

**THE UEANG SAE ORCHID\***  
**(*Dendrobium scabrilingue* Lindl.)**

by

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In the days of Chao Vijayanondh, a ruling chief of Chiang Mai about 52 years ago, when Mae Hong Son was a province tributary to Chiang Mai, flowering plants of the "Ueang Sae" orchid (*Dendrobium scabrilingue*) formed one of the prescribed articles of tribute to be paid annually to the said chief by the local people of Mae Sarieng, then called Muang Yuam, a part of the province of Mae Hong Son.

There are more than one species of *Dendrobium* and also other orchids that go or may go under the general name of Ueang Sae, but the orchid shown in the photographs is the one referred to above. However, the specimens shown in the photographs, the writer regrets to say, happen to be not sufficiently representative of the species, at least as regards the Thai specimens, and at the same time they do not cover all the cases of variation of certain significant parts, the local orchid actually exhibits; moreover, the photographs themselves do not of course show all the details required to identify the orchid. Therefore, as a literal explanation of and a supplement to the photographs so as to enable one to determine, with a feeling of absolute certainty, whether or not an orchid, whose native name is given as Ueang Sae is really the one historically referred to at the beginning, the following description, rather unusually lengthy in detail, has been draw up by the writer from numerous living specimens of the Ueang Sae (*Dendrobium scabrilingue*) orchid available at Mae Sarieng during January and February 1951.

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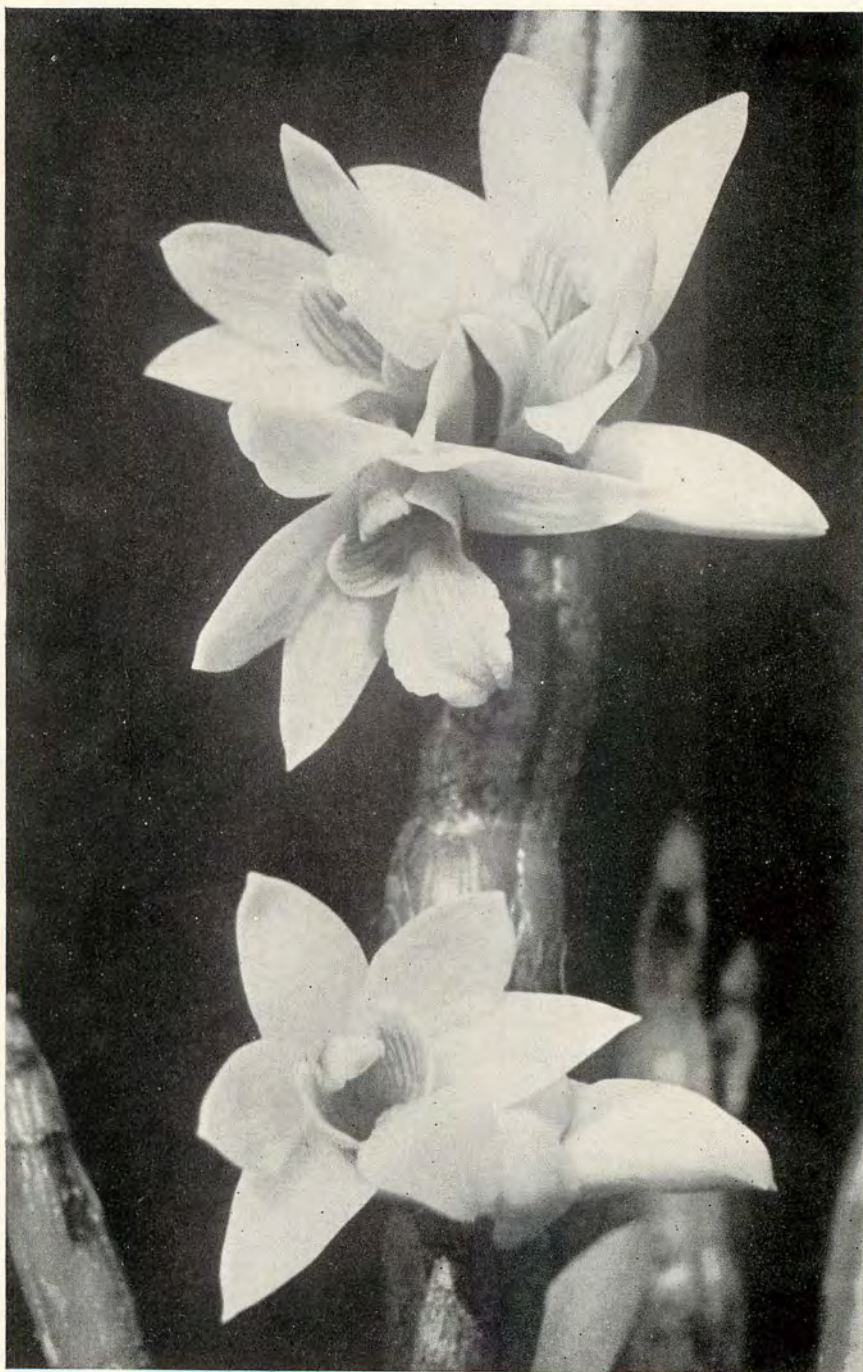
\* This paper was prepared in March 1952, while the author was stationed in Mae Sariang. It was found among his botanical documents handed over to the Forest Herbarium, Bangkok, after his death in 1955. As it has some ethnobotanical significance deserving publication for a wider circulation, the editors consider it worthwhile to be published in this Bulletin.

