



Book Review

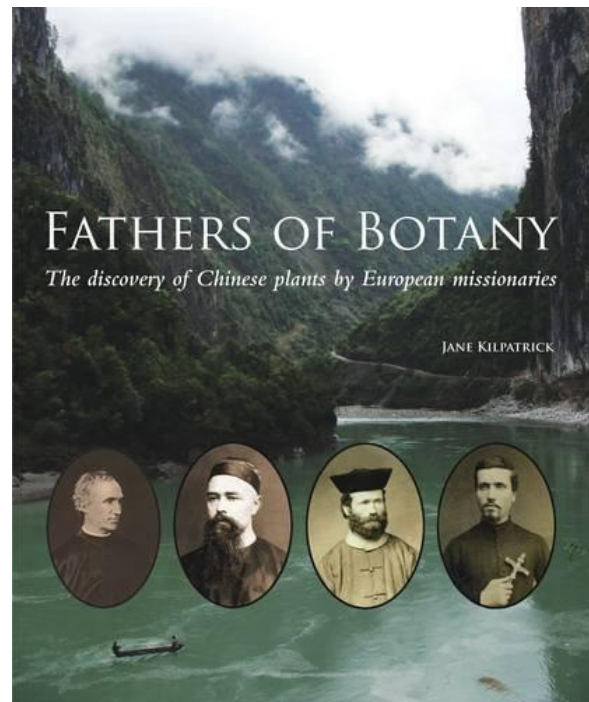
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Fathers of Botany: The discovery of Chinese plants by European missionaries. Jane Kilpatrick. Kew: Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew & Chicago: University of Chicago. 2014. ISBN: 9781842465141. 253 pages, 250 colour plates. £40.

If, like me, you enjoy delving into the history of plant collecting, then this beautifully illustrated book by Jane Kilpatrick is a must. It tells the stories of several missionary priests sent from Europe to live and work in the Chinese interior at the end of the Opium Wars in the 1860s. These were some of the first Westerners to discover China's botanical riches, yet until now, their plant collecting achievements have remained largely forgotten.

The book, arranged in 17 chapters, focuses mainly on the lives and botanical collections made by four French missionary-botanists, but priests and missionaries from Germany, Ireland and Italy are also featured, as are more familiar characters such as E.H. Wilson and George Forrest. The chapters are arranged chronologically and discuss each individual in turn, describing their journeys, the hardships they encountered and the discoveries they made. Herbarium specimens, archive images of plant illustrations and stunning colour photographs of living plants serve to enhance the author's narrative. Simple full-page colour maps allow the reader to visualise the journeys taken by the missionaries, and photographs of the men themselves, the indigenous people they encountered and the places they visited help to bring their stories to life.

Kilpatrick uses many archival sources to piece together the lives of the missionaries, including extracts from letters written by three of the priests to Adrien Franchet at the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris, who described and worked on the collections they sent home. But the book is more than just an historical treatise. Indeed, many of the chapters include a section entitled "Horticultural Developments" describing how some of the plants discovered by the missionaries have since been cultivated and exploited. The tree peony *Paeonia delavayi*, for



example, discovered by Père Jean Marie Delavay in 1884 on the slopes of Yulong Shan, was used by Arthur Saunders in America to develop dark-flowered "Black Pirate" and other stunning hybrid garden plants. *Tsuga chinensis*, discovered by Père Paul Guillame Farges, is now grown in arboreta throughout North America where its resistance to hemlock pests could help researchers increase resistance in native North American species.

The subjects covered by Kilpatrick in this book – including history, politics, horticulture, botany and zoology (the discovery of the giant panda!) – will ensure its appeal to a wide audience and, with up to five colour plates on each double page to illustrate the equally colourful plant collecting stories, it should not disappoint.

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