
Some Old Azaleas: Opening Pandora's Box

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Evergreen azaleas are gifts of the Orient, particularly Japan and China, to the Western World. With so many species, cultivars, and hybrids introduced in the West during the last two centuries, confusion regarding the origin and names of many of these azaleas is abundant in books and other records. Often the individuals involved in the acquisition of these plants either misunderstood or were misled regarding their history due to language barriers. Of course, once an error is made, it seems to linger on, especially in the azalea world. The main theme of this article is to revisit two such errors.

Recently William C. Miller III wrote an article (1990a) and a Letter to the Editor (1990b) in *THE AZALEAN* in response to my presentation at the 1990 Azalea Society of American Annual Convention on Satsuki azaleas and two articles on the same topic (1989, 1990) published in the same journal. In one of my two articles (1989) and at the Convention, I mentioned the fact that 'Koromo Shikibu', a beautiful and unusual evergreen azalea, is erroneously sold as a Kurume hybrid by many growers even though enough has been said to point out its origin. Mr. Miller (1990b) disagrees with that and adds another of the "Kurume" introductions named 'Ho Oden' in the controversy. There were several other points in those two articles which also require close examination.

Since my knowledge of Kurume azaleas is limited, I decided to seek help from the experts in the field and study their English and Japanese sources. This article is the result of sort of a group research involving Hideo Suzuki, Masaaki Kunishige, Yuji Kurashige, my wife Yoko, and myself. Mr. Suzuki, Mr. Kurashige, and Dr. Kunishige provided me with information from Japanese literature search and sharing their knowledge and expertise in the field through letters and notes. Finally, Yoko played a very important role in translating Japanese literature and notes. Without their collaboration, this work would not have been possible.

A few words of introduction of the above Japanese experts may be in order. Hideo Suzuki is a retired businessman, amateur botanist, and internationally acclaimed rhododendron expert. He is a founding member and Vice President of the Japanese Rhododendron Society, Director of the Board of the International Rhododendron Union, and an honorary life member of the Seattle Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. He collected large numbers of plants from all over the world which he recently donated to a botanical institute. He has published frequently on rhododendrons and assisted Fred Galle in correcting and revising his work on azaleas (1987). Yuji Kurashige is a plant specialist in the Botanical Institute at Gunma and in charge of construction of Akagi Nature Park. He is a plant collector and has been donating seeds of species azaleas and rhododendrons to people all over the world. Masaaki Kunishige is an internationally recognized author and expert on species azaleas and rhododendrons. He has written various scientific articles on the genetics and origin of the Kurume as well as other azaleas. Dr. Kunishige was for many years a scientist at the Kurume Agricultural and Ornamental Research Station. Recently he was transferred and promoted to become the Director of the Botanical Institute in Miya Prefecture.

'Koromo Shikibu': It seems that controversy still exists among the azalea experts in the United States regarding the origin of 'Koromo Shikibu', a beauti-

ful and unusual evergreen azalea. As a result, a little historical background is in order.

A plant under the name 'Koromo Shikibu' was introduced in America in 1929 by R. K. Beattie under the auspices of the United States Department of Agriculture Plant Introduction Section. The plant came from Kurume Agricultural and Ornamental Research Station. The description given for this plant at that time in the published Plant Introduction Records was as follows (bold face type indicates emphasis added by the present author to indicate differences among the sources through this article):

P.I. 77142. *Rhododendron Obtusum Japonicum* Wilson

No. 600. Koromo shikibu. Kurume; flowers white with corolla tipped purple.

No other description was given about plant habit or any special flower or leaf characteristics. Later, Frederic P. Lee in his famous work *The Azalea Book* (1958) gave the following descriptions of this plant on different pages:

Under "R. K. Beattie Kurume Introductions":

KOROMO-SHIKIBU (P.I. 77142): White with corolla tipped purple (strap-like petals).

