

Multiple uses of Job's tears (*Coix*, Gramineae) in mainland Southeast Asia (Oral Presentation)Yukino Ochiai

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Introduction

The genus *Coix* of family Gramineae, commonly known as Job's tears, includes four species, one sub-species and three varieties of perennial grass plants. This genus is mainly distributed in Southeast Asia and the surrounding areas. This paper focuses on the Itakies species and discusses the common practices and knowledge shared by a people from various ethnic backgrounds in mainland Southeast Asia.

Objectives

This paper aims to provide an overview of Itakies and understand the interaction of the people with the plants in mainland Southeast Asia based on the field observations of the living plants and interviews with the locals regarding its uses in daily domestic life.

Methods

Field research was conducted in Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and the Yunnan Province of China from 1994 to 2006 to collect information on the taxa, the part(s) of the plant, its different uses, and the manner of human-participation to promote plant growth, and the different ethnic groups of the users.

Results

Domesticated and non-domesticated types of six taxa were recognized in the field observations. On interviewing fifty ethnic groups that belong to the different linguistic categories including Tai, Tibet-Burman, Chinese, Mon-Khmer and Miao-Yao, it became apparent that the plants of the *Coix* species are mainly used for three main purposes, namely, as a staple diet and for preparing snacks, as medicines, and seeds as decorative beads on dresses and bags. The users focus on different parts of the plants for different uses. People who use the *Coix* species collect them by gathering the plants from natural habitats and by cultivating them in their gardens and farmlands.

Conclusion

People from various ethnic backgrounds in mainland Southeast Asia share common knowledge and practice with regard to the *Coix* species. When compared to other regions in the world where only one or two taxa of the species are distributed, the complex interaction between people and plants is peculiar to mainland Southeast Asia.

Keywords: food culture, folk medicine, material culture, multi-ethnic society, geographical distribution

Selected References

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