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One of the more pleasant e-mails I have received in recent memory was from my friend and colleague Dr. Ling Guo of the Beijing Botanic Gardens. It read: "*Jim, would you please come to Beijing for Crabapple Conference in April 14-19 for one hour talk. All expenses paid.* Hmm, let's see. Yes! Fortunately for my talkative nature it turned out to be a bit more than that one hour talk, not including the translations, but what a deals.

Ling and I have known each other for years, since she first came to the U.S. to study crabapples as part of her PhD project on the genetics of *Malus*, the genus for crabapples (small apples under two inches in diameter) and apples. Our plot in Wooster at OSU's Secrest Arboretum at the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center is the keystone plot of the International Ornamental Crabapple Society, where we study disease resistance and ornamental features of crabapple, and a good place for Ling to see a range of crabapples planted in the U.S.

She is also the current and improved registrar for ornamental apples for the International Cultivar Registration Authority, replacing me (with my recommendation!), and has just published a new checklist of all the different types of crabapples in the world. Crab apples are cherished by landscape architects and designers worldwide for their range of features. They vary in flower color, fruit color, and for their variability of tree shape, from weeping and spreading types to rounded and columnar forms. Crab apples are especially revered in China, where they anchor locations such as the Summer Palace outside Beijing, where in combination with peonies symbolize honor, health, and distinction.

Off I flew last Friday for the 18 in air hours to San Francisco and the sprawling Beijing Airport. Ah, an exit row on the China flight - but next to a central restroom. Grand Central Station of the Sky. But I digress. In Beijing the smog is heavy, but the first horticultural wonder I noted was the planting of rows and rows of trees all along the freeway, from ornamental peaches to a yellow-leaved version of the Chinese scholar tree (*Sophora*), from purple-leaved sand cherries (introduced to China by Ling) to fast-growing poplars. Every inch of available land a nursery.

To the main attraction we go, to the most-visited botanic garden in the world, and groggy or not – I must see their Crabapple Garden. Tens of thousands of families were enjoying the tulips, fragrant lilacs, the many other flowering trees, the sprawling grounds of everything from dawnredwoods to tiny yellow-flowered maples, and then we arrive to where in the last decade Ling has added many new American cultivars of crabapples to complement older species.

A number of these crabapples, including the very fragrant and showy double-flowered pink Brandywine™, the diminutive Cinderella™, the spreading weeper Molten Lava™, the little foliage ball of the top-grafted Lollipop™ and the large-flowered Madonna™ are introductions from Jim Zampini, the beloved Lake County Ohio plantsman. Alas in China we learned to our sadness that Jim passed away a week ago today at the age of 85. Jim's crabapples live on throughout the world.

The Chinese people are especially drawn to vibrant coral-pink to reddish-pink flowered trees, so they also love 'Prairifire' crabapple, one of the most popular sellers here in the United States. This also explains their love-affair with a cousin of crabapples, ornamental peaches (*Prunus persica*), which have some of the most intensely electric red-flowered versions of any flowers I have ever seen (as well as pink and white versions). Though we are still a bit cold here in most of Ohio for this tree, it is starting to show up in southern Ohio gardens. We need only wait another 50 years and soon it shall survive and thrive well this far north.

After visits to the Great Wall at Badaling with sweeping views of those yellow-flowered maples (*Acer mono*), lilacs, and all of us tiny human figures arrayed throughout the winding stone paths, and the Summer Palace with its iconic crabapples, the Conference commences. There are long walks through the crabapples and Ling introducing and then translating my comments (what a challenge) on the crabapples and there are formal presentations, from scientists looking at everything from anthocyanin pigments in crabapple flowers to electron micrographs of the male stamens of ‘Royalty’ crabapple, and my comments on crabapples and crabapple diseases in the U.S.

One of the key things I always relearn is what Kenny Cochran of Secrest Arboretum always taught me: right plant, right place. ‘Royalty’, ‘Radiant’, and ‘Van Esseltine’ are beautiful crabapples that they love and that thrive at the Beijing Botanic Garden and in many locations in China. We cannot sustainably enjoy these crabapples in Ohio because of our wetter springs. Here apple scab and fireblight make their diseased presence known. This is one of the reasons our International Ornamental Crabapple Society has plots around the country to test crabapples in different climates, making for better planting and sales planning for nursery producers and a nursery crop worth tens of millions of dollars annually for Ohio growers. Much crabapple collaboration with China and the U.S. is to come.

I cannot let this tale of travel to China end without a note about the unusual foods tried when overseas. In this case the unexpected delicacies were plant-based. After descending the last part of the Great Wall at Badaling on sliding cars we ate willow leaves and flowers in a delightful vinaigrette. Never have I expected to eat any part of a goldenraintree, but at the Conference banquet, along with an endless rotation of savory foods that included delectable wood ear fungi – there it was, a dish of bright green goldenraintree shoots.

There was a syrupy hot pear tea one night and a friend’s description of young elm fruits often eat in early spring, but the coup de grace for me was –jujube juice. In Michael Dirr’s *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants*, there it is, the very last tree description in the book, date palm. I had always thought it has the most exotic Latin name for a plant: *Ziziphus jujube*. And for breakfast, lunch and dinner, I would eat a few of the oval fruits and drink cold jujube juice. Both earthy and heavenly.

Final Note: Beijing’s spring is about 10 days ahead of us this year, and their crabapple flowers were fading. For us, now is the time. Stop by Secrest Arboretum in Wooster, Seiberling Naturealm in Akron, or Holden Arboretum in Geauga County. Enjoy. And remember, a crabapple is defined as an apple that at maturity is less than two inches in diameter (far too small to be beloved by most caterpillars), its Latin genus name is *Malus*, and botanically it has what is considered a pome fruit (don’t ask). Which led the First Earl of Pome-roy to pen:

There was a young wormling from Rome

Who yearned to make Malus his home

He searched and he searched

For a perch to besmirch

But crab apple was too tiny a pome