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**Abstract:** Shaoyao 芍藥, la peonia erbacea (*Paeonia lactiflora*, da non confondersi con la peonia arborea, *mudan* 牡丹, *Paeonia suffruticosa*), è in Cina una delle piante dalla storia più longeva. Il termine appare già nel Libro delle Odi (*Shijing* 詩經), anche se potrebbe qui riferirsi a un'altra specie botanica. L'uso medico della peonia erbacea è attestato in fonti del periodo Han. A partire dalle dinastie Wei e Jin, la peonia shaoyao è stata elogiata dalla poesia per la sua bellezza; durante il periodo dei Song settentrionali, la sua coltivazione fu particolarmente diffusa a Yangzhou, e apparvero dei trattati, opera di intellettuali come Liu Ban, Wang Guan, Kong Wuzhong e Ai Chou. Questo studio cerca di indagare soprattutto la datazione di tali opere, il loro contenuto e la figura dei loro autori, con l'intento di chiarire la storia culturale della peonia erbacea in Cina.

All objects are constructed by the universal principle. We are different from ordinary people who feast their eyes on peonies. We may elucidate natural providences by the Creator.

物皆有至理，吾儕看花異于常人，  
自可以觀造化之妙。

(Shao Yong 邵雍, *Yixue Bianhuo* 易學辨惑).



Fig. 1 This is an illustration of *Shaoyao* in a Chinese herbal text from the thirteenth century.

### The Herbaceous Peony's Initial Recognition in Early China

In the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經), the earliest Chinese poetry collection, a folk song contains the plant name *shaoyao* 芍藥, which commonly refers to the herbaceous peony (*Paeonia lactiflora*). Later, ancient scholars left controversial commentaries, which contemporary historians extensively overlook, pertaining to the identification of *shaoyao*. In the twelfth century, another scholar suggested that *shaoyao* in the *Shijing* did not refer to the herbaceous plant but to the tree peony (*mudan* 牡丹, *Paeonia suffruticosa*, characterised by a woody or shrublike aspect). In this section, we review the early Chinese cultural history of the peony, referring exclusively to the herbaceous peony (*shaoyao*), if not otherwise stated.

### *Shijing's Annotations*

*Shaoyao*, the Chinese term for the herbaceous peony, is a significant plant in the early Chinese culture, whereas the beauty of the tree peony (*mudan*) was overlooked until the eighth century. In the Western world, however, the tree peony is considered as one of China's most famous native plants. The Chinese term *shaoyao* first appeared in *Zhen You* 淮洧, a folksong on love belonging to the *Shijing*, which was dated between the eighth and seventh centuries BCE. *Zhen* and *You* are the names of two rivers in the Henan Province. The translated lyrics are as follows:

"The *Zhen* and the *Wei* (streams) are just now amply flowing; knights and girls are just holding *jian* (蘭) plants in their hands; a girl says: 'Have you been [there] and looked?' The knight says: 'I have'. 'Shall we go again and look?' - 'Beyond the *Wei*, there is truly great and pleasant [peace].' The knight and the girl, they are going to sport together; the one presents the other with a *shaoyao*."



Although the lyrics may have sounded obscene to the conservative intellectuals in China, even Confucius encouraged his pupils to learn the songs (albeit inconsistently) of *Shijing*. During this period, the Confucians in the Han dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE) widely believed that the lyrics were caricatural and criticised the immoral habits of that area. Presently, it is broadly accepted that this was an ancient ritual, where the boys and girls danced and sang for the purpose of matchmaking. In the lyric above, ‘shaoyao’ appears to refer to the peony, as this is the exact name thereof in contemporary Chinese, and it symbolises both love and separation. However, the Mao school commentary of the *Shijing* in the Han dynasty emphasised that: ‘Shaoyao is a scented grass’.

Since the Chinese species of peonies have minimal fragrance, this definition of the *shaoyao* is puzzling.

Around the third century, Lu Ji 陸璣 investigated the plants’ and animals’ names in the *Shijing*, according to his personal observations. He questioned the Mao school’s previous interpretation of the *shaoyao* by stating: “The medicinal *shaoyao* (presumably the herbaceous peony) has no scent. The *shaoyao* in the *Shijing* must be a different plant that is unidentifiable”.

During the Han dynasty, we locate the term *shaoyao*, which is typically associated with food in several works of literature: *Seven Discoveries* (*Qi fa* 七發), *Rhapsody of Mr. Vacuous* (*Zixu fu* 子虛賦), the *Rhapsody of the Shu Capital* (*Shudu fu* 蜀都賦), and *Discursive Weighing* (*Lunbeng* 論衡). The latter source states: ‘The food loses its balance if it is without *shaoyao*’.

At that time, this plant was often used for seasoning food, however, we no longer use the peony for cooking. Thus, the doubts regarding the identification of this edible *shaoyao* with the herbaceous peony remain.

