

Hemp & other Bast Fibres in Thailand: Current Status and Perspectives

– *Thai-German Agro-based Fibre Exchange Programme* –

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Abstract

Thailand, officially the Kingdom of Thailand, is a country in Southeast Asia in which hemp (*Cannabis sativa* L.) has been cultivated by the Hmong people since a long time. The Hmong is an ethnic group from the mountainous regions of China, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand. The historical migration of the Hmong starts from China moving southward in the 18th century. Today, hemp is cultivated by Hmong people in northern Thailand and the neighbouring countries like Laos. The Hmong have a culture built on animistic beliefs with lots of rituals of which the burial is the most important and elaborate one. Burial clothes made of hemp, for example, hand-made hemp shoes are an important part of this ceremony. The Hmong people cultivate and process hemp in a very traditional way to produce hand spun coarse hemp yarn and rough clothes.

In the past, hemp cultivation practised by the Hmong people was in conflict with the Thai law which classified hemp as a drug. In 2002 public authorities allowed hemp cultivation for scientific studies. Since 2016 hemp cultivation is allowed in 6 northern Thailand provinces under permission of the Ministry of Public Health and is controlled by the Food and Drug Administration. The Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Board proposed hemp as a new economic plant in Thailand especially for the mountainous regions. Now the question is, if hemp will become the new economic plant in the next research strategy of Thailand, which will allow researchers to improve understanding in hemp plant science, cultivation, applications as well as product innovation.

Thailand is located in a region with a high diversity of fibre plants beside hemp. Most of them are not used for fibre extraction yet. One aim of the joined research project "*Thai-German Agro-based Fibre Exchange Programme*" deals with the investigation of unknown kinds of fibres for technical and textile applications, for fibre reinforced composites or nanocellulose. Possible areas of application for fibres from Thailand and agricultural residues should be identified. A Thai-German cooperation in the field of agro-based fibre materials and materials from agricultural waste will be developed. This contains a concept development for a closed chain from raw agro-based products to materials as well as a sustainable development in agriculture: from plant to product.