



New Varieties of Rice

A farm house on the outskirts of the city, Beijing qingming scroll

“In the early part of the Song dynasty ... a new variety of early-ripening rice was introduced into China from Champa, a kingdom then located near the Mekong River Delta in what is now Vietnam, and by 1012 it had been introduced in the lower Yangzi and Huai river regions. ... Because the variety of rice was relatively more drought-resistant, it could be grown in places where older varieties had failed, especially on higher land and on terraces that

climb hilly slopes, and it ripened even faster than the other early-ripening varieties already grown in China. This made double-cropping possible in some areas, and in some places, even triple-cropping became possible ... the hardiness and productivity of various varieties of rice were and are in large part responsible for the density of population in South, Southeast, and East Asia.

According to the Buddhist monk, Shu Wenying, the Song Emperor Zhengzhong (998-1022), when he learned that Champa rice was drought-resistant, sent special envoys to bring samples back to China.”

— Lynda Noreen Shaffer

In “A Concrete Panoply of Intercultural Exchange: Asia in World History,” in *Asia in Western and World History*, edited by Ainslie T. Embree and Carol Gluck (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 839-840.

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

Dr. Randolph Barker

Professor Emeritus, Cornell University

rb19@cornell.edu

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.