

Research Article

Taxonomic identities of *Coelogyne roseans*, *C. chen-tsii* and *C. niana* (Coelogyninae, Orchidaceae)

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The taxonomic identities of *Coelogyne roseans* (= *Pholidota roseans*) and *C. niana* (= *P. niana*) have long been misunderstood. Our findings indicate that *C. chen-tsii* (= *P. longipes*) is conspecific with *C. niana*, consequentially *C. chen-tsii* is reduced to a synonym of *C. niana*. Although *C. roseans* and *C. niana* are closely related and frequently confused, we have clarified their taxonomic distinctions, which primarily lie in the morphology of the lip and column and we have emended descriptions of the two species.

Keywords: China, emended description, Orchidaceae, revision, taxonomy



Introduction

Coelogyne Lindley (1821, sub t. 33) was established by John Lindley in *Collectanea Botanica*. Since its establishment, approximately 200 species have been recognized (Clayton 2002, Chen and Clayton 2009), with 31 species occurring in China (Chen and Clayton 2009). *Pholidota* Lindley (1825, p. 138) was first established for its remarkable structure of inflorescence, and is characterized by its usually tiny and numerous flowers with boat-shaped hypochile (Chen and Wood 2009). *Pholidota* is a genus with around 30 species distributed in mainland and southeast Asia, Australia, New Guinea, and the Pacific islands (Chen and Wood 2009). In 2021, *Pholidota* was reduced to a synonym of *Coelogyne* based on molecular evidence (Chase et al. 2021).

Pholidota roseans Schlechter (1913, p. 107) was described according to a dried specimen, J. Esquirol 2047 (holotype: E), collected in Guizhou, China in March, 1910. According to its original protologue, *P. roseans* is single-leaved and has light roseate flowers. Only one gathering with no flowers was confirmed to be *P. roseans* since 1910 (Chen 1999), and no sure records can be found in Chinese largest plant photo bank (PPBC, <https://ppbc.iplant.cn/>). At the back up of molecular data, *P. roseans* was transferred to *Coelogyne roseans* (Schltr.) R. Rice (2019, p. 175) in 2019.



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Pholidota longipes S.C.Chen & Z.H.Tsi (1983, p. 346) was also described by dried specimens, Z. R. Wang 639 (holotype: PE), collected in Xichou, Yunnan, China in 1978. According to its original protologue, *P. longipes* is characterized for its rather long cylindrical pseudobulbs and its lip with two keels on hypochile and three keels on epichile. In 2019, *P. longipes* was substituted with *Coelogyne chen-tsii* R.Rice (2019, p. 172).

Pholidota niana Y.T.Liu, R.Li & C.L.Long (2002, p. 227) was claimed different from *P. longipes* that the former has short-petiole leaves, 7- to 17-flowered inflorescences, 3-veined sepals, and a yellow-spotted lip. In 2019, *P. niana* was transferred to *Coelogyne niana* (Y.T.Liu, R.Li and C.L.Long) R.Rice (2019, p. 174).

After a careful examination of fresh flowers and the protologues of relevant taxa, the present authors confirm that only two distinct species exist: *P. roseans* and *P. niana* (*P. longipes* is conspecific with the latter). However, *P. roseans* was misidentified as *P. longipes* nearly all specimens in Chinese Virtual Herbarium (CVH) and photos from PPBC. This misidentification is potentially from the morphological similarity between the two species and the ambiguous descriptions in their respective protologues.

De Vogel (1988) noted structural differences in the flowers of these two species. However, due to insufficient material, he attributed these differences to intraspecific variation within *P. roseans*. He also amended the description of the leaf number in *P. roseans*, but his illustration for this species inadvertently included traits of the other. This error likely occurred because De Vogel was unaware of *P. longipes* at the time, as the name is absent from his monograph on *Pholidota*. Although Dang et al. (2021) identified the issue in De Vogel's work, they failed to recognize the fundamental distinction between the two species and overlooked the conspecificity of *P. longipes* and *P. niana*.

In this study, we first clarify the key morphological differences between these two species based on a comprehensive morphological examination. We then resolve the historical confusion surrounding the descriptions of *P. roseans* and *P. longipes*. Finally, we propose the taxonomic revision of synonymizing *C. chen-tsii* (*P. longipes*) under *C. niana* (*P. niana*).

