

## SANDALWOOD AND BUDDHISM: A PERSPECTIVE OF MATERIAL CULTURE

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### Abstract

Sandalwood, a class of woods from the tropical and subtropical hemi-parasitic trees in the genus *Santalum*, has a special value in social culture, because of its association with Buddhism. Sandalwood and its products are classic materials, they are encountered in Buddhism through investigating the records of the Tripitaka, the Complete Poetry of the Tang, archaeological findings, and visiting Buddhist temples in China. From such studies, we can conclude many material-cultural aspects of sandalwood. Such as Buddhist temples named “TanLin(檀林)” “TanSi(檀寺)”, there are books of sutra named “TanJing(檀经)” in Chinese Language, and that some temples are built of sandalwood. Many products made of sandalwood are commonly utilized in Buddhism, such as Buddha sculptures and figures, Buddhist utensils, Buddha medicine, and so on. Sandalwood plays an essential part in Buddhist culture and is regarded as the “Divine Tree”. “Buddhism without Sandalwood is not transmitted; sandalwood without Buddhism context is not pricey,” according to a Chinese saying. Sandalwood tree evolved from a plant to a cultural tree after being immersed into Buddhist culture. They are unified together from the perspective of material culture.

**Keywords:** *Sandalwood, Buddhism, Material Culture, Symbols, Meaning*

### 1. Introduction

Object/thing is the traditional research object for archaeology and anthropology. Archaeology focuses on the study of objects excavated from the underground to tell the story of the past, while anthropology focuses on the investigation and collection of objects in others' societies from the field to tell the story of their society and life. These stories are collectively referred to as culture, and these objects are regarded as the objective reality outside of people. These objects are collected, stored,

displayed in museums, and become the main object of museology study. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, cultural studies gradually became prominent, and the study of anthropology and history also turned their attention to material culture studies. Anthropological studies turned from culture of objects in human's perspective to the relationship between objects and human beings in the objects' perspective. Historiography shifted from the traditional focus on text research to the study of material carriers to explore their roles in social and cultural history. These turns in material studies gave birth to the material culture studies in the 1970s and 1980s, namely, the anthropology of things<sup>1</sup>, the history of material culture<sup>2</sup>, etc., which were included in the broad category of cultural studies. Peter Burke, a British historian of new culture, takes the study of material culture as one of the main research fields of the new cultural history<sup>3</sup>. In general, during the development of more than 40 years, material culture studies focus on the material world in a broad sense, including humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. Such as, study on everyday life objects (food, hat), natural human landscape and historical sites (museums, local ruins), crafts and industrial products (painting, porcelain), religious material culture studies (temple, religious supplies), material cultural history of natural science (history of the urban environment, life science), etc., and its core is the relationship between material culture and human beings.<sup>4</sup> Researchers use items or materials as study tools, examine the cultural value of those that humans have bestowed onto them, and then divulge the cultural life of those objects. Material culture research developed into an important content in cultural studies. Researchers from different disciplines construct material culture theories in the postmodern context, such as "materiality"<sup>5</sup>, "social life of things"<sup>6</sup>, "pedigree of things"<sup>7</sup> and so on. Material culture research has become a multi-disciplinary research topic in history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, literature, etc., with diverse research methods. It is currently a unique academic space and a new hotspot in cultural studies.<sup>8</sup>

*Santalum album L.* is an evergreen tree that belongs to the *Santalaceae* family and *Santalum* Genus and is a member of the tropical and subtropical plant kingdom (also known as sandalwood). It was discovered as a naturally growing tree in Java and West Timor in Indonesia, southern India (Bangalore, Mysore plateau), and numerous other Pacific islands. As a rare plant species, sandalwood is closely related to human beings and their cultures. Buddhism and sandalwood, the items, were introduced to ancient China. Sandalwood gained