### Medical Use

During the Han dynasty, the *shaoyao* was used for curing diseases, appearing as a medicinal plant name in the silk manuscript *Prescriptions for Fifty-two Diseases* (*Wushierbing fang* 五十二病方); in the bamboo slips *Prescriptions for Sixty Diseases* (*Liushibing fang* 六十病方); and in *Wuwei Medical Wood Slips* (*Wuwei yijian* 武威醫簡).

In the Eastern Han dynasty’s *Treatise on Febrile and Miscellaneous Diseases* (*Shanghan lun* 傷寒論), Zhang Zhongjing 張仲景 recorded more than thirty formulas that included the *shaoyao*. Another work by Zhang, *Synopsis of Prescriptions of the Golden Chamber* (*Jingui yaolue* 金匱要略), also mentioned Angelica and peony powder (*danggui shaoyao san* 當歸芍藥散), that is still frequently prescribed to patients by contemporary physicians, especially in the case of gynaecological diseases. In these formulas today, the roots of the *shaoyao* added to the recipe refer to the herbaceous peony undoubtedly.

Interestingly, ancient physicians in Greece and Rome during the same period also used the roots of ‘πατωνία’ (peony) to treat gynaecological diseases.<sup>14</sup> Pedanius Dioscorides describes the form of ‘πατωνία’<sup>15</sup> in his work *De Materia Medica*, and its features correspond to the peony. The polymath, Zheng Qian 鄭虔 (691-759) collected Arabic and Persian herbal knowledge, and he mentioned the peony in his work *Herbal of West Barbarians* (*Hu bencao* 胡本草).<sup>16</sup> According to the famous Persian scholar Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (973-ca. 1050), wild peony was scarcely distributed in the Middle East because it was not originally native to India nor Arab countries but was introduced from Europe.<sup>17</sup> This corroborates the idea that China possibly received Greek and Roman herbal knowledge on the peony’s roots via the Middle East by the eighth century. However, there is no clear proof of medical knowledge diffused to China from abroad during the first and second centuries. The similar usage of peony in China and Rome in treating gynaecological



diseases in that period may thus be considered a coincidence.

### *Peony in Poetic Works*

After the third century, the Southern Dynasties' medical works still contained references to the *shaoyao* such as: *Supplementary Records of Famous Physicians* (*Mingyi bielu* 名醫別錄), *Annotation of Materia Medica* (*Bencao jizhu* 本草集注), etc. (Fig. 1).<sup>18</sup> However, the use of *shaoyao* in cooking practice had nearly disappeared in the literature.<sup>19</sup> Some poets began to highly praise the *shaoyao* flowers since the fourth century, like the poetess Xin Xiao 辛蕭, who depicted the peony flowers in her *Ode to the Shaoyao Flower* (*Shaoyao hua song* 芍藥花頌). Since the *Shijing*, this is the earliest poem that mentions *shaoyao*. At the commencement of her ode, she vividly describes the luxuriant shape of peonies that are planted in the garden, and the charm of the green leaves, which are consistent with the peony's nature. As opposed to the descriptions from the Han dynasty, her ode clearly and adequately describes the peony's morphological features. Therefore, it is established that around the fourth century the Chinese planted the peony near their houses for ornamental purposes. Later, Wang Yun 王筠 (481-549) composed the *Rhapsody of the Peony* (*Shaoyao fu* 芍藥賦) in 496, when he was fifteen years old. Many intellectuals at that time paid significant attention to natural beauties, composing verses on this topic. However, most poems and rhapsodies, including *Ode to the Peony*, are lost, so we can only speculate on the plants that were appreciated, basing our judgement on the title alone.

In the eighth century, the tree peony *mudan* became a favourite variety among the Chinese, and literary works regarding the peony flourished.<sup>20</sup> The celebrated Tang dynasty poet, Wang Wei 王維 (ca. 701-761), also planted the peony in his house, as stated by Qian Qi 錢起 (?-782) who noted:

"The master (i.e. Wang Wei) passed away; however, the peony flowers always bloomed in the front yard of his old house".<sup>21</sup> In addition, Wang Bing 王冰 (ca. 710-805), a well-known specialist in medical theory, annotates the following in *Plain Conversation* (*Suwen* 素問): '[after the fifty-fifth day of spring] there is thunder, and the peony (*shaoyao*) is blooming [... another fifteen days later, the] voles transform into quails, and the tree peony (*mudan*) begins to flourish'.<sup>22</sup> From this we know that in Tang dynasty herbaceous peonies and tree peonies became a common sight in the springtime.

