



# Japanese and Hawaiian Cultural Practices : Traditional Knowledge for a Sustainable Food Production

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## Introduction

Fresh water points like lakes and rivers were the start for new Human communities as they provide vital resources for food production and construction materials. The ahupua'a system is a comprehensive structure that allowed native Hawaiians to manage their land sustainably for several generations. In Japan, similar land management systems can be observed. In both countries, it was important for communities to maintain a healthy relationship between Human and their surroundings.

The Kai Yama program allows us to investigate traditional and cultural practices in Japan and Hawaii that allowed our ancestors to live a sustainable lifestyle. This program is a collaborative learning experience where we emphasize information given by the community we worked with over intensive literature research.

## Japan and Hawaii's Main Crops

**Taro** was the main source of starch in Hawaii. Taro fields represented about 35,000 acres across the Hawaiian islands. Each Hawaiian was estimated to eat 2.95 million kg of taro per year. The tuber was cooked and eaten as is or pounded into Pa'i'ai or Poi. Taro was also used in traditional medicine (intestinal disorders).

**Rice** is the most important agricultural resources in Japan nowadays. About 8 millions tons of rice are produced every year in Japan. Each Japanese eat the equivalent of 50 kg of rice in a year. The rice grain is commonly used to accompany meals and can be pounded into mochi. The grains can be used as fermentation starter to make miso paste used Japanese cuisine. Lastly, the rice straw were used to make household items.

## Waterfront resources

Water points create ecosystems where a diversity of fauna and flora developed and thrived. Human communities were able to use these resources for food and/or construction. Lakes and rivers were abundant in bird species, fish and mammals. On the Japanese water banks, Yoshi (*Phragmites japonicus*) used for the construction and making of everyday life items: houses, boats, brooms, elevated stands...etc. On Hawaii's seashore, coconut trees were used for food, construction and medicinal purposes. Other coastal species like Naupaka Kahakai were used in la'au lapa'au as well.



## Traditional Forestry in Replenishing Water Sources

Native tree species are a major components of watersheds in both Hawaii and Japan. They allow water to sink into the soil, replenishing the aquifers and reducing the amount of runoff from the land. Water sources are replenished thanks to atmospheric phenomena like rainfall, snowfall, typhoons/ hurricanes. In addition to that, native trees were used traditionally for construction. In Hawaii, Koa and 'Ōhia trees were common hardwoods used to build canoes (wa'a) and houses (hale). In Japan, pine trees from the sugi family were used for building houses.



## Conclusion

Previous generations have lived sustainably and resiliently for several centuries. With very limited resources, they were highly reliant on what the environment could provide them. Any form of Human activity has an impact on the environment. It was the responsibility of Human communities to care for their environment for survival purposes. Native Hawaiians were planning and managing their land foreseeing seven to eight generations ahead of them. Take care of the land and it will take care of you.



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