popularity with Chinese people, who utilized it extensively in Buddhism historically<sup>9</sup> and contemporarily<sup>10</sup>. It is also one of the four famous incense<sup>11</sup> in Chinese culture. The understanding of sandalwood in Chinese culture must be together with Buddhism. Buddhism refers to the sandalwood tree as a “holy tree”. According to a proverb, “Buddhism without Sandalwood is not transmitted; sandalwood without Buddhism context is not pricey”(Fo Wu Tanxiang Buchuan, Tanxiang Wu Fo Bugui. 佛无檀香不传,檀香无佛不贵). Buddhism uses sandalwood in a number of different ways. Therefore, as an important material sandalwood, it is very meaningful to discuss the relationship between sandalwood and Buddhism from the perspective of material culture. As saying, “Objects, ideas about objects, and behaviors associated with objects came with Buddhism to China. Today in all areas where Chinese culture is present, Buddhism continues to hold a prominent place in local material culture.”<sup>12</sup> This article aims to clarify the many uses of sandalwood and its products in Buddhism while also outlining its material and cultural representations. The life cycle of sandalwood from biological tree to cultural tree is shown via the cultural research of sandalwood in Buddhism.

## **2. Research Materials and Methods**

Fieldwork and literature records serve as the study’s main information sources. These documents and materials include the “Taisho Tripitaka,” “Complete Poetry of the Tang,” and reports on the excavations at *Famen* Temple in Xi’an, Shaanxi Province, and Great Gratitude Temple in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, P.R.China. The fieldwork materials comprise the author’s investigation of *Yonghegong* Palace in Beijing, Potala Palace in Lhasa, and a few Buddhist temples in other China provinces. Fieldwork method, and literature analysis method were mostly employed in this study. The term “literary analysis technique” refers to the investigation and study of the literature records indicated above, and the classification of the usage of sandalwood and its byproducts as described in Buddhist classics. The “fieldwork approach” refers to field trips to the *Yonghegong* Palace, Potala Palace, and other monasteries, as well as a look at the Buddha statues there that are made of sandalwood and interviewing some monks and local people.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. Chinese Name of Sandalwood and Buddhism

Sandalwood is also called 旃檀(*Zhantan*), 栴檀(*Zhantan*), 真檀(*Zhentan*), 白檀(*Baitan*) in Chinese Language, its name comes from the transliteration of the Sanskrit “*Candana*”. “檀(*Tan*)” in Sanskrit means “giving alms”, meaning to give pleasure and help others to overcome difficulties. “香(*Xiang*, incense)” in Sanskrit means “*Canda*”, referring to all pleasant smells. Sandalwood, as a spice crop, has the nature of natural fragrance, also can give out its fragrance. The natural fragrance of sandalwood is beneficial to people’s physical and mental well-being and healthy life, and it can also realize the religious goals of divine intervention and alms. In addition, there are a number of sacred books, and objects and temples in Buddhism which are named after the sandalwood, such as “*Zhantan* melody sutras”, “*Zhantan* trees’ sutra”, “Part *Zhantan* sutra”, “*Zhantan* smear tower sutra”, *Nanwu Zhantan* Buddha, *Nanwu Zhantan* Incense Buddha, *Nanwu Sumeru Zhantan* Buddha, *Shijiazhuang* Liu-village *Zhantan* Temple, etc. It can be seen that sandalwood’s name embodies the essence of Buddhism. Sandalwood and Buddhism have been integrated from the name itself.

### 4. Sandalwood as Temple Construction Material

Since its introduction to China during the Eastern *Han* Dynasty(25-220)<sup>14</sup>, Buddhism has been practiced predominantly by members of the royal family and the highest strata of society, and it has been intimately connected with Confucian and Taoist thought. Throughout the *San’guo Liangjin* Dynasties(220-420), the translation of Buddhist literature quickly superseded local regional cultural and ideological traditions. After Confucianism and Taoism, Buddhism finally emerged to become the third main religion under the *NanBei* Dynasties(420-581). Its societal effect peaked during the *Sui*(581-618) and *Tang*(618-907) dynasties. Throughout the development and expansion of Buddhism in China, sandalwood was commonly used in Buddhist temple architecture. The Jokhang Temple in Tibet’s capital city of Lhasa has a roughly 1300-year history. When we get to the main construction of the temple presently, we can see that the sandalwood frame and girder support the entire structure. As a result, the titles “Sandalwood Temple”(TanSi,檀寺) and “Sandalwood Forest”(TanLin,

檀林) for Buddhist temples also denote the practice of delivering alms and assisting Buddhist institutions.

