



The Good Luck or Fortune-inviting Bamboo *Shibataea kumasaca* (Steud.) Makino ex Nakai: A discussion of the correct botanical name

Chris Stapleton

Introduction

The article by Karl Bareis in UK Bamboo Society Newsletter No 26 led me to look at the spelling of the species name for this lovely bamboo, and to find out why the local name for *Sasa veitchii* became tied up in it. I concluded that the Bad Luck Bamboo would be a better name for it, for anyone trying to get the name right. Both spellings *kumasasa* and *kumasaca* appear in the literature, and the authorities given for the generic and species names also vary widely.

This is a charming dwarf bamboo with rounded leaves, having the appearance of a miniature short-branched *Phyllostachys*. As an architectural plant it is very useful, spreading slowly into dense low domes that can be clipped to maintain their size. Okamura et al. (1991), in their guide to horticultural bamboos in Japan, report that it is essential for the *Yebisu* religious festival. Karl has now kindly filled in more details of its history for us. It certainly warrants wider planting, both for its attractive appearance, and for its strong Japanese cultural associations.

When it was first referred to in lists of plants grown in Dutch colonies of the East Indies, now Java, nearly all bamboos were still placed in the genus *Bambusa*. Munro seems to have been the first to realise that such a placement was unsatisfactory, and he transferred it into *Phyllostachys* (1868). Makino later decided that it deserved a new genus of its own, and he coined the name *Shibataea*, dedicating it to the Japanese botanist Dr Keitaro Shibata, in recognition of his contributions to the study of Japanese bamboos. Unfortunately on the two occasions that he tried to name this new genus (Makino, 1912; Makino, 1914), he failed to give a description, so the publications were not valid. Nakai later gave the necessary description (1933), and therefore it is known as *Shibataea* Makino ex Nakai, which can be abbreviated to *Shibataea* Nakai, but not *Shibataea* Makino.

The first validly published species name was *kumasaca* (Steudel, 1855). This has often been 'corrected' to *kumasasa*, either because the name was first published (invalidly, as it also had no description) as *kumasasa* (Zollinger, 1854), or possibly under the mistaken view that the local name for it is Kumasasa. As the spelling should follow the first valid publication of the name, regardless of the spelling of previous invalid publications, *kumasaca* is technically correct. Okame-zasa is the principal local name for this species, while Kuma-zasa is the local name for *Sasa veitchii*, meaning bordered bamboo, in reference to the withered leaf edges of that species in winter (Mitford, 1896). As we all know, the margins of the leaves of the fortune-inviting bamboo stay green in winter, although the tips of this species often wither.

The name *Bambusa ruscifolia* was also applied to this species, but unfortunately never in a valid publication. It would have been a nice name, reflecting the similarity in shape of the leaves to the cladodes of the Butcher's Broom *Ruscus aculeatus*. Unfortunately the name *kumasaca* had already been given, so that *ruscifolia* would be a synonym even if it had been validly published.

Changing the name from *kumasaca*

This is where it all starts to get horribly complicated, and it is amazing how one little letter can lead to so much largely wasted time. McClure (1957) tried to establish that *kumasasa* would be a better spelling of the name for this species. The justification he put forward for the use of S was based on a guess that the name written on the label of a specimen might possibly have been spelt with a C with a cedilla. There might then be some justification for the Ç being transcribed to S on Latinisation. Bean (1894), horticulturalist at Kew, seems to have been the first to spell the name with Ç rather than C or S, and he suggested the correct pronunciation

should be as if spelt with the S, in order that it follows the supposed local name. In his personal copy of that article he later made the annotation that this was not in fact the correct local name, but McClure probably did not see that copy, and he may well have been completely unaware that Kuma-zasa was not the correct local name for this bamboo at all.

Ohrnberger & Goerrings (1987) and Ohrnberger (1996) followed McClure (1957) in using the spelling *kumasasa*. They justified changing the original spelling of the epithet from *S. kumasaca* to *S. kumasasa* by referring to what is now Article 60.6 of the current Tokyo Code of Botanical Nomenclature. That article states that diacritical signs should be suppressed and necessary transcription of letters is to be made, in names drawn from words in which such signs appear. However, to follow this it would be necessary to see that the word *kumasaça* was actually in print spelt that way before the name *kumasaca* was published, so that there was something for it to be drawn from. McClure's postulated hand-written herbarium label with a cedilla would not really be sufficient. Bean's spelling of the name *kumasaça* 40 years later is certainly not adequate for the name to be changed.

There seems to be no evidence that it ever was written with a cedilla anywhere prior to publication of the name with an ordinary C. The type was Heinrich Zollinger's own collection, No. 29. Whether that type still exists I do not know. He was Swiss and would have spoken French as well as German, and the French language does use Ç, but I have seen no French literature in which *sasa* is spelt *saça*. If Zollinger had been Spanish or S American this might be more plausible.