Under "Kurume Hybrids":

KOROMO-SHIKIBU (P.I. 77142): upright, tall; early midseason; flowers single, petals are narrow and strap-like and widely separated, distinctive, does not have appearance of an azalea flower, 2-1/2, reddish violet (mallow purple, HCC 630/1) with darker blotch, long sticky sepals, may be a macrosepalum hybrid.

Lee then showed a plate of the flowers in black and white, which, of course, does not tell us which description fits the flower correctly.

Under "Evergreen Species and named Varieties", Lee once again lists 'Koromo Shikibu' with the description same as the second one quoted above. Lee here reiterates that it is

"perhaps a macrosepalum hybrid". Here Lee describes *R. macrosepalum* Maxim. (*R. linearifolium* var. *macrosepalum* (Maxim.) Makino (Mochi tsutsuji)) and mentions form *linearifolium*, P.I. 274890 and provides a black-and-white plate (Plate No. 40) of the same plant. Based on Lee's description, the flowers are "slashed petals of reddish violet (mallow purple, HCC/1)". The pictorial descriptions in black-and-white are identical to the one for 'Koromo Shikibu'.

Since then, there have been numerous publications on azaleas in America, and all the authors basically gave the same description for 'Koromo Shikibu'. To quote Galle:

'Koromo Shikibu' (P.I. 77142): usually listed as a Kurume Hybrid is more like a *R. macrosepalum* hybrid. The hairy leaves are of normal size; petals are divided and strap-like, 1/2" wide, 1-1/2" long, light purplish pink with darker tips and dark spots at the base.

Galle's color plate shows the plant which is sold here as 'Koromo Shikibu'.

The International Rhododendron Register (1958) (Royal Horticultural Society) describes 'Koromo Shikibu' as:

'Koromo Shikibu' Cl. [Kurume]; (introduced to U.S.A. by R. K. Beattie 1929); Single, petals narrow and strap-like and widely separated, distinctive, does not have the appearance of an azalea flower; 2-1/2 in., reddish violet (mallow purple H.C.C. 630/1); perhaps a *linearifolium* var. *macrosepalum* hybrid.

Most of the descriptions do not mention that the flowers are very sweetly fragrant, just like *R. macrosepalum* and *R. ripense* (Kishi tsutsuji). Also, the color descriptions and sizes vary from one source to another, and within the same source. (Perhaps our color perception depends on the mood we are in!)

A few notes about *R. macrosepalum* Maxim. (Mochi Tsutsuji) are in order here. According to Jisaburo Ohwi

(1984), this species is indigenous to Honshu (Izu, Kai, and westward to eastern Chigoku District) and Shikoku. It is very common on the hillsides with numerous cultivars grown in gardens. Ito Ihei in his famous *Kinshu Makura* (1692) described Mochi ("Birdlime") and many of its strap petal and other irregular forms. Experts believe that these unusual forms are produced by mutation. *R. indicum* and *R. kaempferi* are two of the other evergreen species where we find these types of variations often. There are several divided corolla forms of *R. macrosepalum* that are popular in Japan currently. They are: 'Saigyō', 'Shide Guruma', 'Gin (Kin) no Zai', 'Hanaguruma', and 'Shiro Hanaguruma' (Kurashige-letter to the Author). The name Mochi came from the fact that the leaves and the petals have a sticky substance on them. This azalea is not a native species on Kyushu island where Kurume is located. Also, there is no fragrant evergreen species azalea indigenous to Kyushu island.

Kurume Agricultural and Ornamental Research Station is one of several agricultural research stations in Japan like their American counterpart at the U.S.D.A. Their role is to preserve the flora of Japan. They propagate, distribute, and hybridize new plant materials. Western horticulture owes a great deal to the Station in Kurume. Many of the azaleas we enjoy were obtained from Kurume. They were not all Kurume azaleas. Many Satsukis, 'Mucronatum', Kuwana and Hirado azaleas, *R. kiusianum*, *reticulatum*, *ripense*, *sataense*, *tamurae*, and others were introduced in the U.S.A. from Kurume. Surely, one does not want to lump them all under the name "Kurume Azalea." Miller's analogy between the Glenn Dale and Kurume azaleas fails to reach me.