Material and methods

This paper is based on the studies of relevant literatures (particularly the protologues), examination of fresh flowers collected from greenhouse of Kunming Botanic Garden and field trip in Malipo and Wenshan of Yunnan, alongside photos from CVH and PPBC, and specimens from Herbarium of the Institute of Botany, Chinese Academy of Sciences (PE), Herbarium of Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (E), Herbarium of Kunming Institute of Botany, Chinese Academy of Sciences (KUN), Herbarium of Guangxi Institute of Botany (IBK), Herbarium of Guangxi Botanical Gardens of Medical Plants (GXMG).

Results and discussion

Taxonomic identities of *C. roseans* and *C. niana*

C. roseans and *C. niana* are two quite related species, they resemble each other in having two leaves (*C. roseans* sometimes one), short petiole, similar leaf veins, similar bractlets, white flower, boat-shape lip, 5 veins in hypochile and similar flower phenology.

However, there are several distinctive traits show that they are two disparate species. *C. roseans* and *C. niana* mainly differ at their lip and column. The lip of *C. roseans* folds usually once and its base is vertical, the height of lateral lobe is 4–5 mm, almost as high as column (Fig. 1C), on the epichile there are 2–3 white eminent fleshy keels (the middle one sometimes not obvious, Fig. 1D), while the lip of *C. niana* folds twice and its base is triangular, the height of lateral lobe is 2–3 mm and usually lower than column (Fig. 1H), and there are 2–3 (the middle one sometimes not obvious) yellowish–orange spots on the epichile (sometimes swelling to keels or not eminent, Fig. 1I). The column of *C. roseans*, is around 5 mm long with the cavity at the upper 1/4–1/3 of the column (Fig. 1E), while of *C. niana* is around 3 mm long with the cavity at the middle of the column (Fig. 1J). They also differ at their shape of pseudobulbs, number of flowers per inflorescence, the width of wing of column and their distributions. However, the most important distinction between the two species still lies in their floral structure, because other characters can have a wide variation which sometimes overlaps with each other. A more comprehensive and detailed comparison of *C. roseans* and *C. niana* is listed in Table 1.

Taxonomic notes on the confusing protologues

Notes for *Pholidota roseans* (= *Coelogyne roseans*)

The column of the flower from the holotype specimen of *P. roseans*, is around 5 mm with the cavity at around upper 1/4–1/3 of the column, and the lip bends only once (Fig. 2), these traits show its true identity.

Initially, we were confounded by the description of *P. roseans* (= *C. roseans*) as having roseate flowers. A clue emerged from its related species, *C. niana*. Photographs of *C. niana*, taken by Xin-Xin Zhu in different years, depict flowers with different colors (Fig. 3). In 2012, *C. niana* had white flowers as we usually see. However, the same plant depicted roseate rather than white flowers in the next year (Fig. 3B). Zhu noted that the flowers were initially white but turned roseate following a cold wave in 2013. The type specimen of *P. roseans* was collected in March, significantly later than the typical flowering period of *C. roseans* in January. Given that March temperatures in Guizhou remain relatively cold, this climatic condition may have influenced the flower color of *C. roseans*, as observed in *C. niana*. We therefore hypothesize that the roseate coloration described in the protologue of *P. roseans* was an environmentally induced variation rather than its natural coloration.

