

The Second International Symposium on the Family Magnoliaceae Guangzhou, China May 5–8 2009

Post-Symposium Tour to Kunming and Wenshan, Yunnan Province May 6–14 2009

Beth Edward

In May of this year, China welcomed scientists and horticulturalists from all over the world to the Second International Symposium on the Family Magnoliaceae in Guangzhou, Guangdong, China. The Symposium was organized by the South China Botanical Garden (SCBG) of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The Botanic Gardens Conservation International and the Magnolia Society International were co-organizers of the symposium. Over 150 participants and presenters came from at least 19 countries: China, the USA, Netherlands, Cuba, Papua New Guinea, the United Kingdom, Latvia, Thailand, Korea, Columbia, Belgium, Japan, Canada, Nigeria, New Zealand, Vietnam, France, India, and Indonesia.

The scientific presentations addressed issues in taxonomy, conservation, DNA research, Magnolia propagation and cultivation, as well as providing an introduction to China's outstanding collections of magnolias. The differences in taxonomic treatment, the mono-generic *Magnolia*, versus multi-generic treatments consisting of many small genera, *Magnolia*, *Manglietia*, *Michelia* and *Talauma*, *Kmeria*, *Parakmeria*, and so on, between various presenters made it rather confusing to me (a non-scientist), but also generated some lively discussions following the presentations.

The conference opened with a ceremony—complete with large party crackers that exploded and showered confetti on the crowd. A highlight was the unveiling of the South China Botanical Garden as a World Magnolia Center under the auspices of the Botanic Gardens Conservation International. As a World Magnolia Center the SCBG carries out conservation studies and provides germplasm resources on Magnoliaceae. The World Magnolia Center plaque (see Figure 1) was unveiled and opening speeches were made by the deputy director of SCBG, Dr. Fu Sheng-Lei; the Secretary General of Botanic Gardens Conservation International, Sara Oldfield; Susan Treadway of the Magnolia Society International; Dr. Huang Hong-Wen the Director of the SCBG, and Dr. Xia Nian-He, the Chairman of the Scientific Committee for the Symposium. There was coverage by local media and the Symposium generated great excitement amongst the students at SCBG.



Figure 1. Unveiling of the plaque for the World Magnolia Center at the South China Botanical Garden, Guangzhou China.

Magnolia Society members who presented included Dick Figlar of the United States, *Turning Points in the Taxonomic History of Magnolioideae—From Baillon to Dandy to DNA*; Sangtae Kim of Korea, *Phylogeny, Diversification, and Evolution of Magnoliaceae Based on Sequences of Ten Chloroplast Regions*; Koen Camelbeke of Belgium *Magnolia ex situ Collection at Arboretum Wespelaar, Belgium*; Jim Gardiner of the United Kingdom, *The Cultivation, Propagation, Breeding and Gardens Growing Magnolias in Europe*; Gary Knox of the United States, *Commercial Nursery Production of Magnoliaceae in the Southern United States*; Kevin Parris of the United States, *Determining Ploidy Levels and Relative Genome Sizes in Magnolia L.*; and Hans Nooteboom of the Netherlands, *The Origin and Distribution of Magnolias*.

During the conference, the attendees were treated to a tour of the *Magnolia* collection at South China Botanical Garden in Guangzhou. Guangzhou is in the Pearl River delta, and has a humid, subtropical summer and mild and sunny winters, which makes it possible to grow many evergreen magnolias beautifully. The Botanic Garden also has a large and impressive glasshouse, a separate chilled glasshouse for tundra and alpine plants, water features, and an extensive collection of food plants, including a rice field.

Of course, we were there to see the magnolias and we were not disappointed. The SCBG has an outstanding collection. Among the many interesting trees was a new species, *Magnolia guangdongensis* (*Michelia guangdongensis*), an evergreen shrub about 10–13ft (3–4m) in height. There were two examples of this wonderful plant, with dark green leaves and a deep coppery-bronze indumentum that was truly spectacular in the sunlight (see Figure 2). Even though we did not see this tree in bloom, the leaves alone made this plant one of the most memorable of the collection. Other highlights included *Magnolia dandyi* (*M. megaphylla*), *M. hodgsonii*, *M. henryi* and many other species. One remarkable fact about all the Chinese gardens that we visited was the sheer number of trees planted (we first noticed this at SCBG, where multiple examples of each species were found planted near each other).

On the third day of the conference a small group of non-scientists (including me) took a side trip to the Fairy Lake Botanic Garden in Shenzhen, Guangdong. Shenzhen is a beautiful, modern city on the mainland opposite Hong Kong. The hundreds of buildings in this city are very tall and impressive. Most of them are quite new, and there is a great deal of new construction still underway. Seeing a

city with so many new skyscrapers reminded me of the "Emerald City" in the movie, *Wizard of Oz*.

