

The Origin and Spread of Early Ripening Champa Rice: Its Impact on Song Dynasty China

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Often overlooked is the importance of early maturing varieties with their ability to escape droughts, avoid floods and in some localities open up the opportunity for double cropping. Most varieties grown in the tropics until the last half century matured in 150 to 180 days or longer and were photo-period sensitive. However, non-photo period sensitive one-hundred-day varieties were grown in the Champa Kingdom in what is now Central Vietnam centuries ago. How these varieties moved into Song Dynasty China and the impact of the early ripening rice on population growth in South China is well documented. However, the origin of the Champa varieties is less clear. According to a recent DNA test the Champa varieties belong to the *aus* sub-species. The *aus* have the characteristics of both *indica* and *japonica* and originated in the hill areas of what is now Eastern India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. Because the Champa Kingdom adopted the Indian language, religion, and customs, it seems logical that the Champa rice must have been disseminated from the hilly areas in the Indian sub-continent to Central Vietnam and eventually to China – the Southern Song Dynasty - in the 11th century.