

NUX-VOMICA

51. The nux-vomica or strychnine tree (*Strychnos nux-vomica*) is mentioned in the *Pen ts'ao kan mu* under the name 番木鱉 *fan mu-pie* ("foreign *mu-pie*," *Momordica cochinchinensis*, a cucurbitaceous plant), with the synonymes 馬錢子 *ma ts'ien-tse* ("horse-coins," referring to the coins on a horse's bridle, hence Japanese *maçin*), 苦實把豆 *k'u ši pa tou* ("pa-tou [*Croton tiglium*] with bitter fruits"),¹ and 火失刻把都 *hwo-ši-k'o pa-tu*. The latter term, apparently of foreign origin, has not yet been identified; and such an attempt would also have been futile, as there is an error in the transcription. The correct mode of writing the word which is given in the *Čo ken lu*,² written in A.D. 1366, is 火失刺 *hwo-ši-la*, and this is obviously a transcription of Persian *kučla* or *kučula* ("nux-vomica"), a name which is also current in India (thus in Hindustānī; Bengālī *kučila*). The second element *pa-tu* is neither Persian nor Arabic, and, in my opinion, must be explained from Chinese *pa-tou* (*Croton tiglium*).

The text of the *Čo ken lu* is as follows: "As regards *hwo-ši-la pa-tu*, it is a drug growing in the soil of Mohammedan countries. In appearance it is like *mu-pie-tse* (*Momordica cochinchinensis*), but smaller. It can cure a hundred and twenty cases; for each case there are special ingredients and guides." This is the earliest Chinese mention of this drug that I am able to trace; and as it is not yet listed in the *Čen lei pen ts'ao* of 1108, the standard work on materia medica of the Sung period, it is justifiable to conclude that it was introduced into China only in the age of the Mongols, during the fourteenth century. This is further evidenced by the very form of the transcription, which is in harmony with the rules then in vogue for writing foreign words. The *Kwan k'ün fan p'u*³ cites no other source relative to the subject than the *Pen ts'ao kan mu*, which indeed appears to be the first and only

¹ This name does not mean, as asserted by STUART (*Chinese Materia Medica*, p. 425), "bitter-seeded Persian bean." STUART (*ibid.*, p. 132) says that the Arabic name for *Croton tiglium* is "bato, which was probably derived from the Chinese name *pa tou* 巴豆." True it is that the Arabs are acquainted with this plant as an importation from China (L. LECLERC, *Traité des simples*, Vol. II, p. 95), but only under the name *dend*. I fail to trace a word *batu* in any Arabic dictionary or in Ibn al-Baitār.

² Ch. 7, p. 5 b. See above, p. 386.

³ Ch. 6, p. 7.