The Complete Poetry of the Tang also has a description of temples and pavilions constructed of sandalwood. For instance, “Sandalwood pavilion is standing here,”(*Zhantan Xiaoge Jinyudu*)<sup>15</sup> in “*Congxing Xiangshan Temple Yingzhi*” by *Shen Quanqi*. *Li Bai*’s “Making poem in Sandalwood pavilion, Drinking wine at parrot island,”(*Fushi Zhantange, Zongjiu Yingwuzhou*)<sup>16</sup> in “Giving a Monk who named *Xingrong*”, *Jiang Wei*’s “Sing at Sandalwood pavilion in *Dengxiao Temple*,”(*Yin Dengxiaosi Zhantange*)<sup>17</sup> in “Writing for *Bailu Temple*”, *Chen Tao*’s “Sandalwood building and pavilion, fragrant for half a day”(*Zhantan Louge Bantianxiang*)<sup>18</sup> in “Writing for *Yuzhang Xishan Xiangcheng Temple*”, *Guan Xiu*’s “Sandalwood building and palace are present like waterfall”(*Zhantan Loudian Pubengteng*)<sup>19</sup> in “Visiting *Shanchan Temple in Jinhua*”, and “Red sandalwood tower with six-seven storeys”(*Chi Zhantanta Liuqi Ji*)<sup>20</sup> in “Written on wall of *Shibichan House*”. Some words like sandalwood pavilions, sandalwood buildings, sandalwood palace, sandalwood towers in these poem sentences, all show the scene that sandalwood was used in the construction of Buddhist temples and pavilions at that time. It added spirituality to the temple with the fragrance of sandalwood, and made sandalwood an important material for Buddhist temples and courtyards construction in China.

## 5. Sandalwood and Buddha Carving

Sandalwood is a popular carving material because of its thick, solid, and fragrant texture. Its delicate and light flavour might assist the smeller relieve tension and tiredness, which is congruent with Buddhism’s cultivation of all living things. As a result, it is widely used for carving Buddha sculptures. Although Sakyamuni lived more than 2,500 years before Buddhism was founded in ancient India, he opposed the Brahmin religion’s idolatry. For 600 years after the birth of Buddhism, the Buddha’s disciples practiced idol-free Buddhism. There were no Buddha statues or images in India before the first century A.D.. According to widely recognized ideas in archaeology and art history, the first Buddha statues may have appeared in Gandhara or Mathura in the first century A.D.. However, historical documents by Chinese monks and early *Agamabu* classics indicate that the “*Udayana Sandalwood Statue*,” constructed in the lifetime of Sakyamuni, was the first statue of Buddha and the “origin of all statues” in Buddhism.<sup>21</sup>

The Adhiam Sutra<sup>22</sup>(Listening to Dharma) states: “at that time, *Prasenajit* and *Udayana* went to *Ananda*’s place and asked him, ‘where is the Buddha today?’ *Ananda* reported, ‘Kings, I don’t know where the Buddha is.’ At that time, the two kings missed Buddha and suffered from misery. Then, all officials went to King *Udayana*’s place. ‘Why are you so worried?’ questioned one of the officials. ‘It is because the *Tathagata* does not emerge,’ responded the monarch. If I do not see *Tathagata*, I will perish.’ The officials then responded, ‘For the sake of not ending *Udayana*’s life, may we offer to be the image of *Tathagata*?’ ‘We want to build an image, and we will also serve with regard and courtesy,’ *Baiwang* explained. When *Prasenajit* learned that *Udayana* made sculptures out of sandalwood, he summoned all his experienced artisans to his king’s office and told them, ‘Now I want to construct a statue of the Buddha.’ Tower which was five feet tall and was gilded in purple and gold. *Yanfuli* began to see this vision of the two Buddhas. This is a summary of the absent Buddha and the creation of Buddha statues by *Prasenajit* and *Udayana* when Buddha was summoned to heaven to be addressed by *Akro Devnm Indra*. The first Buddha statue is said to be the sandalwood Buddha statue.

