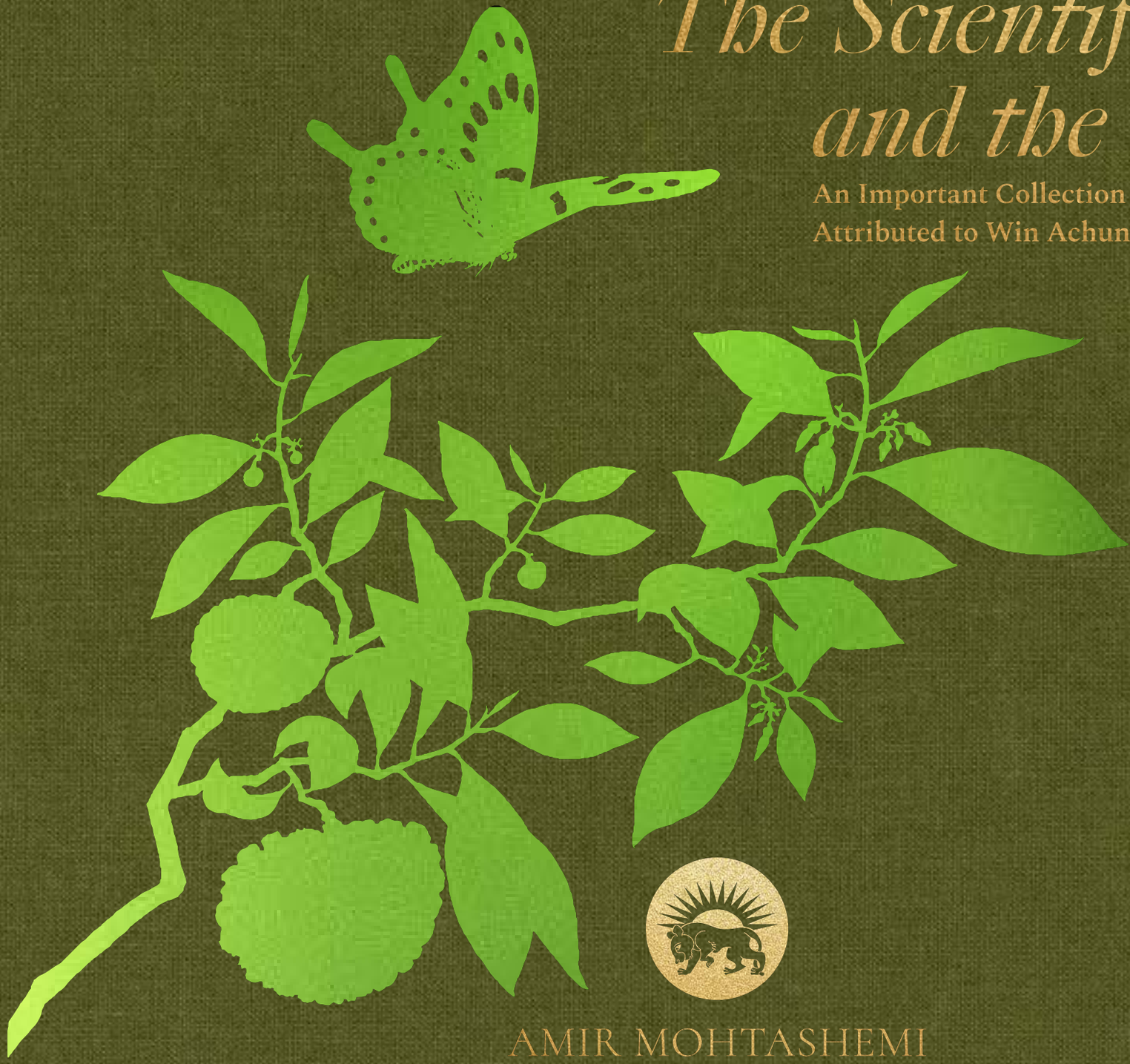
The Scientific and the Sublime

An Important Collection of Botanical Illustrations, Attributed to Win Achun and Other Artists



AMIR MOHTASHEMI

'Of the Botany of China, using the term in its proper sense, very little is known in this country. The native treatises and herbals which have come to our hands, whether we regard the illustrative figures or the descriptive text, are among the most astonishing specimens to be met with of the 'palpable obscure.'

Murray et al, 1836

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Text by Christina Hales

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Foreword

Although science has become the watchword of the 21st century, seldom is it presented with a sense of aesthetics. Step back two centuries and we see what natural companions the spirit of enquiry and the creative impulse can be. This collection of botanical paintings says it all. Pleasing the senses and the mind was a priority at a time when knowledge did not preclude visual appeal. Kings such as Charles II were enthusiastic enough about understanding nature to found the Royal Society in 1660. It was George III who reigned at the time when these paintings were commissioned. Compensating for the loss of his premier colony in America, he gained an entourage of scientists to keep him company at his palace in Kew.

The 47 works in the present collection reveal a world of discovery, wonder and international collaboration. They mark an aesthetic summit in the relationship between British empire builders and Chinese empire defenders, preserving the glories of their far older civilisation. It was a meeting of minds that combined the British enthusiasm for scientific observation with the traditional Chinese love of painting flowers, birds and butterflies. Added to this was the allure of fruit that was either unfamiliar or prohibitively expensive. Above all, there were views of the tea plant in its original form; a source of enduring mystery.

There is as much news as ever about the benefits of newly discovered plants. Nothing has really changed since the days of apothecaries and their herbals. The discovery of this collection is another exciting breakthrough. It is to China what the Farquhar Collection is to Southeast Asia. The latter is now considered one of the greatest treasures of the National Museum of Singapore.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Christina Hales, who has been working on this collection for nearly a year to unravel its history.

Amir & Soha Mohtashemi

An Important Collection of Chinese Botanical Illustrations, with a Series of Paintings Attributed to Win Achun

Canton or Macau. Circa 1803-1809

'China is the only country on Earth where there are unbroken connections among tropical, subtropical, temperate, and boreal forests. The country is home to approximately one-eighth of the world's total plant species, including thousands found nowhere else on Earth.'
Flora of China Editorial Commitee

This rich and diverse collection of 47 botanical illustrations represents the astounding floral diversity of China and further afield. The paintings were procured at the request of John Roberts (1739-1810), a Director and Chairman of the East India Company, by Britain's first plant hunter to reside in China, William Kerr (1779-1814). Correspondence between the East India Company in London and Canton reveals the historical context of the works, and that Kerr employed a local artist, most likely Win Achun. It is exceptionally rare to encounter a named artist from this period and research into Win Achun has been hitherto overlooked. The paintings in this collection had been bound into two albums in London, prior to 1810, when the bookbinder's partnership ended.[1] Following Roberts' death in 1810, they were sold at auction by his executors. More recently, in the 1990s, the albums were sold again, and it was revealed that 100 works had been undertaken by Win Achun.[2] At some point following this sale, the albums were cut up and the paintings dispersed. Analysing the first group of illustrations in this collection with related studies in the William Kerr collection at Kew, and an album of botanical illustrations in the British Library, a sense of Win Achun's individual artistry emerges. The present group of images attributed to Achun are united in their astounding level of detail, close observation of form, graceful movement and rich colouration. Each study is imbued with vitality and a sense of the plant's individual spirit. They are nothing short of exquisite.

The second group is an exceptional selection of individual plant studies, ranging from a magnificent illustration of a pineapple to a resplendent magnolia. Each work represents a seamless fusion of the scientific with the artistic. The final group includes botanical illustrations with insects, predominantly butterflies. The sublime colours of the plants and insects are enhanced by the joyful sentiment these paintings evoke. The works are supremely well painted, elegant and vivacious.

The underlying narrative of these paintings is a truly fascinating story of dedication, loss, creativity and endurance. Considering the perils of international botanical exploration in the early 19th century, we are extremely fortunate that any botanical illustrations have survived. Moreover, the extraordinary skill of the Chinese artists, during the period, has ensured that the paintings in this collection are as vivid and magnificent today as they were over 200 years ago.

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1 Middleton 1996, p.330.
2 Christie's. 5792. 30 April 1997, lot 14.

Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820), Botanist, Explorer and Scientist

'All ranks of people cannot fail of being interested in the introduction of Chinese flowers.'
Sir Joseph Banks, 1792

Sir Joseph Banks dedicated his lifetime to the pursuit and understanding of the natural sciences. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1767 and the following year he joined James Cook's first pioneering voyage on the Endeavour. Prior to the trip, Banks was eager to record as much of the local flora of each country as possible, so he assembled a group of four naturalists and botanical artists to accompany him. Returning to London in 1771, he was elected a member of the Royal Society and latterly became the longest serving President in the institution's history. Following the Endeavour journey, keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, Rev. Sheffield visited Banks' London home and was astounded by its contents; 'His house is a perfect museum; every room contains an inestimable treasure. I passed almost a whole day there in the utmost astonishment, could scarce credit my senses ... What raptures must they have felt to land upon countries where everything was new to them! whole forests of nondescript trees clothed with the most beautiful flowers and foliage.'[1]

Banks' passion for botany was shared with King George III, and the two men became lifelong friends. They both wished to develop the collections of the Botanical Garden at Kew and Banks was to oversee this. His ambition was to create a world-class garden, showcasing rare and unusual species that were previously unknown in Europe. Banks was joined on the Endeavour by the Swedish naturalist Daniel Solander, a pupil of Carl Linnaeus, who Banks greatly admired. Solander worked at the British Museum and assisted Banks with his collection of botanical texts and herbarium specimens.

In order to increase his knowledge and collections, Banks dedicated himself to sending botanists on expeditions across the globe. He arranged missions to Africa, China, India, the East Indies, America and Australia. These endeavours resulted in him being sent a phenomenally wide variety of plants and seeds to be grown at Kew. Banks' home in Soho Square, London became an international nexus of exchange between eminent naturalists. At the time of his death in 1820, his herbarium and library became 'one of the most prominent natural history collections of late eighteenthcentury Britain,' and were bequeathed to the British Museum, London.[2]

A passionate botanist with a profound love of nature and a benevolent wish to share his knowledge, Sir Joseph Banks was a true patron of the natural sciences. In fitting tribute, the genus Banksia was created in his honour, which encompasses a wide variety of global species. When Banks died, Kew had indeed become one of the world's greatest botanical gardens and it would no doubt gratify him to know that it remains so to this day.

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(Fig. 1) Sir Joseph Banks, RHS Lindley Collections.

John William Roberts (1738–1813), Chairman of the East India Company

'What raptures must they have felt to land upon countries where everything was new to them! whole forests of nondescript trees clothed with the most beautiful flowers and foliage.'
Rev. Gilbert White, 1877



(Fig. 2) John Roberts by William Daniell, after George Dance, early 19th century, National Portrait Gallery, London.

The life of John Roberts was eventful, adventurous and in more than one respect, secretive. He was known for being quick-witted and acting with conviction. He spoke Chinese and 'was entrusted with delicate diplomatic missions on behalf of Britain and the Company.'[1] Chinese officials referred to him as *taipan* (chief) and he oversaw the activities of William Kerr, during his time in Canton.

John William Roberts was born in 1738 to a merchant family. As a young man, he joined his father's firm, Roberts, Baynes and Roberts, located at King's Arms Yard, London. In 1761 he married Jane Fenton, the daughter of a plantation owner in St Kitts. From 1764, Roberts spent the next 32 years appointed as either Director or Chairman of the East India Company.

In 1803, Sir Joseph Banks wrote to Roberts, to inform him that he had seen the King, who approved of Banks' proposed expedition to send a botanist to China.[2] Roberts then secured a house for William Kerr, with a garden for him to sow seeds and prepare his plants for their long voyage to Kew. 1803 would prove a busy year for Roberts, as well as welcoming the new botanist, he was requested to undertake a secret mission for the Company. He was first notified of the project on 19th November and within 5 days was sailing from Canton to the Vietnamese port of Tourane (present Da Nang).[3] Roberts was instructed to contact Emperor Gia Long (1762-1820) and propose a trading deal. The emperor purchased arms on credit from British firms in India, during his 1802 campaigns to conquer the whole of Vietnam. Concerned about French dominance in the region, the Company saw this as an opportunity to negotiate with the emperor and expand their interests in the country. Roberts was unable to see the emperor when he arrived and was advised that he would be campaigning for at least two months. On 24th December he decided to leave and sailed to Malacca where he wrote his report to the Company.[4]

He then visited Penang briefly before sailing to Calcutta, where he was received by Lord Wellesley. Following this, he returned to Vietnam, but had little success; he was unable to meet the emperor in person and the Company's propositions were met with suspicion and ultimately rejection.

Arriving back in Canton, Roberts continued his duties as a Director of the Company, a role in which he was described as 'bold, generally judicious and prompt in his decision.'[5] In 1807, as President of the Select Committee, Roberts oversaw the 'Neptune' incident'. A skirmish between sailors from East Indiaman 'Neptune' and a group of Chinese men, resulted in one of the Chinese men dying, after he returned home. Trade by English ships was halted while the investigation took place, eventually resulting in a judgement of accidental homicide. A painting from the National Maritime Museum depicts the trial of four British seamen, in the hall of the British Factory in Canton (see Fig.3). To the left of the sailors on trial, Roberts is the second figure from the right, seated in the front row, (see Fig.3 detail).

At the end of 1810, Roberts left his position at the Company and sailed for England 'on urgent family business', early the following year.[6] He returned to Macao in September, 1812, reportedly with a Portuguese woman who gave birth to their second son in January, 1813.[7] Roberts already had a daughter and two sons with his English wife, Jane, who died in 1806.[8] It has recently been re-discovered that Roberts had another son, Manuel James Johnson (1805-59), who at his father's wishes was sent to England to attend the Company's 'military seminary' at Addiscombe. However, during his application, the Company questioned the young man, who could provide neither birth nor Christening certificate.[9] The boy explained that his father had died, and he was entrusted to the care of John Wiliam Bowden, (the husband of Roberts' daughter, Mary Anne). Questions continued and



(Fig. 3) Trial of Four British Seamen at Canton, 1 October 1807. Chinese School, 19th century. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London. Caird Fund.



(Fig. 3 detail)

eventually the boy declared; 'I was born at Macao of European Parents, my father being John Wm. Roberts Esqr., in Council at Canton, and my mother a Portugueze.' Bowden also confirmed this.[10] Despite his troublesome encounter with the Company, Roberts' son went on to have a phenomenal career; he became Radcliffe Astronomer at Oxford (1840-59), a Fellow of the Royal Society (1856), and President of the Royal Astronomical Society (1857-58).[11]

John William Roberts certainly led an eventful life and appears to have felt most at home in the Portuguese colony of Macau, where he retired to and died in 1813.[12] He dedicated his career to the Company and seems to have acted with diligence and perseverance in his various duties. He appears to have had a close relationship with William Kerr, assisting the young botanist when English sea captains complained of the weight of his plant cabins and asking Kerr to help in his own garden at Macau.[13] Kerr even confided in John Livingstone that 'had it not been for the kindness of the chief of the factory, [Roberts] he could not have done so much.'[14] Observing Kerr directing a local artist to complete a set of botanical illustrations for the Company's Museum, it is likely that Roberts commissioned his own set of drawings at the same time. That would certainly account for the duplicate works in the William Kerr Collection at Kew. As Mildred Archer notes, 'towards the end of eighteenth century and during much of the nineteenth, European residents in India and Southeast Asia showed a keen interest in natural history... they procured drawings of birds, animals and plants – the whole providing foundations for later scientific knowledge... large numbers of drawings were made, many of them for private collectors, others on the instruction of the East India Company as part of an official policy.'[15]

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1 Hearl, p. 34, 2018.
2 See Dawson, 1958, p.296.
3 Lamb, 1961, p.107.
4 Ibid, p.113.
5 Morse 1926, p.132.
6 Ibid, p.133.
7 Hearl 2018, p.35.
8 There is a plaque at Bath Abbey to Jane Roberts, nee Fenton.
9 Hearl 2018, p.35.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid p. 34.
12 It is often erroneously written that Roberts died in 1810, likely because he wrote a will that year while he was in London, however, he also made a will in 1813.
13 William Kerr, Letter to William Aiton. Esq. 3rd March, 1809. Library and Archives, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.
14 The Chinese Repository 1833, p. 227.
15 Archer, insert sleeve, 1962.

William Kerr, (1779–1814)
Britain's First Resident Plant Hunter in China

'Good God. When I consider the melancholy fate of so many of botany's votaries,
I am tempted to ask whether men are in their right mind who so desperately risk life
and everything else through the love of collecting' plants.'
Carl Linnaeus, 1737



(Fig. 4) The European Factories, Canton, early 19th century. William Daniell, 1806.

On 1 October 1803, the Honourable East India Company ship Coutts limped into Whampoa harbour. The vessel was in such a dilapidated state that she had to be towed. After passing Java Head, a ferocious typhoon had rolled the Coutts, sending the mast and mizzen overboard and badly injuring her captain. She was taking on water at a rapid rate and was still rolling the following day, losing the foremast and bowsprit to the engulfing waves. Miraculously, amongst the commotion, the sailors were able to create a temporary mast and sail from the vessel's longboat. It is a remarkable feat that the boat and all her crew were not lost for good.[1]

On board were the surgeon John Livingstone (c.1770-1829), experienced supercargo Mr David Lance (1757-1820) and William Kerr, a 23-year-old Scotsman who worked at Kew Gardens, London. Kerr had been selected by Sir Joseph Banks to become the first British resident plant collector in China; 'His Majesty has been graciously pleased to select you from your Fellow Gardeners & appoint you to the very desirable office of collecting the plants of Foreign Countries for the use of the Royal Gardens.'[2] Attending to his new position with great zeal, Kerr began gathering plants before he had even reached China, making several excursions at Anjer Point, on the western tip of Java.[3] Sadly, most of these specimens did not survive the typhoon.

When Kerr arrived in China, all international trade was restricted to the port of Canton (Guangzhou) and had to be conducted during the winter months. 'Factories' comprising offices and warehouses were built by the Company and business was conducted via wealthy Chinese merchants. During the hot summer months, the supercargoes (officer merchants) and other Company men would vacate to the Portuguese settlement of Macau.

With only about four months until the next fleet of ships left for England, Kerr had no time to waste. David Lance gave him an illustrated "*Book of Chinese Plants*" from Banks.[4] He was to use it as a reference guide when selecting plants to send to Kew. Initially, Kerr had limited results; he didn't speak the local language and was cheated by the 'Fa-Tee' (flower garden) nursery owners.[5] Eventually

success prevailed and he was able to send 'a collection of above eighty plants most of which are very rare or entirely unknown in Europe'.[6] During this time, Kerr also received word that alongside Joseph Banks, the Company wanted him to commission a set of paintings, depicting Chinese plants. They were required for the Company's new India Museum, adjoining their headquarters and were likely intended to compliment the 'Cabinet of Natural Productions.'[7]

Reporting on this, the chief of the Company's factory in Canton, George Thomas Staunton (1781-1859), notified the Court of Directors in London;

'The Honourable Committee's Instructions respecting the Desiderata for their library has been attended to. A Botanical Painter has been constantly employed in copying the plants, fruits and flowers of this Country, as they come successively in Season and we shall continue him till all that is curious in vegetable nature shall be designated. Mr Ker, [sic] His Majesty's Botanical Gardener, directs his employment and sends a description of those already painted which go in the Earl Camden's Packet, together with Drawings of the Malacca Fruits by the same artist. Also various drawings as per list enclosed.'[8]

After what must have been an exhilarating few months, Kerr had managed to secure both the plants and the paintings. Loaded into containers especially made for the long journey, the majority of Kerr's plants were transported by the Honourable East India Company's ship Henry Addington, while others were aboard the Hope and the Worley.

Leaving China on 6 February 1804, the sixteen-strong fleet was joined by a further eleven private vessels, to form an impressive flotilla.

Writing to the superintendent at Kew, William Aiton, Kerr was very proud of his first consignment; 'You will not be surprised to hear that more Plants have gone from Canton this Season than ever did at one time before, being scarcely a Ship on the Fleet without some.'[9]



(Fig. 5) The Action off Pulo Aor, 15 February, 1804. Thomas Butterworth, circa 1804. British Library.

Coincidentally, the Earl Camden, the very boat that had towed Kerr into Whampoa harbour upon his arrival in China, was now tasked with safely delivering his paintings to London. However, as with Kerr's journey, the perils of seafaring would prevail once more.

Following the collapse of the Treaty of Amiens in 1803, the Napoleonic Wars had resumed. Carrying millions of pounds worth of cargo, the China fleet would have been an exceptional prize for the French. With this in mind, Contre-Admiral Charles-Alexandre Durand Linois (1761-1848) went in search of the flotilla. Eventually, the vessels were in sight, although at some distance. Aboard the Earl Camden, Commodore Nathaniel Dance (1748-1827) knew they could easily be overpowered by the French squadron but was undeterred. He ordered his fleet to hoist Royal Navy flags and form a line of battle. From this distance, he hoped the French admiral would mistake their larger merchant vessels for warships. Linois did open fire and the British ships retaliated. Housing Kerr's paintings, the Earl Camden was the flagship vessel and engaged with Linois for a short period, before the Frenchman ordered his squadron to retreat. Keen to maintain his deceptive advantage, Dance ordered his ships to pursue the French, until they could no longer match their superior speeds. When they eventually docked in England, the men received a hero's welcome, and Dance was knighted. The battle of Pulo Aura had been won and Kerr's paintings were finally safe. His plants had also fared well in the care of John Allen, a miner returning from Australia who had offered to tend to them.

Undoubtedly eager to see Kerr's bounty, Joseph Banks and King George III were at Kew to witness the arrival of the plants.[10] Aiton was also impressed; 'I had the satisfaction of writing you by the spring Fleet last year acknowledging the Receipt of the rich Collection of China plants by the Henry Addington under the Care of Mr Allen and which arrived in very good Condition at Kew, & are flourishing exceedingly in His Majesty's Gardens. Mr. Lance's favourable representation to benefit you are highly satisfactory to me[;] and above all the King has frequently inquired after you and keeps you in his Remembrance.'[11]

His initial tasks complete, Kerr went to Macau for the summer where he 'explored most of the islands in the estuary in search of wild plants.'[12] At the beginning of the new trading season, the Company men were permitted to return to Canton and Kerr set to work. He had been given a small plot of land where he could pot up and organise the next group of plants destined for Kew.

Honourable East India Company ship, Winchelsea, was due to take Kerr's second consignment to England. The plant cabins now full, the vessel crossed the second bar on 4th January, 1805. The journey was arduous, and Captain Campbell and his men were regularly met with tempestuous conditions. They eventually reached the remote volcanic island of St. Helena, in the South Atlantic. Governed by the East India Company, it was visited by hundreds of British ships a year, as a midpoint on their journeys. A number of Kerr's plants were destined for the island, as well as for London. By the time the rest of the China fleet joined the Winchelsea, the plants had suffered greatly. After a ten-month journey, the ships arrived in London but dishearteningly nearly all of Kerr's specimens had perished. One notable survivor was a fragrant double pink herbaceous peony, latterly named *Paeonia fragrans*.[13]

Around this time, the Company reported back from London on Kerr's paintings. An extract from 23rd January, 1805 reads; 'Approve of the employment of a Botanical Painter and observe with pleasure that the works of that artist received by the Earl Camden have been much admired. Desire that drawings on miscellaneous subjects be likewise produced.'[14]

Replying to a letter from Banks, Kerr informed him that the Company vessels Hope and Henry Addington had arrived. On board were plants chosen by Banks to offer the Canton merchants, which he hoped would initiate a new form of botanical exchange between the two countries.[15] Unfortunately, due to the poor sailing conditions, very few plants could be salvaged. Kerr also responded to Banks's reference to the King; 'It gives me the most heartfelt satisfaction that His Majesty has been graciously pleased to approve of my conduct in the commencement of my undertaking. My only ambition will be to merit the continuance of such honourable approbation.'[16] Kerr's delight is evident, and he must have been anxious for his next venture to be of equal merit.

