

## 35<sup>th</sup> All India Rose Convention & Rose Show

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### China's contribution to modern roses

Ping Lim\*



In 1930, British geneticist Dr. C. C. Hurst traced the genetics behind modern garden roses back to four cultivars from China — the Four Stud. These four roses, in the words of Jerry Haynes (History of Roses), “changed the rose world profoundly.”

While these four cultivars undoubtedly influenced the rose world, the reality is that without the careful work of Western plant hunters, scientists and breeders, these four roses could have remained relatively unknown, though pretty, plants in the Chinese landscape. In 1992, Roger Phillips and Martyn Rix made a nine-day expedition to China in search of any existing old tea roses (specifically, Hume's Blush Tea-Scented and Parks' Yellow Tea-Scented China) and to find out what is new in China. But instead, they found the “Peace” rose -- a western cultivar and few other common *Rosa* species... Even today, China is producing 140 million rose bushes annually, but most of the cultivars are imported from the West. Only a handful of new Chinese roses are bred from local breeders and only few ancient cultivars have survived the Cultural Revolution. Just as some Western people may be surprised that garden roses have their roots in China, many Chinese people today would also be surprised to learn this – rose is not an exotic flower. The truth is that modern roses involve both Western and Eastern cultures and mutual interests.

What were Western roses like before the introduction of China's roses? In the mid-eighteenth century, European roses were mostly descendants of Gallicas, Centifolia, Alba, and later, Damasks — all European lines. These roses were well known for their hardiness and intoxicating fragrance. But the Western roses were limited in color range. Most of them were in the ranges of pinks, purples, and whites, habitual flower form and coarse plant habits. But despite the limited diversity, roses were still the most popular favorite flower. Even Shakespeare famously remarked, “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet” and that “of all flowers methinks a rose is best.”



Then one day in 1751, a bright naturalist named Pehr Osbeck brought *Rosa chinensis*

from Canton back to Europe. This was a surprise to Carl Linné (Carl von Linnaeus), Osbeck's teacher and the famous Botanist in Sweden, who had thought that the red hibiscus (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*) was a rose from China. So Osbeck's work in bringing back *R. chinensis* (one of the four studs), completely overturned what European naturalists had previously understood to be a Chinese rose.



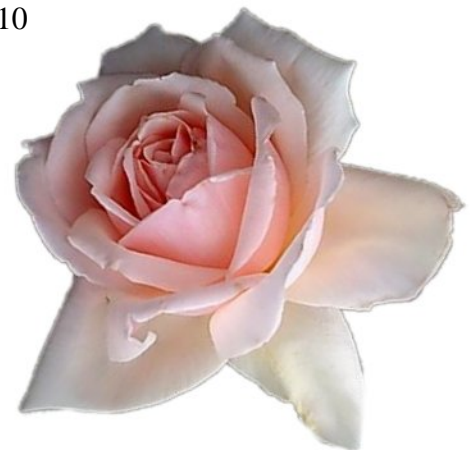
By 1792, Parsons commercially introduced *R. chinensis* (Parsons' Pink China, Old Blush, YueYueFeng) to UK to be known by the western world. Due to its re-flowering ability and dwarf quality, this legend started to reach out to France and further via French colonial expansion. This made 'Old Blush' become the most popular rose in the world. Eventually, this was quite rewarding, as it resulted in hybrid descendants such as Noisette and Bourbon setting the foundation for hybrid perpetual (HP) breeding lines (1828).

