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SPOTLIGHT ON TREASURES

Flora Sinensis Call number: ULB581.951 F63

— Iris Chan
Special Collections Librarian —

In 19 folios, these 202 paintings of the plants of China were commissioned by Dr Bernard E. Read in the early 1910s. Dr Read worked as a scientist in China from 1909 to 1949. He taught at Peking Medical College from 1909 to 1932 and was later Head of Physiological Sciences and Director of the Henry Lester Institute of Medical Research in Shanghai.

His wife, Mrs Katherine Read, informed the Libraries in a letter of 1959 that Dr Read hoped to publish a complete visual record of the plants of China in colour. As he wanted to combine artistic beauty with scientific accuracy, he invited a Chinese artist, Mr Soong, to work with him. It took months of training before Mr Soong could render the scientific details, but eventually he was as eager as anyone else to paint exactly what he saw in the flowers and the plants. Many of the unusual flowers that appear in the paintings were collected by Dr and Mrs Read during special trips they made to locate and collect plants in outer Mongolia, Shensi, the Nankow pass of the Great Wall, and other places. It took them years to locate one particular male plant in bloom.

Flora Sinensis, while not complete, serves as a very good start to a complete record of the flora of China. The paintings are beautifully mounted and classified. The classification and listing of the Latin and Chinese names were done by a lecturer at the University of Hong Kong's Department of Botany in the 1950s. Anyone interested in the flora of China will be delighted by these works.

Chinese Juniper



Pinus Tabulaeformis Carriere



Maiden Hair Tree

