

ICS Profiles

Shin'ichiro Kishikawa

An anecdote

Bee Robson

On December 11 2009, I travelled up to London to a famous horticultural library. It was there that, several years before, I first saw the 19th century illustrations that inspired my passion for ancient camellias; thirteen priceless volumes, the nursery catalogues produced by perhaps the most famous of the mid 19 century nurseries - the Verschaffelt nursery of Ghent, Alexandre (and later Ambroise) Verschaffelt's *Nouvelle Iconographie des Camellias*. These books covered the years from 1848 to 1860 and contained the illustrations and descriptions of 603 camellias, camellias that he considered to be worthy of note that had not already been described by L'Abbe Berlèse in his *Iconographie du Genre Camellia*.

I came to love these books: it was quietly thrilling to turn over the tissue sheets that protected each illustration, the colours still bright and fresh after more than 150 years, and, quite apart from their intrinsic interest and beauty, the little stories they contain brought them to life. One in particular strikes a chord!

"Rectifying notice

We have just received from our usual correspondent, Mr Cesar Franchetti of Florence, a letter in which he rectifies thus the following facts:

"By a change of labels, with which I have nothing to do, the Camellias Paolina Maggi and Carolina Franzini which were sent to you, and which you have recently described and given the figure of under these names, must change those names thus - Poalina Maggi is the real Carolina Franzini, the latter is the Margherita Coleoni etc

*We beg our subscribers to take good note of this rectification, which corrects a regrettable error which we did not suspect, accustomed as we were to the synonymous exactness of our Italian correspondents"**

One can almost hear the tones of frustration, of self-justification and recrimination!

On March 14 the following year, I returned to the

library, to these beloved volumes, but the books were not there. Perhaps they had been moved - I asked the duty librarian but she did not know. Perhaps they had gone for restoration. Nobody had any information. Finally I talked to the Library Director, to explain the situation. It transpired that, unbeknown to the library, all thirteen volumes had been stolen - sometime between December 11 and March 14. The case finally came to court and a conviction was obtained. The books were never recovered.

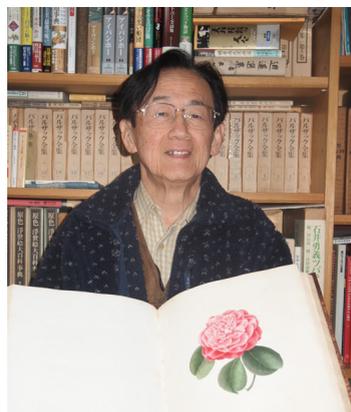
Although the Verschaffelt originals are gone, it is still possible for researchers to have access to them and that is due to the work of one man, Shin'iricho Kishikawa, who has produced facsimile copies of these and other treasured books. Through his work, Mr Kishikawa has brought these wonderful books within reach. The original descriptions and illustrations are the primary sources of information for identification, and although not faultless, their value cannot be overestimated.

Mr Kishikawa has always been most generous in giving his permission to use his images for which I thank him.

*The translation from the original French was made by E. A. McIlhenny

A conversation with Shin'ichiro Kishikawa

Bee Robson



Where were you born and brought up?

As my father worked for a National company, after graduating from Kyushu University, he used to be

transferred to various places. I was born in Taiwan (which was Japanese at that time). I attended primary schools in Hokkaido and Osaka, a junior high school and a high school in Saga Prefecture in Kyushu. I graduated from Kyushu University in Fukuoka.

Was the family interested in horticulture?

When I was a junior high and high school boy, I attended the schools while living with my uncle's family in Saga Prefecture. My aunt was very fond of flowers and in the garden she grew sasanquas, peonies, cherries, Japanese apricots etc. as flowers and shaddock, loquats, pomegranates, peaches etc. as fruit trees, and many vegetables.

When did you first become interested in camellias?

In 1966 I happened to see 'Daikagura' at a plant market. I was amazed by it and I have been obsessed with camellias ever since that time.

What triggered this interest? Was it a person or an event?

The motivation was that I bought a plant of 'Daikagura' at the plant market in Tenjoji, Osaka. In around 1970, the shows of New Zealand camellias were held at Hansin Department Store in Osaka. I happened to see foreign camellias for the first time at an NZ camellia show.

