The Huang Azaleas—Do They Need English Cultivar Names?

By Ronnie Palmer— Pine Bluff, Arkansas

In 1981, John G. (Jack) Shaffer, the editor of The Azalean newsletter had an article on new "Chinese Azaleas." That is roughly 35 years ago, a short time in azalea years. Dr. George Drake, proprietor of Big Rock Garden Nursery in Bellingham, Washington, had received a shipment of 143 rooted cuttings from the People's Republic of China. These azaleas were the end product of hybridization work by Mr. Teh Ling Huang.

The 1981 article stated[1]:

> "Dr. Drake understands that the better of the Huang cultivars are the early-flowering hose-in-hose and the late-flowering doubles and semi-doubles. The early-blooming varieties tend to be hose-in-hose while the late-flowering tend to be single (20 varieties) or double (19 varieties). About a half of all the late-blooming varieties are reported to be bi-color while only four of the 28 early blooming varieties are bi-color. Of the 143 cultivars, 28 are early bloomers, 43 early mid-season, 26 late midseason and 46 late bloomers. Most are compact in form and are probably only marginally hardy, given the parentage and the fact that they were hybridized in a part of China where the mean temperature in January is 37°F and the minimum temperature in January is 10°F. July temperatures average 73°F. Annual rainfall is 45 inches."

Dr. Drake distributed the plants to various gardens and interested nurserymen. Among those receiving plants was Mr. Pete Vines, a nurseryman in Springfield, Virginia. In his plant catalog, Mr. Vines described the Huangs and explained the unusual code that was used in lieu of names.[2] His catalog description was placed on the ASA website. A portion of the article is shown below. The full article can be accessed by going to http://www.azaleas.org/huang.html.

> "Although many varieties have not been grown for sufficient time to allow a comprehensive evaluation, and the favorable winter conditions during the past two years have precluded adequate cold hardiness evaluation, it has become abundantly clear to me that they represent a major hybridizing effort and will ultimately come to include some of the "best 100" azaleas known to the Western world. The range of plant characteristics is very broad; including both small and very large blooms, small

▼ Table 1

Code Table 1

First Digit - bloom times shown below are in Springfield, VA

1 Early April	2 Late April	3 Mid May	4 June

Second Digit - type and size of bloom

1 Large Single (diam. > 5 cm.)	2 Medium Single	3 Small Single	["Single" = "sgl"] (diam. < 3 cm.)
4 Large Hose in Hose	5 Medium Hose in Hose	6 Small Hose in Hose	["Hose in Hose" = "hih"]

7 Double ["dbl"], Semi-Double ["sdb"], and irregular Hose in Hose ["ihh"]

Third and Fourth Digit - color of bloom

11-19 White	21-29 Light Pink	31-39 Pink
41-49 Lavender	51-59 Rosy/Purple-Red	61-69 Red
71-89 Bi-Color or Variegated		

Photo Ronnie Palmer

▲ Hu 2-7-51

Photo Ronnie Palmer

▲ Hu 2-5-71

▼ Hu 2-1-22, a favorite of Pete Vines who called it "Tiananmen Square," according to William C. Miller III.

Photo Ronnie Palmer

and extremely large foliage, plants with varying growth characteristics, and all major bloom forms. All cultivar's were introduced without names, using a four-digit numerical code (2-1-62 as an example)." The code translates as shown in Table 1, p. 52.

This system is convenient in many ways. It allows us to look at a cultivar and determine if we have a correct plant. The second digit is very helpful in that regard. The first digit is rather broad. I have found that all of the plants beginning with a 1- do not bloom at the same time. As far as the 3rd and 4th digits are concerned, I am at a loss for the meaning of 51 versus 59. Orange-pink is a common color in the Huangs, but I am not sure what digit represents that color.

A difficulty that arises with this system is that when 1-6-72 is entered into a spreadsheet it immediately becomes January 6, 1972. I have noticed that many of us now list this plant as Hu 1-6-72 to avoid the date problem.

Mr. Vines was a primary distributor of these plants. It is obvious that he was quite excited about this group of plants. Two places that received the plants were the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden and Auburn University. We were allowed to get plants and cuttings from the Auburn research project when it came to an end. Sadly, all of the plants in the research project were given away or destroyed to make room for other agricultural research. I am unsure of the conditions of the plants at the Dallas garden.

In my opinion, it is time to give the Huangs attractive cultivar names in English for marketing purposes. When the Kurumes were introduced in 1918, many were given English names. Do you recognize the names 'Kirin', 'Ima-shojo', or 'Ho-o'? It is more likely that 'Coral Bells', 'Christmas Cheer', and 'Appleblossom' are more easily recognized. I think the renaming was a good move. These plants are still being grown by wholesale growers after nearly 100 years. In reality, Hu 2-1-22 is an identifier that only a collector could love. A cultivar name

Photo Ronnie Palmer

▲ Hu 2-5-41

Photo Ronnie Palmer

▲ Huang 4-2-84

▼ The collection of 16 Huang Hybrids in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden at Stephen F. Austin State University's SFA Gardens in Nacogdoches, Texas. This collection was seen and obtained at the 1999 ASA convention in Mobile, AL.

Photo Ronnie Palmer

in English would make a pretty azalea more attractive and acceptable to the buying public.

Personally, I do not have a great imagination for cultivar names. I think we need to give the Huangs names that are easily recognized. Dr. David Creech of SFA Gardens at Stephen F. Austin University in Nacogdoches, Texas, has volunteered to help us with this endeavor. So now we need some catchy names. My only suggestions at this writing are 'Genghis Khan', 'Marco Polo', and 'Kubla Khan'.

If you would like to join us in this endeavor, please contact me at Ronnie.Palmer88@yahoo.com. We are in need of digital photos and any other information that you might have. Pictures of several Huang azaleas are on our website: azaleahillgardens-arkansas.com.

References and Notes

1. Shaffer, John G., Editor. "Chinese Azaleas." The Azalean. 1981. III(4):11-12.
2. Vines, Pete. Huang Code Table. "1990 Reference Guide and Catalog." Vines Horticulture Gardens. Pete Vines publisher. Used by permission on the ASA website: Huang Hybrid Azaleas. http://www.azaleas.org/huang.html.
3. All material reproduced in this article is shown as previously published, except size of bloom was added based on a second version of the code table (source long forgotten) from the files of William C. Miller III.

Ronnie Palmer and his wife Donna own and have operated an evergreen azalea nursery in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, since 1975. They specialize in Glenn Dales, Back Acres, Robin Hill, Satsuki, Huang, Holly Springs and some elepidote rhododendrons. The over 5-acre garden area contains large collections of the azaleas listed above as well as collections from some of our newer hybridizers. They have about 60 Huang Hybrids, most of which came from the Camp Hill project by Auburn University. They are in the process of establishing legacy plantings of Glenn Dale and Earl Sommerville azaleas.