Let me give now my description of 'Koromo Shikibu'. The plant attains medium-to-large size; is about 3-5' tall and 4-6' wide in ten years. Leaves are slightly narrower than the ones on *R. macrosepalum*, about the same width as the ones on *R. ripense*; otherwise,

rather large, reminding one of many 'Mucronatum' forms. The plant is generally semi-deciduous around Washington, D.C. area and farther north. The leaves are hairy and dull green with some folding, rough and hairy underneath. Unlike the Kurume and the Satsuki azaleas, the leaves and the plant are not attractive. The flowers are light purplish pink, with big sepals as in *R. macrosepalum* and are very fragrant. In the winter time, 'Koromo Shikibu' and *R. macrosepalum* cannot be distinguished from one another. Also, both plants bloom almost exactly at the same time in early spring. In other words, along with many others, I maintain that the plant introduced as 'Koromo Shikibu' is one of many forms of *R. macrosepalum* (possibly 'Hanaguruma'). The cover of this issue of THE AZALEAN has a color photograph of the plant.

The name 'Koromo Shikibu' indeed is a Japanese name meaning "court lady's dress", but there is no record of any Kurume hybrid by this name in Japan. (Kurashige checked lists of 700 varieties of Kurume azaleas from the Edo to the Meiji periods, Kunishige checked 803 published Kurume names). In fact, there is no azalea by that name in Japan. According to Kunishige, the closest sounding name of an azalea, which is not available today, is 'Koromo Kaye (Gaye)' ("Springtime Dress Change") which was described in an old book on azaleas named *Meikan* (Meiji 18, 1885). Its description is not known. Kunishige thinks the flower form indicates that 'Koromo Shikibu' may be related to 'Hanaguruma' or 'Seigai' (*R. macrosepalum* var. *linearifolium*), but the plant habit is weaker (spreading). Both 'Hanaguruma' and 'Seigai' seem to be strong (upright) growers, but the picture of my 'Koromo Shikibu' shows more spreading habit. Dr. Kunishige was surprised to hear that there is still controversy here (is there really?) regarding 'Koromo Shikibu' after what Galle said on p. 124 of *Azaleas* (p. 129 in the Revised Edition) (1987) regarding this plant. Let me here quote from Kurashige's letter to me:

...Anyway, the picture which you sent to me looks like *Rh. macrosepalum* 'Hanaguruma'. It is not a Kurume azalea at all...In my opinion "Koromo Shikibu" is Hanaguruma. I do not know why it was classified as a Kurume azalea. Perhaps by some mistake. But the name "Koromo Shikibu" (which is a true Japanese name) is mysterious.

Just when we were about to close the chapter on 'Koromo Shikibu', the plot thickened. Miller recently retrieved and published some notes from files at the U.S.D.A. Plant Introduction Station, Glenn Dale, Maryland (1987). These notes taken on the Beattie Azalea Collection, were attributed to B. Y. Morrison. According to these:

77142. 'Koromo-shikibu'. Stamens 5, stigma green, white with corolla tipped with pinkish purple, very flat flower, good but small (3/4"). 3/22/29.

Morrison always paid attention to detail. Supposing these notes were made by him, why would he not notice the unusual strap petal form or the fragrance of the flowers, the sticky nature of the leaves (and flowers), and the loose plant habit with rough moderately large leaves? Why did he note that the flowers were white? Why did he note that the flowers were "good but small (3/4")" when other sources list the size anywhere between 1-1/2" and 2-1/2"? Or was this a different plant altogether than the one being sold in the United States as 'Koromo Shikibu'?

In conclusion, I agree with Masaki Kunishige, Hideo Suzuki, and Yuji Kurashige—the name 'Koromo Shikibu' is still a mystery to us. It is possible that some local nurseryman in Kurume named a particular selection of 'Hanaguruma' as 'Koromo Shikibu' and Beattie got specimens of that named plant. Furthermore, it is quite possible that there was a mix-up in Beattie's notes at the time of introduction. All three Japanese experts I contacted think that possibility is there. After all, the "Wilson Fifty" included

several azaleas that were Satsuki, Hirado, or other types, and they were all introduced as Kurume (Kurashige, letters to the author).

