

ON THE STUDY AND VALUE OF CHINESE
BOTANICAL WORKS, WITH NOTES ON
THE HISTORY OF PLANTS AND
GEOGRAPHICAL BOTANY FROM
CHINESE SOURCES.

BY

E. BRETSCHNEIDER, M. D.

PHYSICIAN OF THE RUSSIAN
LEGATION AT PEKING.

ILLUSTRATED WITH 8 CHINESE
WOOD CUTS.

Printed by ROZARIO, MARCAL & C., Foochow.

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PREFACE.

In presenting these pages to the learned world, I consider it my duty to confess, that I am neither a Sinologus nor Botanist, my knowledge in Chinese as well as in Botany being very limited. But living in the Chinese Metropolis five years, I was encouraged by the favourable conditions in which I found myself, to make some inquiries into Chinese plants and to venture on the publication of these notes on Chinese Botany. Every body will admit, I think, that some questions regarding Chinese plants can be more easily decided by men, living in China, by direct observation and information taken directly from the natives,—than in Europe by eminent savants, who have not been in China and must base their views, for the most part upon accounts given by travellers, which are not always exempt from errors, and upon translations from Chinese works, made by sinologues, who know little or nothing about Botany. I beg therefore to be excused if I have attempted sometimes to contradict some views of well known scholars. I implore indulgence for any errors which I may myself have committed. I have at least always endeavoured to adduce the sources whence I derived my information and prosecuted my enquiries in order to afford an opportunity for correcting or confirming my views. Although I had the advantage of having access to the splendid library of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission at Peking, where are to be found not only all Chinese works of importance, but also most European books relating to China,—the reader will observe the want of some special works on Botany, indispensable in the treatment of botanical questions. But such works can only be met with in the great European libraries.—

As my notes have been written for Sinologues as well as for Botanists, I have endeavoured to be intelligible to both, and especially to the latter, by explanations of the Chinese characters, which occur therein. I would take advantage of this opportunity to observe, that Chinese names of plants should not be considered from the same point of view as names in other oriental languages, which can be transcribed easily and unmistakably by our letters. The Chinese language does not possess more than 400 words or monosyllabic sounds, distinguishable by an European ear. But as the Chinese characters (or hieroglyphs) are very numerous, each sound relates to a great number of characters of very different meaning. I will quote an example taken from the Chinese nomenclature of plants.

李 is a Plum,
梨 a Pear,

栗 a Chestnut,
櫟 a kind of Oak,

藜 a kind of Vegetable,
蒜 a kind of Garlic,

All these characters are pronounced by a sound, which must be rendered *Li* by European letters. In addition to this the Chinese characters, used by almost all peoples of Eastern Asia, are pronounced in a very different manner, not only by these different peoples, but even in different parts of China.* Finally, European writers, ignorant of the Chinese language, frequently render Chinese names of plants very incorrectly and distortedly. This may suffice to prove, that it is completely useless and unintelligible to write the Chinese names of plants in European books, without the Chinese characters. The Chinese language is one suited more for the eye, than the ear. Therefore, in quoting Chinese names of plants, ambiguities can only be avoided by the addition of the Chinese characters.

* 金橘 is the well-known little Kum-kwat orange (a variety of *Citrus japonica*.) The Chinese characters, meaning "Golden Orange" are pronounced *Kum-kwat* in the Southern dialect, but *Kin-kü* in the Mandarin dialect.