

BOOK REVIEW: Bamboos of Hong Kong. Edited by N.-H. Xia & Eric K.-Y. Liu, with K.-S. Pang, R.-S. Lin, Jenny Y.-Y. Lau & C.H. Zheng. Photography by K.-W. Lam, K.-S. Wong & K.-Y. Tam, line drawings by D.-H. Cui. 2021.

Hong Kong: Agriculture, Fisheries & Conservation Department, HKSAR Government. 178 × 252 × 18 mm, softback, 272 pp. ISBN 978-988-12022-0-8. HK\$164.

In 1985, Hong Kong's then Urban Council released a simple guide to *Hong Kong Bamboos* authored by Paul P.-H. But of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Prof L.-C. Chia and H.-L. Fung of the South China Institute of Botany, and Shiu-Ying Hu of Harvard University, the last a champion of producing a modern revision of the flora of Hong Kong, which she was fond of. Long out of print, this guide, with a brief introduction to bamboo structure and a key to the 57 types of bamboo found, presented half-page images and half-page descriptions and notes of each bamboo. That was in a time when photographically illustrated guides to bamboos were a rare item, and there was not a wealth of bamboo accounts for many places accessible to general readership or informed practitioners who did not want to pour through the great classics of the past century. In short, *Hong Kong Bamboos* led the way towards well-illustrated local guides accessible to more than just bamboo specialists.

The present book is similarly a flagship account, this being much more substantial and coming nearly 40 years after. The Hong Kong Herbarium, over 140 years old, collaborating with bamboo specialists led by Prof Xia Nian-he of the South China Botanical Garden (himself tutored by Prof Chia of the earlier account), spearheaded a special study of Hong Kong's bamboo flora over many years. The result is this splendid book, including more than 80 taxa, with over 60 taxa (representing 49 species, 6 varieties and 6 cultivars) documented in great detail, both descriptive and through a rich presentation of photographs and line-drawings. The pages present the information in a nicely alternating arrangement between Chinese and English, and are well-edited to have the relevant illustrations close by. The elegant cover painting of the present book is of *Oligostachyum shiuyingianum* (L.C.Chia & But) G.H.Ye & Z.P.Wang, named for the anchor of the earlier account.

Instructions on how to use the book start off the account. The sections reveal if a recorded bamboo was native or cultivated to Hong Kong, provide the Chinese and any English common names, scientific names and bibliographic citations and key flora references, also relevant basionyms and synonyms, and notes on distribution. Accompanying descriptions are for both vegetative and reproductive parts. There is a rich accompaniment of photographic images depicting habits and structural details, and where pertinent, good line-drawings are included. The genera are presented in



the order that they are keyed out at the beginning, and page edges are accordingly colour-coded to distinguish the sections occupied by genera. A checklist of Hong Kong bamboos, and indices to English common names, Chinese names and scientific names close the account.

This exemplary account of the *Bamboos of Hong Kong* is a trail-blazer. These plants are so iconic of the Orient but for too long they are shrouded in much mystery even taxonomically among botanists. Today we have an increasing understanding of not just their usefulness, known for a long time, but also the extraordinary richness they represent and the highly interesting evolutionary pathways the different groups have traversed. But most of all, botany must seek to provide a service, and to have such a guide as this for a group of plants otherwise so complex, we have the funders, organisers, editors, authors, and diligent illustrators and photographers to thank.

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