

# SEAWEEDS OF ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE IN SOUTH CHINA

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## ABSTRACT

IN CHINA, marine algae bear the name, 'sea vegetables' and have been used as such by the coastal population since prehistoric times. At least 20 species can be enumerated, used as an ingredient in soup, fried or broiled dishes, or as a condiment, for its savoury flavour and for its crisp or mucilaginous texture. Sun dried or processed specimens are stocked in all grocery shops. The red forms form the main source of all GEL food.

As medicines, they are recognised as having a cooling effect in time of fever, brewed for drinking in the form of tea. The brown algae, *Sargassum fusiformis*, *S. Thunbergii* and *Laminaria japonica* have long been used for producing a cooling and blood cleansing effect, for treatment of glandular weakness, apoplexy, and for normalising blood pressure. The red algae, *Digenia simplex*, forms the basic stock for the manufacture of the local drug called TSE Ko-Tsoi, taken by adults and children alike as an anthelmintic throughout the country, and is of great economic concern.

In industry, a paste for sizing silk is obtained from the red alga, *Gloiopeltis furcata*. The sized black silk is worn by a big majority of the population, men and women alike, throughout the long summer months. The durability of the silk and the cooling effect in wearing depend largely on the quality of the paste used in sizing, obtained mostly from the tetrasporic plants. Size of inferior quality, obtained from the cystocarpic plants, is used in the industry, also of enormous concern, in converting silver to gold 'ghost paper' for use as money for the dead in the next world.

The bulk of the *Sargassum sp.*, abundant in this region, is harvested for use as fertiliser for crops or as fodder for pigs.