'Ho Oden': The second plant, 'Ho Oden', was also introduced in the United States by Beattie. The Plant Introduction Section described it as:

'HO-ODEN'. P.I. 77112. Probably a garden hybrid. Hose-in-hose; flowers about 1-1/2 inches in diameter. Thulite pink (Ridgway) irregularly edged with pure white. Beattie—Collected at Agricultural College, Imperial University Komaba, Tokyo, February 1, 1928.

Galle (1987) described it as:

'Ho oden' (Beattie, P. I. 77101): white flushed moderate purplish pink 70D, white edges and dark stripes, hose-in-hose, 2", often listed as a Kurume, but possibly a 'Mucronatum' x *indicum* hybrid.

The description does not quite match the one in Lee (1958):

'Ho-oden' (P.I. 77102): thulite pink, RSC, edged pure white, hose-in-hose, flowers 1-1/2".

Both Lee (1958) and Galle (1987) had wrong P.I. numbers, P.I. 77102 and P.I. 77101 respectively, for 'Ho Oden'; it should be P.I. 77112.

[In the 1980 reprint of the Second (1965) edition of Lee, the description of P. 141 is: 'Ho-Oden' (P.I. 77112): thulite-pink RCS, edged pure white, hose-in-hose, flowers 1-1/2". On page 257 however, the description is: 'HO-ODEN' (P.I. 77012): spreading low; early midseason; flowers single, hose-in-hose, 2 1/2", violet red with white edges and blotch and flecks of same color; possibly a 'Mucronatum' x *indicum* hybrid, ed.].

The International Rhododendron Register (1958) describes 'Ho Oden' as:

'HO-ODEN' Cl. [Satsuki]; possibly *indicum* x *mucronatum*; (R. K. Beattie, 1929); single, hose-in-hose, 2-1/2 in., violet red (Solferino purple H.C.C. 26/3) with white edges and blotch or flakes of same color.

B. Y. Morrison, who was painstakingly thorough, studied 'Ho Oden' and made the following observations (1987):

77112. 'Ho-oden'. Cameo Pink (Ridgway) with tips of petal white. Throat approaching Thulite Pink (Ridgway). Stamens 5, stigma pink but deformed. Pollen apparently good. Very good. 1/12/29. This is a hose-in-hose clone with 2" flowers. Suggests a Kurume x "indica" or better reverse. The ovary is swollen and the style often split. Seed sterile but pollen fertile. Progeny frequently show same sterility.

Let me quote from letters from Hideo Suzuki and Yuji Kurashige:

Ho Oden (pronunciation-wise this should be Hoh Ohden: "Palace", "Classical and Elegant House", "A Fictional Bird", or "Beautiful and Felicitous") does not belong to Kurume azalea group and is said to be a strain of *R. transiens*, which is a very close kin to *R. kaempferi*. It has large corolla, 4" or 5" across. Some of them have dark stripes and others do not. It is hose-in-hose or double. More or less the flowers are large. (Suzuki—letters to the Author).

Ho Oden does not belong to Kurume azalea group, but *Rh. x transiens* (Ohyama tsutsuji) which is natural hybrid of *kaempferi* x *macrosepalum* (Chamberlain, Edinburgh J. Botany, Vol. 47, No. 2). The description by Beattie about Ho Oden is much better. Pale pink flushed purplish pink, white edges, hose-in-hose, sometimes purple stripes. Also there are many cultivars and forms found in the wild. (Kurashige—letter to the Author).