In “Vatsa Kingdom - Engraving Sandalwood Buddha statue” of “Records of the Tang Dynasty’s Western Regions”<sup>23</sup>, “there is a sandalwood Buddha statue in the great mansion that is more than 60 feet high in the royal palace inside the city. *Tathagata* flew to heaven to meet his mother and has yet to return three months later. The king misses him and wishes to see a picture of him. Then, in order to cut the sandalwood, beg that *Maudgalyayanaputra* travel to heaven and see the picture of *Tathagata* for himself. When the *Tathagata* Buddha returns from heaven, greet him with a sandalwood statue.” “The field is more than 30 miles to the east, near the city of *PiMotown*, there is a standing sandalwood statue of Buddha, which is more than twenty feet high and extremely effective, candle brilliant surrounding. And wherever there is an illness, there is a tiny gold plaster figure that heals it. As the local people say, this statue was made by *Udayana* of *Vatsa* Kingdom when Buddha was living,” according to “Kustana - *PiMotown* Sandalwood Statue.” A list of Buddha statues which were brought back by *XuanZang* from India, recorded in “Remember Praise,” includes “a Buddha statue is carved of sandalwood, the height of which is a foot five inches, and it is a carved Buddha in sandalwood because of the missing *Tathagata* by the king of *Vatsa*.” A Buddha statue is carved of sandalwood, the height of which is two feet nine inches, and it is a Buddha statue that is *Sankassa Tathagata* back

from heaven. A Buddha statue is carved of sandalwood, is three feet tall, and is an image of patrolling the city from *Vesli*.” According to historical documents, when *Xuan Zang* visited India, he saw and worshipped the sandalwood idols on his own and brought them back to *Tang* state (dynasty).

“On the third day of the month, *Xiang Gong* crafted a Buddha statue which is three feet high out of white sandalwood in *Ruixiang* pavilion of the temple,” according to “Notes of Pilgrimage & Study in *Tang*”(vol.1),<sup>24</sup> “the *Ruixiang* pavilion is from the *SuiYang* emperor’s reign, and the sandalwood figure is from the western area.” According to legend, when *Yuanren* first entered the *Tang* Empire he travelled to *Taizhou Kaiyuan* Temple to venerate the white sandalwood Buddha statue. Recorded in “No empty JuanSuoMing king achievement product” of “No empty JuanSuotuo Ronnie Sutras”<sup>25</sup>, the Buddha statue’s materials were either wood, white sandalwood, or padauk. This suggests that sandalwood is a popular material for Buddha sculptures.

Today, Buddhist statues carved from sandalwood are enshrined at the heart of Buddhist temples. Among them, Buddha Maitreya in the *Wanfu* Pavilion of *Yonghegong* Palace in Beijing and the main Buddha statue offering in *Potala* Palace in Lhasa, Tibet are the most famous representatives. The giant sandalwood Maitreya statue in *Yonghegong* Palace is about 3 metres in diameter and 26 metres high (8 metres underground and 18 metres above the ground). It was listed in the Guinness World Records in August 1990. It was presented by the seventh Dalai Lama to thank Emperor *Qianlong* for quelling the rebellion launched by the king of Namzhal County in Tibet in 1749-1750. It was a massive white sandalwood purchased by the Lama in Nepal for a great quantity of money. *Qianlong* commissioned hundreds of woodcarving artizan and Lama Craftsmen to sculpt under the creative direction of *Qahandarhan*’s living Buddha. The *Yonghegong* Palace, notable for its huge size, excellent carving, and intricate decorating, is one of the “three wonders.” It is extremely valuable in religious affairs and ancient cultural relics in China. In the extraordinary hall of the *Potala* Palace, the *Songtsan Gambo* Buddha—*Papalog* Summer Buddha, is also carved from sandalwood, with gilded surface and jeweled. About its origin, there are two commonly accepted legends. First, while rebuilding the *Potala* Palace, *Songtsan Gambo* discovered a large sandalwood trunk that had been stored in the palace for many years and had cracked and contained four Buddha statues, one of which was *Guanyin* Bodhisattva, which said, “*Songtsan Gambo* is my incarnation, I am the king of Tibet *Songtsan*

*Gambo* himself.” Second, the Buddha statue is *Songtsan Gambo*, carved from excellent sandalwood in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. from Nepal and India’s border back to Tibet, standing 1.18 metres tall and dating back more than 1370 years. It was robbed multiple times but mysteriously restored to *Potala* Palace. Believers thought that the statue has limitless power, and it has become the principal Buddha statue and palace treasure.

Above, we have seen the universality and nobility of sandalwood Buddha statues in Buddhism from the aspects of documentation and material preservation. As the preferred material for Buddha sculpture, sandalwood has abundant examples found in Buddhist classics and seen in real temples.

