

China 1992, 1993 and 1994 Cycad Expeditions: 30 years of growing success

More than three decades ago, Montgomery developed an important partnership – Terrence Walters and Dr. Si-Lin Yang painstakingly built plans via fax and mail, in an age of slow communication.

Their diligent efforts – 13 months of correspondence across 13 time zones – finally bore results in September 1992, when Terrence arrived in the People's Republic of China for the Montgomery Foundation's research expedition.

Because of Si-Lin's negotiating skill and persistence, the team was able to access many areas long closed to foreign botanists. They returned with hundreds of seeds for our garden, numerous photographs, huge amounts of field data, and a greatly enhanced understanding of these ancient and beautiful plants.

The first of three major cycad expeditions in China, this large-scale field project brought tremendous insight to the biology, ecology, and conservation status of the diverse *Cycas* species, and also provided unique, irreplaceable diversity for the landscape at Montgomery Botanical Center. Subsequent projects in 1993 and 1994 built upon these successes, describing new species and adding to the beauty of gardens in Florida, China and beyond.

Only 13 cycad species were known to the entire region prior to the expeditions. Astonishingly, 12 new *Cycas* species were discovered in China, 21 more from Vietnam and 7 more from Thailand. At Montgomery, these irreplaceable plants have been used in numerous studies over the past three decades, informing phylogeny, conservation biology, pollination biology, and biogeography. Additionally, the plants have served in an educational role in innumerable field trips, tours, and botanical lessons. These cycads are truly LIVING TREASURES, and like any treasury their value compounds over time as they continue to grow and thrive, inspire and inform us, and beautify our garden.

Background: Dr. Si-Lin Yang (2nd from the left) searching for cycads in Guizhou, China.

Dr. Si-Lin Yang and Mrs. Hong Yang (pictured at Montgomery in 2022) with a plant of *Cycas hongheensis* – an exceedingly rare species with perhaps only about 10 plants in cultivation. Dr. Yang described this new species based on his field collaboration with Montgomery three decades ago – and at that time he also noted how horticultural collecting practices had inadvertently killed many plants. The native range of this species is now within a military reservation, and thus nearly impossible to return to again.



One of the *Cycas panzhihuaensis* plants from the expedition (pictured at Montgomery in 2015), with Dr. Yang Yongqiong, Director of the Panzhihua National Cycas Nature Reserve, the place from which the seed was collected. She was very happy to see these plants thriving in our care – we see her treehugging as an endorsement of our work!



The steep, rocky terrain of Xingyi, Guizhou (Background) contributes to its remoteness and isolation. This region is home to *Cycas guizhouensis*; only four plants were found after an extensive search – the 1992 report notes that this once abundant cycad was heavily harvested during the Cultural Revolution. The species now thrives in Montgomery's landscape (photo, 2023) where it has been used in numerous studies.