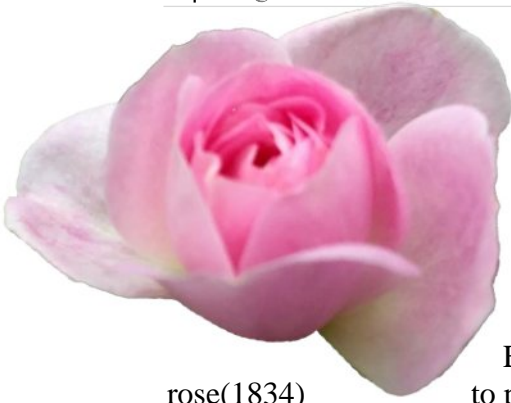
Since the year Osbeck brought back repeat blooming pale Old Blush to England in 1751 or earlier, when Dutch experts brought back Chinesische Eglantiere in 1733, nothing has been done for more than 50 years until the introduction of the hybrids Noisette, Bourbon and Portland in the early Nineteen century.



The 'new and exciting' genetics from Asia set fertile seeds to combine the most desired horticulture qualities via crossing.

In the early nineteenth century, French rose breeders took the lead and stormed the rose industry by fashion. Much of this foundation was set and supported by Empress Josephine Bonaparte and Napoleon. "Postman" Andre Dupont, who was a well-known rose collector and curator for Josephine at Malmasion, helped to search and propagate roses around the world, starting from 26 species in 1804 to 250 cultivars by 1814. These included 107 Gallicas, 32 Centifolia, 20 China, 8 Damask, and 7 Alba plus other odd species, which formed an abundant gene pool for advanced breeding efforts. Dupont created 25 of these while employed by Josephine. Subsequent French hybridizers combined these roses with China and Tea roses to create over 1000 new rose cultivars in the 30 years following Josephine's death. By 1910 there were about 8000 new hybrid roses in Gravereaux's garden (1892 - the first exclusive Rose Garden @ Roseraie de L'Hay) from many significant French breeders, including Jean-Baptiste André Guillot, the forerunner of rich yellow ('Soleil d'Or') Joseph Pernet-Ducher, Georges Delbard, Henri Lédéchaux, Jean-Pierre Vibert, Pierre Orard and the Triumph Meilland.





rose(1834)

Noisette family plays important role by introduced Old Blush to USA(1798) and brought back improve hybrid descendent from American (John Champney) *Rosa x Noisette* (1803) also *Rosa x Bourbor* from French Africa colony Mauritius (1824), These two hybrid of China with *Rosa x Damask* and *Rosa moschata* were among the first marketable products in Europe, correspondingly initiated groundwork of HP (hybrid perpetual) (1837) and open up European the ‘ALL Season’ flower craze! Later add on Tea to pioneer modern HT roses “La France” in 1867, more color range, hardiness, compactness plant habit, vigorous growth and long lasting flowers to replace HPs with more type such as Polyantha, miniature pot roses and long straight stem fresh cut roses to dominate the global landscape and market places.

Today, roses have become the largest floral industry, with an annual production of 8 billion stems, 80 million pots, and 220 million garden roses to enrich our civilization, landscape and social functions... from ‘Peace’ to ‘Iceberg’ to ‘Flower Carpet’ to ‘Knock Out’ and more to come....

Because most Chinese roses to the West were carried by East India Trading Company and transited at Calcutta, India (1751-1789), these roses were raised and localized as *Rosa indica*. Thus it is no surprise that Bengal roses still being called by French and German. Only a handful of varieties survived this long journey.

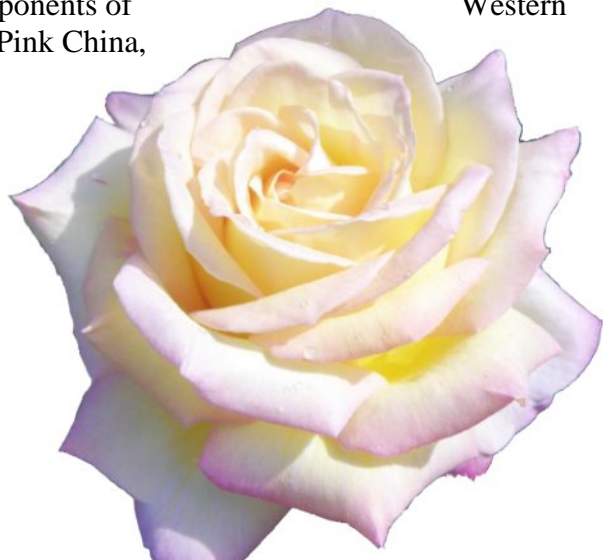


Luckily “the Four Stud Chinas” made their way to glorify Western rose breeding programs.

