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“Competition for Resources in a Changing World:
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Plant Biodiversity Use in SW China: Preliminary Results of Ethnobotanical Research

ABDOLBASET GHORBANI, JOACHIM SAUERBORN, GERHARD LANGENBERGER

University of Hohenheim, Institute for Plant Production and Agroecology in Tropics and Subtropics, Germany

Abstract

There is a continuing demand for products from wild species, mainly by people living in rural areas to support their daily life and subsistence. Approximately 1–5% of global food is harvested from natural forest. More than one billion people now live within the world’s biodiversity “hot spots”. Often, these people have a traditional life style that evolved over a long time to cope with specific environments. Traditional land use enabled people to live simply but without destroying their environment - a role model of sustainable land use. In many places, modernisation and implementation of new development policies promotes intensive higher yield agricultural systems resulting in an alteration of the traditional life style. The Nabanhe National Nature Reserve (NNNR) is experiencing such changes. The reserve is located in Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, along the western banks of Lancang River, Southwest China. The reserve harbours eight vegetation types with high floristic diversity. Five different ethnic minorities also live in this area. An ethnobotanical survey was conducted during the dry season in 2007/2008. We used semi-structured interviews to collect data on wild food and medical plants. Interviews were supplemented by field walks. In addition, plant samples were collected for identification. During field work, 94 utilised plant species representing 45 families were identified. Among these wild species 48 are used as food and 49 species are used for medicine. Principal families holding medical plants include Asteraceae (6 spp.), Araceae, Verbenaceae, Lamiaceae, Melastomataceae (each with 3 spp.). For food plants Piperaceae (6 spp.), Apiaceae (5 spp.) and Solanaceae (3 spp.) contributed the highest number of species. The results show that a variety of plants from different families are used by local people in the area. Detailed information about the miscellaneous use of these plant species will be presented.

Keywords: Biodiversity use, China, ethnobotany