1) (1890-1955), late of the Royal Forest Department, former Member of the the Siam Society, and former Member of the Royal Institute of Thailand.

**Description of *Dendrobium scabrilingue* LINDLEY**

Epiphyte. Stems at flowering time up to 6-, usually 2-4 leaved, tufted, erect, clavate, grooved, upto 30 cm long and 1.8 cm thick, narrowing towards the base gradually or in stout short stems somewhat rapidly to a smooth, glossy, cylindrical stipe up to about 2.5 cm long and 3-4 mm thick; internodes, about middle part of stem, 2-2.8 cm long, tightly and completely covered by vaginate leaf bases which are black-hirsute when young. Leaves linear-oblong, occasionally oblong, with the upper part slightly narrowed to an unequally bilobed obtuse or acute apex, up to 8.5 cm long and 2.5 cm broad, coriaceous, glabrescent above, blackish puberulous beneath. Inflorescence terminal, subterminal and leaf-opposed lateral, 1-2-rarely 3-flowered; axis 1-3 mm long, closely invested with about 6 concave black hirsute membranous bracts, the basal 2 bracts broad triangular-ovate or semicircular, obtuse 4-6 mm long, 6-7 mm broad, 5-7-nerved, the middle 2 bracts oblong, obtuse or subacute, 8-9 mm long, 4-5 mm broad, 5-7-nerved, the uppermost 2 bracts shorter, linear, acute, 2-3.5 mm long, 1 mm or less broad, 1-3-nerved. Flowers on leafing, rarely on leafless stems, 2-4.5 cm across, nodding, fragrant, with 5-7-nerved subequal (1.5-2.3 cm long, 6-8 mm broad) white sepals and petals, erecto-patent with the upper part a little ascending recurved, curving backwards. Lateral sepals, often tipped light orange on the back, oblong, acute or shortly acuminate, sometimes slightly falcate with oblique base 8-10 mm broad; dorsal sepal often tipped light orange on the back, oblong—or ovate—lanceolate, acute or subacute, sometimes minutely apiculate. Petals obovate-oblong, obtuse. Mentum short conical, blunt-tipped, slightly dorsi-ventrally compressed, 3-4 mm long, 2.5-3 mm across at base, white, greenish on the side facing the ovary. Lip 3-lobed, oval or ovate in outline when spread out, 1.9-2.9 cm long, 8-18 mm broad, white, with close-set, scabrid, light greenish veins in the part below the middle lobe, the lateral lobes included, golden-yellow or orange in the middle lobe, with a thickened central band of 3 light green veins and 1 auxiliary scabrid vein of similar colour on either side of the band, which auxiliary vein forks below or when entering the middle lobe, running from base towards tip of the lip, making up 7 veins in the middle lobe, where they spread a little apart and become





*Dendrobium scabrilingue*





reticulated by veinlets of similar colour; lateral lobes sometimes orange-tipped, ovate, obtuse or bluntish-acute, often with 1 or 2 slight marginal dents in the apical part, pointing obliquely upwards, laterally upcurved towards the column, 4-10 mm long, 3-5 mm broad, measured from point of junction with the middle-lobe, with many parallel, scabrid, light green veins issued from the auxiliary veins of the central band running up the length of the lobes; middle lobe variable in shape, from oblong to suborbicular, usually oval or obovate, reflexed, with the sides slightly inflexed and converging towards the top of the lobe to form a pointed apex to the lobe, golden-yellow or orange, rigidly fleshy, about 1 mm thick at margin and 2 mm thick at centre, 1-2.1 cm long, 7-10 mm broad, margin crenulate, often undulate in part, surface rough, minutely transversely wrinkled outside (or 4-6 grooved) disk, disk 5-occasionally 7-ridged, the 3 inner ridges more prominent. Column green or greenish, 6-8.5 mm long, 2.5-3 mm broad, with a white tooth-like projection on the top on either side of the anther, foot of similar size or slightly longer, of similar colour and often tinged with orange at base; anther greenish-white, triangular-obovoid, the front side erect and quadrate-obovate, 2-2.75 mm high, 1.75-2 mm broad at base; pollinia linear. Ovary greenish, clavate, faintly 6-ribbed, 5-7 mm long, 3-3.5 mm across at top; pedicel greenish-white, 8-14 mm long, 1 mm thick. Capsule nodding, obovoid or globose obovoid, 6-ribbed, crowned with the persistent remains of the column foot, 1.3-1.5 cm diameter, 1.5-2.2 cm long without the crown.