Many of the hills that make up the topography around Shenzhen have been flattened for development but the Fairy Lake area remains natural, a beautiful lake

surrounded by green hills. Halfway up the side of one hill an outline map of China is carved into the forest. On an adjacent hill, we toured and explored an elaborate Buddhist temple complex with intricate tile-roofed buildings overlooking the lake below.

At Fairy Lake we could only sample the entire garden in the single day we had to visit. The *Magnolia* collection is outstanding, with large plantings of hundreds of trees including *Magnolia cavaleriei* var. *platypetala*, *Magnolia baillonii*, *M. coco*, *M. henryi*, *M. chapensis*, and many more. Once again, we saw many examples of each species planted in large groupings of 20 or more. Fairy Lake also has an outstanding, well maintained collection of cycads spread over a large area. We very much enjoyed our visit there and the hospitality of the Director, Dr. Li Yong, and also the garden staff who transported us from one section of the garden to the next by electric cart so we could see as much as possible during our visit.

The final day of the Symposium was a day trip to the Nankunshan Forest Preserve in Guangdong Province, 37mi (60km) northeast of Guangzhou City. On the way we noticed the hills covered with orchards of lychee trees, some damaged by unusually cold weather in February.

We stopped to view the type specimen of *Magnolia* (*Manglietia*) *longipedunculata*, and later observed an amazing *Magnolia kwangtungensis* (syn. *M. moto*) growing in the leftover rocks and soil from a road construction project. *Magnolia mauldii* and *M. macclurei* were also found growing along the roadside mixed with ferns, orchids, rhododendrons, smilax, and other interesting plants. Our hosts knew exactly where to take us to see the best trees along the way. As we climbed the hill in our tourist bus, they periodically stopped to let us out to explore the botanical wonders along the sides of the road. We observed good examples of *Magnolia changhungtana* (*Manglietia pachyphylla*). Professor Zeng Qing-Wen told us this species is found only at 1,968–2,625ft (600–800m) elevation (see Figure 3).



Figure 2. Leaves of *Magnolia guangdongensis* at South China Botanical Garden, showing indumentum.

We continued winding upward to the observation pavilion on the top of the mountain at about 2,953ft (900m). From there we could see the city of Huizhou in the distance far below us. Nearly everyone had their picture taken here because the terrain falling away below made a spectacular background.

Each lunch and dinner at the Symposium was a fabulous feast of Chinese cuisine. I enjoyed every new dish and so did everyone I sat with. Meals also gave us a chance to meet participants at the symposium and speak with the professors and students at SCBG. I noticed that the non-Chinese botanists in attendance could not resist "playing with their food" to identify the vegetables and greens found in many of the dishes. Unusual cooked vegetables were constantly being unfolded and spread out on their plates and a guessing game ensued.

I was very glad to have signed up for the post-tour to Yunnan province because I had enjoyed the field trips from the Symposium very much. However, it was sad to say goodbye that evening to the students from SCBG who had accompanied us on the Symposium excursions and provided translation services and transportation while we were in Guangzhou. They were a delightful group and it is good to know so many of these future botanists are interested in studying magnolias.

The next morning a small group of 16 post-tour participants boarded a plane for Kunming in Yunnan province. Yunnan is located in southwest China, bordered by Myanmar (Burma), Laos and Vietnam. Yunnan is nearly as large in size

(square meters) as California, and larger than the state of Montana. It is largely rural, but the capital city, Kunming has about 6.8 million inhabitants, more than Los Angeles. The province is mountainous and beautiful, with limestone karst, mountains, and adequate moisture to support a huge variety of plants and animals. Yunnan also has the largest number of Chinese ethnic groups (Chinese minority cultures) of any province. The terrain is very beautiful, and it is a plant paradise. There are about 30,000 species of plants in China, and 18,000 of them are found in Yunnan.



Figure 3. Professor Zeng Qing-Wen holds a branch of *Magnolia longipedunculata* (*Manglietia longipedunculata*), a new species he authored jointly with Liu Yu-Hu in 2004. The type tree appears behind him, at the Nankunshan Forest Preserve.

As we traveled from the airport to our hotel we noticed the heavily planted street medians and sidewalks. *Magnolia delavayi*, *M. yunnanensis*, and *M. grandiflora* were all found as street trees. In this large, busy city we found densely planted urban landscapes. I also spotted a large Walmart store and a McDonalds fast-food restaurant. On the way to the hotel our tour guide explained that the major agricultural products in Yunnan were tobacco, sugar, and tea, and that cigarette manufacturing was very important to the Kunming economy.

