



**A study of a Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush (*Pterorhinus pectoralis*)**

China, 19th century

watercolour on paper

34 cm high, 37.6 wide

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Known for their overt and rollicking calls, this medium-sized songbird was first described in 1836 by English Ornithologist John Gould. Greater Necklaced Laughingthrushes favour the hill country of eastern and southeast Asia and their plumage can vary greatly, depending upon the subspecies. The current work depicts *Pterorhinus pectoralis robinii*, a member of the Laughingthrush family that is currently found in southern China, northern Vietnam and northeast Laos.

The present bird has a brown crown, rufous nape and flanks and pale brown wings and tail feathers. Between the white stripe above the eye and that along the throat, the cheeks are chalky grey with dainty black lines traversing them. The naturalistic brown, chestnut and blueish grey hues of the bird's plumage are complimented by the delicate pinks of the flowering camellia beneath it.

The tradition of flora and fauna painting in China was born out of the academic painting produced during the Song dynasty (960-1279). Bird and flower painting developed as an independent tradition and incorporated Taoist principles such as the value of harmony in nature. The present work certainly adheres to this tradition. The artist's focus on subtle details, such as the whiskers at the top of the bird's beak, or the manner in which the flower petals unfurl demonstrates an exceptional talent for relating to their subject matter. This in turn creates an overall atmosphere of gentle tranquillity that suffuses the composition with a meditative quality.

Karen Philips and John Mackinnon. 2022. Guide to the Birds of China. OUP Oxford.

Rosalien van der Poel. 2016. Made for Trade Made for China, Chinese Export Paintings in Dutch Collections. Leiden University.