Rather than follow the customary tradition of passing the summer in Macau, David Lance recommended that Kerr visit the Philippines, to gather a wider variety of botanical specimens.[17] Sailing to Manila in February, he would spend around the next six months exploring and botanising. Upon his return to Macau in September, disaster struck; whilst still in the port, a typhoon swept through the region, destroying a great number of Kerr's plants.[18]

William Kerr's third consignment to Kew was particularly noteworthy. Banks had requested northern Chinese plants from the Canton merchants, as no foreigners were permitted in the region. They obliged and sent many entirely new species to England. The cargo also included highly desirable peonies, one of the King and Banks' 'musthave species'.[19] Kerr provided detailed lists of the plants contained in the cabins, including a great number from Manila. He had also included seeds of plants from Manila and Bengal, harvested from John Roberts' garden in Macau. Alongside the wide variety of plants, Kerr also sent another set of botanical illustrations. Informing his London colleagues about the paintings, George Staunton wrote from the Canton factory; 'We have continued to employ this Artist and he is now engaged under the direction of Mr Ker [sic] in completing an additional set of Botanical Drawings as many of which as are ready we propose to transmit to your Honourable Court by the present Fleet.' The letter continues; 'It gives us much pleasure to find that his Productions have been approved and he will occasionally be employed in future in the manner your Honourable Court has directed.'[20]

By the end of February 1806, with the plants, paintings and letters safely aboard, the Hope and the Henry Addington left China for their long journey home. The following season Kerr's shipments included a 'List of plants contained in the Plant Cabin on board the Walmer Castle, consisting chiefly of plants from Manilla [sic]. The Plants from Manilla are referred to by their respective numbers in the Manilla Catalogue sent last season. Reference is likewise made to the Collection sent last season in the Hope, and to the Drawings sent to the Honourable East India Company.'[21]

For the next three years, Kerr worked diligently and continued to send an extremely impressive number of plants back to Kew. John Livingstone, who was aboard the Coutts when Kerr arrived in China, and latterly became the factory surgeon, wrote in praise of the Scottish gardener; 'No mission could have been better filled; [Kerr] was familiar with the best practice of modern gardening and had acquired a most perfect acquaintance with the habits of plants. He also possessed a competent share of botanical knowledge, much natural shrewdness, and great bodily strength. Under the influence of a burning sun, I have seen him scale the highest hills in this part of China, whilst I have myself, though equally ardent in the pursuit, been obliged to seek a friendly shade, where Kerr would join me with the fruit of his labour.!'[22] However, Livingstone's appraisals for Kerr turned to somewhat malevolent insinuations, when he later wrote of his idle procrastination and inferred that he suffered injuries while intoxicated. Livingstone believed Kerr's poor salary led him to keep nefarious company and he belittled his achievements.[23] Kerr's salary of £100 per annum was indeed extremely low, he could not afford to have his clothes laundered, or repair them and John Roberts occasionally assisted him financially.[24] However, despite Livingstone's derogations, Kerr had continued to send plants back to Kew, with detailed and legible descriptions and notes. Banks clearly did not share Livingstone's sentiment. Writing to Kerr in 1810, he remarked upon 'your good Conduct during the time you have been employed as Botanical Collector to the Royal Gardens at Kew, & the success with which you have conducted that business at Canton.'[25] Banks went on to notify Kerr that the King had been impressed by his diligence and that he was being promoted to 'Superintendent & Chief Gardener of the Royal Botanic Garden of Ceylon'.[26] Kerr left for Sri Lanka with a good salary and the prospect of a comfortable retirement. Arriving in Colombo, he worked as a superintendent at a garden in the Company Roads district. During a botanising expedition to the interior of the island, he caught a severe fever, which tragically led to encephalitis. He died in November, 1814, aged just 33.

In 1819, it was estimated that only one Chinese plant in a thousand survived the journey back to England, yet through Kerr's perseverance, he introduced over 230 new species to Europe, many of which he collected himself.[27] A few of his notable introductions include; Tiger lily, *Lilium lancifolium*, Hardy begonia *Begonia grandis*, Mock orange, *Pittosporum tobira*, Honeysuckle, *Lonicera japonica*, Sacred bamboo, *Nandina domestica*, and Chinese juniper, *Juniperus chinensis*. He also sent a new species of rose, named in honour of Banks' wife, and at the personal request of King George III, the first Chinese herbaceous peony in England.[28] The genus Kerria was named after him and includes the species *Kerria japonica 'Pleniflora'*; an exuberantly floriferous shrub, whose double buttercupyellow flowers erupt in spring like a sea of constellations. Aside from the plants, the hundreds of botanical drawings, each of which were directed by Kerr, marked the first of their kind ever commissioned by the Company.[29] Their exotic subject matter and vivid colours must have captivated visitors to the Leadenhall street museum. For Banks and those at Kew, the drawings were integral to their understanding of growing Chinese plants in Britain and were a vital addition to the plants themselves.

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1 For further information see Kilpatrick 2007, p.166.
2 Ibid, p.165.
3 Kerr, Memorandum 1803-1808.
4 Bailey 2019, p.48.
5 Kilpatrick 2007, p.167.
6 Ibid, p.168.
7 Goodman 2021, p.329.
8 Canton to Court of Directors, 29 January 1804. British Library. MSS EUR D562.16.
9 Kerr to Aiton, 4th March 1804, BL, ADD MS 33981, p.138. See also Goodman 2021, p.317.
10 See Kilpatrick 2007, p.170-71.
11 Aiton, Kew Record Book 1793-1809, p.255.
12 Kilpatrick 2007, p.174; BL Add. MS. 33981, p.181.
13 Kilpatrick 2007, pp.174-5.
14 Court's Letter to Canton, 23rd January 1804. BL MMS.EUR.D 562/16.
15 See Goodman 2021, pp. 321-323.
16 Kerr to Banks, 24th Feb 1806. National Library of Australia.
17 Kerr to Banks, 29th December 1804. BL Add. MS. 33981, p. 181.
18 Richard 2017, p.168
19 Goodman 2021, p 323.
20 Canton, 26 February 1806. British Library. MSS EUR D562.16.
21 Kew Record Book-1804-1826 GIO_1_2_0052.
22 Chinese Repository, II, May 1822-April 1834 p.227.
23 The Chinese Repository, Vol II. 1834, p. 228.
24 Kilpatrick 2007, p.181.
25 Banks to Kerr, June 30, 1810. See Kilpatrick 2007, p.182 & Dawson 1958, p.487.
26 Goodman 2021, p.326.
27 Coats 1992, p.216.
28 Kilpatrick 2007, p.99.
29 Goodman 2021, p.329.

Win Achun, an Artist of Exceptional Merit

'To render the form of the plant and its true divine nature, one should carefully examine and study it. The transmitting of its very essence depends on the hand, and supreme brushwork. Really it is impossible to put this into words, for the secret originates in the heart and from there must rise.'
The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting

Win Achun, Achunqua, and W.Ch, all seem to be clues leading towards the same man. When the current William Kerr group of paintings were sold in Christie's, London in 1997, they comprised two albums. The 'Fruits' album, which also contained flowers, included 'a leaf of Chinese paper, inscribed in pencil '100 Drawings by Win Achun', and 100 leaves of drawings of flowers and fruit by a single hand'. Alongside other works, Win Achun painted; four tree peonies, nine studies of lychees, six of citrus fruits, two plums, two peaches, two magnolias and a honeysuckle.[1] As a proportion of the paintings sold at Christie's, the current works have been examined to ascertain whether they may be attributed to Win Achun. The following remark from the 1997 catalogue is especially insightful; 'Win Achun's drawings, particularly the group of Tree Peonies (nos.105-108), are arguably a match for anything that western botanical artists were producing at the time.' Not only do all of Win Achun's paintings appear to be of a particularly high calibre, his group of tree peonies are a representation of this. Considering the exceptional peony study in the present group, (see No.1 p.16.), it became apparent that the image was related to a 'sibling' group of peonies. The five studies of peonies in the William Kerr collection at Kew are equally masterful, closely observed and extraordinarily detailed.[2] Moreover, they appear to be the work of the same hand as the peony in the present collection. As outlined in William Kerr's biography, (pp.8–11) he oversaw a local artist in producing two sets of botanical illustrations, one of which, following the demise of the East India Company, now resides at Kew.[3]

The Christie's catalogue also indicates that Win Achun painted a series of lychee illustrations. In Kew's William Kerr collection, there are also several lychee studies, which again appear to have been painted by the same artist as that of the lychee in the present collection (See No.9 and Figs.16–19, p.34.). Notably, one of the Kew lychee works bears the signature 'Achunqua' in European handwriting on the verso. During this period, extremely few Chinese artists' names were recorded by their Western patrons. A beneficial exception appears with Akam, Akut, Asung and Akew, the artists employed by John Reeves (1774-1856) who worked in Canton after Kerr. The names appear to be more familiar versions of their true Cantonese names.[4] While the letter 'A' at the beginning of a name may have been equivocal to 'Mr', Win Achun, and Achunqua, may have been nicknames for the same artist and used interchangeably by Europeans.

A further work in the present collection, a study of a cinnamon (No.11, p.40.), also appears to bear the hallmarks of Win Achun's style, as does a comparable work in the Kerr collection at Kew (see Fig.22, p.42). A third image is considered alongside this which is clearly related to the other two (See Fig.23, p.42). Held in the British Library, this study bears the initials W.Ch, which appears to be another reference to Win Achun. A study of a Fingered Citron in the present group (No.12, p.44.), also relates to works in both the British Library and the Kew albums. A study of an osmanthus in the present group, (See Fig.20, p.62) also appears to relate to a study of the same plant in the British Library (see p.62.) and NHD57/35 from the British Library archive). The latter study itself is more simplified, yet the level of detail, again particularly regarding the foliage, is extremely similar in both works. Furthermore, the initials W.Ch appear on the British Library painting. A further W.Ch work in the British Library, a study of a plum, also seems to relate to a plum illustration in the present Kerr group (see No.19, p.60) and NHD56/15 from the British Library archive). Again, the leaves are very similar, with both works depicting the minute venules with extraordinary attention. The flesh of the dissected fruit is less detailed in the British Library painting, however the flowering parts are presented in a virtually identical fashion. One wonders whether Win Achun, or perhaps Kerr, if he oversaw these works, had a little less time to attend to the British Library illustrations. They seem to incorporate fewer elements than the current group of paintings, or those at Kew. Nevertheless, they still retain the many fine qualities which appear to typify Win Achun's style. By cross referencing these images, and a number of other works, a sense of Win Achun's individual artistry emerges. The paintings are united in particular features, such as the dissections of the flowering parts, the shading upon the leaves and an exceptional level of detail. Combined with the naturalistic sense of verdure and movement of the plants, these details suggest the hand of a highly accomplished and experienced artist.

It is likely that Win Achun accompanied Kerr to Macau during the spring and summer months, when the trading season had finished, and the plants were in bud and blossoming. It is also highly likely that the studies were made of plants in John Roberts' garden. Kerr had a house beside Roberts and grew plants in his garden. The reference to 'the Malacca fruits' in the Company correspondence, regarding one set of paintings that Kerr oversaw, may also be explained by this.[5] Since the 1500s, both Malacca and Macau were governed by the Portuguese. During this period, it is likely that highly valuable fruiting plants were transported from Malacca to be utilised by Portuguese citizens, residing in Macau. There is no record of Kerr traveling to Malacca after he arrived in Canton. Although, the likelihood of mature plants from the region growing in Roberts' garden seems highly plausible. If Win Achun was undertaking botanical illustrations for the Company in Roberts' garden, it also seems plausible that upon seeing the works, Roberts would have commissioned a personal set of his own. It is also likely that Win Achun painted in Canton. William Kerr would often visit the gardens of the Hong merchants which provided some of the finest examples of Chinese flora. The bold, large-format studies of the likely 'Malacca fruits' do vary stylistically from some of the daintier illustrations, such as the osmanthus in the same group. It is possible that Achun varied his works according to his patrons' requirements, and the time he could allocate to each painting. Illustrations of the Malacca fruits were in Kerr's first dispatch to London, therefore he would only have had four months to orientate himself, find an artist and oversee all of the paintings. It has been noted that the artist Mak Sau, a predecessor of Win Achun, who undertook a sizeable number of botanical illustrations for John Bradby Blake, also demonstrated great stylistic variety in his works. Comparing two paintings of *Gardenia jasminoides*, Richard notes that 'Mak Sau produced two very different paintings of two varieties of the plant,' and that he 'could perform with different levels of accuracy when it suited him.'[6]

The Christie's entry for the paintings in the Roberts album includes an excerpt from an earlier auction catalogue, when the works were sold. It notes that the collection was 'executed expressly for the Late J.Roberts, Esq. (A Director and Chairman of the East India Company) and are sold by order of his executors. It would be difficult to convey an adequate idea of the taste, beauty and spirit with which the Drawings are executed, and I am assured by a very competent judge who was in China, when the Drawings were made, that their fidelity is equal to their beauty. All the Botanical Drawings were submitted by the Artist to the inspection and received the approbation of Mr. Kerr, the Botanist, who was sent from Kew to China by his Britannic Majesty.'[7] Further laudation for Win Achun's paintings, this contemporaneous account indicates that Kerr and the artist worked closely together in the production of the illustrations.

At a time when we know of less than a dozen named Chinese artists, producing works for Europeans, we are exceptionally fortunate to have come across Win Achun. As further research is conducted, we may come to discover more about this singularly talented artist, however it is likely that his exquisite paintings will remain exceptionally scarce.

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Notes:

1 Christie's. 5792. 30 April 1997, lot 14.
2 William Kerr collection of Chinese plants, Kew Royal Garden Archives, London.
3 Ibid.
4 Xu 2020, p.70
5 British Library: BL Mss Eur D562/16
6 Richard 2020, pp.234-235.
7 Christie's. 5792. 30 April 1997, lot 14.

I.
Illustrations Attributed to Win Achun, Directed by William Kerr



'It is impossible to exaggerate China's botanical riches, yet not so difficult to picture the countless England-bound ships, their decks and cabins laden with seeds, live plans, notebooks and bulging herbaria. Nor it is hard to imagine the excitement at home as Wardian cases, chests and brown-paper parcels were opened by eager gardeners and institutions. We owe a great debt to a succession of men who secured this lasting treasure, and their doughty escapades – steeped as much in the whiff of disease, salty seas and gunpowder as they are in the scent of many beautiful and, thankfully, now familiar plants.'

Anna Rose Hughes, 2007.

1

A Study of a Peony, *Paeonia suffruticosa cultivar* Attributed to Win Achun

Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau, China

Watercolour on paper
40.5cm high, 54.8cm wide

This truly sublime illustration of a peony captures the exquisite beauty of the plant, at the height of its magnificence. A pair of woody stems burst forth into a cornucopia of verdurous ornamentation. The glossy emerald-green foliage comprises biternate, oval leaflets, which are deeply divided. Rich purple blooms crown the stems, their gently ruffled petals enveloping the golden stamens at their centre. The largest flower head radiates forth in its brilliant glory, while the second one turns to illustrate the calix. To the left, a bud rises above tender leaflets, revealing a glimpse of purple behind the sepals. Adjacent to this, a long root beautifully frames the composition, as it traverses the foreground. An exquisite display of the flowering parts appears above this. The centre of a flower has been partially dissected, with the carpel, stigma and stamens appearing to the left, beneath which the bracts are displayed. To the right, the zygomorphic petals augment as the series continues. The overall image is a masterful illustration, suffused with elegance, vitality and wonder.

Cultivated in China for over two thousand years, the peony is often regarded as the country's national flower. The two principal types include the herbaceous *Paeonia lactiflora*, known as *Shaoyao* and *Paeonia suffruticosa*, known as 'moudin', 'mu dan' or 'moutan'. Chinese herbals dating to the fourth century BC describe the medicinal properties of wild mudan, growing around the northern province of Shanxi.[1] During the Tang dynasty (618-906), peonies were featured in the imperial gardens and became a great status symbol.[2] The latest cultivars sold for incredibly high prices and 'peony fever' emerged. Great care was taken in maintaining exemplary specimens; 'when in bloom their owners screened them with wattle fences and protected them from the sun with awnings.'[3] During their flowering period, mutans were displayed at festivals where it was 'considered shameful not to spend some leisure enjoying the flowers'.[4] Known as 'thousand-petalled flowers', the first double varieties were recorded in the Tang period and were the most revered and costly.[5]

The plants also impressed Europeans, who were fortunate enough to seem them in their native habitat. Marco Polo wrote of seeing 'roses as big as cabbages' which were most likely to have been peonies.[6] During the eighteenth century, peony imagery featured widely in export wares such as ceramics, wallpaper and fabrics. The attractive blooms were so large and vivid, they were initially thought to be fanciful creations by the Chinese, rather than actual plants.[7]

Two men who shared a passion for the flowers were Sir Joseph Banks and King George III. Banks had requested East India Company surgeon John Duncan (1751–1831) to send him a 'moudan' from Canton. It was a difficult undertaking, as Duncan noted, peonies were 'so much esteemed here and so difficult to be procured, that a single plant could be sold for thirty dollars.'[8] Finally in 1787, Duncan was able to send one of the prized plants to Banks, however it failed to survive its first winter at Kew.[9] Alexander Duncan (1758–1832) succeeded his brother at the Canton factory and sent the second peony to Banks. It was carefully nurtured upon the stove, then planted out, although much to everyone's disappointment, it also perished. Peonies naturally grew in the cooler areas north of Canton, then were brought down to the city to encourage flowering. Once the last petals had fallen, horticulturalists discarded the plants, knowing they would not bloom again the following season.

During his time in Canton, William Kerr was also instructed by Banks to acquire peonies. Utilising his merchant contacts, he was able to obtain a number of different varieties of moutans. In the Transactions of the Royal Horticultural Society, Sabine's remarks on Kerr's drawings of the plants are particularly revealing;'Five drawings of Moutans, executed at Canton, are in the library of the East India Company, and copies have been made from them for the use of the Horticultural Society; they are all deserving of consideration. Four of these originals were made in 1806. The two first are referable to our Banksii and to our Double Rosea. The third is called Tsu Moutan, and has fine double purple blossoms; it is considered a very handsome variety; the whole plant and flowers are larger than any of the other sorts, and its habit is very conspicuously distinct.' He goes on to comment that this purple variety and the fourth (Pae Moutan, a double white) are 'very scarce.'[10]

The five drawings Sabine refers to are numbers 142-145 and 329 in the William Kerr Album of Chinese Plants at Kew (see Figs.6-9, below) the third one corresponds to Sabine's description of Tsu Moutan, 'a fine double purple'. It is also virtually identical to the present work. When the current painting was still bound in an album for John Roberts and sold at Christie's, the lot description referred to Win Achun's particularly accomplished group of four tree peonies.[11] Given this, and the similarities between the present work and the group at Kew, it seems extremely likely that Win Achun was the artist who painted them all. Furthermore, as we have seen with No.9, p.34, a study of a lychee, the name 'Achunqua' has been written on the back of some of the paintings, in the Kerr album at Kew. Again, these works bear a close relationship with certain paintings in the present collection. Currently, the majority of the Kew works are secured to backing paper, so it is not possible to fully examine them for signatures.

Evident in all these images is the consummate skill with which they have been rendered. The level of detail is exceptional, with each incision demarcated on individual petals and the most delicate use of line employed to illustrate the leaf venation. The flowering parts have been extremely well observed, and the work fills the page with an unashamed sense of prowess. The whole composition is imbued with artistic virtuosity and suggests the work of a master at the apotheosis of their career.

The present work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.



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Notes:

1 Kilpatrick 2007, p.21.
2 Corrigan 2014, p.98.
3 Valder 1999, p.176.
4 Kilpatrick 2007, p.20.
5 Valder 1999, p.176.
6 Aero 1980, p.190.
7 Xu, 2020.
8 Noltie 2017.
9 Kilpatrick 2007, p.99.
10 Sabine 1826, p.483.
11 Christie's. 5792. Lot 14, 30 April 1997.



(Fig. 6) 142. Peony. William Kerr collection of Chinese plants, Kew Royal Garden Archives, London.



(Fig. 7) 143. Peony. William Kerr collection of Chinese plants, Kew Royal Garden Archives, London



(Fig. 8) 144. Peony. William Kerr collection of Chinese plants, Kew Royal Garden Archives, London



(Fig. 9) 145. Peony. William Kerr collection of Chinese plants, Kew Royal Garden Archives, London

2

A Study of a Honeysuckle, *Lonicera japonica* Attributed to Win Achun

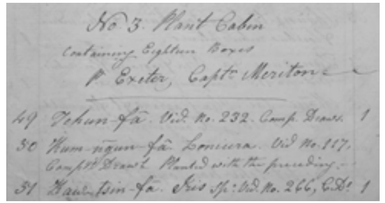
Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau

Watercolour on paper
40.2cm high, 54.4cm wide

'I have scarcely witnessed a more beautiful sight than a plant of this honeysuckle, trained against the wall of Mr Curtis' house...with its long pendent shoots and its copious flowers, appearing through a great part of the summer and autumn and scenting the air with their fragrance.
William Hooker, 1834

This particularly elegant composition depicts a branch of honeysuckle in full bloom. Circuitous, woody stalks wrap around each other before two principal stems arch forth. From the largest, a profusion of white and golden flowers erupt, their trumpet-shaped petals curling and swaying in all directions. The plant's elegant long stamens project beyond the petals, as they appear to dance in the breeze. The naturalistic lightness and movement of the blossoms evokes the delicate fragrance of the plant itself. A dissection of the flowering parts on the lower left shows a long style, with a green stigma, beside a cluster of golden stamens. Beside this, the Cantonese inscription reads *jin yin hua* (golden-and-silver honeysuckle).

Native to Eastern Asia, *Lonicera japonica* is a climbing vine that can reach heights of up to 33 feet, as it scales taller plants. Known as *Jin Yin Hua*, *Ren Dong* and Japanese honeysuckle, the plant appears in the *Tang Ben Cao*, a Chinese *materia medica*, written in 659 CE and remains a crucial plant in modern Chinese herbology. The dried flowers may be drunk as a tea and have cooling and detoxifying properties. They are used to treat a broad range of conditions including inflammation, ulcers, fevers and colds. Current research has indicated that the plant possesses antiviral, antipyretic, antibacterial and blood fat reducing actions.[1] Furthermore, the compound loniflavone, found in *L. japonica*, is able to bind to the spike protein of SARS-COV-2, indicating its potential use in treatment for the virus.[2]


No 3. Plant Cabin
Containing Eighteen Boxes
P. Exeter, Capt.n Meriton
49 Tchun hoa Vid No. 232. Comp. Draws. 1
30 Hun ngun hoa Lonicera. Vid No. 117.
Comp.d Draws. Rend.d with the preceding.
31 Hau tsin hoa. Sent Sp: Vid No. 266. Do. 1

(Fig. 10) No. 30. Lonicera - No. 117 Comp Draws'.
Kew Royal Garden Archives London.[3]



(Fig. 11) No. 117. Honeysuckle, *Lonicera japonica* in the William Kerr collection of Chinese plants, Kew Royal Garden Archives, London.

In February 1806, William Kerr sent two varieties of honeysuckle to London via the Honourable East India Company ship, The Hope. Within the plant cabin was *Lonicera Japonica* and *L. japonica var. repens* (syn. *L. flexuosa*). The ship arrived on 7th September, its cargo no doubt eagerly awaited by Joseph Banks and the Kew gardeners.

On 3rd March 1809, Kerr sent a letter to Kew superintendent William Aiton, noting the specimens he had sent in the plant cabin on board the Exeter. Number 30 is listed as 'Lonicera no. 117 Comp Draws' (see Fig.10 below). Not only does this provide a record of Kerr sending the honeysuckle to Kew, it also makes a direct reference to the illustrations he commissioned of the plants. 'No. 117 Comp Draws' corresponds to No. 117 Honeysuckle, *Lonicera japonica*, a painting in the William Kerr collection at Kew (Fig. 11). Notably, it also corresponds to the present work, a near exact likeness of the Kew painting.

These virtually identical works certainly appear to have a connection and one wonders whether they were painted at the same time. The excerpt from Kerr's letter reminds us that as well as being extremely aesthetic, the botanical illustrations severed as a catalogue record which Aiton and Banks were able to cross reference with the newly arriving plants and seeds. The Christie's catalogue indicated that there was a honeysuckle painted by Win Achun in 'The Fruits Album.'[4] Certainly, the shading on the leaves, fluid line, masterful detailing and sense of elegance within the present composition suggest it could indeed have been his work.