Our first stop in Kunming was the Kunming Botanical Garden, part of the Kunming Institute of Botany. Sun Wei-Bang is the executive director. This garden was founded in 1938 and covers 44 hectares. The *Magnolia* collection consists of over 100 species. It also has a *Rhododendron* collection of over 250 species, a medicinal collection and a *Camellia* collection. Many of the trees in this garden have been here a long time and are quite large. Some exciting specimens we observed were *Magnolia* (*Manglietia*) *decidua*, *M. lacei*, *M. rufibarbata* (like *M. moto* but with upright peduncles) and *M. sphaerantha*. (See Figure 4.)

The next day, we stopped at a local tourist attraction, the Stone Forest, which is a large area of limestone karst formations, with overhangs, caves, and passageways between the large rocks. Our tour guide was very concerned as the group continuously strayed from the path she led and followed their hearts to view the plants growing among the limestone towers. The Stone Forest was very crowded with people, the passages were very narrow, and there were hundreds of ways to get through the place, or get lost forever. Since the group was not very obedient and was in danger of getting lost, the guide took us around to the back road which skirted the forest park. This was a great idea because not only was it easier for her to watch us all, there were a lot more plants there, including four *Magnolia delavayi* growing amid the giant limestone formations. We also met a farmer walking his water buffalo along the road. (See Figure 5.)

The following day we flew from Kunming to Wenshan, in the southern part of Yunnan. The airport was quite small; the only other plane there had propellers and was parked. We came to a stop at the end of our runway and then turned around and taxied to the airport on the same runway. When we returned to Wenshan after traveling to Xizhou and Malipo, a tour around the city in the evening showed it was much larger than the airport would lead one to believe.

There were plenty of shopping opportunities in the large modern shopping district: there were pastry shops, restaurants, clothing stores, music and book stores, and lively street traffic. The city also boasted extensive lighting effects on the buildings and on archways over the street that changed colors and made it very bright and lively.

We left Wenshan by bus for Xizhou County to visit the Xiangpingshan Forestry Farm and went past rice fields and terraced fields. The hills became mountains and the terrain got more rugged with each passing mile. The Xiangpingshan Forestry Farm consists of a planting of some 20,000 individual magnolias (120



Figure 4. Hans Nooteboom of the Netherlands and Marcela Serna Gonzalez of Colombia examine plants at Kunming Botanic Garden while a garden employee scales *Magnolia lotungensis* behind them to retrieve flowers.

the scenery was magnificent. The mountains in this part of China are very tall, steep-sided limestone covered with vegetation and bathed in moisture.

We stopped periodically to view large specimens of trees that have been protected by the villagers and the forestry service. *Magnolia opipara*, *M. aromatica*, *M. dandyi*, and *M. foveolata* each warranted a stop and pictures (see Figure 6). The *Magnolia aromatica* was an enormous tree in the middle of a cornfield. It was the same tree that is shown in the *Magnolias of China* book.

By lunch time we arrived at the little village of Fadou Xiang, which is adjacent to the famous Fadou Nature Preserve. From there we began a hike of several miles up Hemawan Mountain, in the rain, on slippery wet rocks and mud, to get to the largest *Magnolia sinica* that has ever been found (and the first one discovered). Our guide, Mr. Hu Guang-Shi of Fadou, was the first person to collect fruits from *M. sinica* some 29 years ago. According to Professor Zeng Qing-Wen, only 14 of these trees are known to exist in the wild and five of them are in the Fadou Nature Reserve. Along the way we passed many other trees such as *Magnolia dandyi* (*M. megaphylla*), *M. foveolata* as well as two more smaller, but still substantial, *M. sinica*.

species) for the sole purpose of *ex-situ* cultivation. The magnolias covered the mountainside for as far as the eye could see. We saw *Magnolia grandis*, *M. denudata*, *M. yunnanensis*, *M. fordiana*, *M. odoratissima* (with bright red new leaves), *M. dandyi* (*M. megaphylla*), and many other species.

That evening we had dinner with the local officials at our hotel. The food was very good, with lots of interesting and delicious vegetables and special toasting liquor that was the best we had in China. We stayed in Xisa Town, which had about 12,000 inhabitants.