The following are notes supplementary to the above description:—

1. When the flower first opens the colour of the middle lobe of the lip is pale greenish-yellow with the basal part greenish; during the course of expansion of the flower the said colour gradually changes to pale-yellow, and then finally to golden-yellow or light-orange when the flower has attained full expansion.

2. During the process of the colour change above mentioned, the light-green veins and veinlets which are deep-seated and hidden within the thick fleshy middle lobe of the lip remain unaltered in colour all through; these can be seen by transmitted light.



3. The white ground-colour of the part of the lip below the middle lobe, appears greenish because of the effect produced by the preponderance of the green colour of the close-set-veins contained therein.

4. When the flower wilts, the sepals, petals and the lip close, and all parts turn pinkish-orange.

5. When the middle lobe of the lip is pressed flat, its original apparently reflexed, pointed apex becomes quite rounded or only slightly retuse or apiculate.

Besides the Ueang Sae orchid already described, there is a colour form of the same orchid, which is designated by the local people *Ueang Sae Lin Kham* (Golden-tongued Ueang Sae), in which the colour of the middle lobe of the lip is finally dark—or scarlet—orange when the flower has become fully expanded. In this form there is practically no trace of greenish in the basal part of the lobe as is usually characteristic of the typical form, when the flower first opens; also the change from the initial pale greenish-yellow to the final dark—or scarlet—orange is rather rapid, the lobe assuming dark-yellow or orange even well before the flower attains its full expansion. Another feature to be observed in this form is that the apical part of the lateral lobes is always tinged with orange, and the basal part of the foot of the column is always brightly so. This colour form which, by the way, produces flowers with a somewhat stronger scent, is comparatively rare, and is found growing mixed with the typical form, which latter for the sake of discrimination, is given by the local people the name of *Ueang Sae Lin Ngoen* (Silver-tongued Ueang Sae).

The Ueang Sae orchid is in flower in the cold season, from December to February, and well into March. Flowers on single rootless stems detached from their growing clumps, such as are usually brought down from the forest for sale, last about a month or so; but on their own growing plants they remain much longer, as much as about two months, in perfection. Being delightfully long lasting fragrant, the flowers are much used by the local people for hair and table decoration and also as offerings at Buddha's images and Buddha's shrines.

The principal habitat of the Ueang Sae orchid is in the Lower Salween Valley, both in Burma and Thailand. It is from Moulmein (Burma) that the species was first botanically named and described. In Thailand the orchid is pretty common in the province of Mae Hong Son, especially in the district of Mae Sarieng. It has also been collected in certain parts on the eastern slopes of the Tenasserim Range in Chiang Mai province, and it is said to have been found also on the Mae Tuen Mountain in Tak province. From nowhere else in Thailand has the orchid been so far known.\*

In the district of Mae Sarieng the orchid is found in mountainous country, at about 2500 feet elevation above sea-level upwards, probably to about 3000 or 3500 feet, affecting high-elevation deciduous dipterocarps forests and the lower border of the evergreen oaks and chestnuts zone. It is usually found growing on such trees as Mai Tueng (*Dipterocarpus tuberculatus*), Mai Hak (*Melanorrhoea usitata*), Mai Kho (*Tristania rufescens*), Mai Khaeng Kwang (*Wendlandia spp.*), Mai Ngae (*Shorea obtusa*), and Mai Ko (Oaks and Chestnuts).

Besides the local Thai people, the Shans and the Lawas also call the orchid by the name of Ueang Sae. The word *Ueang* is of course a northern generic name for orchids, but the origin of the specific name *Sae* is unknown. The word *Sae* simply means an implement consisting of a bamboo net attached to a long handle, used by the local people for catching small fishes and prawns; but under this meaning it could not possibly have any association with the name given to the orchid. The Karens call the orchid *Pho Mue-kha* (*Pho* = flower; *Mue-kha* = Fairy); the Burmese name for it is *Ka-mong In* (*Ka-mong* = a plant, usually bulbous, tuberous, rhizomatous or with a rootstock, used in native medicine or magic, and is equivalent to the Thai *Wan*; *In* = Mai Tueng, that is, *Dipterocarpus tuberculatus* Tree).

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\* According to SEIDENFADEN & SMITINAND : Orchids of Thailand. 1959-1965, the plant is also found Doi Suthep and Doi Inthanond in Chiang Mai, at Phu Miang in Phetchabun, ca. 1200 m and in the Khao Yai National Park at about 1400 m altitude and at Khao Kuap in Trat. Editors.



