

The Avocado in the Orient

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Nowhere in the three oriental countries which I visited, (the Philippines, China, and Japan), has the avocado passed much beyond the experimental stage of culture. It has longest been grown in the Philippines, the Lyon variety (Lyon of the Philippines is separate and distinct from the Lyon of California.) having been described by Wester as far back as 1914 from seed probably imported in 1903. Numerous varieties representing all three types have been introduced and established at the Lamao and Tanauan Experiment Stations and a variety collection is being established at the new Citrus Station near Lipa. And yet seeds for planting are so scarce that some propagators are splitting each seed in half before planting, thus getting a plantlet from each cotyledon. Other propagators believe that seedlings from split seeds are weak and inferior and plant whole seeds as far as the supply lasts. Propagation by marcottage is successful experimentally; buds inserted in the branches grow out after the marcot is severed from the mother tree. According to reliable information avocado fruits bring 1 peso per kilo (50 cents gold per 2.2 pounds); seedlings one-half peso each; and budded seedlings one peso each.

Avocado trees are scarce and the fruits are rare in South China, although avocados from Hawaii and California are occasionally found in the Hongkong markets. Some "avocado pears" displayed for sale on November 13, 1934, were priced at 28 cents gold a pound. At the Baptist Mission compound, Swatow, Rev. Mr. Page has a small collection of subtropicals, including several avocado trees which are growing vigorously on a hillside in a well-drained decomposed granite soil. The largest is a grafted tree from Hawaii, variety not known, which produced in 1934 over one hundred large, pyriform, maroon fruits. Seedlings grown from the fruit of this tree have been widely distributed in the vicinity of Swatow.

On the Lingnan University campus at Canton, avocado trees introduced by Professor Q. W. Groff and others have been growing for many years. One fine budded tree in the yard of Provost James Henry was obtained from the Hawaii Station in 1921 and produced over twenty large purplish fruits in 1933, but none in 1934. It appeared to be setting a good crop in June, 1935.

The soil on the Lingnan campus is a rather heavy clay, is shallow, and naturally becomes "water logged", the annual rainfall averaging over sixty inches. As a result, the avocado trees very clearly show the trouble recently designated "**malanorhiza**" or root rot. Several trees which were in a dead or dying condition were examined and the roots found to be black and rotten with an offensive odor. No trees were found in the lowlands around Canton where citrus trees are grown more or less successfully adjacent to the flooded rice fields. Apparently the tree will thrive and produce good crops of fruit in well-drained soils of the uplands or on terraced hillsides. It is reported that several trees are thriving in or near the Portuguese colony of Macao.

It may be of interest to know that a near relative of the avocado, "**Persea nan-mu**" Oliv., is found in China. It grows in the Province of Szechwan as an immense tree providing a tough wood much used for buildings and for furniture. Both wood and bark are used medicinally; the fruits are green and not palatable. In the largest building at the Ming Tombs near Peiping, the roof is supported by wooden pillars of this species each four feet in diameter and seventy-five feet high, probably brought several hundred miles down the Yantsze River from the interior and up to Peiping by sea and canals.

The avocado suffers from the attacks of certain insect pests peculiar to South China but probably not as severely as citrus, fig, and certain other fruit trees. Various night-flying beetles eat the foliage and according to A. N. Benererito of Lingnan University a green stink bug punctures avocado fruits causing them to decay and drop.

At the Subtropical Fruit Experiment Station, Kagi, Island of Taiwan, the Japanese are testing out a number of varieties and seedlings of the avocado. Here as in the West Indies, high winds or typhoons are prevalent and avocados as well as other fruit trees are subject to severe breakage of branches unless given windbreak protection. Neither the Chinese nor the Japanese appear to relish avocados as they do sweet or acid fruits. However, it is expected that the fruit will gradually grow in popularity and its culture established in the Orient, probably much more rapidly in Formosa and the citrus districts of Japan proper than in South China.