The present illustration is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.

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Notes:

1 Shang at al. 2021.
2 Kadioglu et al. 2021.
3 Kerr to Aiton. 3rd March, 1809. Plants for His Majesty's Garden. No. 3 plant cabin on board the Exeter. Library and Archives, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.
4 Christie's, 5792. Lot 14. 1997.



3

A Study of a Bilimbi, *Averrhoa bilimbi* Attributed to Win Achun

Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau

Watercolour on paper
41.2cm high, 55cm wide

This truly elegant representation of a fruiting branch of the bilimbi tree depicts the plant with a great air of sophistication. Hanging delicately from their stems, the pinnate leaves have a feather-light quality. Intriguingly borne on panicles from the trunk, the star-shaped, soft pink flowers are exquisitely dainty. A series of three large clusters of fruits also converge around the trunk. Transitioning from lime green to lemon yellow as they ripen, this rich bounty contributes to the overall flourishing lusciousness of the plant.

Native to Southeast Asia, and likely originating in the Indonesian Maluku isles, bilimbis grow semi-wild as well as being popular ornamental garden trees.[1] In 1793, HMS Providence introduced a number of bilimbis from Timor to Jamaica. The voyage provided a second opportunity for Captain William Bligh to transport plants to the island, after his initial attempt resulted in disaster. Having left Tahiti, a number of Bligh's crew, including his personal friend, Lieutenant Fletcher Christian, revolted and took control of the ship, HSM Bounty. The mutineers forced Bligh and his supporters onto a 23-foot launch, with supplies for a week and no nautical charts. They were cast-adrift into the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean. Remarkably, after 48 days at sea, and a journey of over six thousand kilometres, Bligh and his men reached Timor in the Dutch East Indies (present day Indonesia). The journey marked one of the greatest tales of leadership, navigation and perseverance in nautical history. One can only imagine the sense of elation Bligh must have experienced four years later, upon finally reaching Jamaica, with a ship laden with breadfruit, bilimbi and other tropical plants for the island.

Bilimbi fruits are juicy but extremely sour. Despite this they have a variety of culinary uses from chutneys and jams to dips and iced drinks. Medicinally a tea of the flowers is used to alleviate coughing, the pulped fruit drunk as a febrifuge and a paste of the leaves is applied topically for inflammatory conditions such as rheumatism.[2] High in acids, the juiced fruit is employed a stain remover for clothes and to clean the blades of *Kris*, a type of dagger from Java.

The present work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.

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Notes:

1 Datiles, 2015.
2 Ravindran, 2017.



4

A Study of a Sugar Apple, *Annona squamosa* Attributed to Win Achun

Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau

Watercolour on paper
41cm high, 54.6cm wide

'It is not Manjarblanco (white delicacy), although it is a delicacy and white [...] as it tastes delicate and delicious and according to some it is the best fruit of the Indies.'
José Acosta, 1590

With sage green fruits whose tuberculate rind comprises dense syncarps or fruitlets, dusted in a white powder-like bloom, the sugar apple is an intriguing plant. The creamy white flesh is sweet, succulent and delightfully fragrant. Closely related to, and often confused with Custard Apples, *Annona reticulate*, sugar apples are members of the Annonaceae family, which also consists of pawpaws, atemoyas and cherimoyas. The plants grow into small evergreen trees or shrubs with ovate leaves and pendulous yellowish-green flowers.

The present study depicts the flowers and fruits at various stages of maturation. Beneath the branch, the flowering parts have been dissected and appear beside two seeds, one of which is encased in pulp. A cross section of the fruit reveals the numerous seeds radiating from the core. The fruit is eaten fresh and is a popular ingredient in juices and ice cream.

Considered to be native to the West Indies and South America, sugar apples travelled widely and are grown in most tropical regions today. The plant has been used as an extremely effective biopesticide, (living organisms that contain naturally occurring and non-toxic pesticides), with the seed oil protecting against damage from caterpillars, mealy bugs and aphids.[1] The high oil content of the seeds may also be effective in the production of biodiesel. Furthermore, the seeds contain bioactive compounds with antitumor properties, which may be utilised in the treatment of breast, liver and prostate cancer.[2] These hidden depths reveal *Annona squamosa* not only to be a delectable fruit, but a plant that has a great deal to offer modern medicine.

Lower right, the Chinese inscription reads *fan li zhi* or sugar apple and the painting is on I. Taylor watermarked paper. The following work in the William Kerr collection at Kew is a near identical study to the present work.



(Fig. 12) No. 99. Sugar apple, *Annona squamosal* in the William Kerr collection of Chinese plants, Kew Royal Garden Archives, London.

Literature:

Acosta, José. 'Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias,' Vol 1. Seville, 1590. Reprinted, Tomo Primero, Madrid 1894.

Koul, Opender. Biopesticides in Environment and Food Security: Issues and Strategies. India: Scientific Publishers, 2012.

Shehata, Mohamed Gamal et al. "Nutritional, Phytochemical, and in Vitro Anticancer Potential of Sugar Apple (Annona squamosa) fruits." Scientific reports vol. 11,1 6224. 18 Mar. 2021, doi:10.1038/s41598-021-85772-8

Notes:

1 Koul, 2012.
2 Shehata et al. 2021.



5

A Study of a Santol, *Sandoricum koetjape* Attributed to Win Achun

Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau

Watercolour on paper
40.8cm high, 54.7cm wide

'Suntul is by far the worst fruit of any I have or shall mention; it is in size and shape much like the Madja, as large as a midling apple but rounder; it has a thick hide containing within it kernels like the Mangostan, the taste of which is both acid and astringent without one merit to recomend it; indeed I should not have thought it eatable had I not seen it often publickly exposed to sale upon the fruit stalls [sic].'
Joseph Banks, 1770

Also known as the cotton fruit, sour apple and wild mangosteen, santol is native to the floristic region of Malesia and has been introduced more widely across Southeast Asia and to the Caribbean. Alongside the Chinaberry, *Melia azedarach* (See No.17, p.56), it is one of the two edible fruiting trees of the Mahogany (Meliaceae) family.

The trees can measure up to fifty metres and are very fast growing; the Scottish surgeon and botanist William Roxburgh (1751-1815), wrote of a 24-year-old tree growing in the Calcutta Botanic Garden, whose trunk measured over two metres.[1] Santol trees can also be particularly abundant, producing up to 24,000 fruits per annum.

The present depiction is a vibrant study of a branch from a santol tree. The vivid green trifoliate leaves appear to glide across the page, turning to reveal their deeply veined undersides. New growth appears in the form of ochre yellow leaflets, rising from the top of the branch. Behind this, on stalked panicles, vivid pink flowers bloom effusively. A further branchlet is covered in tiny green young fruits, while another bows under the weight of the ripening and fully-ripe fruits. These older mustard-yellow specimens resemble figs in shape, with depressed bases. Below the main branch, the petals, sepals, stigma and stamens of a flower have been illustrated. Cut in half across the centre, a ripe fruit appears beside a carefully dissected mesocarp, whose white juicy pulp houses a cluster of seeds. To the right, an individual seed has been depicted, with the upmost detail paid to its hirsute texture.

Commonly known as cotton fruit, the name derives from the edible flesh surrounding the seeds, which has a milky texture and tart, citrusy sweetness. The Pulp, garnished with spices, is a popular snack in Southeast Asia. It may also be made into preserves or syrups. The whole fruits are also made into chutneys, which add a bitter quality to curries. Medicinally, the fruits are considered to have anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer indications and the leaves are used as a febrifuge in many locations where the trees grow.[2]

The present work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.



(Fig. 13) No. 378, the William Kerr Collection of Chinese Plants, Kew Archives, London. This illustration is extremely similar to the present work, particularly with regard to the flowers and the dissection of the fruit.

Literature:

Banks, Joseph. The Endeavour Journal of Sir Joseph Banks. Macmillan and Co. Ltd. London, 1896.

Davidson, Alan & Jaine, Tom (ed). The Oxford Companion to Food. Oxford University Press, 2014.

Roxburgh, William. Flora Indica Vol. 2. Allen & Co. London, 1832.

Tabamo. Albin Jay C. Angiogenic Modulatory Activity of Santol (Sandoricum koetjape) Ethanolic Leaf Extract Observed through Duck Embryo Chorioallantoic Membrane (CAM) Assay. Int J Biol Med Res. 2021;12(4):7382-7385

Notes:

1 Roxburgh, 1832, p.392.
2 Tabamo 2021, pp.7382-7385.



6

A Study of a Canarium, *Canarium L.* Attributed to Win Achun

Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau

Watercolour on paper
41cm high, 54cm wide

'*Canarium farame*' *a tree of singular appearance with branches and on the top having a handsome crown of drooping leaves.*'
Thomas Locke Lewis, 1817

As a scientific document, this work accurately encapsulates the principal features of a canarium; its leaves, flowers and fruit. However, it also reveals the artist's talent for portraying the character of the plant. The weight of the leaves, their volume and texture, the rich colours of the fruits as they ripen and the latent energy of buds and leaflets, on the cusp of bursting open. There is a vitality to the painting, a luscious quality that invites us to contemplate the rich flora of the tropics.

The name Canarium derives from '*kenari*', the local name for the trees in the Maluku isles in Eastern Indonesia. Members of the Burseraceae family, there are approximately one hundred species of Canarium in tropical and subtropical habitats, where the large evergreen trees can grow up to 50 metres tall. The alternate, pinnate leaves are glossy and the flowers a pale yellow-white. On certain varieties, the oval fruits turn from pale green to an exquisite deep purple upon ripening, while others turn sulphur yellow. Reaching maturity, the hard-shelled kernels open to reveal three seeds, as portrayed dissected under the branch in the present work.

Known as the Chinese olive, *Canarium album* features in gardens and along roadsides. The trees are considered to symbolise longevity and the fruits are sold throughout China, as a fresh or salted snack. The fruit has an initial bitterness, followed by a fragrant mild sweetness. The Han Dynasty Emperor Wu (r.140-87 BC) was sent Chinese olives from the south, an annual tradition that lasted for hundreds of years.[1] During early twentieth century new year celebrations, the Dowager Empress' female courtiers presented her with fruits, including Chinese olives, as a symbol of longevity and peace.[2]

The present work, and the below image from Kew's William Kerr collection, share a great deal. Both compositions are extremely similar, with virtually identical placement of the foliage. The copper-tinged immature leaves are also extremely closely illustrated, as are the flowers. The dissection in the foreground is also remarkably alike; both works even display an individual seed with the seed coat partially scraped back.



(Fig. 14) No. 152, Canarium, the William Kerr Collection of Chinese Plants, Kew Archives, London.

Literature:

Transcription of: Thomas Locke Lewis. Voyage to Madagascar, 1817-26. King's College London, Foyle Special Collections Library, Rare Books Collection DT469.M32 LEW

Valder, Peter. The Garden Plants of China. Timber Press, 2005.

Notes:

1 Valder 2005, p.269.
2 Ibid.



7

A Study of a Pomelo, *Citrus maxima* Attributed to Win Achun

Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau

Watercolour on paper
41cm high, 54.7cm wide

The largest citrus in the world, pomelo fruits can measure thirty centimetres wide and weigh up to three kilograms. Native to Southeast Asia, the trees were transported through India into North Africa, before reaching Europe around eight hundred years ago.

Visiting Barbados in the mid 17th century, East India Company captain Philip Chaddock planted seeds of *Citrus grandis* on the island, before sailing on to England. Originating from the Malay Archipelago, the seeds took, and the tree became known locally as Shaddock. Planting seeds abroad was common practice amongst East India Company men, hoping to provide food for latter visits. A diary recounting Captain William Bligh's visit to Tahiti in 1788 illustrates this practice; 'In this walk I had the satisfaction to see that the island had received some benefit from our former visits. Two shaddocks were brought to me, a fruit which they had not [known], till we introduced it.' The following day, he further notes 'Nelson met with two fine shaddock-trees which he had planted in 1777: they were full of fruit but not ripe.'[1]

The present image is a magnificently detailed and extremely well observed study of a pomelo. The deep forest green ovate leaves bear distinct winged petioles, beneath which spines protrude from the branchlets. From a cluster of inflorescences, an exquisitely perfumed white flower bursts open to reveal its honey-yellow anthers. To the right of the branch, two young fruits appear deep green and pitted, their coriaceous rind protecting the developing segments within. To the left, a greenish-yellow globular fruit appears weighty and ready to be picked. The rind has been particularly finely painted, with minute dots indicating glands where fragrant citrus oils are emitted. In the foreground, the pitted skin of a pomelo has been removed to illustrate the fruit inside. Beside this, an individual segment is shown with the skin carefully peeled back to reveal a seed.

Today, the trees are cultivated in Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, Central and South America, Mexico and Africa. The taste of pomelos can vary from a perfumed sweetness to a tart acidity. In China, the fruit is associated with the moon and is eaten as part of the Mid-Autumn Festival. A relative of the pomelo, the grapefruit was borne from hybridisation of the sweet orange and the pomelo in the Caribbean, during the early eighteenth century.

The present work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.



(Fig. 15) The present work is similar to No. 26 William Kerr collection of Chinese plants, Kew Royal Garden Archives, London. In both paintings, the leaves and flowers are rendered in an extremely similar fashion and there is an individual segment in the foreground, which has been carefully peeled across the middle.

Literature:

Salmond, Anne. Bligh: William Bligh in the South Seas. Penguin Books Limited, 2011.

Bligh, Lieutenant William. A Voyage to the South Sea. London, 1792.

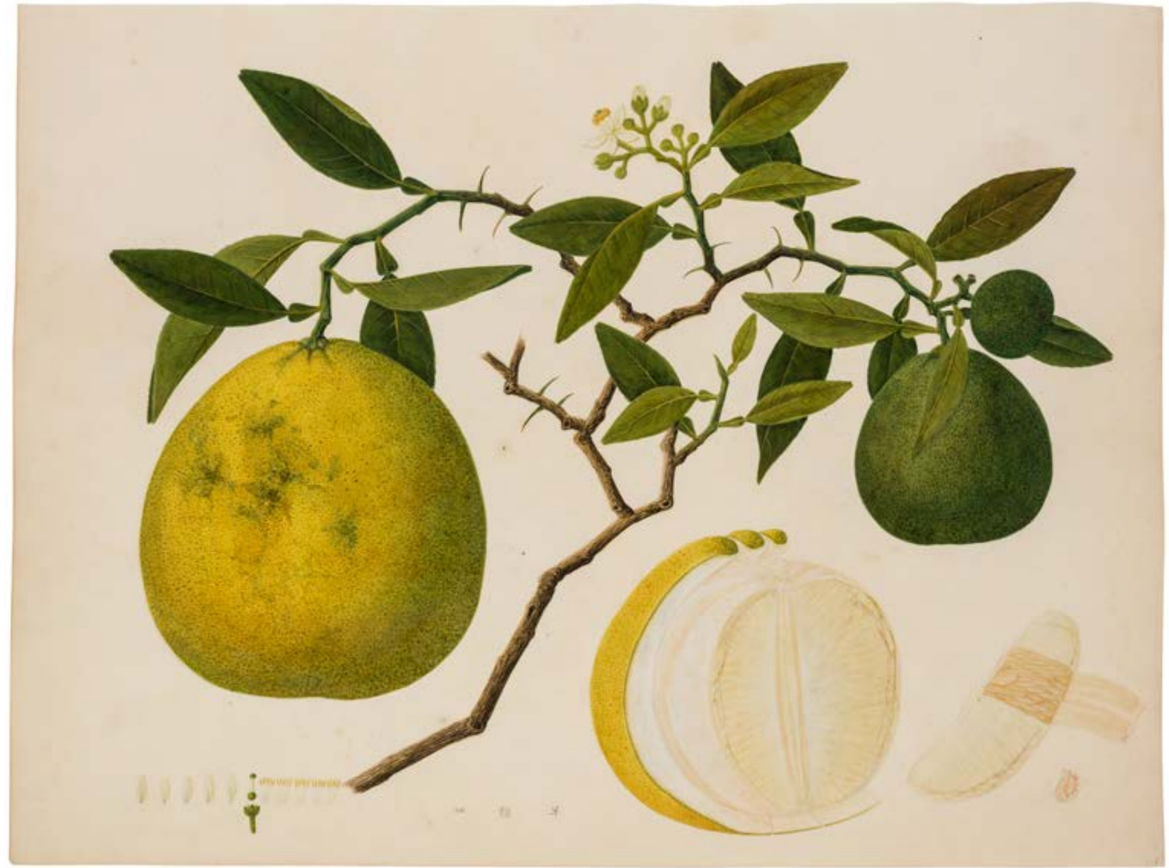
Hancock, James F. Plant Evolution and the Origin of Crop Species. CABI Publishing, Cambridge MA, 2004.

Patrick Ollitraul et al, Citrus Taxonomy in Manuel Talon, in Marco Caruso, Fred G. Gmitter, (Eds) The Genus Citrus. Ch. 4, Woodhead Publishing, 2020.

Fawcett, William. Bulletin of the Department of Agriculture, Jamaica. Vol. 4, part II, February, 1906.

Notes:

1 Bligh 1792, Ch. 6, Tuesday 28th October, 1788.



8

A Study of an Ambarella, *Spondias dulcis* Attributed to Win Achun

Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau

Watercolour on paper
41cm high, 55cm wide

'This is a large stately tree, and often grows to the height of forty and fifty feet: the fruit, which, I believe, is peculiar to the isles, is of an oval shape, yellow when ripe, and grows in bunches of three or four, and is about the size of a middling apple, with a large stringy core: it is a very wholesome and palatable fruit, improving on the taste, which is nearest that of a mangoe (sic); it is strongly impregnated with turpentine, and makes excellent pies when green. The wood; serves for building canoes, and for several other purposes.'
Sydney Parkinson, 1769.

This description was written by the young Scottish botanical illustrator, Sydney Parkinson, who visited Tahiti on Captain Cook's first voyage to the Pacific, on HMS Endeavour. Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander collected plants and animals during the voyage, from which Parkinson made almost a thousand drawings.

The present study depicts luscious branches with pairs of lanceolate leaflets. The mature leaves are a rich glossy green, with paler green undersides. Young leaflets appear from tender golden-red shoots, at the top of the branch. The inflorescence comprises panicles bearing dainty petals, whose white reflexed form accentuates the fuchsia pink pistil, and yellow stamens. The fruit of *Spondias dulcis* typically forms oblong or ellipsoid drupes that turn from green to a golden-yellow as they ripen. In the lower right, a mature fruit has been cut open to reveal the juicy pulp inside. Beside this, an individual seed appears. Typically, *s. dulcis* seeds are covered with fibrous, spiny protuberances, which are not present in the current depiction. However, as Din Hou notes, these can be easily separated; 'The endocarp of good cultivars of *S. cytherea* [*S. dulcis*] has a rather 'small', hard, inner zone which connects to a (delicate) peripheral zone by numerous, radiating, straight or curved, spinose and fibrous processes. The outer zone can be easily torn or peeled off from the inner one.'[1]

As noted by Parkinson, the fruits may have a mild turpentine flavour, they may also taste sweet and acidic. In Malaysia and Indonesia, the immature fruits are made into pickles and preserves and in Java the tender young leaves are steamed inside banana leaves.

The present work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.

Literature:

Ou, Ding. Anacardiaceae. In: van Steenis, C.G.G.J. (Ed): Flora Malesiana, Series 1. Vol. 8. pp. 481-483. Nationaal Herbarium Nederland. 1978.

Molesworth, Allen, B. Malayan Fruits, pp. 20—23. Donald Moore Press, Singapore. 1967.

Morton, J.F. Fruits of Warm Climates, pp. 240—242. Creative Resource Systems, Winterville, N.C., USA. 1987.

Parkinson, Sydney. A journal of a Voyage to the South Seas, in His Majesty's ship, the Endeavour. Stanfield Parkinson, London, 1773.

Popenoe, J. The Genus *Spondias* in Florida. Proceedings of the Florida State Horticultural Society 92: 277 279. 1979.

Verheij, E. W. M. "*Spondias cytherea* Sonnerat." Edible fruits and nuts, Plant Resources of South-East Asia No 2, Edited by E. W. M. Verheij, and R. E. Coronel, PROSEA Foundation, Bogor, Indonesia, record 1545. PROSEA, 1991.

Notes:

1 Hou 1798, p.483.



9

A Study of a Lychee, *Litchi chinensis* Attributed to Win Achun

Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau

Watercolour on paper
40.2cm high, 53.2cm wide

'The Chinese can boast of many excellent edible fruits, some of which, as the li-tchi, the lon-gan, the tse-tscj...are peculiarly their own.'
Murray et al, 1836

During the 2nd century BC, lychees were transported northward over 1,500 kilometres from Guangdong in southern China to Chang'an in today's Shaanxi Province. Han emperor Wudi (r. 141-87 BC) was so taken with the fruits, he named a palace after them and tried to cultivate the trees in heated glasshouses. Such was the demand for lychees that a tradition of horsemen bringing the fruits as tributes to the Imperial Courts was established. Traversing great swathes of land on their fastest steeds was a gruelling marathon and a number of the couriers died of exhaustion while transporting the fruits.[1]

Lychees remained an extremely popular delicacy amongst the gentry of the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD). Recording over thirty kinds of the fruit, Ts'ai Hsiang's 1059AD monograph is considered to be the earliest of its kind in China. The most celebrated varieties included the 'rhinoceros horn,' the 'glutinous rice dumpling,' renowned for its tiny 'chicken-tongue' seeds and the 'imperial concubine's laugh.' The latter variety is believed to be a reference to Emperor Hsüan Tsung's precious consort, Lady Yang, whose predilection for lychees, sent via the arduous courier service, led to the emperor's financial ruin in 756 AD.[2]

The present study depicts a verdurous lychee branch, with coppery-lime coloured young leaves and glossy, deep green mature foliage. The fragrant, siskin-hued inflorescences, appear on terminal panicles. Drupaceous clusters of strawberry-red oval fruits appear below one of the branches. Their tough skin is covered in rough tubercles, painted with the upmost attention to detail. The young fruits are a vivid emerald green. In the foreground, a carefully peeled empty rind appears, beside the juicy opalescent aril. This is accompanied by a large single seed and beautifully presented dissected flower.



(Fig. 16) No. 139 Nephelium, the William Kerr Collection of Chinese Plants, Kew Archives, London.



(Fig. 17) No. 140 Nephelium, the William Kerr Collection of Chinese Plants, Kew Archives, London.





(Fig. 18) No. 48. Nephelium, the William Kerr Collection of Chinese Plants, Kew Archives, London.



(Fig. 19) No. 371. Nephelium, the William Kerr Collection of Chinese Plants, Kew Archives, London.

The delectable, fragrant flesh provides lychees with an irresistible lusciousness. Today, the appeal of this highly ornamental tree has not relented, and cultivation of lychees in China has surpassed that of than any other fruit. In 2002, a single lychee, weighing around half an ounce was purchased by a Chinese firm for an incredible sum of $67,000 USD. It was one of the rare fruits, produced by a four-hundred-year-old tree named *Xiyuangualu*, which grows in Zengcheng District, Guangzhou.[3] From the Imperial Court's courier service to the present day, the lychee remains the 'King of Fruits' in China.

Lower right, the Chinese inscription reads *xiang li zhi*, or lychee.

The following group, from the William Kerr Collection of Chinese Plants at Kew, depict various lychee varieties. Visually, they appear to be related to the current image, particularly with regard to the leaves, emergent leaflets, fruit dissections and their overall composition. Notably, two of the paintings bear the signature 'Achunqua' on the verso. Given that Win Achun may be derived from 'Achunqua' it is highly likely that all the works were painted by Win Achun (see pp.12-13). Furthermore, the Christie's catalogue states that within the 100 drawings by Win Achun, there was a group of lychee studies.[4]

The present work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.

Literature:

Alan Davidson, Tom Jaine. The Oxford Companion to Food. OUP Oxford, 2014.

A.P. Sydney Morning Herald. July 2nd, 2002.

Christie's. 5792. Important Natural History Books and Atlases. The Property of the Beaumont Family. Lot 14. Chinese Botanical Watercolours – Win Achun. London, 30 April, 1997.

Hugh Murray et al. An Historical and Descriptive Account of China, Volume 3. Edinburgh; London: Oliver & Boyd; Simpkin, Marshall & Co, 1836.