In the ninth century, tree peonies gained extreme popularity and the herbaceous peony followed suit. Further descriptions about the peony appeared, as poets during this era, such as Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846) and Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819), describe the peony in their works. Some poems even mentioned the peony directly in their titles, such as 'Red Peony' by Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779-831) and 'Peony' by Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824). In a poem titled 'Looking at Flowers', Meng Jiao 孟郊 (751-814) writes: 'there are peonies near every house'.<sup>23</sup> The peony was widely cultivated as an ornamental plant until the early ninth century.

### *Treatises on the Peony*

In the late tenth century, Zhao Kuangyin 趙匡胤 united northern and southern China, and built a new relatively stable empire: the Song dynasty began. The Central Plains (*Zhongyuan* 中原), which had been reduced to scorched earth, took several decades to rise from the ashes. During this period, the court and the bureaucrats followed the Tang dynasty model, and the Chinese horticulture was gradually revived, eventually reaching a pinnacle. It was not until the eleventh century, however, that many cultivars of the tree peony were fostered and admired in Luoyang. Then, the famous scholar Ouyang Xiu 歐陽脩 (1007-



1072) published the *Record of Tree Peony in Luoyang* (ca. 1034; *Luoyang mudan ji* 洛陽牡丹記), which became famous among the intellectuals of the eleventh century. His treatise about the tree peony stimulated the vogue of ornamental horticulture. Since the herbaceous peony *shaoyao* is closely related to and resembles the tree peony species, it became a popular ornamental plant as well.

The herbaceous and tree peonies are often considered the two superior flowers among all plants. Lu Tian 陸佃 (1042-1102), a northern Song dynasty scholar, even notes the following annotation in his work *Piya* 埤雅: "Tree peonies rank first among all the flowers, and (*shaoyao*) peonies rank second. The tree peony is called the king among the flowers, and the peony is the chancellor among them".<sup>24</sup> In actuality, during the eleventh century in China, the *shaoyao* peonies cultivated in the south-eastern city of Yangzhou were famous and considered to be as precious as the tree peonies of Luoyang. In 1082 Luoyang, Zhou Shihou 周師厚 (1031- 1087), in *Record of Flowers and Trees in Luoyang* (*Luoyang huamu ji* 洛陽花木記), compiled a list of forty-one peony cultivars. These included: Sixteen yellow, sixteen red, six violet, one white and one pink, respectively. He briefly explained the method of root division, emphasising that Yangzhou had become the most famous city for the peony.<sup>25</sup> When Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) governed Yangzhou, he witnessed an event described as the 'thousands flower show' (*wanhua hui* 萬花會), where people enjoyed the peony flowers. In the Song dynasty, Yangzhou became famous for the herbaceous peony.

#### Liu Ban

The scholar Liu Ban 劉攽 (1022-1088)<sup>26</sup> compiled the *Treatise of the Peony* (*Shaoyao pu* 芍藥譜),<sup>27</sup> which is the first of its kind. Although it originally contained illustrations of the cultivars, this component is lost. Liu

initially served as a government official in the capital of Kaifeng but resigned from his position in protest against the Grand Chancellor Wang Anshi's 王安石 (1021-1086) drastic reforms. He relocated from Hailing 海陵, which is presently Taizhou 泰州 in the Jiangsu province, to Yangzhou in 1073,<sup>28</sup> where he became deeply impressed by the diverse peonies there. Without an occupation, he had leisure time to enjoy the flowers and devote himself to writing.

In his book, he listed thirty-one cultivar names,<sup>29</sup> including their simple characteristics. Each of the species' names is composed of three simple characters. For example, Liu describes the first-ranked cultivar, the 'Best of All Plants' (*guanqun fang* 冠群芳), as a 'large and circumvoluted crown, crimson'. This annotation describes the denseness of the many rich, red petals that do not fully open, which mould the flower into a large, crown-like shape.<sup>30</sup> He appropriately summarised its three morphological features by describing the flower's shape, formation, and the colour of its petals. These details reflect the period's cultivar classification and evaluation criteria.

Liu also emphasises the thriving cultivation of the peony in Yangzhou, comparing it to the north. Before he travelled to Yangzhou, he had worked in Kaifeng for a while. Therefore, he was familiar with the peony in the north. Thus, he analysed the rationale for the peony's unique, high-quality features in Yangzhou. He also highlighted that Yangzhou suited plant growth by quoting the *Yugong* 禹貢, a Confucian classic. Liu's views on the peony - and perhaps one of his reasons for focusing on the location - was likely inspired by the *Note of Tree Peony in Luoyang* (*Luoyang mudan ji* 洛陽牡丹記) by Ouyang Xiu, Liu's mentor. Ouyang also focused on local excellence, concluding that Luoyang was the best place for plants to grow. According to Ouyang's unique view, *qi* is the main factor for a plant's mutation. He explains how the *qi*, coming to



