THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE NAN-FANG TS'AO-MU CHUANG 南方草木狀

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Abbreviations used in the notes

CLPT Cheng-lei pen-ts'ao 證類本草 (SPTK)
CMYS Ch'i-min yao-shu chin-shih 齊民要術今釋 ed. by Shih Sheng-han 石聲漢 (Peking, 1957-1958)
IWLC I-wen lei-chü 畫文類聚 ed. by Wang Shao-ying 汪紹楹 (Peking, 1965)
LPLI Ling-piao lu-i 嶽表錄異 (SKCS)
PHL Pei-hu lu 北戶錄 ed. by Lu Hsin-yüan 陸心源 (1880)
TPYL T'ai-p'ing yü-lan 太平御覽 (SPTK)
ESWS Erh-shih-wu shih pu-pien 二十五史補編
SKCS Ssu-k'u ch'ian-shu chen-pen 四庫全書珍本
SPTK Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an 四庫叢刊
TSCC Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng 叢書集成

The dynastic histories cited are the punctuated editions published by Chung-hua shu-chü of Peking since the late 1950's.

The Nan-fang ts'ao-mu chuang (hereafter NFTM), attributed to Hsi Han 慕含 (263-306), is a work often cited by both sinologues and botanists. Such eminent scholars as Emilii Vasil'evich Bretschneider (1833-1901), Berthold Laufer (1874-1934) and Elmer Drew Merrill (1876-1956) regarded it as the earliest Chinese botanical treatise 1). A botanist describes it as “the earliest regional flora written in any language” 2), while another goes so far as to call it


“the earliest purely botanical treatise in any language” 3). A specialist on Southeast Asia says it is one of the two earliest Chinese works on the region that have survived, the other being Ko Hung’s 《薔渓》 (283-343) 《T’ai-ch’ing chin-i shen-tan ching》 4).

Historians cite it as the evidence that by the third century Canton had already become the terminal port of navigation between the Persian Gulf and China with a sizable permanent foreign population 5). Scientists credit it with the first reference in any literature to the entomological control of plant pests 6). Two plants in this work, 甘薯 and 木/pp 去子, have been identified as the sweet potato (Ipomoea batatas) and the peanut (Arachis hypogaea) respectively 7). The general view is that both sweet

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