

# Preface

The orchids are one of the most fascinating and attractive families of flowering plants. Their number of species, variety of growth habit, and the peculiarities of their flowers combine to make them so. These features also combine to make them one of the most difficult families for the systematic botanist.

Some sixty-four genera of orchids have been recorded for Hong Kong. So far as I am aware, no comprehensive account of them has been attempted previously. Consequently the present work by Dr. Shiu-ying Hu is a pioneering study.

This is a thorough-going scientific account of the genera of the orchids of Hong Kong, and is thus the base-line from which future taxonomists will begin their studies. But it is more than that, because Dr. Hu has taken considerable pains to make it serve the needs of the amateur, either experienced or beginner, who wishes to study local orchids. This has been done by augmenting the scientific descriptions with drawings of the growth habits of the plants, illustrating the important features of each genus with admirable line drawings, and providing a glossary to explain the technical terms. Moreover, a cross reference has been provided to the section on the Orchidaceae in the Check List of Hong Kong Plants compiled by the Hong Kong Herbarium (Agriculture and Fisheries Department).

I am sure that this work will provide information and encouragement for those who are already interested in local orchids, and will lead others to study them. Having said this I would emphasize that much can be learned without causing damage to individual plants or endangering a species. It is better to make a careful examination of the plants *in situ*, with photographs or a habit sketch and notes, than to pull it up by the roots; and two or three carefully selected flowers are sufficient for dissection and identification. In this way, all of us can help to ensure that Dr. Hu's work has the lasting value that it merits.

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