Luoyang from all directions, does not cause frontal collisions because Luoyang is located in the centre of the world. Eventually, the *qi* amasses from all directions and becomes tangled and swirled, creating an imbalance, which produces the exceptional beauty of the abundant cultivars of the peony. In addition, Liu introduced the idea that any luxury cultivar that had once been transplanted in different places, aside from Yangzhou, would turn into the common peony.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, Liu also discussed why the historical records did not mention peonies in Yangzhou although it was a commercial city, where the merchants gathered to exchange goods. He states: “all the creatures in nature must have ancestors. Yangzhou must also have had the original peonies, but it only became popular today”. He believed that even though the Yangzhou peony’s beauty had never been mentioned in previous literature, the peony’s prosperity could not be merely a temporary achievement. Therefore, he came to the following conclusion:

“It is just because flower preferences are always changing in different ages. It is not surprising that the ancients did not discover the beauty of peony [...]. It was only for a lack of previous records that we do not know the actual situation before [...] Today’s peony cultivation in Yangzhou may become more prosperous in the future. Now, if no one today should record the peony in Yangzhou, it would not be known to future generations. This is indeed regrettable. Also, it would really be a pity to lose those excellent cultivars. If they are lost and forgotten, future visitors to Yangzhou will never know these flourishing peonies.”

Finally, Liu emphasises the purpose and importance of his treatise. As compared to those of Wang Guan and Kong Wuzhong, Liu’s treatise has fewer words, but the content and originality is relatively rich. Liu did not only record peony variations, but he

also discusses the relationship between the geographic factors of Yangzhou, the peony, and the local flower industry.

### Wang Guan

Wang Guan 王觀 (1035-ca.1100) wrote the *Treatise of Peony in Yangzhou* (*Yangzhou Shaoyao pu* 揚州芍藥譜). He was appointed as magistrate of Jiangdu (江都, the centre of Yangzhou) in the twelfth lunar month of 1075,<sup>32</sup> so he first saw the peonies during the spring of the following year. His words thus describe the situation after 1076. During his sojourn in Jiangdu, he became famous after composing the *Rhapsody of Yangzhou* (*Yangzhou fu* 揚州賦); consequently, the emperor granted him the Red Official Costume and the Silver Stamp. Soon afterward, he was accused of bribery, demoted and sent to Yongzhou. Thus, he appears to have remained in Yangzhou for a maximum of four years after 1076.

In his treatise, he annotated thirty-one cultivars, which were previously recorded by Liu Ban, along with eight new ones and three species of single-petal peonies. In total, he recorded approximately forty-two cultivars. For example, the cultivar dubbed ‘the Best Creation by Nature’ (*jin tiangong* 盡天工) had been introduced by Liu Ban in this matter: ‘*liupu* 柳浦, green stamen and red crown’. Consequently, this flower had a greenish stamen and crown-shaped flowers with red petals. Wang noted the following:

“The small petals are straight and dense, embraced by larger petals. It is most excellent. Only the Creator (*zaohua* 造化) can produce it. The branches are stiff and green, and the leaves are green and thin.”

This flower has two types of petals, and the small petals grow densely, and are surrounded by larger petals. As for the cultivar’s name, ‘the Best Creation by Nature’, he describes how these red and green



petals complement each other, being the result of the Creation's natural work. People in the Song dynasty often understood that the power of nature is what causes mutations. In addition, Wang also records the features of the stems (stiff and greenish-yellow) and leaves (greenish and thin). A thousand years later, we are still able to imagine the overall appearance of the original cultivars.

Opposing Ouyang Xiu's view that imbalanced *qi* causes mutations, Wang details the cultivation, transplantation, and related techniques involved, while acknowledging that human kind plays a significant role in improving novel cultivars:

"People generally believe that all objects in the world are influenced by *qi* in the universe in order to be produced, as we cannot redesign sizes, lengths, or tastes. Yet, this is not true. The tree peony in Luoyang and the herbaceous peony in Yangzhou are affected by nature, but we can still improve their sizes and colours. Certainly, the power of the Creator (*zaowu* 造物) is so powerful that we cannot even compete. In reality, even nature cannot avoid defects, and the Creator's performance is not always perfect."

He proceeds to emphasise the artificial improvements for the peony rather than spontaneous mutations.

#### Kong Wuzhong

Kong Wuzhong 孔武仲 (1042-1098), who belonged to the forty-sixth generation descendants of Confucius, observed and cultivated the peony during his sojourn in Yangzhou, while compiling the *Treatise of Peony in Yangzhou*.<sup>33</sup> He was granted the *jinshi* 進士 imperial scholar title in 1063, and soon after, in the ninth lunar month of 1078, he was appointed as the Principal of Yangzhou Academic Institute (*Yangzhou jiaoshou* 揚州教授).<sup>34</sup> In 1080, at thirty-seven, he wrote the *Treatise of Peony in Yangzhou*,<sup>35</sup> and during his

sojourn, he visited the city's six famous family gardens. He also visited the Buddhist and Daoist temples to view the peonies, as he had been impressed by their extreme beauty.