## **6. Sandalwood Products and Buddhist Utensils**

The entire body of the sandalwood tree is a treasure; its trunk wood can be used for carving and producing various Buddha instruments, heartwood can be removed to produce sandalwood essential oil, roots, wood chips may be processed into powder for medication or incense stick and clay.

### **6.1. Sandalwood Tin Sticks, Sandalwood Boxes, Sandalwood Caskets, Sandalwood Pagodas**

“There was something, such as Buddha tin sticks, galvanised iron ring, sandalwood shaftment, treasure of the container. Recently, a king learned that all of these things were utilised by Buddha himself, depending on their strength and pushing him to return. Already returned to my native state, placed a house, and have not driven but lost. Then restore it to its original location. The five wonders are full with supernatural.” This story and record are from the chapter “*Nagarahara-Hidda*” of the book “Records on the Western Regions of Tang Dynasty”<sup>26</sup>. Sandalwood tin stick as a Buddhist tool is full with anima and knowledge, displaying the wisdom and virtue.

Buddhist scriptures can be stored in sandalwood caskets. In South and Southeast Asia, for example, Buddha is frequently etched on the leaves of peepul trees and preserved in sandalwood boxes to avoid moths and deterioration. Sandalwood is also utilized to create book scrolls for sutra mounting. “*Shi Fatai* is a native of *Longshan* County in *Meizhou*, with the common surname of *lyv*(呂). *Tai* travelled to the city to have a decoration to the sutra, with sandalwood as the shaft, belt, and cover,” according to “Renewing the biography of the distinguished



monk,”<sup>27</sup> “And restore it to other parts of the temple where exotic incense and joss stick is used every night.”

In Buddhism, Sarira (collection of pearl or crystal-like bead-shaped relics) is one of the sacred objects. It was kept in stone caskets and saved in pagodas when Buddhism spread to China. Later, caskets storing sarira developed from single layer to multi-layer, and their materials also developed from stone caskets to silver coffin, gold coffin, jade coffin, and sandalwood coffin and so on. Sandalwood as the casket material is common in Buddhism. In 1987, archaeologists found four sets of sarira caskets and four sariras in *Famen* temple’s underground palace in Shaanxi Province<sup>28</sup>. Such as one Buddha finger sarira in an eight-layer casket, the outermost first layer has the width of an each side 30cm high silver-edge Lu top sandalwood casket; another sarira was in a five-layer casket, the third layer is a silver-wrapped sandalwood casket, and the crystal coffin is surrounded by miniature statues of Buddha’s disciples and its shape is like a peak, symbolizing *the* Sandalwood mountain of *Xumi*, including Bodhisattva and Lux, which are 2cm high, carved from sandalwood. In 2008, an iron casket was found in the underground palace of Glass Pagoda from the ruins of the Great Gratitude Temple in Nanjing. After the opening, there came to sight a pagoda of Ashoka with seven treasures, which was of excellent workmanship. The pagoda contained “gold coffin and silver coffin”, and contained “Buddha’s top true bone” and “ten sensitive sariras”. It is the treasure of Ashoka pagoda in *Jianchu* Temple in Nanjing. The main structure of the pagoda is wood, gold veneer. The wood used in the Tower is sandalwood, which was produced in south India.<sup>29</sup> These physical discoveries are consistent with written records, proving the close relationship between Buddha and sandalwood even after the Buddha’s death.

## **6.2. Sandalwood Medicine, Aroma (Smoke)**

Sandalwood is also an excellent raw material for the manufacture of spices, medicine, incense and fragrance. It used to play the role in eliminating diseases and keep people healthy, spreading fragrance, incense burning, communicating wishes to the Buddha, chasing away evil spirits and avoiding impurities.