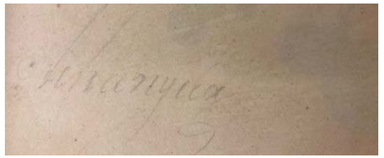
Karp, David. Flavor and Fortune Magazine, Lychees and Their Kin. Fruits, Desserts, and Other Sweet Foods, Spring Volume: 1997 Issue: 4(1) page(s): 5, 6, and 22. http://www.flavorandfortune.com/ffdataaccess/article.php?ID=57

Kilpatrick, Jane. Gifts from the Gardens of China. London, Frances Lincoln Limited, 1997.

Valder, Peter. The Garden Plants of China. Timber Press, 2005.

Notes:

1 Davidson & Jaine 2014, p.1414.
2 Karp, 1997.
3 Sydney Morning Herald July 2nd, 2002.
4 Christie's. 5792. Lot 14, 30 April 1997.



(Fig. 20) No. 48 (verso). Nephelium, the William Kerr Collection of Chinese Plants, Kew Archives, London.



(Fig. 21) No. 371 (verso). Nephelium, the William Kerr Collection of Chinese Plants, Kew Archives, London.

10

A Study of a Rose Apple, *Syzygium jambos* Attributed to Win Achun

Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau

Watercolour on paper
41cm high, 55cm wide

'(19) Jambu (Hugenia malaccensis) is esteemed also a most wholesome fruit; it is deep red, of an oval shape, the largest as big as a small apple; it has not much flavour, but is certainly very pleasant on account of its coolness. There are several sorts of it, but, without much reference to kinds, the largest and reddest are always the best. (20) Jambu ayer (Eugenia). Of these are two sorts, alike in shape resembling a bell, but differing in colour, one being red and the other white; in size they a little exceed a large cherry; in taste they are totally devoid of flavour, or even sweetness, being nothing more than a little acidulated water, and yet their coolness recommends them very much. (21) Jambu ayer mawwar (Eugenia jambos) is more pleasant to the smell than the taste; in the latter resembling something the conserve of roses, as in the former, the fresh scent of those flowers.'
Sir Joseph Banks[1]

This supremely elegant composition depicts the exquisite features of the rose apple. To the left of the main branch, a cluster of the pale-yellow fruits weigh down an arching stem. This is aesthetically counterpoised by a stem to the right, brimming with exuberant flowers, whose radial stamens burst forth like spinning Catherine wheels.

Rose apple trees grow up to twelve metres high, forming wide, dense crowns. They are native to Southeast Asia but have been widely introduced to tropical countries due to their highly valued ornamental features. The species is also referred to as the Malabar or Java plum, though it bears no relation to either the plum or apple family, belonging instead to the myrtle family, Myrtaceae.

The evergreen, opposite, lanceolate leaves are a flammeous red-orange when young, and mature to a deep, lustrous green. Measuring up to ten centimetres in diameter, the large flowers comprise four calyx lobes, supporting four petals, from which around three hundred long stamens erupt, in the most delicate stellate flocculence. Forming small groups of terminal clusters, the blossoms are an exquisite creamy tone, with hints of fresh apple green. The exterior of the calyx enhances this colouration with the addition of rose-pink hues. The edible oval to pear-shaped fruits have thin, smooth and waxy skins, that ripen from green to lemon-yellow. The visible calyx and sepals at the base of the drupes are typical of the Myrtaceae family. The crisp, juicy, although sometimes dry flesh has a delicate sweetness and rosewater scent, which is unique to *Syzygium jambos*. Up to four rounded seeds are contained within cavities inside the fruits, and can give an indication to their ripeness, if they rattle upon being shaken. The fruit can be eaten raw or cooked and is often added to curries.

The plant has a number of medicinal properties and shows promising results as an anti-inflammatory.[2]

The present work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.

Literature:

Hooker, Sir Joseph D. (ed). Journal of the Right Hon. Sir Joseph Banks ... During Captain Cook's first voyage in H.M.S. Endeavour in 1768-71 to Terra del Fuego, Otahite, New Zealand, Australia, the Dutch East Indies, etc. London; New York: Macmillan & Co. Ltd. 1896.

Rasadah, M.A. et al. Anti-inflammatory agents from Sandoricum koetjape Merr, Phytomedicine, Vol. 11, Issues 2-3, 2004, pp.261-263. ISSN 0944-7113. https://doi.org/10.1078/0944-7113-00339.

Morton, Julia. Fruits of Warm Climates. J.F. Morton, Distributed by Creative Resources Systems, Miami, FL, Winterville, N.C. 1987.

Chittenden, Fred J. (ed). Royal Horticultural Society Dictionary of Gardening. Oxford. 1951.

Notes:

1 Joseph Banks describing the fruits of the East Indies encountered during his stay in Batavia, capital of the Dutch East Indies, (present-day Jakarta, Indonesia). Hooker, 1896, p.394



11

A Study of Chinese cinnamon, *Cinnamomum cassia* Attributed to Win Achun

Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau

Watercolour on paper
40.3cm high, 53.6 cm wide

'The River of Heaven turns in the night and floats the stars around,
A stream of cloud between silver shores mimics the sound of water.
The cassia tree of the Jade Palace has never shed its flowers,
A houri plucks their fragrance to hang at her jewelled sash.'
Up in Heaven, Li Ho

A member of the Lauraceae family, *Cinnamomum cassia* originated in Southern China and is now cultivated throughout South and Southeast Asia, where the evergreen trees grow up to fifteen metres tall. There are five species of cinnamon, whose aromatic bark is used for culinary purposes, with Ceylon cinnamon the most used in the West. The grey-brown cassia bark is thicker and has a coarser texture than that of Ceylon cinnamon. The quills form a scroll shape as they are dried, unlike the Ceylon quills, which are more labour intensive to produce.

Around 2000 BCE, cinnamon was imported to Egypt, where the essential oil from cassia bark was used in the embalming process.[1] Cassia also features in the fourth century Chinese work *Chu Si*.[2] The ancient Greeks believed cassia hailed from Arabia, where the quills grew from shallow lakes, guarded by winged snakes and bats with great talons. The spice became popular in Europe, featuring in the Marriage of Hector and Andromache, a work by the celebrated poet Sappho (c. 610-c. 570 BCE).

'Everywhere through the streets
wine bowls and cups
and myrrh and cassia and frankincense were mingling.
Old women raised a joyful cry
and all the men sang out on high, a lovely song.'[4]



(Fig. 22) No. 167. Laurus. William Kerr collection of Chinese plants, Kew Royal Garden Archives, London.



(Fig. 23) NHD53/20 Chinese Cinnamom Tree. c 1800. Cinnamomum cassia (L.) J.Presl; Lauraceae family. British Library: Visual Arts. (BL)

In China there are currently over five hundred medicinal formulas which include dried cassia bark. It is used to treat a wide range of ailments including, gastrointestinal disease, inflammation, cardiovascular disease, and gynaecological conditions. The plant also has strong antiviral and antibacterial properties.[5] Flowering in autumn, the trees represent prestige and longevity and have a long history as an auspicious symbol in China.

The present study depicts a branch with alternate, narrowly elliptic leaves, ranging from yellowish-green to a deep forest green and pale copper-red to a rich claret hue. Apparent on both sides of the leaves, their deep veins are typical of the Cinnamomum genus. The small white flowers bloom in panicles and are depicted in bud, whilst blooming, and shortly after the petals have dropped. Rather than being presented horizontally across the base of the paper, as is typical of this genre of painting, the dissected flowering parts appear vertically under the branch.

This illustration bears comparison with two contemporaneous works, (see figs.22–23 below). There is evidently a connection between a study of a cinnamon plant in the William Kerr collection at Kew and the present work. Furthermore, there is also a relationship between these two paintings and a study of a cinnamon in the British Library. Not only are the leaves, flowers, colours and styles similar, but the unusual depiction of the flowering parts is also extremely close (see figs. 27–29 below). They all bear the hallmarks of what appears to be Win Achun's style; exceptional detail, a refined technique and a particular manner of shading to create volume on the leaves. Furthermore, the flowering panicles are extremely similar to many of those depicted in the present group of paintings, attributed to Win Achun, and the associated Kerr paintings at Kew. If the present work and the Kew paintings are 'siblings', the British Library image appears to be a 'cousin.' The British Library folio holding this painting happens to contain a meteorological journal,



seemingly by William Kerr, entitled 'Monthly account of the fall of rain at Macao and Canton in China, from September 1807 to July 1809.' Kerr wrote to William Aiton at Kew in March 1809. His letter notes: 'I have likewise sent to Sir Jos. Banks another verbatim copy of the Manilla [sic] Catalogue of plants made in 1805, together with a meteorological journal for 1808.'[6] It may therefore seem that the British Library album has a connection to William Kerr, as further evidenced by these paintings.[7] The British Library cinnamon study bears the initials 'W.Ch' as do a further 152 paintings in the collection. The majority of the rest are marked 'H.Sh'. Based on documents relating to the British Library album, it has been suggested that 'H.Sh' is an abbreviation for the artist known as 'Han Sham Flower painter.'[8] If the initials do indicate the artists' name, it seems extremely likely that 'W.Ch' could refer to Win 'A' Chun. (see pp.12–13 for further information).

Literature:

Dal Martello. Rita. NHD52-57 Six Volumes of Plant Illustrations. The British Library: Visual Arts. London, 2019.

Detienne, Marcel. The Gardens of Adonis Spices in Greek Mythology. Princeton University Press, 2021.

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Li, He. The Poems of Li Ho (791-817). United Kingdom: Clarendon, 1970.

Muthukumaran, Sureshkumar. The Tropical Turn Agricultural Innovation in the Ancient Middle East and the Mediterranean. University of California Press, 2023.

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Zhang, Chunling et al. "Cinnamomum cassia Presl: A Review of Its Traditional Uses, Phytochemistry, Pharmacology and Toxicology." *Molecules (Basel, Switzerland)* vol. 24,19 3473. 25 Sep. 2019, doi:10.3390/molecules24193473

Notes:

1 Hancock 2021, p.25.
2 Ibid.
3 Wheeler 1852, pp.110-111.
4 Sappho in Powell (trans). 2007, p.15.
5 Zhang et al, 2019.
6 Letter to William Aiton Esq. 3rd March, 1809. Library and Archives, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.
7 See also Richard, 2020.
8 Dal Martello, 2019.



(Fig. 24) Present image (detail)



(Fig. 25) Kew (detail)



(Fig. 26) BL (detail)



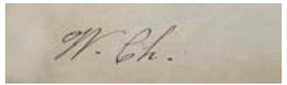
(Fig. 27) Present image (detail)



(Fig. 28) Kew (detail)



(Fig. 29) BL (detail)



(Fig. 30) BL (detail)



12

A Study of a Fingered Citrus, *Citrus medica* Attributed to Win Achun

Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau

Watercolour on paper
41cm high, 54.5cm wide

This fantastically anthropomorphic fruit commands our attention, as finger-like carpels reach towards the sky. Known commonly as Buddha's hands, the fruit can grow to twelve centimetres in length and weigh up to five kilograms. In the present study, three branchlets grow from a woody stem, their small, winged petioles extending into alternate, lanceolate leaves with a glossy shimmer. A cluster of intensely perfumed flowers remain in bud, as one has opened its stellate flowers, whose white petals are highlighted with delicate, cerise edges. A further two blossoms have shed their petals, although their stamens remain, as they commence their transformation into tiny fruits. A further example of this can be seen below as an older fruit matures, casting its moss-green 'fingers' downwards. A magnificent fully ripe specimen crowns the image, with its globular base and elongated mid-section, which erupts into sections of corkscrew-like fingers. The vibrant, daffodil-yellow flesh has a textured surface known as the flavedo. From these glands, citrus oils envelop the whole fruit, suffusing the atmosphere with an exquisitely aromatic scent.

Beneath the main branch, the dissected parts of a flower have been laid out and a fruit has been cut in half towards the base, revealing the white pith inside. There is a notable absence of pulp, flesh and seeds, as is typical of many *Citrus medica*.

In Japan and China, the fruits are placed on altars in Buddhist temples. Symbolising longevity and good fortune, they are frequently given during Chinese New Year celebrations. Since the late Tang dynasty (618-907), ivory and jade carvings of *Citrus medica* or *Fo Sho* were made for elite members of society. Considered to be one of the original citrons from which today's oranges and lemons have derived, the origins of the plants are thought to lay in India, whence they were transported to China via Buddhist monks. They then spread across Asia and entered Europe via soldiers returning from international campaigns.

Known historically as *nata Assyria malus*, the Assyrian or Median apple, Pliny the Elder (23/24 –79 CE), describes the fruit in a number of texts:

'There is another tree also which has the same name of 'citrus,' and bears a fruit that is held by some persons in particular dislike for its smell and remarkable bitterness; while, on the other hand, there are some who esteem it very highly.'[1] He also notes that the pith may be consumed 'as an antidote to poisons' and that chewing the pips reduces 'qualmishness' in pregnant women.[2]

The binomial name, *Citrus medica*, alludes to the plant's medicinal properties. Known as *bijapura*, the fruit and leaves have a long history of use amongst Ayurvedic practitioners. Current research has also indicated that the plants have an extremely wide range of properties, including; anticancer, antimicrobial, hypoglycaemic, antidiabetic, analgesic, hypolipidemic, antiulcer and estrogenic.[3]

With its vibrant colouration, acute detailing and morphic dynamism, the present work is a celebration of this extraordinary historic fruit, whose medicinal properties offer great potential to humanity today.

In the lower right, the Chinese inscription reads *xiang chuan* or Buddha's hands, and the work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.

The present illustration may be considered with regard to two further paintings. The British Library album of Chinese botanical illustrations, which may be connected to William Kerr, has a simpler version of the citrus, revealing notable similarities with the fruits and foliage. A further study of *Citrus medica*, in the Kerr collection at Kew, is also extremely similar, in terms of the execution of these features.



(Fig. 31) NHD52/32. Buddha's hand citron. '*Citrus media, digitata*', circa 1800. The British Library: Visual Arts. London.



(Fig. 32) 74. From the William Kerr collection of Chinese plants, Kew Royal Garden Archives, London.





(Fig. 33) NHD52/32, British Library (detail)



(Fig. 34) Present work (detail)



(Fig. 35) No. 74. Kew (detail).

The British Library painting depicts an immature fruit; hence its lime green appearance. It does, however, bear a striking similarity to the young, green fruit in the present work and in the Kew illustration. Each example demonstrates a fine stippling technique, employed to illustrate the pitted flesh.

The leaves also merit closer attention, as they have been painted in a very similar style. All demonstrate a confident, fluid sense of line, apparent in the midrib and veins. The use of a darker shade of green beside the veins also appears in all three paintings. This subtle technique creates a greater sense of volume and depth to the leaves; they appear more alive and vital.

In the present work and the Kew study, the flowers are also particularly similar, with both exhibiting a subtle dash of pink, highlighting the outer edges of the petals.

Notably, the British Library painting bears the initials 'W. Ch' in the lower left. Given the stylistic concurrences between this and the present illustration, it could be suggested that W. Ch signified the initials of 'Win A Chun' and that he may have been responsible for both of the paintings. William Kerr's meteorological journal for 1808 has, at some point, been placed inside the British Library album, suggesting he may have had a connection to it. Given the stylistic congruity apparent in these works, it may seem as though Kerr, and an artist in his employment, had a relationship with the paintings. William Kerr's possible association with all three collections also suggests that he may have commissioned three sets of illustrations of *Citrus medica*, from the same artist.

Literature:

Choden, Jamyang et al. Chapter 8 – Citrus medica L., in Tarun Belwal, Indra Bhatt, Hari Devkota (eds). Himalayan Fruits and Berries, Academic Press, 2023.

John Bostock, H. T. Riley, (eds), Ch. 31 – The Citron Tree in The Natural History. Pliny the Elder. London: Taylor and Francis, 1855.

John Bostock, H. T. Riley, (eds), Ch. 56 – Citrons Five Observations Upon Them. Pliny the Elder. London: Taylor and Francis, 1855.

Dal Martello. Rita NHD52-57 Six Volumes of Plant Illustrations. The British Library: Visual Arts. London, 2019.

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Saunt, James. Citrus Varieties of the World. 2nd ed. Sinclair International, Norwich, UK, 2000.

Simoons, Frederick J. Food in China: A Cultural and Historical Inquiry. CRC, Boca Raton, 1991.

Swingle, Water T. and Phillip C. Reese. "The botany of citrus and its Wild Relatives," in W. Reuther, H.J. Webber, and L.D. Batchelor (eds.). The citrusIndustry, vol. 1. Univ. Calif., Berkeley, 1967.

Notes:

1 See Bostock & Riley 1855, Ch.31.
2 Ibid, Ch.56.
3 Panara et al, 2012 pp.1292-1297.



(Fig. 36) Present work (detail)



(Fig. 37) NHD52/32 British Library (detail)



(Fig. 38) No. 74. Kew (detail).



(Fig. 39) Present work (detail).



(Fig. 40) No. 74. Kew (detail).

13

A Study of a Water Caltrop, *Trapa natans* Attributed to Win Achun

Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau

Watercolour on paper
40.8cm high, 54cm wide

'The Culture of Water Plants is however so little understood in Europe, that unless new Lights can be obtained on the subject from the Chinese it will not be worth much pains to transport them. Drawings of the Plant however, accurately taken, cannot Fail of being very useful.'
Sir Joseph Banks, 1792

This striking plant appears as though floating on the still waters of a lake. Its velvety green leaves comprise a rosette formation, centred by a dainty, stellate white flower, nestled amongst a verdigris web of inflated petioles. The curious, ornately shaped fruits appear beneath the leaves, their barbed spines preventing them from being disturbed by the current. A flexuous stem bears feathery, adventitious roots, enabling the plant to anchor in sediment. In the lower right, a dissection of the flowering parts appears, beside two depictions of the seed, more commonly known as a nut. The protective woody fruit has been cut open, showing the seed inside and beside this, an individual seed appears.

Not to be confused with the Chinese water chestnut, *Eleocharis dulcis*, the water caltrop may refer to *Trapa natans*, *Trapa bicornis* and *Trapa rossica*. The name is a derivative of the Latin calcitrapa, which refers to an iron ball covered in spikes used during warfare. *T. bicornis* is a reference to the seed's two spikes, which resemble horns. The entire fruits also bear a striking resemblance to a bull's head. Water caltrops are commonly known as water chestnuts, horn chestnuts, buffalo nuts, Jesuit nuts and devil's pods. Native to temperate Eurasia and Africa, they favour gently moving rivers, oxbow lakes, ponds and streams.



(Fig. 41) No.126 Trapa. *Trapacaceae* from the William Kerr Collection of Chinese Plants, Kew Archives, London, (nb. No. 126 in the collection has been duplicated with an Iris).

Rich in starch and protein, water caltrops provided a valuable food source for ancient civilisations and have been cultivated in China for at least three thousand years. Zhou dynasty (1121–256) texts reveal their importance in ritual offerings and auspicious ceremonies.[1] Ancient Chinese herbals also note that the nuts may be used to alleviate diarrhoea.[2] European medical texts also note that the seeds contained anti-diarrheal properties and Hippocrates recommended it as an anti-inflammatory[3] Water caltrops were widely consumed across Europe until the early parts of the twentieth century. However, due to insufficient water quality and habitat drainage, regrettably, they are now a critically endangered and protected species in some European countries.

The Chinese inscription reads, '*lü ling jiao*' (green water chestnut), and the work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.

The above depiction of a water caltrop in the William Kerr album at Kew is extremely similar to the current study, particularly with regard to the dissection, portrayal of the roots and the overall manner in which the plant has been illustrated.

Literature:

Borojevic, Ksenija. Cultural history of water chestnut (Trapa natans L.) from prehistory to nowadays. An Offprint from, Andrew S. Fairbairn and Ehud Weiss (Eds). From Foragers to Farmers. Gordan C. Hillman Festschrift. Oxbow Books, 2009.

Hegi, G. Illustrierte Flora von Mittel Europa, Band V/2. München, Carl Hanser Verlag. 1965.

Guo, Yi et al. Neolithic cultivation of water chestnuts (Trapa L.) at Tianluoshan (7000-6300 cal BP), Zhejiang Province, China." Scientific reports vol. 7,1 16206. 24 Nov. 2017, doi:10.1038/s41598-017-15881-w.

Kilpatrick, Jane. Gifts from the Gardens of China. Frances Lincoln Limited, London, 2007.

P. Adkar et al. Trapa bispinosa Roxb.: a review on nutritional and pharmacological aspects Advances in Pharmacological Sciences. 2014.

Sheng, Z.W., Sun, Z.G. & Shan, J.X. The Developments of Studies on Healthful Function of Water Chestnut and its Products. Food Research and Development, 27, 160-163. 2006.

Zhu, Fan. Chemical composition, health effects, and uses of water caltrop. Trends in Food Science & Technology, Vol.49, pp. 136-145, ISSN 0924-2244. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tifs.2016.01.009. 2016

Notes:

1 P. Adkar et al. 2014.
2 Sheng, Z.W et al, 2006, pp.160-163.
3 Hegi, G. 1965.



14

A Study of a Chinese Privet, *Ligustrum sinense* Attributed to Win Achun

Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau

Watercolour on paper
40.2cm high, 54.2cm wide

Robert Fortune (1812-1880) was a celebrated and eccentric Scottish plant hunter and botanist. Visiting China, Fortune shaved his head, grew a ponytail and wore local dress. He learned some Mandarin and travelled to the north of the country, to seek rare plant species. In 1854, during Fortune's second visit to China, he managed to smuggle valuable tea plants out of the country, despite the risk of severe penalties. The young plants were immediately shipped to India, establishing the country's first ever tea plantations.

Botanising near Shanghai, Fortune encountered Chinese Privet, *Ligustrum sinense*, described by Professor John Lindley (1799-1865), as 'one of the most elegant of shrubs'.[1] A fellow Scotsman, Alexander Duncan was a surgeon for the East India Company who collected plants in Canton for Sir Joseph Banks. In 1794, a Chinese Tree Privet, *Ligustrum lucidum*, sent by Duncan arrived at Kew.[2] The evergreen glossy leaved trees grow to around ten metres tall, producing sprays of creamy- white flowers, succeeded by purplish or blueish-black berries in the autumn.

The present study likely depicts the smaller Chinese Privet, *Ligustrum sinense*. Their semi-deciduous, opposite ovate to elliptical leaves, grow from a silvery brown stem. The flowers, arranged in terminal panicles, form delicate clusters that emit a sweet perfume. Each flower has four petals which join at the base to form the tubular corolla, protruded by fine clusters of stamens. On the uppermost panicles, the artist has ingeniously utilised the verdant leaves as a background to set off the floral sprays, and highlight the enchanting detail of each individual flower.

According to *The Gardener's Chronicle*, Mr W. J. Watson, a gentleman whose ill-health resulted in 'a great liking for the open air pursuits had changed from a solicitor to a seedsman.' He leased the kitchen garden at Fenham Hall, Newcastle and established a nursery. The article continues; 'The oval-leaved Privet is also in large demand, and any quantity of it can be sold, as it stands so well about the northern towns. Mr Watson states there is something akin to a rage for this Privet, and he finds no difficulty in disposing of from 18,000 and 20,000 plants annually.'[3] Today, the privet remains a much-favoured plant amongst horticulturalists, frequently appearing in British gardens as an ornamental hedge.

The present work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.

Literature:

Aiton, William. Hortus Kewensis, or, A catalogue of the plants cultivated in the Royal Botanic Garden at Kew. London, 1815, 1, 19.

Various authors. The Gardeners' Chronical. London, September 21st 1878.

Various authors. The Gardeners' Chronical. London, September 14th 1878.

Kilpatrick, Jane. Gifts from the Gardens of China. Frances Lincoln Limited, London, 2007.

Notes:

1 Lindley. The Gardener's Chronical 1878, p.364.
2 Aiton, Hortus Kewensis 1815, 1. 19.
3 September 14th, 1878, pp.334-335.



