui, narcotic (ma and "drunkenness"); ma-mu, numb (ma and "wood"); and ma-p'i, paralysis (ma and "rheumatism") (Fig. 4).

It should be mentioned that in ancient China, as in most early cultures, medicine had its origin in magic. Medicine men were practicing magicians. The evidence quoted above suggests that the medicinal use of the hemp plant was widely known to the Neolithic peoples of northeastern Asia and shamanism was especially widespread in this northern area and also in China, and cannabis played an important part in its rituals. The great mobility of the nomadic tribes north of China apparently assisted the movement of the plant to western Asia and from there to India, where its use as a drug intensified. While shamanism, and the use of cannabis in particular, were on the upswing in these other Asiatic locales, hallucinogenic practices slowly declined in China beginning with the Age of Confucius. Only in scattered small areas did shamanistic traditions continue in China during later ages.
Figure 3. *Ma* as a component radical with the connotation of “numbness” in the 3 characters above and of “numerous” in the 2 lower ones.
The Western personality tends to be more sedated, and thus not challenge social norms. Cannabis, with its stimulating and erratic effects, can cause guilt-oriented behavior. The adoption of opium and the non-adoption of cannabis reflect a behavioral pattern that is common in Chinese society. The conformity of an individual in Chinese society is regulated by a culturally instilled sense of filial piety. This sense of responsibility towards one's family and ancestors is a fundamental aspect of Chinese culture and personality, dating back to the Neolithic era.

A travel record from 1919 showed that the Han Chinese minority refrained from the use of cannabis, while the Uigurs, being the majority, did not. These tribal peoples, once part of the Chinese minority, were observed to entirely refrain from the use of drugs after a period of 5 to 1. Large-scale war, invasion, and natural disaster during the first quarter of the 20th century led to the Chinese being outnumbered 5 to 1. The Chinese, due to their cultural background, were eager to keep the family and its fortune intact. The discontinuation of the use of cannabis by the Chinese can perhaps simply be referred to as a cultural phenomenon. In reality, the difference between the effects of cannabis and opium can be readily seen. The fantasy, unreality, and sometimes violence caused by cannabis would disrupt family life, a life which the Chinese were eager to maintain.

Chinese culture is characterized by its uniformity and continuity. In spite of the vicissitudes of war, invasion, and natural disaster, the culture is remarkable in its continuous, unbroken history. An historical orientation permeates every level of Chinese society, and is manifested in everyday life in the strong family system, ancestor worship, and filial piety. Geographically, the Chinese culture is characterized by its uniformity and continuity. In spite of the vicissitudes of war, invasion, and natural disaster, the culture is remarkable in its continuous, unbroken history. An historical orientation permeates every level of Chinese society, and is manifested in everyday life in the strong family system, ancestor worship, and filial piety. Socially, the Chinese culture is characterized by the principle that the Universe is regulated by a Natural Order which is moral in essence. Man, the superior being, is a moral entity who can refrain from wrong doing through education and the recognition of one's own nature as a moral being and by constant watchfulness.

The discontinuation of the use of cannabis by the Chinese can perhaps simply be referred to as a cultural phenomenon. In reality, the difference between the effects of cannabis and opium can be readily seen. The fantasy, unreality, and sometimes violence caused by cannabis would disrupt family life, a life which the Chinese were eager to maintain. The cultural background associated with the non-use of cannabis can be illustrated by the adoption of opium. Opium is an Euphorica, a sedative of the euphoria type. Overuse may cause rapid movements and under certain situations stimulate uncontrollable movements. The Chinese were not adverse to taking drugs in order to alter states of consciousness. The discontinuation of the use of cannabis by the Chinese can perhaps simply be referred to as a cultural phenomenon. In reality, the difference between the effects of cannabis and opium can be readily seen. The fantasy, unreality, and sometimes violence caused by cannabis would disrupt family life, a life which the Chinese were eager to maintain. The cultural background associated with the non-use of cannabis can be illustrated by the adoption of opium. Opium is an Euphorica, a sedative of the euphoria type. Overuse may cause rapid movements and under certain situations stimulate uncontrollable movements. The Chinese were not adverse to taking drugs in order to alter states of consciousness. The discontinuation of the use of cannabis by the Chinese can perhaps simply be referred to as a cultural phenomenon. In reality, the difference between the effects of cannabis and opium can be readily seen. The fantasy, unreality, and sometimes violence caused by cannabis would disrupt family life, a life which the Chinese were eager to maintain.