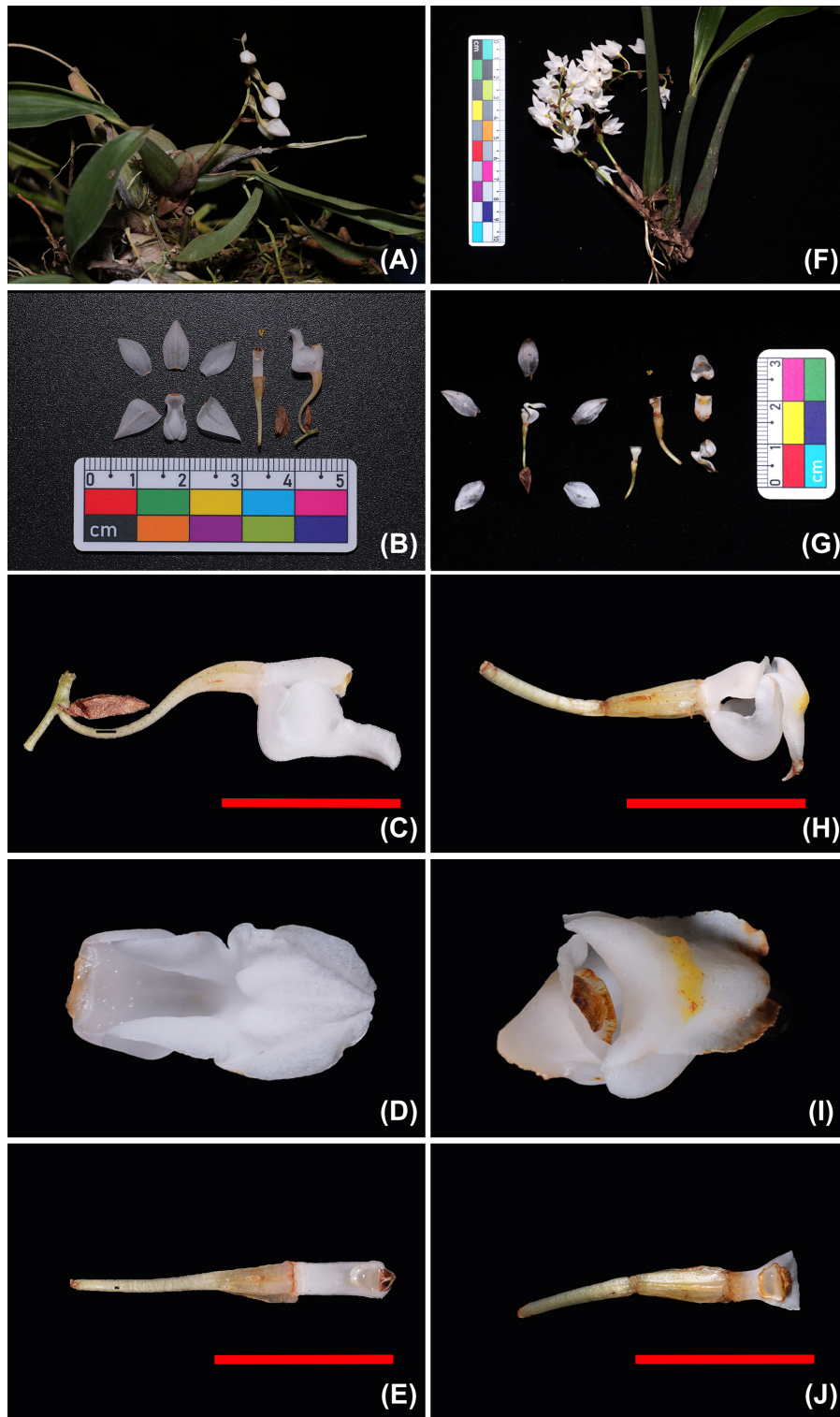


Figure 1. Comparison of *C. roseans* (A–E) and *C. niana* (F–J). Plant with inflorescence (A, F), floral dissection (B, G), lip and column, lateral view (C, H), lip, ventral view (D, I), column (E, J). Scale bars in C, H, E, J: 1 cm. All photos shot by Nan Shu.

Although the protologue of *P. roseans* described it as having a single leaf, the species is, in fact, 1–2-leaved. This has been confirmed by the present authors through the examination

of living plants in the greenhouse (Fig. 1A) and herbarium specimens (e.g. Liu Jing & Hu Ren-chuan Liuyan 1103; Libo Expedition 1353).

Table 1. Comparison of *C. roseans* and *C. niana*.

		<i>C. roseans</i>	<i>C. niana</i>
Pseudobulbs	Shape	ovately cylindric	slenderly cylindric
Leaves	Number	2, sometimes 1	2
Inflorescence	Number of flowers	usually < 10	usually ≥ 10
Flowers	Column	around 3 mm	around 5 mm
	Wing of column	obvious	relatively unobvious
	Position of Stigmatic cavity on column	at around 1/2	at around 1/4–1/3
	The height of lateral lip lobe	4–5 mm, almost as high as column	2–3 mm, lower than column
	Bends of Lip	once	twice
	Base of lip	vertical	usually triangular
	Epichile	2–3 white fleshy keels (the middle one sometimes not obvious)	2–3 yellowish-orangered spots (swelling or not, and the middle one sometimes not obvious)

Notes for *P. longipes* (replacement name: *C. chen-tsii*)

With the traits of flowers from the type specimens of *P. longipes*, the identity of *P. longipes* is definite. The column of the flowers is around 3 mm with the cavity in the middle of the column, the lip is twice folded with its base being triangular and its lateral lobe lower than the column, and there are dark spots on the epichile (Fig. 4).

The hypochile of fresh *C. chen-tsii* flowers lack prominent keels. However, the lip of *C. chen-tsii* exhibits five veins in the hypochile, which become somewhat prominent upon drying. Among these five veins, some may develop a keel-like appearance after drying, explaining why Chen (1983) described two keels on the hypochile and three keels on the epichile.

