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Yao Fu^{a,b}, Jin-chao Yang^{a,c}, Antony Balfour Cunningham^{a,d}, Alexandra Maria Towns^e, Yu Zhang^{a,b}, Hua-ying Yang^f, Jian-wen Li^{a,b}, Xue-fei Yang^{a,b,*}

^aDepartment of Economic Plants and Biotechnology, Yunnan Key Laboratory for Wild Plant Resources, Kunming Institute of Botany, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Kunming 650201, China

^bSoutheast Asia Biodiversity Research Institute, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Yezin, Nay Pyi Taw 05282, Myanmar

^cCollege of Forestry, Southwest Forestry University, Kunming, 650224, China

^dSchool of Public Leadership, University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, South Africa

^eTowson University Honors College, Towson University, Maryland, USA.

^fSchool of Life Science, Yunnan University, Kunming 650031, China

*Corresponding author. xuefei@mail.kib.ac.cn (X.-f. Yang).

ABSTRACT

Ethnopharmacological relevance:

Herbal teas have long been consumed by Chinese people for preventive and/or therapeutic healthcare. Although herbal teas are widely consumed by many cultural groups in different regions of China, no thorough review has been undertaken to assess the diversity of the country's herbal tea usage. This literature review, complemented by a quantitative survey in an important tea market in Kunming, begins to fill this knowledge gap.

Aims of the study:

The study aims to summarize the current knowledge of plant species used as herbal teas by different cultural groups in different regions of China, with a focus on the teas' perceived traditional healthcare functions, related phytochemical/pharmaceutical research, and safety issues.

Materials and Methods:

The study involved a comprehensive literature review and a market survey. The literature review was based on published ethnobotanical studies of herbal teas in China. We searched the Web of ScienceTM, ELSEVIER, the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) and the China Science and Technology Journal Database to locate relevant studies (including journal articles, Masters/PhD dissertations and books) that were published before March 2017. A species list was compiled based on the review and supplemented with information retrieved from the Scifinder database (<https://scifinder.cas.org>) and the Chinese Pharmacopoeia (2010). A Use Value Index was employed for ranking the most cited species. Based on the 29 most cited species, we discussed the current research status in relation to healthcare benefits and safety concerns of herbal teas in China. To better understand the current status of the herbal tea market in China, we also surveyed 136 tea vendors at the Xiongda Tea Market in Kunming. Information gathered from the survey included the species sold, the sale prices and the form of the herbal tea product.

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