

Panax japonicus (T.Nees) C.A. Mey and its varieties in China

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Panax japonicus, the perennial herb in the Araliaceae family, was used as the natural medicinal herb by Chinese traditional doctors for more than thousand years. Its rhizome was mainly used as a tonic, anti-inflammatory and hemostatic agent in China. Most of the therapeutic effects of *P. japonicus* had been reported due to the presence of tetracyclic or pentacyclic triterpene saponins. Volatile oil, polysaccharides and amino acids had also been found in *P. japonicus* species and reported in the pharmacological functions. In our studies, a three-year survey was conducted to determine the current resource status of *P. japonicus* (T.Nees) C. A. Mey and its varieties (*P. japonicus* var. major (Burkill) C.Y.Wu & Feng and *P. japonicus* var. bipinnatifidus (Seem.) C.Y.Wu & Feng) in 10 provinces of southern and southwestern China. Whole plants were sampled at 64 sites. Resource distribution, habitat type, morphological variation and market trend of them were studied and discussed. The natural resource in China is rarely available due to extensive exploitation and continual environment deterioration in recent decades, Abundance of *P. japonicus* was much lower than previous records, mainly found in Hubei, Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunnan province. Wild resources of *P.japonicus* var. major and *P.japonicus* var. bipinnatifidus were even scarcer, only found in Guizhou and Yunan province. Despite their dramatic rise of market trend, the artificial cultivation of them was still not fully developed in China, but progressed rapidly in Hubei province.

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