He decided to record them in order to transfer the knowledge to future generations. He not only investigated the peonies alone, but also sent his disciples to seek them out and to collect information. In the end, he selected thirty-three prominent cultivars and ranked the Yellow Imperial Dress (*yuyihuang* 御衣黃) as the first. A few years later, Zhou Shihou in Luoyang also listed the Yellow Imperial Dress as the best cultivar. This yellow cultivar had not been recorded in Liu Ban's treatise, and although it had been added as a new cultivar by Wang Guan, Kong had first ranked it. Liu, Wang, and Kong individually had different ideas but shared a desire for knowledge. They all delighted in reflecting on the Neoconfucian principle of investigating all things, *gewu* 格物.

According to Kong's description, there were tens of thousands of peonies in the flower gardens, which were comparable to the tree peony gardens in Luoyang. Outsiders came to purchase nursery stocks of premium peonies at substantial prices, but those that were planted in different places would turn into common flowers. Consequently, he traced the history of the peonies from the perspective of exegetics by quoting *Shijing*, *Rhapsody of Mr Vacuous*, etc. Kong emphasised that no poet in the Tang dynasty had composed poems on peonies in Yangzhou despite many having sojourned there. He concluded that the cultivation of the peony (both before and during the Tang dynasty) had never been as popular as in the eleventh century.

#### Ai Chou

According to the German sinologist Martina Siebert, there are five treatises on peonies from pre-modern China. Except for the three by Liu, Wang, and Kong, there are



also the *Catalogue of Tree and Herbaceous Peonies* (*Mudan shaoyao huapin* 牡丹芍藥花品)<sup>36</sup> from the Song dynasty and an encyclopaedia by Gao Lian 高濂 from the Ming dynasty.<sup>37</sup> In addition to these five treatises, Ai Chou 艾丑 had an unknown career but also compiled an essay on the peony.<sup>38</sup> In 1601, the gazetteer *Yangzhou fuzhi* 揚州府志 states:

Yangzhou is famous for the peony. During the Song dynasty, the Buddhist temple Chanzhi si 禪智寺 had a garden, and there was another peony garden in the front. Besides, Xiang Zigu owned a peony garden [...], Kong Wuzhong recorded thirty-two cultivars, and [Ai] Chou recorded twenty-four cultivars. Both treatises placed the Yellow Imperial Dress [cultivar] on the top. The *Gazetteer of Guangling* 廣陵志 recorded 32 cultivars and ranked the Emperor's Favoured Red [cultivar] 御愛紅 as the first.<sup>39</sup>

As demonstrated above, both Kong Wuzhong and Ai Chou equally valued the Emperor's Favoured Red as the best cultivar. This congruity implies that Ai's treatise was completed shortly after 1080, when Kong recorded his treatise. Cao Shouzhen 曹守貞,

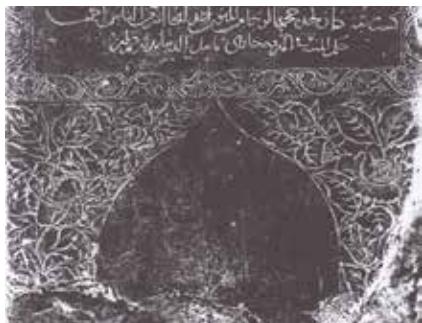
*jinshi* in 1538,<sup>40</sup> in his *Collectanea of Peony Treatises in Weiyang* (i.e. Yangzhou) (*Weiyang shaoyaopu* 維揚芍藥譜) collected Ai's treatise along with another three by Liu, Wang, and Kong.<sup>41</sup> Regrettably, this collection was misplaced, and we are not aware of Ai's background except for his name. The title of his treatise is also unknown.

### *Cultivar Ranking*

While the peony also appeared in many literary works during the Southern Song dynasty, such as *The Beginning Bloom of Peony* (*Shaoyao chusheng* 芍藥初生) by Yang Wanli 楊萬里 (1127-1206), no treatise on peonies from this period has survived. Only the *Gazetteer of Guangling* (i.e. Yangzhou) (*Guangling zhi* 廣陵志, 1190-1194) recorded thirty-two cultivars of peony.<sup>42</sup> Table 1 depicts a brief view about the changing of cultivar rankings over time. As mentioned above, Wang Guan simply transcribed the cultivar ranking from Liu Ban treatise, while adding some new cultivars.