A recent publication from Japan, Kurume no Tsutsuji (Azaleas in Kurume, 1989) lists 'Ho Oden' (listed as 'Houohden') under *R. x transiens* (printing error makes it "Onyama" instead of "Ohiyama" in this work). Three other azaleas of this group, Edo-hanabi, Komurasaki, and Fure-daiko, are also shown in this publication with color plates. Among these, Komurasaki (P.I. 77127) (deep purplish pink flower) is available in the

United States. Unfortunately, this plant too was mistakenly introduced as a Kurume hybrid by Beattie. This book has an extensive list of Kurume, Satsuki, major Japanese species, and other hybrid group azaleas with color plates.

I did not have 'Ho Oden' at the time Miller's letter (1990b) appeared. Since then I acquired a plant last spring and studied its flower and plant forms thoroughly. It is an outstanding, compact, and upright plant that blooms in the midseason. Its leaf form is similar to Satsuki (*R. indicum*), but the time of bloom is unusually early even for any early blooming Satsuki or its hybrid with another group. Also, except for its early blooming nature, this plant does not seem to possess any Kurume characteristics. 'Hoh Ohden' (author's spelling, ed.) has 'Mucronatum'-sized large flowers. They were not quite 4-5" on my plant as suggested by Hideo Suzuki, unless he implied that width after one flattens the flower with pressure. In any case, the flowers are too large and of heavy substance to be of the Kurume hybrid group. From all indications, the plant (or plants?) propagated under the name 'Ho Oden' is a very old cultivar, preceding the Kurume hybrids credited to Sakamoto. It seems to be a selected natural hybrid, possibly a *R. × transiens* form, definitely not a Kurume hybrid. Further, interestingly enough, 'Hoh Ohden' was not introduced from Kurume, indeed not even from the same island where Kurume is located (Kyushu).

Contrary to Miller's disagreement with typical foliage characteristics of Kurume azaleas, there indeed are some common features of these azaleas with the Kirishima azaleas and *R. sataense*. Some cultivars may have some vague *R. kaempferi* similarities, but there are no *macrosepalum* and *ripense* characteristics in the Kurume cultivars, unlike what one sees in the so-called Southern Indian hybrids.

Let me add another item to the "Kurume confusion." A fine azalea named 'Cattleya' was introduced by

the Domoto Brothers as a Kurume in the early twenties. It is a beautiful "lilac tinted white, semi-double" (Lee, 1958) azalea that is an all time favorite with gardeners in America. A search through old and new lists and descriptions of Kurume azaleas fails to identify it with any published Kurume azalea name. This is probably another case of mistaken introduction. I will not be surprised if this cultivar too turns out to be of *R. × transiens* form.

Some Loose Ends: In one of my articles on Satsukis (1990), I made an error in color description of 'Sa Otome', whose lack of flowering is well known. I was told by a good friend, who had both 'Sa Otome' and another *indicum*, 'Flame Creeper', growing next to each other, that he saw a reddish orange flower on 'Sa Otome'. 'Flame Creeper' is true to its name and has reddish orange flowers. I think what probably happened was that one of its branches crept into my friend's 'Sa Otome' and bloomed. Hideo Suzuki writes in one of his letters to me:

...'Sa Otome' ("Rice Planting Girl") is deep pink in flowers but usually hesitant to bloom. People grow it for its small foliage and compact habit.

I can suggest a trick I read in a book by Menninger (with Foreword by B. Y. Morrison) (1962) on how to induce certain trees and shrubs to flower. Apparently, plants which have extremely dense and luscious growth, spend too much of their energy for maintaining foliar growth. It may be necessary to thin out such plants or severely root prune them to induce flowering. When I acquire a second 'Sa Otome', I might try that trick. Incidentally, I have several other *indicums* and at least half a dozen Beltsville Dwarf hybrids which have never bloomed in 11 years. These are well grown mature plants now. They are all extremely dense.