15

A Study of a Hong Kong Hawthorn, *Rhaphiolepis indica* Attributed to Win Achun

Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau

Watercolour on paper
40.5cm high, 54.7cm wide

Despite its botanical name, *Rhaphiolepis indica* originates from Southern China, where it grows wild upon hillsides and beside streams. The attractive evergreen shrubs have a compact, round habit and may grow up to four metres high. The lanceolate, alternate leaves have gently serrated edges and a rich glossy appearance. New growth is indicated by a yellow-copper tinge to the leaves. Borne on conical panicles, a profusion of small, white, five-petaled flowers are typical of those in the rosaceae family. The delicate blooms produce a sweet fragrance in the spring and summertime. As temperatures fall, the leaves bear a purple tinge and inky purple-blue berries are formed.

Rhaphiolepis indica is currently grown widely in warmer climes as a border shrub. As the plant ages, the bark becomes mottled and textured, making it an attractive subject for a bonsai. Crushed and mixed with tin crystals, the berries will produce a rich purple dye. The versatile fruits may also emit deep blue to turquoise hues, which have been utilised to dye silks in China.[1] Once cooked, the berries are also edible and can be made into conserves.

Known later as Edwards's Botanical Register, the Botanical Register was an invaluable horticultural publication which ran from 1815 to 1847. The following entry is provided for Hong Kong Hawthorn, then known as the China Hawthorn:

'Rhaphiolepis indica, China Hawthorn or Rhaphiolepis

A Chinese plant. Introduced by Mr James Drummond in 1806.

Said by Loureiro to grow to a large tree, the wood of which is of a reddish hue, heavy and tough and applicable to various economic purposes. The Haw fruit is eatable.'

'The drawing was taken from a plant which blossomed in April last at the greenhouse of the botanical garden of the Horticultural Society near Hammersmith, an establishment which ... promises to become a valuable depository of curious and useful vegetables.'

The below illustration from the William Kerr album of Chinese Plants at Kew is strikingly reminiscent of the present image. The principal differences being that the Kew *Raphiolepis* bears a cluster of berries to the lower left of the stem, and an additional stem appears, also with berries. One of the fruits has been dissected below this. However, the dissection of the flowering parts to the left is virtually identical.

The present work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.

Literature:

Flora of China Editorial Committee. Fl. China 9: 1–496. Science Press & Missouri Botanical Garden Press, Beijing & St. Louis, 2003.

Grace, Ida. Nature's Colours: Dyes from Plants. MacMillan Publishing Co. New York, 1974.

Labadie, Emile L. Ornamental Shrubs for use in the Western Landscape. Sierra City Press, 1980.

Gijsbert Gerrit Jan, Cornelis et al. Flora Malesiana. Djakarta: Noordhoff-Kolff, 1950.

Ker Gawler, John Bellenden. The Botanical Register. Vol 6. Printed for James Ridgway, London, 1820.

Notes:

1 Grace 1974, p.20.



(Fig. 42) No. 468, *Rhaphiolepis indica*. The Botanical Register. Vol 6, 1820.



(Fig. 43) No. 232. *Raphiolepis* from the William Kerr Collection of Chinese Plants, Kew Archives, London.



16

A Study of a Plumbago, *Plumbago zeylanica* Attributed to Win Achun

Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau

Watercolour on paper
40.5cm high, 54.6cm wide

Plumbago zeylanica typically grows into a rather unruly and rambling plant, in thickets or under taller trees and shrubs. The artist of the present specimen has navigated this beautifully by gathering the cut stems together, enabling the branches to arch in a most elegant fashion. This whimsical, yet highly accomplished and accurate depiction, captures the essence of the plant and is indicative of the most experienced artists working in Canton during the early nineteenth century.

Plumbago zeylanica can be lianous, with up to three-metre-long stems climbing through nearby plants to reach the sunlight. The ovate leaves form alternately along the stem, with dense clusters of white tubular flowers. Encasing the base of the flowers and eventually forming a seed, the calyx is surrounded by stalked glands, which exude a sticky substance, preventing crawling insects from entering the interior of the flower.[1] This natural defence mechanism allows flying insects to access the plant's nectar, while denying other species such as ants. Once flowering has terminated, downy copper-brown seeds appear, as illustrated by a lower stem in the present work.



(Fig. 44) No. 159. Plumbago, William Kerr collection of Chinese plants, Kew Royal Garden Archives, London.

Native to the Tropics and Subtropics, *Plumbago zeylanica* is also known as white leadwort, Ceylon leadwort and doctorbush. Although it is a poisonous plant, small internal doses of the leaves and roots have been used as a rubefacient, emmenagogue and diaphoretic. Known as *'ilie'e* or *hilie'e* in Hawaii, the roots are pulverised until they emit a blue or black dye that has been used as a tattoo pigment.[2]

The present work is virtually identical to this study from the William Kerr collection at Kew, with only the slightest variations appearing.

The present work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.

Literature:

Ameenah Gurib-Fakim et al. Medicinal Plants. Netherlands: PROTA Foundation, 2008.

Whitney, Heather et al. Grip and Slip: Mechanical Interactions Between Insects and the Epidermis of Flowers and Flower Stalks. Communicative & Integrative Biology, pp.505-508. Vol. Issue 6, 2009.

Abbott 1992:128, in Author unknown. Hawaiian Ethnobotany Online Database. Bishop Museum, 2023. http://data.bishopmuseum.org/ethnobotanydb/ethnobotany.php?b=d&ID=iliee

Notes:

1 Heather et al. 2009.
2 Abbott 1992, p.128.



17

A Study of a Chinaberry Tree, *Melia azedarach* Attributed to Win Achun

Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau

Watercolour on paper
40.8cm high, 54cm wide

With elegant fern-like leaves, dainty lilac flowers and bright yellow berries, *Melia azedarach* is an extremely striking tree. A member of the Meliaceae (Mahogany) family, it is native to Eastern Asia and has subsequently been introduced to many tropical and subtropical countries. The tree is also known as Persian lilac, Indian lilac, bead tree and white cedar. Attaining heights of up to fifteen metres, the deciduous trees have a dense habitat and form spreading canopies, up to six metres wide.

An ancient stone stele erected for the Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal II at his palace in Nimrud appears to be one of the earliest references to *Melia azedarach*. Circa 879 BCE. the stone lay bedside the entrance nearest to the throne room and lists Persian lilac as one of the forty-eight trees planted in the King's garden.[1] Written around 300 BCE, the Chinese Taoist text *Chuang -tze* describes a wondrous bird that consumed the tree's berries. Known as *Lian*, *Melia azedarach* was a highly valued plant in China; the flowers were dried to make incense and the wood was appropriated for patten or overshoe production.[2]

The present study depicts a Chinaberry tree branch with flowers, immature and overripe fruits. The bark is dark brown, with grey flecks and ferruginous dapples. The bi-pinnate elliptical leaves are serrated and vary from deep emerald-green to chartreuse. The numerous lilac, star-shaped flowers have a purple staminal tube and emit a sweet fragrance in the spring. Drupaceous immature fruits appear like green marbles, suspended from their stems. Below the arching branches, another stem bears much older fruits with withering, yellow berries, that are typical of the plant in winter. In the foreground, the flowering parts of the tree have been displayed in a most elegant and orderly fashion. Beside this, a berry has been cut open to reveal the white pulp inside, and a seed appears beside a pod containing a further four seeds.

The berries of *Melia azedarach* can cause intoxication in birds and are not suitable for human consumption. However, the dried seed pods have been utilised widely as decorative beads. Upon reaching the Mediterranean, the trees became known as '*abor pareíso*' or paradise tree, as the dried berries were strung to make rosaries.[3]

Literature:

Keng, Hsuan. Annotated List of Seed Plants of Singapore (VI). Gardens' Bulletin Singapore, 1980.

Randhawa, Dr. M. S. Flowering Trees. National Book Trust, India 1965.

Mabberley, D. J. The Gardens' Bulletin Singapore. Published by the Botanic Gardens Parks and Recreation Department Ministry of National Development Singapore. Vol. 37, 1984.

Flora of China Editorial Committee. Flora of China Vol. 11. P. 130. Missouri Botanical Garden Press, 2008.

Notes:

1 Mabberley 1984, p.50.
2 Ibid, p.52.
3 Ibid p.50.



18

A Study Resembling a Fontanesia, *Fontanesia phillyreoides* Attributed to Win Achun

Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau

Watercolour on paper
40.8cm high, 54cm wide

This graceful, deciduous shrub has upright, tetragonal stems bearing lustrous opposite, lanceolate leaves. Abundant sprays of delicate white flowers, borne on panicles, create a softness when contrasted against the sharply pointed leaves. Beside the principal study, a dissection reveals the four petals, sepals and stamens. Absent in this work, *Fontanesia fortunei* produce diminutive samaras (flat dry fruits, whose wings enable them to be carried upon a breeze) which turn from citrus green to pale brown.

The plant is native to China and has been grown as an ornamental in the lower Yangtze valley.[1] It is commonly known as *Xueliu* or snow willow, given that its leaves resemble those of the willow. The shrubs grow up to fifteen feet high in woodlands and beside steams.

A member of the oleaceae (olive) family, Fontanesia was thought to comprise one species, *Fontanesia phillyreoides*, although some botanists have divided the plant into two species: *Fontanesia phillirаeoides* subsp. *Phillirаeoides* which is native to southern Europe, southwest Asia and the Middle East and *Fontanesia phillirаeoides* subsp. *Fortunesia* which has longer and more lustrous leaves.[2] The genus name is a reference to French botanist René Louiche Desfontaines (1750-1833). Desfontaines was a professor at Jardin des Plantes in Paris and latterly became the director of the city's natural history museum.[3] Subspecies. *Fortunei* honours the tea smuggling Scottish botanist, Robert Fortune (1812-1880) who sent a number of species from China to England in the mid-1800s.

Today, this graceful plant may be clipped into an attractive hedge or grown as a border shrub. With elegant foliage and dainty flowers, it provides a welcome alternative to that most popular of Chinese plants to grace our gardens, the privet.

The following study from the William Kerr Album of Chinese Plants at Kew is almost identical to the present work and is characteristic of other paintings associated with Win Achun in the collection.

The present work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.

Literature:

Flora of China Editorial Committee. Flora of China Volume 15. 6: 147. 1978. Missouri Botanical Garden Press, 2008.

Quattrocchi, Umberto. CRC World Dictionary of Plant Names. CRC Press, 2023.

Valder, Peter. The Garden Plants of China. Glebe, N.S.W. Florilegium, 1999.

Notes:

1 Valder 1999, p.287.
2 Flora Of China 2008, Vol. 15 p.272.
3 Quattrocchi 2023, p.755.



(Fig. 45) 246. Fontanesia. William Kerr collection of Chinese plants, Kew Royal Garden Archives, London.



19

A Study of a Plum, Possibly *Prunus mume* or *P. salicina* Attributed to Win Achun

Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau

Watercolour on paper
41.3cm high, 54.7cm wide

The new year, the fresh season
rouses the plants and stirs the dust
The plum breaks into blossom before other trees
She alone has the gift of recognising spring
Receiving sunlight she brings forth golden splendour.
Hsiao Kang

Cultivated for over 3,000 years and one of the most revered subjects of Chinese art, the plum has been depicted in paintings, on ceramics and on a vast number of objects from clothing to fans.[1] The plum, bamboo, chrysanthemum and orchid are known as the 'Four Plants of Virtue' or 'Four Gentlemen' in Chinese art. From the Song Dynasty (960-1279) onwards, they have served to represent the qualities of humility, strength, dignity and elegance, and are also associated with the four seasons. As it blooms in winter, the plum tree is also known in China as one of the 'Three Friends of Winter', alongside bamboo and the pine tree.[2] Unlike most plants that lay dormant in winter, the plum produces sublimely elegant blossoms, despite snow and freezing temperatures. These admirable qualities of gentle perseverance, inner beauty and reserve are considered valuable metaphors in China and have ensured the plum is one of the nations most cherished plants.

According to the influential early sixteenth century scholarly text, the Mustard Seed Manual of Painting, the flowers represent the qualities of heaven (*Yang*) and the trunk and bark symbolise the earth (*Yin*).[3] The present study depicts two plum tree stems, whose branches elegantly fan outwards. The leaves are imbued with vitality as they rhythmically twist and curl. The jewel-like flowers are depicted with supreme delicacy, their pink petals heightened with darker pink outlines and stamens resembling petite candle-lit chandeliers. Among the lower branches, the fruits range from small and apple green, to semi-ripe blushed yellow- green and a sublimely deep magenta for the ripest fruits.

This work truly demonstrates the great flare of the artist, it is at once a harmoniously balanced and elegant study, that also conveys an overriding quality of organic and easeful fluidity. The depiction of the of the sliced fruit in the foreground so accurately represents the colouration of the sponge-like flesh, as one bites into a delectable, ripe plum. The extremely aesthetic and finely executed presentation of the sepals, stamens and petals, further indicate the work of a highly experienced artist.

The Chinese inscription reads *hong xin li*, or red heart plum, and the work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.

As with many paintings in this group, the current work appears to have a 'cousin' image in the British Library.[4] Both paintings are comparable in the detailed execution of the flowers, and the sinuous leaves. Furthermore, the very specific manner in which the petals and stamens are displayed in the foreground is identical. The British Library painting also seems to bear Win Achun's initials; 'W.Ch', is written by a European hand, lower left.

Literature:

Bailey, Kate. John Reeves Pioneering Collector of Chinese Plants and Botanical Art. ACC Art Books Ltd in association with The Royal Horticultural Society, 2019.

Dal Martello. Rita NHD52-57 Six Volumes of Plant Illustrations. The British Library: Visual Arts. London, 2019.

Frankel, Hans H. The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady: Interpretations of Chinese Poetry. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.

Griswold. Mac K. Pleasures of the Garden: Images from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997.

Kilpatrick, Jane. Gifts from the Gardens of China. Frances Lincoln Limited, London, 2007.

Valder, Peter. The Garden Plants of China. Timber Press, 2005.

Wang, Kai. The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting, Reprinted by Princeton University Press, 1992.

Notes:

1 Bailey 2019, p. 20.
2 Kilpatrick, 2007 pp.16-17.
3 Valder 2005, p.43.
4 NHD56/15 Plum. British Library: Visual Arts.



20

A Study of a Tea Olive, *Osmanthus fragrans* Attributed to Win Achun

Circa 1803–1809
Canton or Macau

Watercolour on paper
40.7cm high, 53.8cm wide

Traditionally, during the mid-autumn lunar festival, Chinese families gather outside under the full moon. Osmanthus infused delicacies including teas, wine and moon cakes are shared and lunar offerings of fruit and sweets are made, in the hope of good fortune for the family. Enraptured children sit quietly and listen to ancient Taoist myths told by their grandparents. One such tale concerns the woodcutter Wu Gang, who was banished to the moon by the Jade Emperor. Believing that he would achieve immortality, once he cut down a giant osmanthus tree, Wu Gang set to work with his axe. However, the moon goddess Chang'e's jade rabbit Yutu disrupted him, and the pair engaged in a game of chase that lasted a full lunar cycle. When Wu Gang returned to the tree, it had magically repaired itself and thus his fate was to remain at the moon palace and eternally try to fell the tree.[1]

Gazing up at the night sky in China, the shaded craters on the moon are believed to indicate the palace with the giant immortal osmanthus growing within its walls. Fragrant blossoms of the tea olive, catching the night breeze, and landing beside someone watching this spectacle, are considered to have fallen from the great osmanthus in the sky; a very fortuitous lunar festival omen.

With the use of fluid, gentle line, fine detailing and subtle movement, the present study encapsulates the delicate nature of this plant. The mature leaves, with toothed edges, appear beside new growth, indicated by rufous foliage. Along the stem, tiny clusters of cream flowers erupt like miniature fireworks. Despite their diminutive nature, the flowers of the tea olive produce a truly exquisite fragrance, with notes of apricot and jasmine.

Known as the perfume of perfumes within the fragrance industry, the plant's organoleptic properties have been valued for centuries, with *Gui Hua Cha* (osmanthus flower tea) being drunk by Tang dynasty emperors (618-907 CE). The leaves, bark and flowers have also been widely used in Chinese medicine for a number of different ailments.

With over one hundred varieties of sweet osmanthus in China at present, the tree remains a highly significant and greatly cherished member of the country's native flora.

The present illustration bears comparison with a study of an osmanthus in the British Library.[2] While the latter painting is a more simplified illustration of the plant, it still retains painterly elements that seem to relate to Win Achun. The leaves are extremely finely presented, with individual venules demarcated in richer green tones. The floral sprays are similar, although they appear in greater detail in the present work. Significantly, the British Library painting bears the initials W.Ch, which appears to be a derivative of Win 'A' Chun.

The present work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.

Literature:

Dal Martello. Rita NHD52-57 Six Volumes of Plant Illustrations. The British Library: Visual Arts. London, 2019.

Eberhard, Wolfram. Dictionary of Chinese Symbols: Hidden Symbols in Chinese Life and Thought. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 2006.

Kilpatrick, Jane. Gifts from the gardens of China. London: Frances Lincoln Limited, 1997.

Valder, Peter. The Garden Plants of China. Timber Press, 2005.

Notes:

1 Eberhard 2006, p.76.
2 NHD57/35 Osmanthus. British Library: Visual Arts





II. Individual Plant Studies

'Nowadays, people build gardens not according to their own ideas, or according to more elegant tastes from the past. Instead, they only ask whether or not they are Chinese style or Anglo-Chinese style.'

Christian Cajus Lorenz Hirschfeld, 1779

21

A Study of a Magnolia, *Magnolia liliiflora*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on rice paper
44cm high, 34cm wide

Étienne Soulange-Bodin (1774–1846) is not a well know figure today. Hailing from Tours in the Centre-Val de Loire, he studied medicine and botany before joining Napoleon's forces as a cavalry officer. Exasperated and disillusioned by his experiences on the battlefield, he is reported to have remarked, 'It had doubtless been better for both parties to have stayed home and planted their cabbages. We are returned here and the rising taste for gardening becomes one of the most agreeable guarantees for the repose of the world.'[1] Soulange-Bodin latterly founded the Royal Institute of Horticulture at Formont, near Paris. Wishing to combine the flowers of *Yulania liliiflora*[2] with a larger tree from the genus, in 1820, he successfully crossed the present Magnolia with *Magnolia denudata*. Announcing the hybridisation in a report on the Linnean Society of Paris he wrote:

'It is with the joy of an innocent triumph that I have the honor, sirs and dear brothers, of saying to you a word about the beautiful hybrid product that I have recently obtained in my cultures. It is a new *Magnolia*, provided by the seed, of *M. praecia*, or *yulan*, fertilized by the pollen of *M. purpurea*, or *discolor*.'[3]

The triumphant news was shared in botanical publications from London to New York, as horticulturalists eagerly awaited the arrival of *Magnolia x soulangeana* to the market. Soulange-Bodin's text on *Magnolia purpurea* refers to the old name for the present specimen, *Magnolia liliiflora*. With deep magenta-purple tepals that gradually turn pale pink towards their base and dazzling white interiors, the blooms of *liliiflora* are quite exceptional. This is fully celebrated in the present study, depicting two large flowers and three buds. The vibrant purple and pink hues are set off beside the deep green foliage, which again contrasts against the grey and black stipples of the bark. The image combines a wonderful sense of movement and vitality with an exceptional level of detailing. The minute lines running along the tepals and those used to denote the ferruginous quality of the sepals, combined with the detailing on the bark, all suggest the hand of an extremely experienced artist. Furthermore, the depiction of the plant is extremely well considered, with the flowers and leaves appearing in accurate proportion.

Fossilised remains of magnolias have been found, dating to over five million years old, during which time the plants had a wide-ranging habitat. In China, they have been cultivated for thousands of years and traditionally a magnolia presented in flower was deemed a worthy gift for an emperor.[4] Aside from the ornamental value of the plant, its bark has been used medicinally for insomnia, coughs, nausea, to dispel phlegm and to regulate Qi, or restore balance within the body. The edible flower buds may also be pickled and served with rice, or the magnificent petals infused as a tea.

For a very similar study see Royal Horticultural Society, London, Lindley Library, A/PJI/37. Magnolia purpurea' *Magnolia liliiflora*. From the album 'Plantae Icones Japonicae' formerly owned by Reginald Cory (1871-1934).

Inscribed *Magnolia purpurea* in ink, recto.

Literature:

Barrett, Rosemary, Magnolias. Firefly Books Ltd. Ontario, 2002.

Coates, Alice. Garden Shrubs and Their Histories. Simon and Schuster, New York, 1992.

Curtis, William. Botanical Magazine. Stephen Couchman, London, 1797.

Hewitt, David. The Saucer Magnolia. Growing History: The Philadelphia Historic Plants Consortium. Philadelphia, 2012. https://growinghistory.wordpress.com/2012/10/14/the-saucer-magnolia/

Kilpatrick, Jane. Gifts from the Gardens of China. Frances Lincoln Limited, London, 2007.

Knapp, Sandra. Plant Discoveries: A Botanist's Voyage Through Plant Exploration. Firefly books, New York, 2003.

Valder, Peter. The Garden Plants of China. Timber Press, 2005.

Notes:

1 See Barrett 2002, p.51.
2 A synonym of *Magnolia liliiflora*.
3 Hewitt, 2012.
4 Coates 1992, p.128.



22

A Study of a Cotton Tree, *Bombax ceiba*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on rice paper
42.5 cm high, 33cm wide

Bombax ceiba is a rapidly growing tropical tree, reaching heights of up to sixty metres tall, with a large umbrella shaped canopy. The bark of young trees features conical spines while mature specimens may develop buttresses. They are commonly known as red-silk cotton tree, Malabar silk-cotton tree and the Kapok tree. *Bombax* is derived from the Greek word *bombyx* or silk, a reference to the silk-like wool contained in the seed capsules. The trees prefer wet tropical climates and are native to Indomalaysia and China.

The palmate leaves comprise a number of leaflets radiating from the petiole. The cup-shaped flowers are extremely striking. Measuring up to twenty centimetres in diameter, their petals are a magnificent flammeous orange, and they surround a dense cluster of stamens with golden anthers. The flowers contain large quantities of nectar which can lead to intoxicated behaviours amongst birds, when they feast upon the fermented liquid. Absent in the present image, the dark brown ovoid capsules dehisce to reveal silky cotton fibres, imbedded with obovoid brown seeds. In Nepal and India, the woolly fibres are carded, spun and woven into fabric. It is also used to stuff quilts and pillows.

Bombax ceiba has a long history in China, with the tree being presented to a Han emperor during the second century BC. Today in Guangzhou, (formerly Canton), the cotton tree represents the city's official flower. The edible blossoms may be dried and infused or cooked and eaten. In Northern Thailand and India, they are added to curries and pickled, while in Southern India the immature fruits are ground into a spice known as *Marati moggu*. The young roots and leaves are also consumed in different cultures and the seeds may be ground to produce an oil for cooking. The seeds also contain saponins and may be used in the production of soap. The entire tree also has a wide range of medicinal properties. The bark and leaves are active against the bacteria *Staphylococcus aureus* and Shigella, a form of dysentery.[1] The tree also possesses anti-inflammatory, hypotensive, anti-oxidant, anti-diabetic, anti-tumour and anti-microbial properties.[2]

For a similar study see Royal Horticultural Society, London, Lindley Library, A/PJI/51. Bombax Species (*Bombax ceiba*). From the album 'Plantae Japonicae Icones'.

Literature:

Flora of China Editorial Committee. Flora of China Vol. 12 Page 300, 301. Missouri Botanical Garden Press, 2007.

Engel, David H., Phummai, Suchart. A Field Guide to Tropical Plants of Asia. Timber Press, 2002.

Mostafa N.M. β-amyrin rich Bombax ceiba leaf extract with potential neuroprotective activity against scopolamine-induced memory impairment in Rats. Records of Natural Products. 2018; 12(5):480-492. https://doi.org/10.25135/rnp.47.17.10.062

Suyogya Shah et al. Evaluation of Phytochemical Parameters, Antibacterial and anthelmintic activity of leaves and bark extracts of plant bombax ceiba. Journal of Applied Pharmaceutical Research. Volume 5, Issue 3, Year of Publication 2017, Page 38–44DOI: 10.18231/2348-0335.2017.0006

Notes:

1 Shah et al 2017, p.43.
2 Mostafa 2018, p.481.



23

A Study of a Cotton Rose Hibiscus, *Hibiscus mutabilis*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
43.7cm high, 34.2cm wide

Nestled amongst a sea of rich green palmate leaves, the resplendent flower of *Hibiscus mutabilis* is in full bloom. Traversing from left to right a chromatogram of the palest pink sublimely transcends into a rich cerise. The stem arches forth with a series of magenta-tipped buds, appearing to eagerly await their turn to flourish.

