



## JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT IT WAS SAFE TO GET BACK IN THE WATER –

comments on a proposal by D-Z Li to conserve *Sinarundinaria*

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At the Linnaean Society Bamboo Conference in London in March 1996, in his paper entitled The Flora of China Bambusoideae project: problems and current understanding of bamboo taxonomy in China, and in the journal *Taxon* the same month, Dr De-Zhu Li proposed the conservation of the name *Sinarundinaria*.

The method by which he proposed to undertake this conservation was to fix the name *Sinarundinaria* to the type collection of the species presently known as *Yushania confusa*.

He claims that “Unless the above proposal is accepted, there will be no nomenclatural stability in the *Thamnocalamus* group, in which some 200 species may be affected. *Sinarundinaria* will then be considered a synonym of *Fargesia* or, for those adopting a wider taxonomic concept, of *Thamnocalamus* Munro 1868. Some fifty species presently assigned to *Sinarundinaria* will have to be transferred either to *Yushania* Keng f. 1957 or partly, depending on taxonomic concepts, to some recent segregate”.

Having looked in depth at the consequences of the measure he proposes it seems to me that his claims are rather misleading. Only 5-6 species would actually have to be moved from *Sinarundinaria* into *Yushania* or some recent segregate, rather than ‘some fifty’. The main effect of this conservation would be to replace the name *Yushania* with the name *Sinarundinaria*. Subsequently approximately 56-60 species in *Yushania* would actually require new combinations in *Sinarundinaria*. Another effect would be to change the name of *Yushania confusa* to *Sinarundinaria nitida*. This would mean that the fountain bamboo could no longer be called *nitida* and would require a different name. He seems to envisage the resurrection of the name *Thamnocalamus spathaceus*, but applied this time not to the umbrella bamboo, but to the fountain bamboo, *Fargesia nitida*. It will be recalled that in the days when *Fargesia murielae* was known as *Thamnocalamus spathaceus*, *Fargesia nitida* was known as *Sinarundinaria nitida*. His proposed conservation would also bring back the name *Sinarundinaria nitida* again, but this time applied to another species recently introduced into western horticulture, *Yushania confusa*. Thus the two discredited and disused names *Thamnocalamus spathaceus* and *Sinarundinaria nitida* could both come back again to cultivated bamboos, but this time applied to different species, which would cause untold confusion.

The measure of conservation is allowed to prevent unnecessary name changes and to promote stability. It is promoted by taxonomists to counter the charge from horticulturists and other users of plant names that taxonomists change them too often.

In the democratic area of plant nomenclature, full freedom of speech is allowed. A proposal such as this can be drawn up and published in *Taxon* by anybody without any consultation or any process of critical refereeing before publication whatsoever. After the proposal is made those who disagree are expected to communicate in this case with the Secretary of the Committee for Spermatophyta of the International Association for Plant

Taxonomy, who is Dr R.K. Brummitt, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 3AB, UK, or to the editors of *Taxon*, Drs Brigitte Zimmer and Prof. Dr Werner Greuter, Botanischer Garten und Botanisches Museum Berlin-Dahlem, Königin-Luise-Str. 6-8, D-14191 Berlin. The Committee considers the case for and any submitted case against conservation, and recommends or rejects the proposal, which, if recommended would be ratified at the next International Botanical Congress. In the absence of any disagreement the proposal would go through and the conservation would take effect.

Those who are known to have expressed their disagreement with this proposal in writing include from China, Professor P.C. Keng and Professor Z.P. Wang of the Botany Department of Nanjing University, Professor T.P. Yi of the Chengdu Forestry College, and Xia Nianhe of the South China Botanical Institute, Academia Sinica; at Kew Dr. Derek Clayton, Dr. Soejatmi Dransfield, Steve Renvoize, and myself; in France Jean-Pierre Demoly. Professor C.S. Chao of Nanjing Forestry University has supported the proposal.