Table 1. Cultivar Ranking of the Peony during the Song Dynasty (cultivar names are translated by the author)

Reference	Liu Ban and Wang Guan	Kong Wuzhong	Zhou Shihou	The <i>Gazetteer of Yangzhou</i>
Location (Date)	Yangzhou (1073-1080)	Yangzhou (1080)	Luoyang (1082)	Yangzhou (1190-1194)
Emperor's Favoured Red	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
Yellow Imperial Dress	(New Cultivar)	1	1	2
Treasurable Maquillage	3	33	N/A	N/A
Dawn Sky of Maquillage	5	12	38	N/A
Splash Rouge	6	16	24	N/A
Accumulated Adorability Red	8	20	17	N/A
Tentative Full Makeup	22	32	N/A	N/A
Bundle of Red Threads	26	31	N/A	N/A



**Fig.2** This is a fourteenth-century gravestone at the Phoenix Mosque, (*Fenghuangsi* 鳳凰寺) in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. Based on the leaves, the left lineal drawing appears to represent a tree peony, while on the right there is an herbaceous peony.

In Table 1, the two cultivars *Splash Rouge* (*dianzhuang hong* 點妝紅) and *Accumulated Adorability Red* (*jijiao hong* 積嬌紅) had rapidly declined in rank from the treatises of Liu, Kong, to Zhou. The three cultivars - *Treasurable Maquillage* (*baozhuang cheng* 寶妝成), *Tentative Full Makeup* (*shinong zhuang* 試濃妝) and *Bundle of Red threads* (*cuhong si* 簇紅絲) - had also been ranked lower from Liu's treatise to Kong's. In Yangzhou, new cultivars, such as the *Yellow Imperial Dress*, were continuously introduced in less than ten years, and this variety rapidly spread to Luoyang. This phenomenon assists us in understanding the pace at which the Chinese bred peonies and developed new varieties.



**Fig.3** This image is an export painting of a peony seller in Beijing during the Qing dynasty (British Library Imaging Services; OR. 15929). The Chinese text says: "This flower blooms in the fourth lunar month. It is gorgeous. There are cultivars called Princess Yang, Supreme White, Foreign Red, etc. Peonies that are placed in a vase can be sustained for ten or more days".

In the Yuan,<sup>43</sup> Ming, and Qing dynasties, Yangzhou was still a popular location for the peony, and some Chinese intellectuals had published integrated horticultural books that often mentioned it. During the Ming dynasty, in 1591, Gao Lian 高濂 wrote a book that listed all the cultivars in the treatises of Liu and Kong as well as what was included in the gazetteer of Yangzhou during the Song dynasty.<sup>44</sup> He also described methods for seeding, growing, and pruning peony. Meanwhile, Wang Zijin 王象晉 (1561-1653) introduced cultivars in his plant encyclopaedia, *Treatise for All Various Plants* (*Qunfang pu* 群芳譜) as: Seven yellow, twenty-two red, five violet, and five white. Furthermore, he also discussed its medical usage, root division, processing for medical purposes, immortal figures, remedies, ancient events, and literature. During the Qing dynasty, in 1688, Chen Haozi 陳淏子 recorded the work *Flower Mirror* (*Huajing* 花鏡), where he listed cultivars, including eighteen yellow, twenty-five red, seventeen pink, fourteen violet, and fourteen white cultivars.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, an export painting (Fig. 3) mentions three cultivar names: *Princess Yang* (*Yangfei* 楊妃), *Supreme White* (*shabai* 傻白), and *Foreign Red* (*Yanghong* 洋紅).



The cultivation of peonies in Yangzhou continued until the Qing dynasty, but it seems to have eventually declined during the Republic of China's era. In 1985, the Yangzhou government designated the guelder rose as the city's flower. Peonies in Yangzhou during pre-modern China have been largely forgotten today. In 2005, Yangzhou made the peony its city flower and began to encourage its cultivation and development, but no successful peony gardens currently exist.

### Conclusion

Through the analysis of literary sources, this study explores the history of the herbaceous peony (*shaoyao*) in China. This occurred especially up until the thirteenth century, when the Chinese ornamental horticulture was flourishing. *Shaoyao* first appeared in the *Shijing* around the eighth and seventh centuries BCE; however, no inherent link exists between this *shaoyao* and the peony. Thus, *shaoyao* may have been the name of a different plant until the third century, as it does not possess some of the properties a peony does. Conversely, in the Han dynasty's medicinal texts, the characteristics of the *shaoyao* are related to the herbaceous peony, denoting the term referring to the peony in this context.

In the fourth century, the female poet Xin Xiao composed a eulogy praising the peonies that were planted in the garden, and this composition is the earliest text that involved cultivating and admiring peonies. As the tree peony *mudan* became popular during the Tang dynasty, many poets also wrote works on the herbaceous peony. Still, the Tang dynasty did not produce a poem that described the peony in Yangzhou.

In the eleventh century, Yangzhou became famous for the herbaceous peony, and the Chinese people rapidly produced numerous varieties of its cultivars, while Liu Ban, Wang Guan, Kong Wuzhong, and

Ai Chou, who had sojourned in Yangzhou, wrote treatises on the peony. They desired for those treatises to remain accessible to future generations, in order to inform them of their style of economical peony cultivation. However, after Cao's collection, the treatises by Liu and Kong were misplaced at some point between the late Ming and Qing dynasties, which meant that they were not extensively familiar to the future generations of readers. Today, we can only partly observe some of these fragments that are quoted in other texts.