McClure (1957) tried another justification for changing the name. He suggested that the spelling should follow pronunciation of the word in Japanese. This opens up such a Pandora's Box for all names coming from foreign languages, especially those with non-Roman scripts, that I shudder to think where that path might lead. For a start, we would not use *kumasasa*, but surely *kumazasa*. Then the genus *Chusquea* should be *Chuskea*, and how should we spell *Qiongzhuea*, and should we not be using a phonetic script rather than Latin etc., etc.

I personally do not feel that McClure would ever have pursued these rather speculative lines of argument if he had known that Kuma-zasa meant bordered small bamboo, and that it was actually the local name for *Sasa veitchii* rather than *Shibataea kumasaca*.

Article 60.1 of the Tokyo Code clearly states that the original spelling of an epithet is to be maintained. Article 60.3 states that the liberty of correcting a name is to be used with reserve. An example is given of a name that explicitly should not be changed just because it is considered a corruption of a vernacular name. Examples of changes that are justified are restricted to typographic errors in species names drawn from well-known Latin adjectives when the spelling does not follow the correct accepted spelling for that Latin word.

There is still some flexibility in this helpful Code, however. A formal proposal in *Taxon* for conservation of the spelling *kumasasa* under Article 14.11 of the Code could overturn the original spelling of the epithet and change *S. kumasaca* to *S. kumasasa*. To be successful it would have to be shown that *kumasasa* is the spelling in current use, and that returning to the original spelling would be an undesirable change in name. As both spellings are currently in use and the currently-used spelling in Japan itself is *kumasaca*, that proposal would probably not be successful. Japanese authorities consistently use only the spelling *kumasaca* in their literature (Suzuki, 1978; Okamura et al, 1991; Murata, 1989) as well as on their herbarium labels. They are well aware of the local names, and probably wish to minimise any potential source of confusion. How would we like it if the species name for the buttercup was daisy, or the English oak was beech? Had an equivalent mistake been made by foreign botanists, we would much rather keep the spellings, for example, *Quercus beesh* or *Ranunculus daicy* and might not fully appreciate helpful Japanese changing them for us to *Quercus beech* or *Ranunculus daisy*.

Thus the spelling *kumasaca* is technically correct, as well as being preferable, being less similar to Kuma-zasa, the local name of a completely different species. It looks as though we should follow the original spelling and current use in Japan and continue to call it *kumasaca*.

Conclusions

To summarise, my opinion is that this bamboo should be spelt *Shibataea kumasaca*. The authority for the genus *Shibataea* should be Makino ex Nakai, and the species authority should be Steudel alone, as he used a different spelling (1855) to Zollinger (1854). The transfer of the species from *Bambusa* to *Shibataea* should be attributed to Makino ex Nakai. Thus the full name should be *Shibataea kumasaca* (Steud.) Makino ex Nakai, which can be abbreviated to *Shibataea kumasaca* (Steud.) Nakai. Practically every botanical name for the Fortune-inviting Bamboo that I have come across in print is different from this in some way. It would seem that the only person to agree completely with my interpretation so far has been Professor C.S. Chao, the world expert on the bamboos of *Phyllostachys* and related genera including *Shibataea*, in his guide to bamboos cultivated in Britain (Chao, 1989).

The moral of this story is to be very cautious of local names that people give to plants, and never use them as botanical names when publishing new species until they have been checked. When asked what a plant is, people have a nasty habit of giving a name that is either totally wrong or even a nice-sounding name that translates from the vernacular as 'I don't know' or 'you're the expert—you tell me' or something totally unprintable.

References

- Bean, W.J. (1894). A Classification of Hardy Bamboos. *Gardeners' Chronicle* 3: 238–239.
- Chao, C. S. (1989). *A guide to bamboos grown in Britain*. Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.
- Makino, T. (1912). A new genus of Bambusaceae, *Shibataea* Makino. *Bot. Mag. Tokyo* 26: 236–237.
- Makino, T. (1914). Observations on the flora of Japan. *Bot. Mag. Tokyo* 28: 22.
- McClure, F. A. (1957). Typification of the genera of the Bambusoideae. *Taxon* 6: 199–210.
- Mitford, A.B.F. (1896b). *The Bamboo Garden*. McMillan & Co. London.
- Munro, W. (1868). A monograph of the Bambusaceae. *Trans. Linn. Soc. London* 26: 1–157.
- Murata, G. (1989). In: Kitamura & Murata, G. *Coloured Illustrations of Woody Plants of Japan* 2.
- Nakai, T. (1933). Bambusaceae in Japan proper II. *J. Jap. Bot.* 9: 77–95.
- Ohrnberger, D. & Goerrings, J. (1987). *The Bamboos of the World: Shibataea* Edition 2.
- Ohrnberger, D. (1996). *The Bamboos of the World: Shibataea* Edition 3.
- Okamura, H. et al, (1991). *Illustrated Horticultural Bamboo Species in Japan*. Haako.
- Steudel, E.G. (1855). *Synopsis Plantarum Graminearum*. Stuttgart.
- Suzuki, S. (1978). *Index to Japanese Bambusaceae*. Gakken, Tokyo.
- Zollinger, H. (1854). *Syst. Verz. im Ind. Archipel. Gesammelt*. Zurich.