Besides, Chen (1983) did not describe the yellowish spots because he described *P. longipes* by dried specimens and the color has faded away, this can be confirmed by the dark spots on the lip of flowers from its holotype (Fig. 4).

The presence of three keels on the epichile and the absence of colored spots are both characteristic of fresh *C. roseans* flowers, likely explaining the confusion between the two species.

The relationship of *P. longipes* (*C. chen-tsii*) and *P. niana* (*C. niana*)

Liu et al. (2002) proposed that *P. niana* could be distinguished from *P. longipes* based on its shorter petiole, more-flowered inflorescence, fewer-veined sepals, and the presence of yellow spots on the lip. However, our examination of the relevant type specimens for both names indicates that none of these proposed differences hold.

Regarding petiole length and sepal venation, the holotype of *P. niana* (KUN 1218057) clearly deviates from its original description. As shown in the accompanying image of its holotype (Fig. 5), the petioles measure 1–2 cm, which falls within the range reported for *P. longipes* (1–3 cm). Furthermore, the sepals possess 5 veins, not 3 as previously stated. We suspect that the original description was based on observations of living plants, in which accurate assessment of petiole length and sepal venation can be challenging (see Fig. 1F, G; also see fig. 1 in Dang et al. 2021).

Concerning the number of flowers per inflorescence, we examined three duplicates of the type collection (Z. R. Wang 639) and four duplicates of the paratype collection (C. W.

Wang 86183) of *P. longipes*. Only one specimen (C. W. Wang 86183, PE 00728624) exhibited fewer flowers, while all others bore 7–13 flowers.

The most potentially significant difference may be the yellow spots on the lip. However, as explained above, this character was likely overlooked in *P. longipes* due to the authors' reliance on dried specimens.

We also note that the materials examined by Liu et al. (2002) included the book 'Native Orchids of China in Color' Chen and Tsi (1999), in which *P. longipes* was misidentified as *P. wenshanica*. Coincidentally, in the herbarium of the Kunming Institute of Botany (KUN), where the authors of *P. niana* worked, all pertinent specimens collected before 2002 had likewise been misidentified as *P. wenshanica*. These misidentifications were later corrected by Y. M. Shui and W. H. Chen on 13 November 2001, and the specimens were re-identified as *P. longipes*. Our dissection of these specimens (see Additional specimens examined for *C. niana*) reveals consistent floral structure, alongside variation in pseudobulb length, leaf size, petiole length, flower number per inflorescence that were previously cited as diagnostic. Coincidentally, when compared to *P. roseans*, *P. niana* does exhibit notable differences, including yellow spots on the epichile and more flowers per inflorescence (Table 1). It is possible that Liu et al. (2002) might have misidentified *P. roseans* as *P. longipes*, as explained above, prompted by its confusing description.

Based on our analysis on the type materials of the two names, *P. longipes* (= *C. chen-tsii*) and *P. niana* (= *C. niana*) are actually conspecific. According to the law of priority (Turland et al. 2025), the epithet 'niana' is the right one in *Coelogyne*, thus we adopt *C. niana* as the right name of this species.

Conclusion

The original description of *P. roseans* was based on material of limited representativeness. Consequently, the published account does not encompass the full variation in leaf number, and the floral description likely reflects individuals in an atypical condition. Meanwhile, the description of the flowers of



Figure 2. Holotype of *P. roseans*. Scale bar: 5 mm. Reproduced by permission of Herbarium of Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh: ©Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (E).

P. longipes, which served as one of its key diagnostic features, was in fact confused with those of *P. roseans*, as it was based solely on dried specimens. As a result, subsequent researchers and observers in China have long overlooked the true *P. roseans* and misidentified it as *P. longipes*. This persistent

misidentification is evident in nearly all records of *P. roseans* in databases such as CVH and PPBC, where they are labeled as *P. longipes*.

In this context, *P. niana* was later described as a distinct species, but its diagnosis was actually founded on misidentified



Figure 3. *C. niana*. (A) Normal form with white flower in 2012, (B) abnormal form with roseate flowers after influenced by a cold wave in 2013. Photos taken by Xin-Xin Zhu.

material of *P. longipes*. In reality, *P. niana* is conspecific with *P. longipes*.

We hereby resolve the taxonomic identities of the three names and formally propose the requisite revisions below.