Beside the Fa Tee Nurseries in China and the East India Trading Company in Calcutta, credit must cited to honor the brilliant British plant hunting teams, especially to Parks, Hume, Slater and Parson. They brought more than “the Four Stud Chinas”(1792-1824).

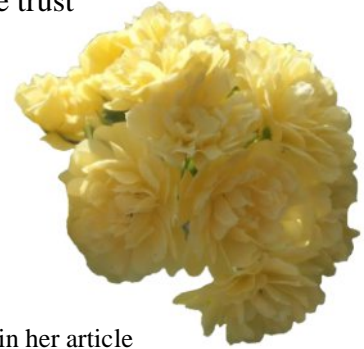
These China roses fulfilled the essential components of old roses such as repeat flowering (Parsons’ Pink China, Old Blush, YueYueFeng), crimson red color (‘Slater’s Crimson China, YueYueHong), yellow tone (Parks’ Yellow Tea-Scented China), symmetric high center solitary bud form (*Rosa x odorata*, XiangShuiYueJi) and varied plant habit, fragrance, and color maturity which revolutionized the future of roses.

Western





China has preserved more than 93 Rosa species (J.Y. Chen), including almost half of the whole world's gene pool for the genus Rosa and many of its historical hybrids. A few noteworthy Chinese beauties have entered the world since the Song dynasty (960-1279 AD), and many continue to be celebrated. Indian rose master M. S. Viru Viraraghavan said, "The contribution of China and its roses to the rose world is unmatched." While acknowledgements to the Rosa motherland are cherished, but it today there is some doubt of plant breeders' rights (PBR) in China. Exchange of ideas and genetic materials is sometimes fraught with tension and unease. There needs to be more trust to build collaborative innovations, as well as clear legal rights. A compassionate business environment would enhance the modern rose industry in China, and a stronger collaboration between breeders around the world would outshine words of appreciation for China's original contributions.



### \*Ping Lim

"Ping Lim is a rosarian for the twenty-first century", according to Lynn Schafer in her article in *Rambling Roses*, June 2011. He has a back ground that spans continents and horticultural traditions. Raised in Laos and educated in Taiwan, Ping got his first American Job in San Francisco. After years of study and training in every aspect of rose breeding, marketing and production, he became the Rose Research Director for Bailey Nurseries, leading an award winning Oregon-based rose breeding program.



In Ping Lim's own words, he has been breeding rose since 1992, his hybridization efforts being focus on 'Eco friendly' with less use of energy for stress resistance to combine with fragrance, grand petals, lasting color, compact form and quick blooming cycle. He has Twenty Easy Elegance Roses patented to his credit, He is three times winner of All America Rose Selections Award for his varieties, 'Love&Peace', 'DayDream' and 'Rainbow Sorbet'. He has also bred four 9/11 roses e.g., 'Forty Heroes', 'The Finest', 'Patriot's Dream' and 'Survivors'; two emblem roses: "Macy's Pride" and "Centennial" ( St. Paul, Minnesota); winner of two Biltmore International Rose Trial Award: "FlyingKiss" and "Double 10"; nine Portland Best Roses Awards since 2005 and Rose Hill International Rose Trial Award : Goldmine 2016. He is Director of Ornamental Plant Research, Altman Plants, USA. One of his favourite quotes is "Rose may be done...it fragrance retains!"

[www.altmanplants.com](http://www.altmanplants.com); [www.rosesbyping.com](http://www.rosesbyping.com) ; <http://www.youtube.com/user/u2ac>