Between the 1070s and 1080s, the practice of *shaoyao* peony cultivation and breeding reached the most prolific period in Yangzhou. New varieties were flourishing, while the older ones were being eliminated. For a lengthy period thereafter, many peonies were cultivated in Yangzhou. In contemporary China, however, the peony's history in Yangzhou and its cultivation practices have been largely disregarded.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Shao Bowen 邵伯溫, *Yixue bianhuo* 易學辨惑 (in *Wenyuan ge siku quanshu* 文淵閣四庫全書 9, Taipei, Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), p. 411.

<sup>2</sup> For an English language reference about the cultural history in traditional China of these two great groups of peonies, see Joseph Needham, Lu Kwei-djen, Huang Hsing-tsung, *Science and Civilisation in China, Volume 6: Biology and Biological Technology, Part I: Botany* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 394-409.

<sup>3</sup> Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of Odes: Chinese Text, Transcription and Translation* (Stockholm, Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1950), pp. 61-62. The underlined 'Zhen' and 'jian' were originally respectively translated as 'Chen' and 'kien'; *shaoyao* was translated as 'peony'.

<sup>4</sup> Zheng Xuan 鄭玄(commentary), Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (sub commentary), Ruan Yuan 阮元 (rev.), *Shisanjing zhushu Maoshi zhengyi* 十三經注

疏毛詩正義 (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1980), pp. 442-443.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Xiao Tong 蕭統 (ed.), Li Shan 李善 et al., (commentary), *Wenxuan* 文選 4 (Ashikaga, Shikagakyo uiku iinkai, 1975), p. 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Ban Gu 班固, Yan Shigu 顏師古, *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1962), p. 2544

<sup>8</sup> Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 et al. (ed.), *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 1985), p. 1096.

<sup>9</sup> Wang Chong 王充 (ed.), Huang Hui 黃暉 (rev.), *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990, 635.

<sup>10</sup> Shang Zhijun 尚志鈞 (rev.), *Wushier bingfang yaowu zhushi* 五十二病方藥物注釋 (Wuhu, Wannan yixue yanke, 1989), pp. 32-33.

<sup>11</sup> Zhao Huaizhou 趙懷舟, et al., "Chengdu Laoguan shan Hanmu 'Liushi bingfang' he 'Wuwei Handai yijian' de bijiao yanjiu 成都老官山漢墓《六十病方》和《武威漢代醫簡》的比較研究", *Chinese Medical Culture* 10,5 (2015), pp. 4-9.

<sup>12</sup> Zhang Yanchang 張延昌 (ed.), *Wuwei Handai yijian zhujie* 武威漢代醫簡注解 (Beijing, TCM Ancient Books Publishing House, 2006), p. 180.

<sup>13</sup> *Danggui shaoyao san* 當歸芍藥散. This formula is compounded with other ingredients in addition to both roots of angelica and peony. It is prescribed for sterility or to cure all type of pain in lady's abdomen, according to *Synopsis of Golden Chamber*.

<sup>14</sup> Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd, *Science, Folklore and Ideology: Studies in the Life Sciences in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 127-128.

<sup>15</sup> Pedanius Dioscorides, *Der Wiener Dioskurides: Codex medicus graecus 1 der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt* (Graz, Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 1999), p. 51.

<sup>16</sup> Dong You 董遇, *Guojia tushuguan cang guangchuan huaba guangchuan shuba* 國家圖書館藏廣川畫跋廣川書跋, Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 2017, pp. 112-113.

<sup>17</sup> Abu Rayhan al-Biruni(ed.), Hakim Mohammed Said (tr), *al-Biruni's Book on Pharmacy and Materia Medica* (Karachi, Hamdard National Foundation, 1973), p. 41.

<sup>18</sup> Tang Shenwen 唐慎微, Zhang Cunhui 張存惠 (rev.), *Chongxiu zhengbe jingshi zhenglei bencao*



重修政和經史證類備用本草, (Beijing, Renmin weisheng chubanshe, 1957), p. 201.

<sup>19</sup> Ge Hong 葛洪, a famous Daoist in the early fourth century, mentioned dietary habit with *shaoyao*, but this is just a quote of practice in an earlier age. It did not reflect the habit of the fourth century. Ge Hong 葛洪, Wang Ming 王明 (revised), *Baopuzi jiaoshi 抱朴子校釋* (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1985), p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Teruyuki Kubo, "The Problem of Identifying Mudan and the Tree Peony in Early China", *Asian Medicine* 5,1 (2009), pp. 108-145.

<sup>21</sup> Peng Dingqiu 彭定求 et al. (ed.), *Quan Tangshi 全唐詩* (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1999), p. 2680.