“*Zhantan*, it means giving pleasure. White sandalwood can cure fever, and red sandalwood can remove wind and swells. Both are eliminating diseases and giving health, therefore it means giving pleasure.” The record is in “*Huilin* Voice & Meaning”. It shows that sandalwood is giving pleasure, and curing diseases. Similar record

appears also in “Buddha telling *Zhantan* Tree sutra”<sup>30</sup>: “this tree is incense and clean, but very rare.....God said: *Zhantan*, root, branches and leaves, can cure many ills, and its incense smells far away, and it is singularity.....King’s sick headache, praying heaven and earth and the gods the disease is not cured, with the help from famous doctor and getting the sandalwood incense then the disease cured.” In “Abbreviated Meaning of the Prajnaparamita Scripture and the Great Blissful Amoghasamadhi of True Reality of Vajrasattva Bodhisattva and the Other Seventeen Holy and Great Mandalas”<sup>31</sup>, it is recorded as “pasting *Zhantan* incense can detoxificate hot like frost and snow”; in chapter “Products of Dharmadhatu” of “Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra”<sup>32</sup>, there is an expression that “pasting white *Zhantan* on the body, eliminating trouble and hot can make cool and pleasure”, “such as white *Zhantan* pasted on body, can destroy everything hot angered, make their body and mind cool and refreshing”. From these records, we can infer that sandalwood has healing effect, as a medicine it can detoxify heat. It is also recorded that “Buddha was honored as the great doctor, he not only can heal all living beings’ heart and soul, but also has profound medical arguments and treatment methods for all living beings’ physical diseases. Buddha would first look for the cause of the disease, and then apply medicine to the disease, and advocate natural treatment, such as grinding sandalwood into a paste, smear on all living things sick, repeated several times, after weeks or days, inflammation of the skin, abscess ulcer, pain relief, and all living things healthy.”<sup>33</sup> These records show that the Buddha highly respected sandalwood. He not only used sandalwood for himself, but also discovered its medical value to dispel diseases of all living beings and realize the purpose of making sandalwood a relationship with Buddhism and pursuing all living beings.

The fragrance from sandalwood dispels all odors and impurity, and makes people comfortable. Therefore, it is taken as a sacred offering to Buddha, Bodhisattva. For example, in “Fugai Zhengxing Sutra”<sup>34</sup>: “Gosirsa-candana, paste on body, fragrance far away.” In “Gathering on Top of Giant Buddha Tuoluonie Sutra”<sup>35</sup>: “ageratum, frankincense, white sandalwood incense, styracaceae, tambac, benzoin, dipterocarpaceae.....all the twelve smells are kings in incense, and used on altar.” In “the lotus sutra · medicine King Bodhisattva skill products”<sup>36</sup>: “entrance the Sanamaya and in the void, rain mandala, maha mandala, grinding and black sandal, which was like clouds descending in the void. *Zhantan* incense six baht, value for saha world, to provide for the Buddha.....such as *Zhantan*, frankincense, turusika, biliga, tambac,

glue incense, and drink deep groundwater *ZhuHua* sesame oil, with a one thousand and two hundred years old, sesame oil coating, filling the sesame oil, encounters with god, nature, light all over eight billion Ganges river sand in the world.” It can be seen that sandalwood is the king of incense in status and value. In “Susiddhikara mahāntra sādhanopāyika paṭala”<sup>37</sup>: “time after I said this incense method in three, submerged sandalwood tulips, etc., with the time, take a feed, or three incense, and three parts, or take a incense, with the department”, “heavy water incense, white sandalwood, red sandalwood incense, shorea incense, costustoot”. It means there are three different incenses to be burnt. Buddha family burnt heavy water incense, Vajra family burnt white sandalwood, Lotus family burnt tulip, and there can also be a kind of incense in three families, but sandalwood is listed as one of the providing. In “Buddha on the top is superior to Tuoluoni in reciting ritual”<sup>38</sup>: “offering to all Buddhas and saints...If you are heading to eliminate disaster, facing the north of round altar, observing the holy people white, all the offerings in the ashram are white, sitting in the white clothes facing the north, burning tambac incense; If you want the growth, facing the east, the Lord and offer and own clothes which are all yellow, burning white sandalwood incense; If you surrender, sit facing the south and burn benzoin incense while offering and dressing in blue or black; If you practice the worship, sit facing the west, observe the red color of the Buddha, eat and drink and wear clothes that are all red, and burn storax incense”, showing different rituals of burning incense when offering sacrifices to Buddha. We need to select the different material of incense to offer the Buddha. According to Ramayana<sup>39</sup>, in the city of Ayuttuo, “one cannot meet anyone who does not apply perfume or oil, and one cannot meet anyone who does not have a full body of fragrance”, wearing rare expensive sandalwood incense “is very cool and fragrant”. Sandalwood mud acts as a material carrier to spread the fragrance.