Also known as the Confederate and Cotton Rose, *Hibiscus mutabilis* is a large shrub or small tree originally from Southern China and Taiwan. The white flowers open at dawn before turning pink towards the afternoon, then a deep red by the evening, leading to the name blushing hibiscus. A further reference to this quality appears in the Chinese name *Fu Yong* or 'drunken flower', which parodies the blush created by drinking too much alcohol.[1]

Of all the species of hibiscus *H. mutabilis* appears to have been the most revered in China. During the Tang Dynasty, Chengdu in Sichuan province became synonymous with the plant, which adorned the city's walls. Traditionally in Shanghai, every month was associated with a flower deity and the tenth month was that of the cotton rose God.[2]

By 1632, the plant had arrived in the Mediterranean and around 1690 it was introduced to Britain by Lord Portland.[3] There are a number of studies of hibiscus in the John Reeves Collection at the Natural History Museum, London and a particularly interesting work at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.[4] The latter painting (see Fig. 46) depicts a virtually identical study of *H. mutabilis* to the present work, even down to the snapped petiole off the main stem and the positioning of all six buds.

As well as commissioning a local artist to work under his direction, William Kerr was tasked by Banks to buy Chinese botanical illustrations as 'the Plants Painted by the Chinese... are so exact and so little exaggerated as to be intelligible to a Botanist.'[5] There were a number of studios in Canton where artists produced exceptionally ornamental and accurate botanical paintings of local flora. These were tailored to the requirements of their western clients; however, they also drew upon traditional Chinese texts, which conveyed detailed instructions on the presentation of each species. It is possible that the current work and its 'sister' image in the Victoria and Albert Museum were produced by the same studio, around a similar date.



(Fig. 46) A Study of Cotton Rose Hibiscus, *Hibiscus mutabilis*. D.103-1890. Circa 1800-1830, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Literature:

Bailey, Kate and Charlotte Brooks. The RHS Reeves Collection: What's in a Name? The. Occasional Papers from the RHS Lindley Library, p. 56. Royal Horticultural Society, London 2018.

Goodman, Jordan. Planting the World: Joseph Banks and his Collectors: An Adventurous History of Botany. William Collins, London, 2021.

Flora of China Editorial Committee. Flora of China Vol. 12. Malvaceae, pp. 264, 286,294. Missouri Botanical Garden Press, 2008.

Kilpatrick, Jane. Gifts from the Gardens of China. Frances Lincoln Limited, London, 2007.

Valder, Peter. The Garden Plants of China. Glebe, N.S.W. Florilegium, 1999.

State Library of New South Wales. Sir Joseph Banks Papers. Series 20.34.

Notes:

1 Bailey & Brooks 2018, p.56.
2 Valder 1999, p.57.
3 Kilpatrick 2007, p.50.
4 The John Reeves Collection of Botanical Drawings from Canton, China. The Botany Library. The Natural History Museum, London.
5 See Goodman 2021, p.312.



24

A Study of a Greater Swamp Orchid, *Phaius tankervilleae*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on rice paper
44cm high, 34cm wide

This vibrant work depicts the greater swamp-orchid, also referred to as the nun's orchid, veiled orchid, the crane's head orchid, or *he ding lan* in Chinese. The species is native to Asia and the islands of the Pacific Ocean, where it grows in grasslands and damp forests. The plant was sent from China to England in 1778, for the physician and keen botanist John Fothergill, although it was his niece, Sarah Hird, who took delivery of the specimen. It was at Mrs Hird's home in Yorkshire, in May 1778 that, alongside her gardeners, she became the first person to witness the maiden flowering of *Phaius tankervilleae* in the country.[1] The binomial name, *tankervilleae* is a reference to Lady Emma Tankerville who is credited with cultivating the first greater swamp orchid ever to flower in England. Indeed, in 1788, another greater swamp orchid flowered in the Surrey greenhouse of Lady Tankerville. A tour de force, her ladyship had eleven children and defied the contemporaneous restrictions on women's education, to become an accomplished botanist herself. She also commissioned over six hundred botanical illustrations of her plants, which now form one of the largest and most important private collections at Kew.[2] Lady Emma was also a talented artist, as her friend and fellow horticulturalist Sir Joseph Banks remarked, 'Emma knows plants well and paints them exquisitely.'[3] It was also Banks who honoured her achievements with the greater swamp orchid by naming the plant *Limodorum tankervilleae* in 1788.

The present study has deep green lanceolate leaves, at the centre of which appears a stem bearing a number of resupinate flowers. The five sepals are white on the exterior and have a vivid flame orange interior. Within the labellum, whitish greys transcend into deeper mauve tones, contrasting beautifully with the rufous halo that appears to surround them. The artist's attention to line and shading within the painting is truly admirable; as the leaves rise around the central stem, one has a tangible sense of their rigidity and thickness, without requiring any familiarity with the plant itself. The work stands as testament to the rigorous training and advanced expertise of Chinese artists during this period.

Inscribed in ink lower left Bletia tankervilleae.

Literature:

Kilpatrick, Jane. Gifts from the Gardens of China. Frances Lincoln Limited, London, 2007.

Smith, Edward. The Life of Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society with some notices of his Friends and Contemporaries. London: John Lane, The Bodle Head, 1911.

Watson, June. Lady Emma Tankerville. The Northumberland Archives, 2nd November, 2021. https://www.northumberlandarchives.com/2021/11/02/lady-emma-tankerville/

Notes:

1 Kilpatrick 2007, p.88.
2 See Watson 2021.
3 Smith 1911, p.83.



25

A Study of a Crepe Ginger, *Hellenia speciosa*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on rice paper
39cm high, 33.9cm wide

A wonderful and striking composition, the crisp white flowers command our attention like symphonic trumpets, whose balletic leaves appear to dance toward a magnificent crescendo. Jubilance, animation, finesse and vibrancy typify this magnificent study of *Hellenia speciosa*.

These dramatic plants bear oblong or lance shaped leaves, that spiral outward from slender stems. The flowers emerge between green and crimson, or pure crimson bracts. Measuring up to eight centimetres wide, the magnificent trumpet-shaped blossoms are extremely delicate with crenate edges, inspiring the common name crepe ginger. In the present study, the conical stamen is a magnificent buttercup yellow, vividly contrasting against the surrounding emerald hue. Typically, however, costus species bear petaloid stamens. After the summer flowering period, the bracts remain as a number of glossy black seeds develop.

Crepe gingers favour a wet biome and are native to Subtropical and Tropical Asia, and Queensland, Australia. As well as being extremely ornamental, *Hellenia speciosa* also have medicinal actions, including anti-inflammatory, antifungal and analgesic properties.[1] Crepe Ginger also has a long history of use in Ayurvedic medicine for a wide range of conditions, including dysentery, fever, skin disorders, bronchitis and in the treatment of snake bites.[2] Recent experiments have also revealed further benefits of the plant. A 2009 study identified that an extract of the leaves could positively affect neurotransmitters in the brain to reduce stress.[3] Another project monitored the larvicidal potential of *Hellenia speciosa*, concluding that an extract of the leaves could effectively reduce juvenile mosquito populations.[4] This is extremely significant, given that mosquito borne diseases such as dengue fever, malaria, yellow fever and schistosomiasis often affect those who share the wider habitat with this extremely valuable plant.

The painting has erroneously been labelled *Hedychium*, (another member of the ginger family).

Literature:

Flora of China Editorial Committee. Flora of China Vol. 24 Page 320. Missouri Botanical Garden Press, 2008.

Muniyandi, Surendra Kumar et al. Studies on Costus speciosus Koen Alcoholic Extract for Larvicidal Activity. International Journal of Pharmacognosy and Phytochemical Research. 5(4), pp. 328-329, 2013.

Verma, Nitin and R. L. Khosa. Effect of Costus speciosusand Wedelia chinensis on Brain Neurotransmitters and Enzyme Monoamine Oxidase following Cold Immobilization Stress. Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences and Research, 1(2), pp. 22-25, 2009.

V. A. Pawar1 and P. R. Pawar. Costus speciosus: An Important Medicinal Plant. International Journal of Science and Research, Volume 3 Issue 7, July 2014. https://www.ijsr.net/archive/v3i7/MDIwMTQ4ODU=.pdf

Notes:

1 Pawarl & Pawar 2014, p.28.
2 Ibid p.29.
3 Verma & Khosa 2009, pp.22-25.
4 Muniyandi et al. 2013, pp.328-329.



26

A Study of an Indian Shot, *Canna indica*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
43.2cm high, 34.2cm wide

'If there were no other plants of handsome habit and graceful leaf available ...but these, we need not despair for they possess almost every quality the most fastidious could desire...'
William Robinson, 1868

Canna indica is a plant that has captured the imagination of botanists for centuries. Native to Central and South America, Mexico and the West Indies, it was the first species of Canna to arrive in Europe during the sixteenth century. In his 1629 work Florilegium, John Parkinson noted:

'This beautiful plant riseth up with faire greene, large, broade leaves, every one rising out of the middle of the other, and are folded together, or writhed like unto a paper Coffin (as they call it) such as Comfitmakers and Grocers use, to put in their Comfits and Spices, and being spread open, another riseth from the bottome thereof, folded in the same manner, ...as I have observed in mine owne garden. The flowers grow at the toppe of the stalke one above another, which before their opening are long, small, round, and pointed at the end, very like unto the claw of a... Sea-Crab, and of the same red or crimson colour. (sic)'[1]

During the mid-eighteenth century, Swedish naturalist Peter Osbeck (1723-1805) collected *Canna indiaca* in Guangzhou, China, although the plants had appeared in Chinese paintings around a hundred years prior to this.[2] In 1837, John Reeves (1774-1856) shipped one of the plants from Canton to Britain and during that year the Botanical Register bestowed the honour of naming the yellow flowered *canna reevesii* after him[3] (see Fig.47) 'Canna fever' really gained momentum across Europe from the mid eighteenth century, with the French rose breeder Pierre Antoine Marie Crozy (1831-1903), diverging to produce hundreds of new cultivars of the plant. Affectionately known as '*Papa Canna*,' in 1888 Crozy was awarded seventy first class certificates by the Royal Horticultural Society in London for his new Cannas.[4]

Between 1846 and 1864, botanist, landscape designer and adventurer, John Gibson worked alongside James Pennethorne (1801-1871) on the development of Battersea Park in London. As the park's first superintendent, he wanted to create something truly magnificent. He ventured to India and South Africa botanising and collecting specimens to bring home. As well as designing the lake, mounding and carriage drives, Gibson created a sub-tropical garden, the first of its kind in Britain. Planted with flourishing tree ferns, cannas and bananas, this profusion of exotic verdure must have been an astonishing spectacle. Gibson's novel and inspiring planting scheme led toward the burgeoning fashion for tropical gardens amongst the English gentry.[5]

The present study is a magnificent example of *Canna indica*, with sizeable, luscious emerald green leaves, emerging spirally from the base of the plant. Arising from the stem, the lanceolate flowers bear vivid blood-orange petals, with a soft apricot hue to their outsides. Beneath the image, '*Canna*' has been inscribed in black ink. Today, Canna's remain ever popular garden plants in Europe and frequently appear as elegant, striking and colourful border plants, gracing the flowerbeds of public parks and other municipal spaces.



(Fig. 47) Plate 919 from the John Reeves Collection of Botanical Drawings from Canton, China. Held in the Botany Library at the Natural History Museum, London.

Literature:

De l'Ecluse, Charles. Histoire des Plantes Rare Observées en Espagne. 1576.

Lindley, J. Canna reevesii. Mr. Reeve's Indian Shot. Edwards's Botanical Register. 23: t. 2004. James Ridgway and Sons Ltd. London, 1837.

Parkinson, John. Paradisi Sole; Paradisus Terrestris, 1629.

Robinson, William. The Parks, Promenades and Gardens of Paris. 1868.

Valder, Peter. The Garden Plants of China. Glebe, N.S.W. Florilegium, 1999.

Kilpatrick, Jane. Gifts from the Gardens of China. Frances Lincoln Limited, London, 2007.

Author unknown. Battersea Park. www.batterseapark.org/sub-tropical-garden.

Marsh, Dr. David. Cannas. The Gardens Trust, 20th February, 2016. https://thegardenstrust.blog/2016/02/20/cannas/

Notes:

1 Parkinson, 1629.
2 Valder 1999, p.354.
3 Lindley 1837, 23: t. 2004.
4 Marsh, 2016.
5 See www.batterseapark.org/sub-tropical-garden



27

A Study resembling Prunus, *Prunus sp.*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
40cm high, 54cm wide

The present study depicts a chestnut-brown branch, punctuated with hints of copper and bronze. The peridot hued leaves appear alongside delicate clusters of white flowers, with yellow stamens. The Chinese inscription reads *tian xing hua* which may be translated as 'Stars on the sky.' Despite this charmingly whimsical title, is does not reveal the plant's true identity. However, it does somewhat resemble a member of the *Prunus* genus.

Comprising 430 different species, Prunus is a genus of trees and shrubs which includes plums, peaches, cherries, apricots, nectarines and almonds. Consistent with the present study, their leaves are alternate, they may be sessile or petiolate (present study) and their margins may be crenate or serrate, the latter appearing in the current work. The inflorescences are predominantly white or pink with five petals and sepals and around 20-30 stamens. Although deficient in stamens, the present blossoms confer with this description.

Historically prunus has presented a challenge to botanists as Liberty Hyde Bailey noted;

'The layman may not know that the genus Prunus, to which the plums and cherries belong, is one of the hard knots to botanists. That is, the plants are widely variable, and there are few pronounced or constant marks to distinguish one type of variation from another. The numerous forms grade into each other so imperceptibly and inextricably that the genus cannot be readily broken up into species.'[1]

Many prunus species are native to China and since ancient times have been an extremely popular theme in Chinese poetry, ceramics and painting. The fruit trees also appear on clothing, furniture and wallpaper. Known as the *meihua*, plum blossom is considered one of the most cherished flowers in China. In classical landscape design it is planted alongside bamboo and pine, with the combination being referred to as the 'three friends of winter.'[2] Chinese folk traditions considered the five petals of the plum flower to symbolise the five blessings: *Xi* (joy), *Shou* (longevity), *Fu* (happiness), *Lu* (fortune) and *Cai* (wealth).

Subtle, elegant and graceful, the present work is a fine addition to the canon of prunus iconography that remains much cherished in China to this day.

The present work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.

Literature:

Bailey, Liberty Hide. Sketch of the Evolution of Our Native Fruits. London, Macmillan & co., ltd. 1898.

Flora of China Editorial Committee. Prunus. Flora of China Vol. 9 pp. 401-403. Missouri Botanical Garden Press, 2008.

Kilpatrick, Jane. Gifts from the Gardens of China. Frances Lincoln Limited, London, 2007.

Valder, Peter. The Garden Plants of China. Glebe, N.S.W. Florilegium, 1999.

Notes:

1 Bailey 1898, p.181.
2 Kilpatrick 2007, p.17.



28

A Study of a Grape Vine, *Vitis vinifera*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
41cm high, 55cm wide

The spring wind comes from the east and quickly passes,
Leaving faint ripples in the wine of the golden bowl.
The flowers fall, flake after flake, myriads together.
Before the Cask of Wine, Li Po.

From woody stems, sinuous vines emerge, bursting with fresh leaves and clusters of grapes. The immature fruits hang in small dainty clusters, with several bunches depicting filigree-like like yellow flowers. To the right, larger green fruits appear and beneath this, a fully mature dusky purple bunch weighs heavily upon its stalk. The palm shaped leaves are also presented at different life stages, from unfurled, tender, copper green shoots, to fully mature foliage in lustrous hues of emerald and jade. Amongst this, tendrils emerge from bracts and seek out in all directions for points to anchor the plant.

The practice of viticulture in China may be traced back over 7000 years. During the Xia Dynasty (2070BCE–1600BCE), the emperor Shao Kang appears as the first known wine maker in China, according to historical records.[1] The beverage itself would have been a concoction of fermented grain and fruits. The *Shi Jing* is considered to be the earliest example of a poetry anthology in China. The book comprises over 300 poems dating from the commencement of the Western Zhou Dynasty to the middle of the Spring and Autumn Period (1100BCE–600BCE) and contains the first reference to grape berries in Chinese literature.[2] The earliest poem extolling the virtues of wine made from grapes was written by Lu Ji circa 300CE. Lu celebrates imbibing wine from shimmering glass goblets at night, with his compatriots.[3]

During the Han dynasty (226BCE–220CE) Eurasian grapes entered China via the Silk Road. Following this, wine making blossomed in China, reaching its zenith during the Tang dynasty (618CE–907CE).[4] Elite members of society could now purchase white, red and rosé wines and drinking in court became commonplace. Elegant and highly ornamented rhytons inspired by Persian drinking vessels were made from gold, silver, crystal and jade. Drinking establishments burgeoned and state taxation increased towards the end of the dynasty, as wine drinking became ever more fashionable.

The present work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.

Literature:

Li, Bai and Shigeyoshi Obata. The Works of Li Po, the Chinese Poet. E.P. Dutton & Company, 1922.

Gernet, Jacques. Daily Life in China on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion, 1250–1276. H. M. Wright (Trans). Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962.

Hua Li et al. The Worlds of Wine: Old, New and Ancient. Wine Economics and Policy, Vol. 7, Issue 2, Pp. 178-182, 2018.

Kupfer. Peter. Amber Shine and Black Dragon Pearls: The History of Chinese Wine Culture in Victor H. Mair, (Ed). Sino-Platonic Papers. Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations University of Pennsylvania, No. 278 June, 2018.

Notes:

1 Hua et al 2018, 2.2.
2 Ibid.
3 Kupfer 2018, p.17.
4 Hua et al 2018, 4. Table 1.



29

A Study of a Bottle Gourd or Calabash, *Lagenaria siceraria*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
39.5cm high, 54.7cm wide



(Fig. 48) No 141. William Kerr collection of Chinese plants, Kew Royal Garden Archives, London.

A celebration of the curvilinear, this work depicts the scrolling vines and orbicular form of the calabash or bottle gourd. As the verdurous lobed leaves fan in all directions, white flowers develop along their axils. Pairs of tendrils, like coiled springs, explore their surroundings, while two gourds hang down from robust stems. The smallest bears a dried flower at the tip, while the largest displays the magnificent shape of a mature gourd. Beside this, segments of the fruit appear with detailed studies of the flowering parts. Growing up to a metre in length, the bitter or sweet tasting fruits may be eaten alongside the leaves, flowers, shoots and dried seeds.

In Asia, bottle gourds have been discovered at archaeological sites dating to approximately 8000–9000 B.P.[1] Extraordinarily versatile, the dried fruit has been used to make a wide variety of containers, as well as utensils and pipes. During the Japanese Edo period (1603-1867), Samurai warriors used dried calabash as containers for water and wine. They have also been utilised to construct musical instruments such as the flute-like *hulusi* in China, the *sitar* in India and the *kora* in west Africa.

Known as the *húlu* in China, the bottle gourd symbolised the eight immortals, particularly the healer Li Tieguai, whose gourd was said to contain an infinite supply of medicine. The fruit is also associated with the deity Shouxing, the god of longevity.[2] Producing a great number of seeds, bottle gourds became synonymous with fertility and remain popular with young families today.

In ancient China, the shape of the calabash was adopted for coins and charms, due to its auspicious symbolism. The plants have also been widely utilised for their aesthetic versatility. Grown in carved earthen moulds, decorative motifs would imprint upon the surface of the fruit. During the Ming Dynasty (221-206 BC), the ancient art of pyrography was applied to gourds. The technique involved burning intricate designs onto the dried fruits. Today in the Dongcheng District of Beijing, the art of gourd pyrography has been protected as an important element of Chinese cultural heritage.

Although this painting does not portray *Lagenaria siceraria*, it does merit comparison with the present image. The depiction of the fruit, and the illustration of the sliced cross-section are very similar. Furthermore, the vine itself is closely rendered in both compositions.

The present work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.

Literature:

Erickson, D.L. et al. An Asian origin for a 10,000-year-old domesticated plant in the Americas. Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A. 2005 Dec 20;102(51):18315-20. doi: 10.1073/pnas.0509279102. Epub 2005 Dec 13. PMID: 16352716; PMCID: PMC1311910.

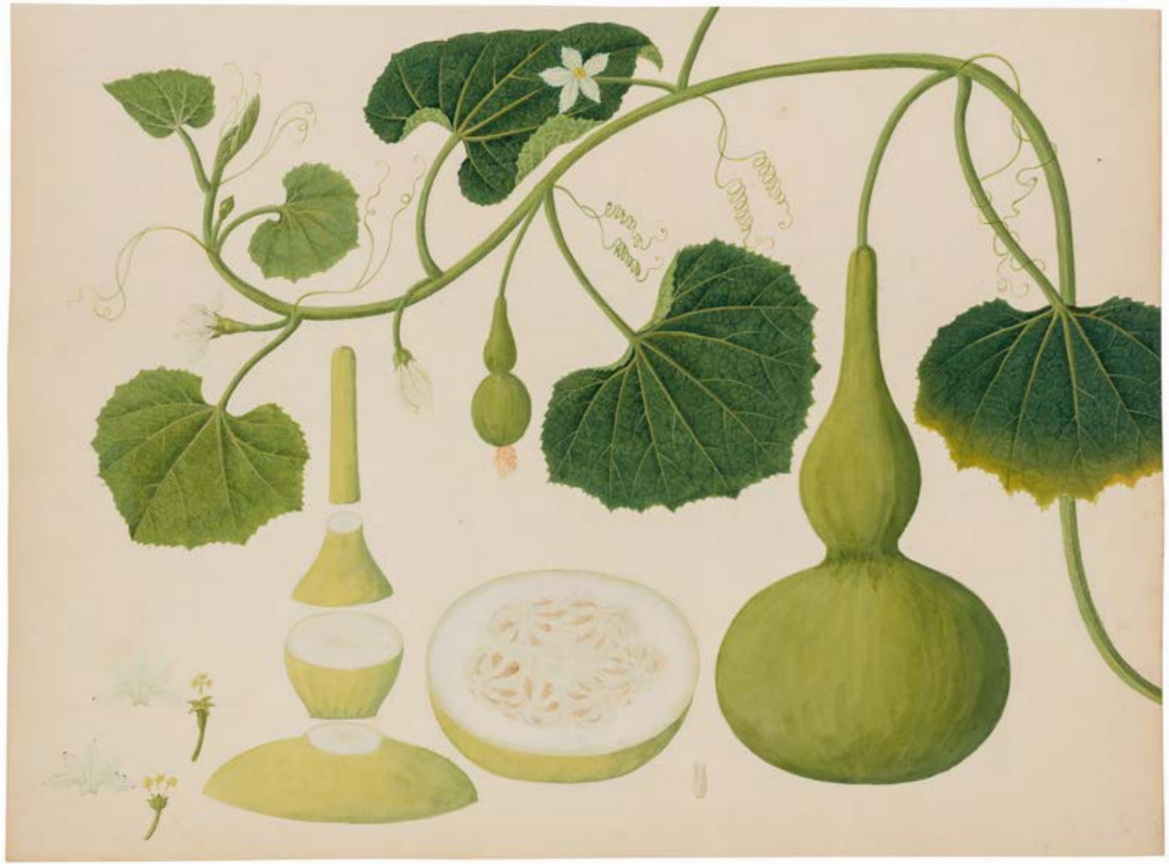
Ho, Kwok Man. The Eight Immortals of Taoism: Legends and Fables of Popular Taoism. Translated and edited by Joanne O'Brien. New York: Penguin Books, 1990. pp. 93–94.

Knapp, Ronald G. China's Living Houses: Folk Beliefs, Symbols, and Household Ornamentation. University of Hawai'i Press, 1999.

Xifan, Li. A General History of Chinese Art, Qing Dynasty. De Gruyter, Berlin, 2022.