<sup>22</sup> Anonym (ed.), Wang Bing 王冰 (commentary), *Huangdi neijing suwen 黃帝內經素問* (Beijing: People's Medical Publishing House, 1963), p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Peng Dingqiu et al., *Quan Tangshi*, p. 4231.

<sup>24</sup> Lu Tian 陸佃, *Piya 埤雅* (Beijing, Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1998), p. 374.

<sup>25</sup> Teruyuki Kubo, "A Study of Mudan-pu (Monographs of the Tree Peony) in the Song Dynasty", *Studies in the History of Natural Sciences* 29,1 (2010), pp. 46-60.

<sup>26</sup> Qian Zhongshu 錢鐘書, *Songsbi xuanzhu 宋詩選注* (Beijing, Joint Publishing, 2007), p. 84.

<sup>27</sup> Zhu Mu 祝穆, Fu Dayong 富大用 (eds.), *Gujin shiwen leiju 古今事文類聚* (in possession of National Library of China, reference no. 07564), Houji 後集, juan 30, 11ab.

<sup>28</sup> Tuotuo 脫脫 et al. (ed.), *Songsbi 宋史*, (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1977), p. 10388.

<sup>29</sup> In addition to the 31 cultivars mentioned by Liu, there is also a cultivar named 'golden tie' (*jindai wei* 金帶圍). In total, he recorded at least 32 cultivars mentioned in his treatise.

<sup>30</sup> This is a double-flowered variety, whose small petals transformed from stamens are circumscribed by the normal petals.

<sup>31</sup> The function of pollens had never been recognised until the pre-modern era in East Asia, so that breeding left spontaneous pollination to chance.

<sup>32</sup> Liu Xiaoguang 劉曉光, "Wang Guan shengping shiji kao 王觀生平事蹟考", *Journal of Hubei Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)* 27,3 (2007), pp. 24-29.

<sup>33</sup> Wang Wei 王達 (ed.), *Sankong xiansheng qingjiang wenji 三孔先生清江文集* (Beijing, Xianzhuang shuju 線裝書局, 2004), pp. 218-

219. The title of his treatise is precisely the same as in Wang's treatise. Perhaps, Kong has never seen Wang's treatise.

<sup>34</sup> Qin Liang 秦良, "Beisong Jiangxi mingren Xiao Guan Kong Wuzhong de shengcu niankao 北宋江西名人蕭貫孔武仲的生卒年考", *Journal of Jiangxi Institute of Education*, 15, 3 (1994), p. 52, p. 38.

<sup>35</sup> Li Chunmei 李春梅, *Sankongshibijiannian 三孔事蹟編年* (Chengdu, Sichuan University Press, 2003), pp. 2884-2885.

<sup>36</sup> The *Catalogue of Tree and Herbaceous Peonies* is a collection of previous works. It only contains the treatise on peony by Kong Wuzhong.

<sup>37</sup> Martina Siebert, "From Bamboo to 'Bamboology': The Search for Scientific Disciplines in Traditional China", in Jiang Shaoyuan (ed.), *History of science in the Multiculture: Proceedings of the Tenth International Conference on the History of Science in East Asia*, Shanghai, Shanghai jiaotong daxue chubanshe, 2005), pp. 307-320.

<sup>38</sup> Wei Chin-sheng, "A Short History of Herbaceous Peony in Yangzhou", *Acta Horticulturae Sinica* 3,3 (1964), pp. 269-278.

<sup>39</sup> Yang Xunxiu 楊洵修, Lu Junbi 陸君弼 (eds.), *Yangzhou fuzhi 揚州府志* (Yangzhou, Guangling shushe, 2015), p. 619.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 497.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 687.

<sup>42</sup> Shen Maoguan 慎懋官, *Huayi huamu niaoshou zhenwan kao 華夷花木鳥獸珍玩考* (in *Siku quanshu congmu congshu zibu 四庫全書存目叢書子部* 118 (Jinan, Qilu shushe, 1995)), pp. 539-540.

<sup>43</sup> A peony was carved on the 14th century's gravestone in a Chinese mosque in Hangzhou (fig.2). Alexander Morton (transl.), *Hangzhou Fenghuang si alabowen bosiwen beiming shidu yizbu* 杭州鳳凰寺藏阿拉伯文、波斯文碑銘釋讀譯注 (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 2015), p. 69.

<sup>44</sup> Gao Lian 高濂, *Zunsheng bajian 遵生八箋*, in *Beijing tushuguan guji zhenben congkan 北京圖書館古籍珍本叢刊* 61 (Beijing, Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1998), p. 484.

<sup>45</sup> Chen Haozi 陳淏子 (ed.), *Yi Qinzheng 伊欽恆* (revise), *Huajing 花鏡* (Beijing, China agriculture press, 1962), pp. 305-310.