The author thanks Miller for pointing out that *R. kaempferi* selection 'Tubiflorum' also has persistent and changing flower color as does 'Choju-

ho', a rather unusual Satsuki. Hideo Suzuki (1976 and letters to the author) writes about this and other unusual forms of *R. kaempferi* growing in the wilderness. The unusual forms are mostly due to mutation. The small rose-like fully double *kaempferi* 'Tachisene' is also a persistent bloomer. It generally starts to bloom in the middle of May and lasts through July unless the plant is exposed to direct sunlight. The problem I encountered with 'Tubiflorum' is that the plant is not very winter hardy even in Springfield, Virginia. Also, if the plant survives a mild winter, it tries to bloom too early and starts developing new leaves at the same time. As a result, it is subject to severe damage by spring frost. After having three plants killed, I am trying to protect the fourth 'Tubiflorum' I acquired from Malcolm Clark last spring.

Several other issues raised by Miller such as the appropriateness of the "Satsuki" name for some Satsuki cultivars, their variations in flower colors and forms, and "What is a Satsuki" will be addressed in the future.

Finally, before ending this discussion, let me point out an error in a very recent description of a species azalea by Miller (1991). He refers to *R. tashiroi* (Sakura Tsutsuji) as "This delightful deciduous azalea...". *R. tashiroi* is a monotypic evergreen azalea. In fact, in Zone 7 it is more evergreen than *R. poukhanense*, *R. tosaense*, *R. komiyamae*, *R. kiusanum*, and even most *R. kaempferi*. Let me quote from Ohwi's *Flora of Japan* regarding *R. tashiroi*:

...Evergreen or partially deciduous erect shrub...

Lee (1959) and Galle (1958) also have similar descriptions for this rare azalea. Suzuki and Kurashige write about different forms of this azalea. Kurashige grows seedlings of these different forms. The rather rare white form of this large azalea is spectacular at its maturity when it can get to be over 25' in height like a small tree. *R. tashiroi* is considered by many experts as the "link" between evergreen

and deciduous varieties and crosses rather easily with both. I have two plants of this species from two different sources, and they are both evergreen (or should I call them partially deciduous?).

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The George Harding Azalea Garden at River Farm - Part II

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Background

The previous issue of *THE AZALEAN* gave the background and an overview of the plan for a George Harding Azalea Garden at River Farm. The garden is to be a memorial to George Harding, one of our foremost and best-liked azalea experts, who died in February 1990, and a means of continuing his efforts to educate the public about the beauty and variety of azaleas. This article discusses the garden design, lists the candidate azaleas for the garden, and describes how you can participate in building the garden.

Purpose

The purposes of the garden are:

- to be a permanent memorial to George Harding;
- to be an attractive and educational display of azaleas; and
- to be the focus for future annual "Azalea Days," for the public to see the azaleas at their peak, to meet with members of the Azalea Society of America to have their questions about azaleas answered, to learn about the Society goals and activities, and to sign up as new members.

To accomplish these purposes, we will use natives, other deciduous and evergreen hybrid azaleas in a woodland edge setting at the River Farm headquarters of the American Horticultural Society.

After the garden is installed, the American Horticultural Society will work with other plant societies to augment the azaleas with companion plants such as ferns, bulbs and wildflowers to be provided by those plant societies.

Status Update

With Leslie Nanney joining us from the Northern Virginia Chapter, all three ASA chapters near the River Farm site (Ben Morrison, Brookside Gardens, and Northern Virginia) are now represented on the garden committee. About \$1000 has been donated toward the garden expenses, against a budget of \$4000 for materials and supplies.

The committee recently reviewed a conceptual plan for the garden, as shown by the drawing titled George Harding Memorial Azalea Garden. The scale of the drawing is about 1"=50' and shows an overall garden area of about four tenths of an acre, with 500 circles representing azaleas spaced at four foot centers. As shown, the plan is to have a number of planting beds among the existing trees, along with a few new ornamental trees, with frequent paths to allow closer examination of the plants, and with several benches and interpretive signs along the outside edge of the garden. The committee decided that the plants had to be selected before we could refine the design.

The committee also settled on the spring of 1993 for the garden dedication. To have a garden by then, first we need to pick the plants for the garden, and then we can refine the plan around those particular plants.