

檳榔與佛教 ——以漢文文獻為主的探討

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本文主旨在於探討檳榔在佛教世界中所佔有的地位，以及佛教在檳榔文化的發展過程所扮演的角色。根據傳世的漢文文獻來看，印度、南亞、東南亞和中國南方的佛教僧人，基本上都認為檳榔為「許食」之物，可是，如果不是為了健康或是宗教儀式的緣故，則不宜「數食」，尤其是不允許為了追求「逸樂」而吃檳榔。在真實的生活中，不同時期、不同地區的僧人都有吃檳榔的記錄，其中有若干著名的「高僧」，至少，他們都接受過信徒的檳榔供養。

佛教認為檳榔是藥，適度的食用有益健康，有些僧人還會利用檳榔調治藥劑。同時，佛教也將檳榔當作祭品和禮物，鼓勵信眾用來「供養」（祭祀）佛、菩薩、眾神和亡魂，或是「供養」（施捨）僧人及佛寺，因此，在許多佛寺中，都可見到信徒所貢獻的檳榔，有些佛寺甚至栽種了檳榔樹。而僧人在獲得檳榔之後，有時會用來款待賓客，做為交際應酬的「禮果」。

此外，檳榔及其周邊的物品（如檳榔盒）曾經被當做外交禮品，透過「朝貢」或「贈予」的方式，在亞洲地區的「佛教國家」之間流傳。而浸潤在這種檳榔文化中的佛教僧人，對於檳榔也有所觀察、省思，並有所記錄或述說，留下了各種類型的檳榔文本，包括：名物考證、醫藥、物產與禮俗、貿易往來和佛門生活。

事實上，在近代以前，佛教除了「禁戒」檳榔的逸樂性和情欲性使用，並要求節制用量之外，幾乎全盤接受了既有的檳榔文化，至少是「隨俗」。而從另一方面來看，佛教對於檳榔文化的傳播也有所貢獻。以中國來說，檳榔算是舶來品，而檳榔文化在中國的傳佈，幾乎和佛教入華同步，因此，我們可以合理推測，僧人可能是中國檳榔文化的主要推手之一。

關鍵詞：檳榔 佛教 醫藥 禮物 儀式

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Betel Nut and Buddhism: A Discussion Centered on Chinese Texts

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This paper intends to explore the role betel nut plays in the Buddhist world, as well as how Buddhism influenced the development of betel nut culture. According to the extant Chinese texts, Buddhist monks in India, South Asia, Southeast Asia and South China generally perceived betel-chewing as legitimate. However, unless it was for health reasons or at religious rituals, repetitive consumption of betel nut was regarded as inappropriate. Recreational consumption of betel nut was certainly disapproved as well. In fact, there are some accounts indicating that monks in different periods and in different regions had the habit of betel-chewing. At least, several highly-esteemed monks had received offerings of betel nut from their believers.

Betel nut was perceived as a kind of medicine in Buddhist beliefs, and therefore consumption of betel nut in an appropriate amount was deemed healthy. Some monks even used betel nut to prepare medicinal drugs and prescriptions. Betel nut was also used as religious sacrifices and gifts in Buddhism. Buddhist believers were encouraged to offer betel nut in their worship to the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and other deities as well as ghosts, or to offer them to the monks and monasteries. Therefore, betel nut was commonly seen in Buddhist temples, and some even had betel nut trees planted. Upon receiving betel nut, monks would also use them as treats for the guests during events of social gathering.

Betel nut and related goods (such as containers) were also used as diplomatic gifts, and were circulated among the Buddhist countries in Asia through acts of tribute or bestowal. As they became immersed in the betel nut culture, Buddhist monks left various types of texts presenting their observations and thoughts about betel nut. These texts can be categorized into: (1) the study of betel nut from philological and naturalistic perspectives; (2) the medical utilization of betel nut; (3) the habitat of betel nut and custom of betel-chewing; (4) the trading of betel nut; (5) betel nut in Buddhist temples.

In fact, prior to the modern era, Buddhist practitioners almost wholly accepted betel nut culture, banning only recreational and erotic use of betel nut while reminding people to consume betel nut in appropriate amounts. On the other hand, Buddhism also contributed to the spread of the betel nut culture. Betel nut can be seen as exotic for the pre-modern Chinese, and the spread of betel nut culture in China almost synchronized with the spread of Buddhism in China. Therefore, Buddhist monks can be assumed to be one of the main proponents of spreading betel nut culture in China.

Keywords: betel nut, Buddhism, medicine, gift, ritual