Notes:

1 Erickson et al. 2005, pp.18315-18320.
2 Ho 1990, pp.93-94.



30

A Study of a Watermelon, *Citrullus lanatus*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
40.7cm high, 54cm wide

A sinuous vine with branching tendrils, pinnately lobed leaves and vivid yellow stellate flowers, undulates across the page. Stemming from this, a large rotund watermelon fruit, whose mottled skin echoes the exquisite natural colouration of agates and jade. In the foreground, a second fruit has been cut in half to reveal the succulent pink flesh and dense clusters of glistening black seeds.

Originating from West Africa, ancient cultivars of watermelon species have been discovered in the Nile Valley, dating back to the second millennium BC, and watermelon seeds were found in the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamun (c.1341 BC- c.1323 BC).[1] Historically, watermelons were an extremely valuable commodity. Due to their high-water content, they were an important source of hydration during long journeys in hot, arid climates.

Watermelon seeds are thought to have traversed the Gobi Desert into China via the nomadic Khitan people, who established the Liao Empire (907–1125).[2] An Inner Mongolian tomb mural dating from this period, depicting a nobleman eating a watermelon, is considered to be one of the earliest depictions of a watermelon in Chinese art.

In 1143, after his release from detention in the north, the Southern Song envoy Hong Hao brought watermelon seeds back with him, whereupon they were propagated in the imperial nursery garden and the Yangtze-Huaihe River basin. During the reign of Emperor Shizong of Jin (1161-1189), polymath Fan Chengda found watermelon to be 'juicy and light tasting', he also noted that 'originally it was only planted in the north and nowadays it can be found everywhere to the south of the Yellow River.'[3]

A love of watermelons continued with the Ming Emperor Jiajing (r.1521 to 1567) patronising an imperial melon garden. A green glaze evoking the colour of watermelon skin also gained upmost popularity amongst ceramicists during the Jiajing era.

Presently, there are over 1,000 cultivars of watermelon, with China supplying the majority of international demand. The world's first watermelon museum, located in Panggezhuang Town, Beijing also attests to the nation's enduring love of this delightfully indulgent fruit.

For two extremely similar studies depicting a large watermelon, with a half segment in front of it see: NHD42/1, Watermelon c.1808, British Library, Prints and Drawings Room and Album of Chinese Watercolours of Asian fruits, c.1798-1810 and Rare-Folio QK357.5.A85. F.15 (seq. 35), Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington DC.

The present work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.

Literature:

Author unknown. China Archaeology and Art Digest. Hong Kong: Art Text (HK) Limited, 1999.

Buell, Paul D. E.N. Anderson, Montserrat de Pablo Moya, and Moldir Oskenbay. Crossroads of Cuisine: The Eurasian Heartland, the Silk Roads and Food. Brill, 2020.

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Zohary et al. Domestication of Plants in the Old World: The Origin and Spread of Domesticated Plants in Southwest Asia, Europe, and the Mediterranean Basin. OUP, Oxford, 2012.

Notes:

1 Zohary et al 2012, p.154.
2 Buell et al 2020.
3 Ruixi 2017, p.105.



31

A Study of a Pineapple, *Ananas comosus*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
40.5cm high, 55cm wide

A sculptural delight bestowing the sweetest of flavours, the pineapple is undoubtedly one of the most celebrated tropical fruits. Indigenous to South America, the plants were introduced to Europe during the seventeenth century. After much experimentation, they were cultivated in 'pineries', temperate glasshouses that cost vast sums to heat. With individual fruits selling for thousands of pounds, they became synonymous with luxury and extreme wealth. So great was their status that many pineapples were not consumed but hired as luxury dinner party centre pieces. As the fruits travelled to different venues, they were accompanied by a security team and theft of a pineapple could result in deportation.

In *Theatrum Botanicum*, Royal Botanist to Charles I, John Parkinson, describes the fruit as 'scaly like an Artichoke at the first view, but more like to a cone of the Pine tree, which we call a pineapple for the forme... being so sweete in smell... tasting... as if Wine, Rosewater and Sugar were mixed together.'[1] King Charles II so revered the pineapple that he appears in a portrait being presented the fruit by John Rose, the Royal Gardener. Pineapple fervour also entered the architectural realm, with motifs of the fruits appearing as decorative features on grand buildings. A magnificent example of this remains in Scotland to this day. In 1761, the Earl of Dunmore built two hothouses to contain his pineapple pits; heated beds which enabled him to experiment with growing tropical fruit and vegetables. The central feature of the building was an enormous stone pineapple, with fantastically carved fruitlets and an imposing, spiked crown. The building was gifted to his wife Charlotte and commanded extensive views across the Dunmore Park Estate. It is now considered to be one of the greatest follies in the United Kingdom.

Sir Joseph Banks also had a pinery built at his estate in Middlesex. It was designed by botanist and Kew superintendent, William Townsend Aiton (1766-1849). A contemporary description of the building notes; 'A Pinery built for Sir Joseph Banks at Spring Grove, Smallbury Green, Middlesex.

This pinery is heated by two fires, one at each end; there is no pathway in front of the pit, which is separated from the front flue by a cavity. The flue is above ground all around. The surface of the pit forms an inclination nearly similar to that of the roof. Iron columns, placed on the wall of the pine pit, support each alternate rafter, and arches of iron between each column support the intermediate ones. A fruit room is formed behind the pine-house, which is fitted up with shelves, drawers, and compartments for each day of the week, and for placing and keeping the fruit when gathered. This pinery was designed by W.T. Aiton, Esq.'[2]

Known as a sorosis, a pineapple develops as its flowers turn to fruitlets, which fuse and become the complete fruit. The hexagons on the rind denote the individual 'eyes' or fruitlets, as these mature the crown grows above the fruit. The present work depicts the fruit with an astounding mastery of line, as minute brushstrokes capture the intricate details of the leaves, rind and sepals. Not only has the artist depicted the fruit with supreme refinement, the greatest of the leaves undulates across the page with profound elegance. A stroke of compositional mastery, it serves to demarcate the flowering pineapple and segment from the larger specimen, achieving a sense of lilting harmony as it traverses the paper. Hailing from a great legacy of botanical painterly tradition, the artist who produced this work has created not merely a scientifically accurate botanical study, but an exquisite painting, imbued with their own sense of visual poetry.

The present work is on I. Taylor watermarked paper.

Literature:

Beauman, Francesca. The Pineapple: King of Fruits. Chatto & Windus, London, 2005.

Parkinson, John. Theatrum Botanicum. Tho Cotes, 1640.

Collins, JL. The Pineapple: Botany, Cultivation and Utilization. Leonard Hill Ltd, London, 1960.

Tod, George. Plans, Elevations and Sections, of Hot-houses, Green-houses, an Aquarium, Conservatories, &c., Recently Built in Different Parts of England, for Various Noblemen and Gentlemen. J. Taylor, London, 1823.

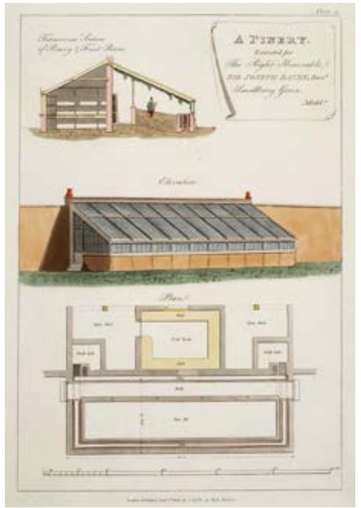
Woods, M and Warren, A. Glass Houses: A History of Greenhouses, Orangeries and Conservatories. Aurum Press, London, 1990.

Notes:

1 Parkinson 1626, Ch.85.
2 See George 1823, p.15.



(Fig. 49) The Pineapple, Dunmore Estate, Stirlingshire, Scotland.
©Christina Hales



(Fig. 50) Plate XI. A pinery. Executed for the Right Honourable Sir Joseph Banks, Bart. Smallbury Green, Middx.





III. Botanical Illustrations with Butterflies

‘Chinese artists work to produce that extreme fineness of detail, which is so conspicuous in the best specimens of these drawings. The fine down or rather feathers on the back of a butterfly are often so perfect, that it would appear almost as if they had been counted for the purpose.’

Downing, 1838



32

A Study of a Sunflower, *Helianthus annuus*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
44cm high, 34.5cm wide

Joy abounds in this study of a sunflower in full bloom. The vivid yellow of the large flowerheads exquisitely contrasts with the striking monochrome patternation ornamenting the wings of an approaching butterfly. Arching its proboscis in anticipation, another butterfly flutters towards the inflorescence.

Native to North America, sunflowers were used domestically by American Indians around three thousand BC. The seed was ground into flour for bread or the meal combined with vegetables. The oil was also extracted for use in baking. The binomial name, *Helianthus annus* derives from the Greek, *helios* (sun) and *anthos* (flower), while *annuus* refers to the Latin for annual. A Chinese text of 1621 mentions sunflowers as *Zhang-ju* or big chrysanthemum, although it is likely they were introduced prior to this.[1] During the sixteenth century, Spanish explorers introduced the plants to Western Europe. This coincided with the period's aesthetic revolution and publication of florilegia; lavishly illustrated books celebrating the ornamental qualities of plants.[2] In the eighteenth century, the eminent naturalist Carl Linnaeus was notably taken by the sunflower when he remarked 'Who can see this plant in flower, whose great golden blossoms send out rays in every direction from the circular disk, without admiring the handsome flower modelled on the sun's shape?'[3]

Notably, the sunflower in the present work bears an almost identical likeness to a study of the same plant in the John Reeves Collection (see Fig.51, right). Both specimens are identical in terms of the shape and positioning of the stem, leaves, buds and flowers. The proportions are the same, and both include the same damaged petiole towards the base of the stem. There is some variation in the presentation of the disc florets in the centre of the flowerhead, and the Reeves sunflower does not feature any insects. Despite this, there is a clear relationship between the two paintings.

Prior to John Reeves leaving for Canton in 1812, he had a set of copies made of Kerr's botanical studies, held in the East India House museum. Reeves would have wished to avoid obtaining the same plants as Kerr and the paintings would help with this. Upon his homecoming in 1816, the works were returned. Prior to Reeves returning to China early the following year, he asked to copy a further set of the drawings. He was granted permission although appears to have taken the originals once more.[4] This may explain why there is such great similarity between the present sunflower and that in the Reeves Collection.

The Cantonese inscription reads *zhao ri kui* or sunflower. 'Sunflower' is also written in black ink and below this again in pencil.



(Fig. 51) *Hellanthus annus*, Sunflower, c. 1818-1831. The John Reeves Collection, The Natural History Museum, London.

Literature:

Schneiter, Albert A. ed. Sunflower Technology and Production. The American Society of Agronomy No. 35, pp. 1-19. 1997.

Bailey, Kate. John Reeves Pioneering Collector of Chinese Plants and Botanical Art. ACC Art Books Ltd in association with The Royal Horticultural Society, 2019.

Blunt, Wilfrid and William T. Stearn. The Art of Botanical Illustration. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors' Club Ltd. 1994.

Gong-She, Liu & Alain Bonjean. History, Production and Perspectives of Sunflower in China. Agrimony 439. International Sunflower Association. https://www.isasunflower.org/fileadmin/documents/aProceedings/14thISC1996-1/Agronomy1996/AGRONOMY439.pdf

Hanson, Kristan M. Sunflower: Knowledge, Myth, and Meaning. Dumbarton Oaks, Plant Humanities, 2022.

Linnaeus, Carl. Critica Botanica. Lugduni Batavorum: Apud Conradum Wishoff, 1737.

Magee, Judith. Chinese Art and the Reeves Collection. Natural History Museum, London, 2013.

Notes:

1 Gong-She & Bonjean, p. 440.
2 See Hanson 2022.
3 Linnaeus 1737, p. 97.
4 See Bailey 2019, p.107.



33

A Study of a Pink and White Hibiscus, *Hibiscus sp.*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
44cm high, 34cm wide

The attractive study depicts a magnificent hibiscus whose pink-edged white petals evoke a confectionary charm. The unashamedly overt staminal columns perform their role in a supreme fashion, as the flowers attract a great variety of insects. Large, vivid green palmate leaves contrast with the blossoms exquisitely and alongside the gently bowing buds, they provide a subtle air of movement to the overall composition.

In the lower left, the Chinese inscription reads *fu rong hua*, or cotton rose, this is a common name for *H. mutabilis*, traditionally the most popular member of the hibiscus family in China. The cotton rose is celebrated for its flowers, which turn from white to pink throughout the course of the day, before fading as night encroaches. Depictions of the plants occur in the *Xuanhe Huapu*, a Song dynasty palace catalogue dated 1120, which detailed paintings owned by Emperor Huizong (r. 1100–1125).[1] From this point, the cotton rose emerges as a common theme in Chinese painting, although it is the double flower which takes precedence over the single, as depicted in the present work. The five lobed leaves of the current illustration do correspond to those of *H. mutabilis*, although they are not unique to the species. Furthermore, there are around 200 hundred species of hibiscus, therefore it may be pertinent to refrain from attempting a definitive categorisation.

The painting is certainly a fine demonstration of artistic prowess; from the detailed stippling upon the bark to the minutely observed pistil, and the exquisitely rich colouration, the work is extremely accomplished. Combining all these elements, the painting triumphs as a floriferous delight which maintains a timeless charm.

Literature:

Flora of China Editorial Committee. Flora of China Vol. 12. Malvaceae, pp. 264, 286,294. Missouri Botanical Garden Press, 2008.

McNair, Amy. Xuanhe Catalogue of Paintings. Cornell University Press, 2019.

Valder, Peter. The Garden Plants of China. Glebe, N.S.W. Florilegium, 1999.

Notes:

1 McNair, 2019.



34

A Study of a Lilac Coloured Hibiscus, *Hibiscus sp.*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
44cm high, 34.3cm wide

The large yet delicate blooms of this hibiscus comprise pale lilac and violet-tinged petals, each one appearing to flutter as though carried by the morning breeze. Peppered with numerous dainty yellow stamens, a long pistil adorns each blossom like a filigree crown. The glossy, three-lobed leaves have serrate margins and are borne from silvery stems. The scene is further adorned with two black and white butterflies, one with iridescent lapis spots and a flame-orange and black beetle, who keenly inspects an unopened bud.

A member of the Malvaceae or mallow family, the name hibiscus derives from the word *ibískos*, used by the Greek herbalist Dioscorides (c. 40–90 AD) to describe *Althaea officinalis*. Comprising herbaceous annuals and perennials, shrubs and small trees, the plants are native to a wide variety of temperate tropical and subtropical regions across the globe.

Appearing in the lower left of the present work, the Chinese inscription reads *zi fo sang* or purple shoe black plant. A number of hibiscus species were given the same name during this period, (see No.35, p.96), as when crushed they produce a purplish-black dye. Murray noted this practice during his time in China;

'Several species of Hibiscus are cultivated as ornamental plants. The petals of H. Rosa Sinensis are employed by the Chinese to prepare a black dye, with which they not only stain their eyebrows, but also polish their shoes; and the mucilage extracted from the roots of H. manihot is used by them as size. The seed-vessel of H. ochra is eatable; its flavour is like that of white of egg.'[1]

Today the plant is still used as a hair dye in various countries and a shampoo can be made from the leaves. The flowers are pickled in China and dried for tea and the leaves are eaten raw when young, or cooked as they mature. In Chinese medicine, the flowers are used to clear damp-heat within the body and to cool the blood. A recent study examining the physiological effects and human health benefits of *Hibiscus sabdariffa* concluded;

'Significant evidence indicated that consuming decoctions, infusions, beverages, and capsules/pills of HS calyxes exert physiological and beneficial health effects in humans, exhibiting antihypertensive, hypoglycemic, lipid-lowering, antianemic, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, anti-xerostomic, and diuretic properties; moreover, HS could be used as an adjuvant to control or reduce body weight.'[2]

This serves as pertinent reminder of the value of botanical illustrations, such as the present work. Not only was the painting a necessary scientific document when it was first painted, today it provides an important record of the great variety of the hibiscus genus. As we continue to unveil the vast medicinal potential of the botanical world, at a time of ecological decline, these studies appear to gain a renewed status.

Literature:

Coates, Alice. Garden Shrubs and Their Histories. Simon and Schuster, New York, 1992.

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Kilpatrick, Jane. Gifts from the Gardens of China. Frances Lincoln Limited, London, 2007.

Montalvo-González, E. et al. Physiological Effects and Human Health Benefits of *Hibiscus sabdariffa*: A Review of Clinical Trials. Pharmaceuticals (Basel). 2022 Apr 12;15(4):464. doi: 10.3390/ph15040464. PMID: 35455462; PMCID: PMC9033014 https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9033014/

Murray, Hugh et al. An Historical and Descriptive Account of China. Vol 3, p. 366. Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1836.

Valder, Peter. The Garden Plants of China. Glebe, N.S.W. Florilegium, 1999.

Notes:

1 Murray, Hugh et al. 1836, Vol 3, p.366.
2 Montalvo-González et al, 2022.



35

A Study of a Cerise Hibiscus, *Hibiscus syriacus*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
44cm high, 34cm wide

A pair of exquisite butterflies flutter towards the elegant *Hibiscus syriacus*, their velvety jet black wings punctuated with shimmering, electric blue spots. Underneath, a further winged insect approaches the plant with a sense of purpose and determination. Their prize, the sumptuous, puce double flowers appear to nod in anticipation, as the pollinators hone in. Around the three principal blooms, a series of buds await their turn to adorn the plant. The tri-lobed, coarsely toothed leaves are a rich olive green, with hints of yellow. Appearing alternately along the branch, they swish and swoon in all manner of directions.

Also known as rose of Sharon and rose of Althea, *H. syriacus* are deciduous shrubs, or small trees, with mauve, white or cerise single, semi-double, or double flowers. First published in 1753 by Carl Linnaeus in Species Plantarum[1] the binomial name stems from the erroneous belief that the plants came from Syria, whereas they are in fact native to China and India.[2]

The Scottish botanist Robert Fortune (1812-1880) described seeing *H. syriacus* whilst visiting the Zhoushan Archipelago, off the northern coast of Zhejiang province, in eastern China. Fortune's account was referenced by the Royal Horticultural Society in 1853; 'This traveller found it forming a shrub eight to twelve feet high, with light "blue" flowers, in the hedges and on hill-sides on Poo-too-san, and other islands.'[3] The society had grown the plant from seed, provided by John Reeves, noting that 'when growing in a stove ... it forms a very handsome shrub flowering in July and August.'[4]

Today *Hibiscus syriacus* is an extremely popular shrub in Britain. The species may be grown as a hedge, or pruned into well-shaped individual plants. *H.syriacus* is also frequently utilised to provide a welcome burst of colour to late summer gardens.

Appearing in the lower left in the present work, the Chinese inscription reads *shuang tuo fo sang* or shoe black plant. (See No.34, p.94, A Study of a Lilac Hibiscus for further information regarding this).

Literature:

Coates, Alice. Garden Shrubs and Their Histories. Simon and Schuster, New York, 1992.

Kilpatrick, Jane. Gifts from the Gardens of China. Frances Lincoln Limited, London, 2007.

Linnaeus, Carl. Hibiscus syriacus. Species Plantarum 2: 695. 1753.

Valder, Peter. The Garden Plants of China. Glebe, N.S.W. Florilegium, 1999.

The Journal of Royal Horticultural Society, Vol VIII London, 1853.

Notes:

1 Linnaeus 2: 695.
2 Coates 1992, p.105.
3 See RHS VIII 1853, p.29.
4 Ibid.



36

A Study of Wintersweet, *Chimonanthus praecox*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
44cm high, 34.5cm wide

From seemingly dormant branches, sulphur-yellow blossoms with purplish red interiors burst open with a joyful air. Their sweet, spiced perfume is known to permeate widely across the frost-tinged landscapes of remote Southern Chinese villages. Following the twelfth month of the lunar year, wintersweet heralds the beginning of a new year with aromatic profusion. Villagers eagerly gather the woody stems in great wicker baskets, before separating them into bunches and selling them in local markets.

Also known as Japanese allspice and *là méi* in Chinese, *Chimonanthus praecox* is a deciduous shrub or small tree in the Calycanthaceae family. The ovate-elliptical leaves typically occur after the flowering period, although they appear together in the present study, for the purpose of identification. The waxy flowers comprise around fifteen vivid yellow tepals which deepen to a rich claret in the centre.

Recording in his 1643 work, *Relatione della grande monarchia della Cina* that the plant flowers in winter, the Jesuit, Alvaro de Semedo, is believed to be the first European to have written about wintersweet.[1]

In 1766, the 6th Earl of Coventry, George William Coventry (1722-1809) took delivery of England's first wintersweet from China. It was planted in the conservatory at Croome Court, his estate in Worcestershire. Tended to with great care, by 1779 it had grown into a sixteen-foot-high shrub. Delighted by the specimen he noted in a letter of that year that the plant 'surpasses all description, it is covered with blossoms from top to bottom and the fragrance of it may be perceived at the distance of fifty yards from the conservatory.'[2] This account was included in the entry for wintersweet, then called Japan all-spice, in Botanical Magazine, 1799. The illustration (Fig. 52) depicts a plant grown by a London nurseryman, which descended from the Earl's shrub at Croome Court.



(Fig. 52) No. 466, Japan All-Spice, Calycanthus Praecox. Botanical Magazine, Vol. 13, 1799.

Literature:

Curtis, William. Botanical Magazine. Vol 13. London 1799.

Peter Valder. The Garden Plants of China. Timber Press, 2005.

Jane Kilpatrick. Gifts from the Gardens of China, Frances Lincoln Limited, London 2007.

Semedo, Álvaro. Relatione della Grande Monarchia della Cina. 1643.

Notes:

1 See Valder 2005, p.18.
2 Curtis, Botanical Magazine 1799, vol. 13. No. 466.



37

A Study of a White Rose, *Rosa cultivar*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
42.2 cm high, 34cm wide

This charming study portrays the branch of a rose bush in various stages of bloom. The white petals transcend to richer creamy tones, as they gather within the clasp of the sepals. Buff coloured areas of shading create a sense of movement around them and provide depth. Nestled within the heart of the petals, the pale-yellow stamens compliment the overall soft and subtle colour palette. The leaves appear in a natural, sinuous manner as they twist and turn away from the branches. Their toothed leaflets have been individually demarcated with extremely fine detail.

Careful attention has been paid to show the flowers from the front and reverse, as well as the plant in bud. On the lowest flower, the sepals and stamens are revealed, as two remaining petals are about to fall to the ground. This educational quality reminds the viewer that these paintings were of scientific interest and yet their naturalistic aesthetic results in them being far removed from lifeless academic records.

Rose cultivation was established in China over 5000 years ago, with many species hailing from the provinces of the southwest. The plants themselves symbolise longevity and eternal spring, while white roses are associated with peace. Floral painting, *huahui*, originated in China around 4000 BC, with its earliest incarnations appearing in Buddhist art. During the Tang dynasty (618-907), it became an established art form, as painters began to focus on depicting the true spirit of a plant. With its natural and fluid painterly technique, the present study appears to combine this evocation of spirit, with nineteenth century interests in the recording of botanical subjects. The result is a triumph of the academic and the aesthetic, merged together with scholarly precision and true sense of artistic prowess.

Aside from the insects, the present image is virtually an exact likeness to this study of a white rose in the John Reeves Collection, at the Natural History Museum, London, (see Fig. 53, right). Given the similarity of the two paintings, one wonders whether Reeves visited the same studio as Kerr, or whether this may have been one of the Kerr paintings that was copied for Reeves.[1]

Literature:

Rix, Martyn. The Golden Age of Botanical Art. Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, London, 2012.

Magee, Judith. Chinese Art and the Reeves Collection. Natural History Museum, London, 2013.

Valder, Peter. The Garden Plants of China. Glebe, N.S.W. Florilegium, 1999.

Notes:

1 No.34, p.90 A Study of a Sunflower regarding this.



(Fig. 53) Plate 430. Rosa Cultivar, c.1812-183, the John Reeves Collection. Botany Library at the Natural History Museum, London.