Taxonomic treatment

***Coelogyne roseans* (Schltr.) R.Rice (Rice 2019, p. 175)**

Pholidota roseans Schlechter (Schlechter 1913, p. 107).

Type: China, Guizhou Province, Qiannan Buyi and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Duyun County (Daping), 1230 m a.s.l., 10 Mar. 1910, J. Esquirol 2047 (Holotype: E [barcode E00383580], photo!).

Emended description

Plant 15–30 cm high. Roots ca 1.5 mm in diameter. Pseudobulbs close together, ovately cylindric or sometimes slenderly cylindric, 5–11 cm × 6–12 mm, narrowed towards apex, apex 1–2 leaved. Leaf blade narrowly elliptic-lanceolate or narrowly oblong-lanceolate, 5–13 cm × 1.5–3.5 cm, papery to thickened-papery, apex acuminate; main veins 5–9, obscure adaxially, slightly prominent abaxially, small veins many, 20–30, obscure dorsiventrally, all veins more prominent dorsiventrally when dried; petiole 1–2 cm. Inflorescence proteranthous, 7–15 cm, rachis 4–8 cm, 5–9(–11) flowered; bractlets persistent, ovate to broadly ovate, 5–6 mm × 3–5 mm. Flowers white, pedicel and ovary ca 14 mm, ovary with 3 ridges. Dorsal sepal oblong-elliptic, concave, 8–10 mm × 4–6 mm, dorsally slightly carinate, veins 5; lateral sepals ovate-triangular, oblique, 8–10 mm × ca 6.5 mm, dorsally carinate, veins 5. Petals oblong-elliptic, slightly smaller and narrower than dorsal sepal, veins 3–5; lip boat-shaped, 9–10 mm × ca 4.5 mm, base vertical to column, and bended once at the middle of hypochile vertically, 3-lobed; lateral lobes often slightly higher than column, width ca 5 mm; mid-lobe subquadrate, apex emarginate and mucronate, with 3 longitudinal keel; keel somewhat crested, median short, lateral longer, extending downward into 3–5 thickened veins which might be more prominent when dried. Column ca 5 mm,

slightly winged, the cavity at upper ca 1/4 of the column; rostellum broadly ligulate. Capsule oblong, ca 1.8 × 0.7 cm, 3-ridged, ridges narrowly winged; fruiting pedicel ca 8 mm.

Phenology

Flowering in December–February, Fruiting in April–October.

Distribution and ecology

Southern Guizhou and Guangxi in China, Vietnam. Lithophytic on limestones in thickets; 250–1150 m a.s.l.

Additional Specimens examined

China, Guizhou Province: Dushan County, 830 m a.s.l., 24 July 1959, Libo Expedition 1353 (PE). Guangxi Province: Huanjiang County, 535 m a.s.l., 108°01'53"E, 25°09'35"N, 27 Apr. 2012, Xu Wei-bin Liuyan1013 (KUN); Luocheng County, 357 m a.s.l., 108°56'59"E, 24°50'29"N, 31 Dec. 2012, Liu Jing & Hu Ren-chuan Liuyan1103



Figure 4. Flowers of *P. longipes* from its holotype. Reproduced by permission of Herbarium of the Institute of Botany, CAS: ©Herbarium of the Institute of Botany (PE).



Figure 5. Holotype of *P. niana*. Reproduced by permission of Herbarium of Kunming Institute of Botany, CAS: ©Herbarium of Kunming Institute of Botany (KUN).

(KUN); Rongan County, 190 m a.s.l., 109°18'04.04"E, 24°51'34.07"N, 11 Apr. 2019, Rongan County Expedition 450224190411003LY (IBK); Nandan County, 527 m a.s.l., 107°49'28.81"E, 24°59'08.91"N, 28 Oct. 2017, Nandan County Expedition 451221171028019LY (GXMG); Jingxi County, 910 m a.s.l., 28 Dec. 2007, Xu Wei-bin 07083 (IBK); Yongfu County, 425 m a.s.l., 25 Mar. 2013, Nandan County Expedition 430326130325043LY (GXMG, IBK); Debao County, 1146 m a.s.l., 106°23'45.50"E, 23°28'52.01"N, 5 Apr. 2017, Debao County Expedition 451024170405013LY

(IBK); Fengshan County, 940 m a.s.l., 31 Mar. 2013, Huang Bao-you, Hu Xue-yang, Yao Ji-jun 451223130331010LY (GXMG); Daxin County, 29 Dec. 2015, Huang Bao-you, Mo Lian-lan, Li Jin-hua 451424151229003LY (GXMG).