The next morning we traveled by bus to Xizhou County's Fadou Nature Reserve. Along the way we passed many farming communities where the irregularly shaped fields worked their way across the valley and up the mountainsides. Water buffalo were used in the rice fields in the lowest areas. As the hills became bigger and steeper, the roads turned to cobblestone and dirt. It got a little scary looking over the edge of the mountain cliff with no guard rails, but



Figure 5. *Magnolia delavayi* growing in a limestone outcrop at Stone Forest, Shilin, Yunnan.
(Kevin Parris)

At one point along the way, we noticed the fallen tepals of *Magnolia foveolata* on the ground, but we could not see the tree since its crown was so high in the forest canopy. Leaches could be seen in a small waterway that paralleled the path for a short way. Native *Alpinia* and begonias bloomed in the dark forest interspersed with interesting ferns and ground covers. Eventually we reached an enormous *Magnolia sinica*—the largest in the world. We approached it filled with awe and feeling a little inadequate since we were covered in mud, and were wet and disheveled. A long slippery hill rose in front of us, and the tree crowned the top like a titan. Most of the group made the final push (some of us were pulled) up the hill to touch this mighty specimen. To me, it felt like winning an Olympic medal just to stand next to it. We all had our pictures taken there with this magnificent tree. Then we ate our box lunches under its spreading branches before heading back down the slippery mountain path to the village far below.

That evening we headed for Malipo, which is very close to northern Vietnam. As night fell, I could hear the calls of chickens in the nearby market outside our hotel. The same noisy birds woke me up at 4:00AM.

In the morning we boarded our bus and headed into the countryside. We stopped several times to observe the local flora. On one fog shrouded hillside we noticed large white flowers, which turned out to be rhododendrons with individual flowers as big as a coke bottle. Beautiful hydrangeas and ferns, *Cardiocrinum*, and countless magnolias also grew there. At the bottom of the valleys the villagers inter-planted corn, beans, squash, cannas, and buckwheat, along with other plants I didn't recognize. The terraced fields were all planted by hand and often contained rocks and tombs surrounded by crops.

In one village we were invited into the schoolyard by the local teacher while about 100 school kids laughed hysterically at us, but would not get too close. However when Anita Figlar showed the children their own pictures on her digital camera display, they were entranced and would run up, look at the pictures and then run



Figure 6. An enormous old *Magnolia aromatica*, located in a cornfield, near Fadou, Xizhou County, appears to be in decline. This famous tree is pictured on page 125 in *Magnolias of China* (Liu et al 2004) and in the *China Plant Red Data Book* (Fu Li-Kuo 1992). Dick Figlar (under the umbrella) is reluctantly returning to the coach.



Figure 7. These two boys were not so shy and are probably featured in everyone's photographs from this trip!

Figure 8. Farmer bringing chickens to market in Fadou village.



away. In another village, school was in session and we could hear the school children singing. This part of China is the home of many ethnic minorities and their clothing was unique and very colorful. The people were very friendly and seemed both surprised and delighted to

see us visiting their towns. (See Figure 7 and Figure 8.)

It was hard to return to Guangzhou after such a fascinating trip to Yunnan, but our final evening in Guangzhou was a special one because we were guests on a Pearl River dinner cruise. At night, all the buildings in Guangzhou have fiber optic light effects that change colors, form patterns, and shimmer in the darkness. As we floated down the Pearl, we noticed that even the bridges and the other boats were decorated with a myriad of lights and patterns. It was a magical evening and a fitting end to a wonderful Symposium and tour.

All photos by Beth Edward, except where noted.

The author wishes to Dick Figlar for his help in preparing this article.

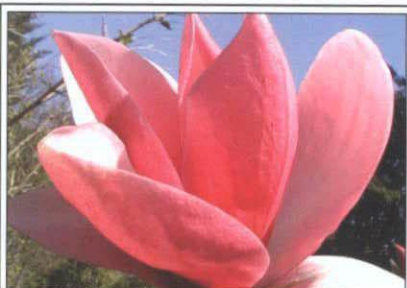
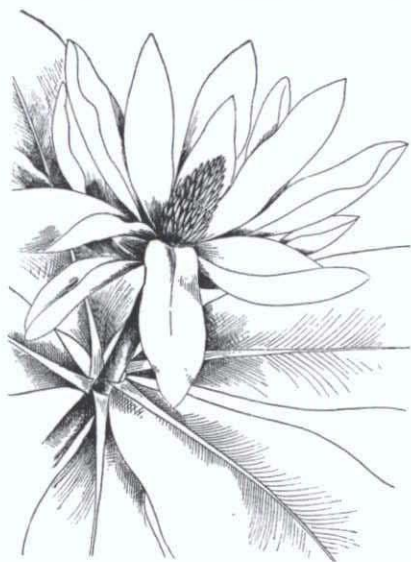
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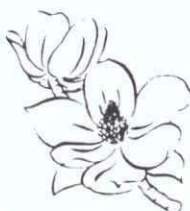
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