How did you become interested in old camellias?

In 1994, at an auction of old documents of the Edo period, I obtained an old book 'Koirogami Tsubaki-e' ('Small Coloured Pictures of Camellias'). As I was not able to read old sentences in the Edo kana system of syllabic writings of the book at that time, I asked Mr. Mitsuo Watanabe, a top authority on Edo camellias in Japan, how to read them. Taking this opportunity, Mr. Watanabe and I cooperated to make a database of Edo camellias taking a lot of pictures and material from his collection into my computer system.

Why do you think that old camellias have an important place in the history of the places that grow them?

It is because many samurai, like the second shogun Hidetada Tokugawa first of all, priests and merchants during the Edo period loved to grow

camellias and they made a lot of illustrated books and documents. Camellias including Edo cultivars were first introduced to Europe in the early 18th century, and they were enthusiastically accepted by enthusiasts over there, and many illustrated books and catalogues of camellias were produced.

When did you first see the historical camellia manuscripts?

It was in 1994.

What gave you the idea of making facsimile copies of old manuscripts?

I thought that it would be wonderful if I could make a database by myself, importing the pictures and documents into my computer. As I was able to collect old documents somewhat systematically, I wanted to be able to donate them to an appropriate facility in order to avoid their dissipation. I thought for that purpose making a database was indispensable to keep them together.

Where did these books come from?

I obtained the books of the Edo period in Tokyo. I bought Western books through a second-hand book shop in Gunma Prefecture run by a British person. I knew the shop from 1998 through a magazine, Japanese Old Book Communication. In the beginning I started to buy books published in the West after the second World War. Later I realised that even the books published in 18th to 19th centuries were available from that shop. So I asked the shop to look for Western old camellia books, mainly in the USA, so I was able to buy them one after another. I also utilized Internet auctions to get some books.

In the 18th to 19th centuries the owners of gorgeous camellia illustrated books were limited to royalty, nobility and millionaires in Europe. When the camellia enthusiasm revived after the Second World War, American millionaires rushed to get them. The reason why I was able to get some of them easily was that there was no demand for them because the post-War camellia enthusiasm burnt out before long, and JPY appreciation at that time also favored me in buying them.

How did you get the permissions to use them?

As to Western books, there was no need to get

permission because I owned them by myself and they were more than 100 years old. I never made copies from the books printed after the Second World War. As to Japanese books, there were usually many transcriptions and there was no need to get permissions, but as for original manuscripts without any transcriptions, I had to get permission from their owners.

What were the problems and difficulties in making the copies?

It was very hard to take pictures, as many as 1,500 from Western books and 1,200 from Japanese books, and many texts, into my personal computer. It has become much easier to take texts in by OCR for the last 6 to 7 years, although for the Edo style kana documents OCR cannot be used. Texts were all input by hand before. A lot of work was needed.

What do you think is your most important contribution to the camellia world?

- a) Making reprints of 19 Western camellia books and 10 Japanese ones. The total numbers of the real reprints are much larger, because some of the original books are commonly integrated in some of the reprints.
- b) Making databases of 4,500 Japanese and Western camellia cultivars. The database of Western cultivars is not being released because of copyrights.
- c) Publishing an illustrated book, 'Western camellia cultivars being grown in Japan'. The newest publication is Vol.6 with 1,180 cultivars. At present in Japan this is the only illustrated book covering camellias originating in the West.

What do you think are the main issues facing camellia lovers at the moment?

I am afraid of the decline in camellia enthusiasm due to the increasing age profile of camellia lovers.

Which camellias do you grow and which is your favourite?

I grow camellias mainly in pots. As I am getting older, I have now started to donate my camellias here and there. I am still propagating camellias by grafting.

My favorites include 'Frank Hauser', 'Elegance Supreme', 'Julia France', 'Lily Pons', 'Cile Mitchell', 'Donckelaeri', etc. It just goes on forever.

Editor's note

Mr Kishikawa also breeds his own camellias. Two of these, 'Momoko' and 'Seigen Sakura-hime' are named for his granddaughters.



Momoko



C. j. Seigen Sakura-hime