38

A Study of a Sweet Osmanthus, *Osmanthus fragrans*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
44cm high, 34.5cm wide

With two serene lakes, enclosed by verdurous needle-shaped limestone pinnacles, Guilin in southern China is reputed to possess the finest scenery under heaven. In autumn, the city is infused with the heady aroma of osmanthus blossom, as the trees grow prolifically throughout the region. Guilin also translates as 'forest of sweet osmanthus', attesting to the plant's enduring popularity amongst the town's citizens.[1]

Known as *guihua*, osmanthus flowers have been employed in Chinese cuisine and medicine for over two thousand years. Today, they are used to infuse deserts, jam, congee, wine and tea. Medicinally, the plant is valued as a remedy for dysentery, asthma, metrorrhagia and hepatitis. Extracts of the flower have also been shown to produce anti-inflammatory, antioxidant and cytotoxic effects in the treatment of prostate cancer.[2] With exquisite apricot notes, osmanthus flowers are also rich in antioxidants. They have been used in cosmetic products for their moisturising and rejuvenating properties.

The present study depicts a pale grey stem, with waxy green leaves, bearing serrated margins. Small clusters of enchanting lemon-yellow flowers enliven the composition, as do the insects drawn to their scent. Two butterflies circle the plant as a rufous winged insect approaches a particular floral spray. These extremely finely painted and charming additions form part of a tradition of botanical illustration, dating back to the Song dynasty (960-1279), whereby insects appeared alongside flower blossoms.

Gui hua, or sweet osmanthus, appears in Chinese characters, beside which is written Olea fragrans.

Literature:

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Hu, Shiu-ying. Food Plants of China. Osmanthus. The Chinese University Press, Hong Kong. 2005.

Notes:

1 Hu 2005, p.76.
2 Huang et al. 2023.



39

A Study of a Tea Flower, *Camellia sinensis*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
44cm high, 34.3 cm wide

'There are few subjects connected with the vegetable kingdom which have attracted such a large share of public notice as the tea-plant of China.'
Robert Fortune, 1847

According to legend, in 28 BC, the mythical Chinese Emperor Shennong was sitting at the foot of a tree when some leaves fell into his cup of hot water. During the infusion, the water turned a pleasant green and Shennong, who had a masterful knowledge of poisonous and medicinal plants, decided to try the drink. Impressed by the aromatic and uplifting properties, he extolled the virtues of the plant to his ministers. The story of tea had begun.

Originally, the leaves of *Camellia sinensis* were predominantly valued for their medicinal properties. However, during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), drinking tea as a beverage gained popularity. Small briquettes of powdered tea were infused in hot water, the ritual of which bore a tradition of tea ceremonies among Chinese elites. Exports of tea spread to Japan, Korea and Vietnam. Apart from the Himalayas, tea was primarily considered a medicinal drink in India, until the mid 1800s. In 1652, tea was introduced to the United Kingdom; until then water had to be boiled to avoid diseases and was the primary beverage alongside beer. Tea became an instant success, with great numbers of wealthy Britons descending upon tea-houses to enjoy the restorative and medicinal beverage.

From the seventeenth century, the Chinese tea trade was flourishing as more nations adopted the drink. Not only did China hold a monopoly on selling tea, they also retained vital information about its cultivation. British merchants were eager to understand the mysteries of tea production and Robert Fortune (1812-1880), was tasked with unearthing the secrets. In 1848, the Horticultural Society and British East India Company tasked Fortune with exploring the interior of China. Fortune immersed himself in the task, embracing Chinese dress and hiring a local guide. The two men traveled to the Wu Yi Shan hills, where they visited a green tea factory. Proving to be of great importance, Fortune discovered that, unlike previously thought, green and black tea came from the same plant, however their distinction lay in the production process. He also learnt a great deal about the requirements and husbandry needed to successfully grow, harvest and importantly, how to produce tea. Subsequently, Fortune managed to smuggle a number of tea plants onto a junk, with their final destination being Darjeeling, India.[1]

Today, tea is the second most widely drunk beverage in the world after water, and 165 million cups of tea are drunk in Britain each day.[2] The present study depicts spirally arranged glossy leaves with toothed margins, borne on grey branchlets. Amongst this, a number of emerald green, rounded-cuneate seeds appear, as well as three flowers, two of which remain in bud. The sole blooming flower has five white petals, surrounding a dense cluster of golden stamens. A resplendent pair of butterflies and a sapphire dragonfly all appear to make their way towards the central flower and claim their prize.

Lower left, the Chinese inscription reads *cha ye hua* or tea tree flower.

Literature:

Fortune, Robert. Three Years' Wanderings in the Northern Provinces of China. John Murray, London, 1847.

Hobhouse, H. Seeds of Change: Six plants that transformed mankind. London & Basingstoke: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1999.

Macfarlane, A. & Macfarlane, I. Green Gold. London, Edbury Press, 2003.

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Rose, Sarah. For All the Tea in China: How England Stole the World's Favourite Drink and Changed History. Penguin, Random House, 2010.

Willson, K. C., & Clifford, M. N. Tea: Cultivation to Consumption. London: Chapman & Hall, 1992.

Notes:

1 See Rose, 2010.
2 Macfarlane & Macfarlane 2004, p.32.



40

A Study of a Peach, *Prunus persica*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on rice paper
43cm high, 34.3cm wide

This delightful study encapsulates the rarefied beauty and elegant form of a flowering peach. Appearing beside one another, the two branches delight the viewer with malachite greens and a multitude of pink hues. The stellate flowers comprise five soft pink petals, whose radiating stamens appear nimbus-like to adorn each blossom. The fine, wispy, lanceolate leaves seem to be bursting into life, as they seek out the initial warmth of spring. A pair of butterflies further effuse the study with the jubilance of the season.

Originally thought to hail from Persia, peaches were known as Persian apples to the Ancient Romans. The English noun is a derivative of the French word *pêche*. The trees however are native to China, with the first domesticated varieties being cultivated in the Eastern province of Zhejiang 7,500 years ago.[1] An enduring feature in Chinese culture, the peach has appeared in art, poetry, mythology and festivities. Within ancient traditions, peach wood was considered to ward off evil spirits and was utilised to carve protective door guardians.

In ancient Daoist mythology, the Queen Mother of the West, Xiwangmu, presides over life, death, health and longevity. Residing in the Kunlun Mountains, her ancient peach tree was considered to be the axis joining heaven and earth. The tree would only fruit every three thousand years, an occasion celebrated by a lavish banquet, wherein those who ate the peaches were granted immortality.[2] Frequently appearing in Chinese art, Xiwangmu is often portrayed with a tiger's teeth and a leopard's tail, wearing a headdress adorned with peaches.

During the Song dynasty (960-1279 AD), attractive cultivars were bred with semi-double and double flowers, comprising pink, white and red flecked petals.[3] Flat peaches were also grown which are considered by some to be the original peaches of immortality. The third month of the Chinese lunar calendar is associated with peach trees, and they represent longevity and good fortune during New Year celebrations. Today, peaches continue to be extremely popular and China is the world's largest producer of the fruits.

In 1787, the Scottish surgeon living in Canton, Alexander Duncan was tasked by Joseph Banks with sending local plants back to England. One of the specimens he sent to Banks was the flat peach.[4] Banks must have had a particular fondness for the fruit; of all the hundreds of illustrations he commissioned, it is the peach he chose to signify his botanical endeavours in a portrait commissioned for the Royal Society (See Fig.1, p.4) Latterly becoming the Royal Horticultural Society, Banks was president for forty-two years, until his death in 1820. This remains the longest serving presidential term in the history of the organisation.

Lower left, the Cantonese inscription reads *tao hua* (peach flower).

For a comparable image see no. 496. 'Flowering Peach' *Prunus persica*, Canton 1795-1820. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Literature:

Cahill, Suzanne E. Transcendence and Divine Passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1993.

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Notes:

1 Zheng Y, et al. 2014.
2 Valder 1999, p.110.
3 Kilpatrick 2007, p.15.
4 Ibid, p.16.



41

A Study of a Peanut, *Arachis hypogaea*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on rice paper
41cm high, 33.5cm wide

This informative and lively study depicts a peanut or groundnut plant, beside which a pair of butterflies engage in an animated tussle, most likely for access to the buttercup yellow flowers.

Peanuts are herbaceous annuals which can grow up to half a metre tall. Classified as legumes, they are not true nuts. Originating from South America, Peruvian remains of the pods have been dated to approximately 7,600 years ago. Found in the environs of the Ñanchoc people, typically the plants did not grow in that region, implying they were already domesticated and brought to the area via traders.[1]

The plants have compound, pinnate leaves, comprising four oval leaflets. As night falls and temperatures drop, peanut leaves curl inward and 'sleep'. Other nyctinastic legumes include peas, beans, vetch and clover. Borne in axillary clusters, the flowers are typical of the pea family. Measuring up to four centimetres across, they are a vivid yellow with orange-red veining. The flowers only last for one day, during which time they self-pollinate and the peduncle or peg grows downward into the soil. During this process of geocarpy, the seed or 'nut' develops underground, protected by the seed coat and shell. This characteristic is unusual amongst legumes and resulted in the binomial name *hypogaea* or under earth. It also explains the common name groundnut.

Rich in minerals and high in protein, peanuts are now one of the world's major food crops. They were introduced to China by Portuguese merchants during the seventeenth century and now there are over one hundred cultivars growing in the north, south, east and west of the country. Today, India and China are the world's largest producers of peanuts, with the nuts being most commonly ground into oil.[2]

The Chinese inscription in the lower right reads *hua sheng* (peanut). In the lower left *Arachis hypogaea* is written in black ink and below this again in pencil.

Literature:

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Dillehay, Tom D. 'Earliest-known evidence of peanut, cotton and squash farming found.' Vanderbilt University, June 2007. https://www.eurekalert.org/news-releases/887796

Hammons, R. O. 'The Origin and History of the Groundnut' in The Groundnut Crop: A Scientific Basis for Improvement. Springer, Netherlands, pp. 24-42. 1994.

Notes:

1 Dillehay, 2007.
2 Davidson & Jaine 2014, p.1141.



42

A Study of a White Chrysanthemum, *Chrysanthemum indicum*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
44.2cm high, 34.2cm wide

'Picking chrysanthemums at my east fence,
I see South Mountain far off
air lovely at dusk, birds in flight returning home.
All this means something, something absolute
whenever I start to explain it, I forget words altogether.'
Drinking Wine, Tao Qian

The effusive flower heads of a chrysanthemum burst forth with numerous creamy-white petals which radiate from the disc floret in copious abundance. The serrated, lobed leaves twist and turn as though caught on a breeze, as a small cluster of young flower heads arch downwards. Cultivated in China for over three thousand years, Chrysanthemum flowers were originally white, before yellow varieties were produced. The flowers are believed to have spread to Korea, then Japan during the Tang dynasty (618-907). In the 1820's, as honorary secretary of the Royal Horticultural Society, Joseph Sabine (1770-1837) wrote two papers on Chrysanthemums new to England. He included both the 'white pagoda' *Chrysanthemum indicum*, *Yok puon lung* and the yellow flowered 'gold pagoda' *C. indicum*, *Wang kum tap*, which resembles the present example.[1] He noted that 'In the last two seasons, the exhibition of Chrysanthemums in the Garden of the Society has been generally allowed to be the most splendid one of flowering plants in one mass, that has ever been seen.'[2] Since antiquity, chrysanthemums have been a frequent theme in the arts of China. The revered poet, Tao Qian (Tao Yuanming, 365-427), grew the flowers after adopting a secluded and pastoral life. Often appearing as metaphors in his poems, chrysanthemums became known as 'the Hermit of all Flowers,' in reference to Tao Qian's works.[3]

Chrysanthemums are also associated with the Double Ninth Festival, which occurs on the ninth day of the ninth month. According to the classical Chinese text, the *I Ching* (Book of Changes), '9' is a *Yang* number and two of the numbers together constitutes too much *Yang*, which may lead to inauspicious consequences. The festival is seen as a measure against this and is traditionally celebrated by drinking liquor and eating cakes made from the flowers.

The plant also has a wide range of medicinal properties; the tea is drunk to reduce blood pressure, extracts of *C. indicum* demonstrate anti-inflammatory properties and the flowers have antibacterial and antifungal actions.[4]

The Chinese inscription reads 'white chrysanthemum' with 'Chrysanthemum' written beside this.

Literature:

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Notes:

1 See Bailey & Brooks 2018, p.63.
2 Sabine 1821, p.322.
3 Nelson 2001, pp.437–60.
4 Dasgupta 2019, pp. 69-91.



43

A Study of Magnolia with Butterflies, *Magnolia liliiflora*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
44cm high, 34cm wide

This study of *Magnolia liliiflora* is a riot of colour and ornamentation. Set against the luscious, malachite-tinged leaves, the large goblet-shaped blossoms range from the softest to the most vivid shades of pink. Attracted by the floral notes, a magnificent butterfly has just landed upon a flower. The black forewings shimmer with a silver-tinge as they catch the light, while the hindwings are adorned with sublime patterns in magnificent colours. A second butterfly approaches, their ferruginous wings ornamented with magenta and blue eyespots. This exceptionally elegant plant is native to China and has featured in Chinese painting from the thirteenth century onwards. Magnolia (*Yulan*) is often depicted with the tree peony (*Mudan*) and crabapple (*Haitang*) to suggest the phrase 'wealth and rank in the jade hall' (*yutang fugui*), a reference to the most advanced scholars at the Hanlin Academy in Beijing.[1]

The first Asiatic magnolias arrived in Europe in the late 1700s, from China and Japan. Described by Curtis in the Botanical Magazine as Magnolia purpurea (see Fig. 54), the type species of the present example has more recently been reclassified as *Magnolia liliiflora*. Native to the provinces of Yunnan and Sichuan in southwest China, *Liliifloras* are small bushy shrubs, or occasionally trees, growing up to four metres tall. Their elliptic leaves are a brilliant emerald green and grow up to twenty centimetres in length. The goblet shaped flowers are extremely striking, with deep fuchsia outer tepals, which provide an exquisite contrast with the delicate pink of their insides. The inflorescences appear in the spring and summer, making it an extremely popular magnolia. The plant has also been known as the woody-orchid, Mulan magnolia, tulip magnolia and lily magnolia. A French text of 1778 suggested that *magnolia liliiflora* resembled, 'a naked Walnut Tree with a Lily at the end of every branch.'[2] The arrival of Magnolias in Britain was certainly met with great excitement and fervour as the Botanical Magazine's 1797 entry on *M. liliiflora*, (then known as *M. purpurea*) illustrates:

'There is a magnificence about the plants of this genus which renders them unsuitable subjects of representation in a work the size of ours; nor would it have been in our power to have given a figure of this new and beautiful species, differing so materially from all the others in the colour of its flowers, had we not been fortunately favoured by the Countess of Coventry with a small plant of it, about a foot high, which flowered with her Ladyship in town.'[3]

Literature:

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Valder, Peter. The Garden Plants of China. Timber Press, 2005.

Notes:

1 Valder 2005, p.49.
2 Coates 1992, p.128.
3 390. *Magnolia purpurea*. Purple magnolia. Botanical Magazine, 1797.



(Fig. 54) 390. Magnolia purpurea. Purple magnolia. Botanical Magazine, 1797.



44

A Study of a Crepe Ginger, *Hellenia speciosa*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
44cm high, 34.3cm wide

Also known as wild ginger, spiral flag, spiral ginger and Malay ginger, this attractive rhizomatous perennial herb typically grows up to three metres tall, with spirally arranged oblong to lance-shaped leaves. The flowering spike can reach fifteen centimetres high, with pink-tipped conical bracts producing extremely striking white trumpet-shaped flowers, resembling crepe paper. These are particularly attractive to sunbirds, carpenter bees and butterflies, as demonstrated in the present work. While two butterflies approach the flowers, a magnificent caterpillar ascends the stem, turning its head and flexing its mouth parts in a highly realistic and characterful fashion.

As with many plants, the species name for Crepe Ginger has evolved over the centuries. Ranging from *Hellenia grandiflora Retz*, in 1791, to *Costus speciosus*, (also in 1791), to *Cheilocostus speciosus* in 2006, and more recently *Hellenia speciosa*, (2013). The common name is somewhat misleading as the plant only bears a distant relationship to the ginger. Although both are members of the Zingiberaceae (ginger) family, Costaceae only have a single row of spirally arranged leaves along their stem, unlike gingers.

The inscription on the present work incorrectly identifies the plant as a 'Hedychium.' Given that members of the genus Hedychium are also rhizomatous perennials, native to the South-Central and Southeast China, it is evident where the confusion may have occurred.

The fastest method of propagating crepe gingers is by planting rhizome cuttings. Unlike *zingiber officinale* (ginger), their rhizomes do not emit an aromatic odor, nor do they have a pungent, spicy taste when eaten, indicating the plants possess different phytochemicals.[1] Recent studies have identified the chemical compound diosgenin in the rhizomes of *Hellenia speciosa*.[2] A sapogenin steroid, diosgenin is a naturally occurring phyto or plant-based oestrogen which can by synthesised into cortisone, pregnenolone and progesterone. In the 1960s, it was used in the first oral contraceptives. Diosgenin is also effective against cancer, hyperlipidemia, diabetes and cardiovascular conditions.

Literature:

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Notes:

1 Kala et al, 2016.
2 Semwal et al, 2022.



45

A Study of a Composite Plant

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
43.7cm high, 34cm wide

This lively composition presents a group of insects approaching a strikingly vibrant plant. The lanceolate leaves turn from forest green to chartreuse, followed by a magnificent crimson. The leaves resemble some dracaenas. Within the Asparagaceae family, the genus dracaena comprises approximately one hundred and twenty species. The majority are native to tropical and subtropical Africa, with exceptions from Central and South America, southern Asia and northern Australia. Dracaena may be trees, or succulent shrubs, with extremely diverse leaf designs and colours. The name derives from the ancient Greek *drakaina*, meaning female dragon. Colloquially referred to as 'dragon's blood,' a deep red resin is produced by *Dracaena cinnabari*, native to Socotra Island in Yemen and *D. draco*, native to the Canary Islands.[1] In Yemen, the resin has been used in the treatment of dysentery, ulcers, diarrhoea and for healing wounds.[2] As with many tree resins, it has anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. In the Mediterranean, the sap has been employed as a medicine, a dye and for bodily adornment.

The unusual dappled yellow-orange inflorescences emerge above undulating bracts. The inscription reads '*po jü lan*;' big orchid. However, the flowers have a calyx, unlike orchids. With regard to the labellum, the flowers bear a faint resemblance to some members of the Zingiberaceae family, such as *Renealmia sessilifolia*, although other identifying characteristics, such as the stigma do not correspond. Despite the plant not resembling one particular species, it is nonetheless a characterful and vivacious study. The architectural foliage and delicate flowers have evidently been painted by a confident and experienced hand, as have the magnificent insects that flutter enthusiastically towards them.

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Notes:

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2 Gupta & Gupta 2007, pp.361-80.



46

A Study of an Orange Lily, *Lilium sp.*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
44cm high, 32.8cm wide

From Bronze Age Minoan palaces to portraits of Mughal emperors, lilies have captivated people for thousands of years. This wonderfully vivacious study depicts a magnificent flame-orange lily, whose grandiose, trumpet shaped blooms echo the light-hearted sway of the surrounding butterflies.

The Cantonese inscription reads *hong bai he* or red lily, beside which is written 'Lilium tigrinum.' Fondly referred to as the Tiger lily, *L. tigrinum* is presently known as *Lilium lancifolium*. William Kerr's very first shipment from Canton arrived in London in August 1804. Within its botanical cargo, the East Indiaman Henry Addington contained two lilies; *L. brownii* and *L. tigrinum*. In his accompanying notes, Kerr remarked that he had not seen the leaves or flowers of either species, although *Pae-hup-fa* (*L. brownii*), was valued for its ornamental and medicinal properties. As superintendent at Kew, William Townsend Aiton (1766-1849), received the plants and was able to propagate a great number of Lilium tigrinum bulbs.[2] Characteristically, the plants have narrow, lance-shaped, alternate leaves with parallel veins, vivid orange tepals, (resembling petals), that are strongly recurved backwards and ornamented with purplish-brown to black raised spots. Differing from this, the present study bears oblanceolate to obovate leaves, with lateral veins and mildly recurved tepals, with deep crimson spots. The tepals somewhat resemble those of *L. concolor*; a native species that was a popular in Chinese paintings, it was introduced to Britain in 1790 by horticulturist and friend of Sir Joseph Banks, Charles Francis Greville (1749–1809).[3] However, the flowers of *L. concolor* face upward, in contrast to the nodding habit of the present study. Given that China has almost forty Lilium species, the greatest number of any country, it is understandable that the present example has been erroneously labelled as *Lilium tigrinum*.

All members of the Liliaceae family are monocotyledons, a defining feature of this clade is parallel venation on the leaves. By contrast, the present study depicts leaves with reticulate venation, typical of dicotyledons. It must therefore be concluded that this is a hybrid study, bearing the flowers of one plant and the leaves of another. This anomaly by no means detracts from the overall composition. The exquisitely rich pigmentation, delicate brushwork and sense of gentle motion all converge in this ebullient and striking painting.

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Notes:

1 Kerr, Memorandum.1804.
2 Compton 2022, pp.29-62.
3 Bretschneider 1898, p.209.



47

A Study of a Lotus, *Nelumbo nucifera*

Circa 1803–1809
Canton (Guangzhou), China

Watercolour on paper
44cm high, 34cm wide

Majestic and elegant, the sacred lotus is a highly revered plant across multiple traditions. Lotus flowers appear in some of the earliest Buddhist iconography and are one of the most frequently depicted subjects in Chinese art. Representing summer, the plants often feature in botanical paintings, symbolising the four seasons, or twelve months. Lotus seeds germinate in the murky silt before their stems rise and the leaves and flowers adorn the water's surface with an elegant serenity. This is considered a metaphor for purity in Buddhism and to represent the enduring qualities of a Chinese nobleman. The plants are also thought to symbolise the three stages of existence; past, present, and future, as the seeds, buds, and flowers present simultaneously.

Comprising over 300 poems, dating from the 11th to 7th centuries BC, the *Shi jing* or Book of Odes appears to contain the earliest reference to the lotus plant in China, where it is referred to as *he* or *hehua*:

'Where its shores the marsh surround
Rushes and lotus plants abound.'[1]

The enduring popularity of lotus plants ensures they have remained an important feature of Chinese gardens. As well as growing in lakes and ponds, specialised porcelain or earthenware containers provide an attractive setting for the plants. Visiting Beijing in 1816, Clarke Abel noted that the lotus was prized above all other flowers and raised 'in capacious vases of water, containing gold and silver fish, supported on stands a few feet from the ground.'[2] The following illustration, from the William Kerr collection at Kew, provides a wonderful insight into how both Abel and Kerr may have witnessed lotus plants growing during their time in China (see Fig.55).

In his memorandum, Kerr provides notes on two species of lotus which he sent to Kew:

21. Hang-lin-fa
22. Pau-lin-fa

'Nelumbo – these are two smaller varieties, generally cultivated in pots for the beauty of their leaves and flowers. The large or common lotus is called Lin-n fau [it] is frequently found wild in standing waters but is generally cut.' Kerr also notes that the roots are eaten.[3]

The present study encapsulates the full majesty and beauty of this alluring plant. Beside an ashen cricket, a juvenile bud and leaf appear, tightly bound in folds of moss green. Above them a large peltate leaf appears fan-like, with deeply forked veins. Some discolouration and cracking appears along the wavy margins. This is a typical feature of classical Chinese botanical illustration, which valued realism and truth over purely idealised forms of beauty. In front of the leaf, a magnificent blossom erupts into a riot of pink hues, accentuated by fine striations. Above this, a mature bud hints at opening its first petal and two exquisite butterflies gleefully approach the flower. Overall, this work triumphs in the confident fusion of elegance, balance and sophistication. It is vivid and bold yet retains a feeling of serenity. The viewer is invited to contemplate the magnificence of the sacred lotus, a plant which holds a timeless mystique.

Lower left-hand side, the Chinese inscription reads '*hong lian hua*', (red lotus) with 'Water Lily' written beside this in black ink.



(Fig. 55) 189. Nelumbo, The William Kerr Collection of Chinese Plants. Kew, London.

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Notes:

1 Zebei, in the Odes of Chen, quoted by Xurong Kong, 2022.
2 Valder, p.227.
3 Kerr. Memorandum,1804.





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Christina Hales, February 2024.

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"But intending to understand ten things, you actually do not understand even one. If you know a hundred flowers you do not "know" a single one."

Masanobu Fukuoka, 1975

