Lotus, often confused with botanical Lotus Linn. in the legume family, is the common name of Nelumbo Adans. (Nelumboaceae), which has only two species, Nelumbo nucifera Gaertn. native to Asia and N. lutea Willd. native to America and the Caribbean sea region. As a result of its diverse germplasm and a long history of lotus cultivation and breeding activities, China has bred the greatest number of lotus cultivars in the world (Tian and Tilt, 2010). In the past 30 years, many cultivars have been recognized or rediscovered, particularly in the suburbs and rural regions. Nelumbo nucifera ‘Zhizun Qianban’ is a newly named cultivar discovered in southern China in 2009 and registered by the International Waterlily and Water Garden Society in 2010. It is a large-sized lotus with a double pink flower composed of up to 1650 petals. It can be planted in ornamental ponds, containers, or grown potentially as a cut flower.

Origin

‘Zhizun Qianban’ (‘至尊千瓣’ in Chinese characters), which means “ultimate thousand-petals,” was discovered and named by Dr. Daike Tian at the South China Botanical Garden (SCBG), Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) in 2009. In Chinese, “Zhizun” means the highest position, the most honorable, or a synonym of the King, and “Qianban” means thousand-petals. The name can be translated into “ultimate thousand-petals” in English. This lotus grows in a pond of SCBG and was introduced by an aquatic plant researcher, Dr. Lei Chen, in 2008 from a small nursery owned by Mr. Changxin Chen in the suburb of Guangzhou. According to Mr. Changxin Chen’s recall (during an interview with Dr. Daike Tian), he bought a rhizome shoot at the price of 2 RMB ($0.30 U.S.) from an unnamed owner in Daliang of Shunde in ≈1981. It is more interesting that the former owner informed Mr. Changxin Chen that this lotus luckily survived through a tragedy resulting from the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China from 1966 to 1976. During this event, private gardens were not permitted and the Chinese people were not allowed to own plants. Therefore, the ornamental plants of the former owner were almost completely destroyed. Fortunately, one plant of this lotus survived because it was planted in a traditional hard-to-break stone ponder (a large mortar-like utensil used for grinding rice, corn, and other food). Mr. Changxin Chen does not know the exact name of this lotus but calls it “Qianceng Mudan” (thousand-layer tree peony), “Xuri Dongsheng” (morning sun rising in the east) and “Dahong Mudan” (big red tree peony). This cultivar has not been documented, and to date, the true history, creator, original owner, and name of this cultivar are unknown. Therefore, it was given a new name based on morphological traits. ‘Zhizun Qianban’ was probably derived and preserved as a natural mutation from the wild. It more closely resembles the cultivar Zhongshan Hongtai (Zhongshan duplicate red, Wang and Zhang, 2005). It is often difficult for novice gardeners to readily distinguish between both of these cultivars. However, close examination clearly shows that ‘Zhongshan Hongtai’ has fewer petals, some stamens, and a nearly normal receptacle, whereas a trained observer will easily note that ‘Zhizun Qianban’ has increased petals, no stamen, and extremely degenerated receptacle. There is a possibility that these two cultivars are closely related. Future basic molecular analysis is necessary to decode if ‘Zhizun Qianban’ is derived from ‘Zhongshan Hongtai’. ‘Qianban Lian’, another thousand-petaled lotus, can be traced at least back 1500 years based on Chinese literature, Shi Yi Ji (Wang, 317–394 A.D.) in the East Jing Dynasty; thus, it may be possible that ‘Zhizun Qianban’ has much longer history than that currently known. Its complete story remains a challenge for further exploration of the literature and the use opportunities and resources available through molecular biology.

‘Zhizun Qianban’ was a new trial name first published in The Picture Album of SCBG 80th
of ‘Zhizun Qianban’ are susceptible to aphid damage, the larvae of the cotton leaf worm (*Spodoptera litura* Fab.), and yellow-tea thrips (*Scirtothrips dorsalis* Hood.), particularly in the southern region of China.

**Availability**

‘Zhizun Qianban’ is easily confused with ‘Zhongshan Hongtai’ (Fig. 10), therefore, and has probably been distributed across China by nursery producers under the name of ‘Zhongshan Hongtai’. It is an excellent plant material for study on development and evolution of double flowers of lotus. An undergoing research project on molecular mechanism of double flowers in *Nelumbo* is conducted in Dr. Daike Tian’s laboratory at Shanghai Chenshan Plant Science Research Center, CAS, and Shanghai Chenshan Botanical Garden. Currently, a very limited number of the stock plants can be obtained by contacting Dr. Daike Tian (e-mail: tiandk09@gmail.com).

**Literature Cited**