***Coelogyne niana* (Y.T.Liu, R.Li & C.L.Long) R.Rice**
(Rice 2019, p. 174)

Pholidota niana Y.T.Liu, R.Li & C.L.Long (Liu et al. 2002, p. 227).

Type: China, Yunnan Province, Wenshan Prefecture, Xichou County, Dongzongcao, 1340 m a.s.l., epiphytic on rocks in forests, 22 Dec. 2001, Chen Yu 14119 (Holotype: KUN [barcode 1218057]!).

Taxonomic synonyms

Coelogyne chen-tsii R. Rice (Rice 2019, p. 172), **syn. nov.**; *Pholidota longipes* S.C. Chen & Z.H. Tsi (Chen 1983, p. 346), replaced, **syn. nov.**

Type: China, Yunnan Province, Wenshan Prefecture, Xichou County, Fadou, 1400 m a.s.l., on wet rocks in broad-leaf forest along limestone valley, 18 Jan. 1978, Z. R. Wang 639 (Holotype: PE [barcode 00027203], photo!; isotypes: PE [barcode 00027201], photo!, PE [barcode 00027202], photo!).

Emended description

Plant 15–40 cm high. Roots ca 1.5 mm in diameter. Pseudobulbs close together, slenderly cylindric or sometimes cylindric, 7–15(–20) cm × 4–10 mm, apex 2 leaved. Leaf blade narrowly elliptic-lanceolate or narrowly oblong-lanceolate, 9–15(–20) cm × 2.5–4.0 cm, papery, apex acuminate; main veins 7–9, slightly prominent dorsiventrally, small veins many, 20–30, obscure dorsiventrally, all veins more prominent dorsiventrally when dried; petiole 1–2 cm. Inflorescence proteranthous, 10–18 cm, rachis 6–12 cm, 9–14 flowered; bractlets persistent, ovate, 5–6 mm × 3–4 mm. Flowers white, pedicel and ovary ca 12 mm, ovary with 3 ridges. Sepals and petals ovate-elliptic, dorsal sepal and petals silimar, 8–10 mm × 3.5–5.0 mm, lateral sepals slightly oblique and wider, 8–10 mm × 4.5–6.0 mm, veins 3–5; lip boat-shaped, ca 10 mm × ca 4.5 mm, bends twice, base saccate, triangular, epichile often reflexed, lip 3-lobed; lateral lobes often lower than column, width ca 3 mm; mid-lobe near rectangular, apex acute, mucronate, with 2–3 yellowish-orangered spots near base of epichile (swelling or not, and the middle one sometimes not obvious), and 3–5 thickened veins in hypochile which might be more prominent when dried. Column ca 3 mm, upper parts broadly winged, the cavity at the middle of the column; rostellum broadly ligulate. Capsule obovoid, ca 2.1 × 0.8 cm, 3-ridged, ridges narrowly winged; fruiting pedicel ca 9 mm.

Phenology

Flowering in December–February, Fruiting in April–October.

Distribution and ecology

Southeastern Yunnan and southwestern Guangxi in China, Vietnam. Lithophytic on limestones in thickets; 1000–1650 m a.s.l.

Additional Specimens examined

China, Yunnan Province: Xichou County, 1400 m a.s.l., 6 May 1964, Wang Shou-zheng 0144 (KUN); Xichou County, 1650 m a.s.l., 3 June 1964, Wang Shou-zheng 690 (KUN); Xichou County, 1355 m a.s.l., 104°50'48"E, 23°24'19"N, 13 Dec. 2018, Cai Lei, Zhang Dan, Tao Li-dan & Yang

Feng-mao KIBCL035B05 (KUN); Malipo County, 1500–2000 m a.s.l., 23 Nov. 1947, K. M. Feng 13589 (KUN); Malipo County, 1000 m a.s.l., 4 Jan. 1940, C. W. Wang 86183 (PE, photo!, KUN); Malipo County, 1220 m a.s.l., 104°49'39"E, 23°01'13"N, 29 Jan. 2018, Ya Ji-dong & Zhang Wei 18CS16655 (KUN). Guangxi Province: Jingxi County, 17 June 2010, Yu Li-ying & Huang Ying-feng 23249 (GXMG)

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Conflict of interest – The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author contributions

Nan Shu: Conceptualization (lead); Investigation (lead); Methodology (lead); Resources (lead); Writing – original draft (lead). **Rong Li:** Funding acquisition (lead); Supervision (lead); Writing – review and editing (lead).

Data availability statement

This article has no additional data.

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