Recorded in “Damamūka nidāna sūtra”<sup>40</sup>: “*Funaqi* is in the *Jetavana-vihāra* of *Śrāvastī* country, where he sits in meditation and thinks, via remote ear, hearing brother *Xianna* is in danger, to the heart, sadly and goes home in peace. *Funaqi* persuaded his brother to build a small hall with sandalwood entirely. When the hall was finished, he persuaded his brother to invite Buddha to the hall. *Xianna* answered, what kind of thing should I use to to invite Buddha to the hall, and not to respect Buddha? *Funaqi*, together with his brother, provided full provision, each holding a censer, together they climbed a high building, far away to *vihāra*, burning incense to the Buddha and the holy monk. The only wish

for tomorrow is to see my country and realize the ignorance and blindness of all living beings. When the vow was over, the incense and smoke were satisfied, and when it is empty, it goes up to the top of the Buddha, and gathers together to make a smoke cover. After that, they washed the feet of Buddha. The water came from the hollow, like hairpins, the wishes to the feet of the Buddha. When Anan saw this, he asked the Buddha who put the smoke and water out. The Buddha told Anan that it was the *Funaqi rohan bhikkhu*, who was in the state, to persuade his brother *Xianna* to invite the Buddha and the monk. So put out smoke and water, make it as a signal.” This record tells the story how *Funaqi* and his brother built Sandalwood Hall, and holding censer, incensing, putting out water, and guiding Buddha and the monk to come to Sandalwood Hall. Buddha found the Sandalwood Hall with incense and smoke and water as the messenger. Therefore, the disciples decided that “incense” is the medium of information channeling, reaching the heart of Buddha, making “incense as Buddha’s messenger”, “incense as messenger”, and “incense can pass through all”.<sup>41</sup> Thus, incense worship arose in Buddhism. From daily chanting and meditation, to grand bathing Buddha dharma meeting, water and land dharma meeting, as well as Buddhist activities such as the opening, preaching and releasing of Buddha statues, the above-discussed incense ceremony as the opening rite. Sandalwood, as the most pure and mellow, natural and long distance, fragrance and cool representative of many spices, was highly praised by the Buddha, and it seems proper to give a new meaning to sandalwood fragrance with the Buddhist wisdom. That is to say, sandalwood incense is connected with people’s wisdom and virtue, and is in contact with the perfect wise men. The sages admired by people can preach sandalwood incense, so as to achieve “if people are stained with incense, the body is fragrant, and the name is fragrant light solemn”. Recorded in the chapter of “Tuṣita Products” of “Mahā-Vaipulya-Buddhāvataṃsaka-Sūtra”<sup>42</sup>: “one hundred trillion *Zhantan* incense net..... one hundred trillion black *Zhantan*, one hundred trillion incredible incense, one hundred trillion aromatic..... scattered countless colors of *Tianhua*, however countless colors of *Tianxiang*, offering to Buddha..... A countless variety of color sandalwood incense, serve spread Buddha.....”. It shows that sandalwood fragrance channeled the Buddha, creating an atmosphere to calm people’s minds and eliminate distractions. Therefore, incense burning became the ritual of later generations of Buddhism to help people achieve the ideal state of meditation and tranquility.

According to “*Samgharakṣa Sūtra*”<sup>43</sup>: “the incense wheel turns forward to subdue demons and grievances.” In “*Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya Sundries*”<sup>44</sup>: “the dead body stunk, made everyone not to smell. Buddha turned into the forest of sandalwood and spread out the incense. Everyone became joyous.” That is the gods are coming to the Buddha to smell, then into the forest of an ancient name for sandalwood incense, make out fragrant scent, and all the gods smell and are happy, they arrive at Buddhist land, and eliminating the demon, enjoy all living beings. Buddha’s greatest wish is that “on the solemn land of the Buddha, it should be ‘ten sides of the Buddha world, with wonderful incense’. If the world is fumigation, sewage turbidity, air chaos, smell of pungent, tears, the gods will not drop the world, subdue the tiger, cut evil demons, for the people. It must be perfumed with the delight of sandal, which surprises the gods in its delight and delight in Buddhism to welcome the Buddha.”<sup>45</sup> It can be seen that the aroma of sandalwood can kill evil spirits and become a mysterious substance for people to communicate with god. Therefore, lighting sandalwood to worship Buddha can communicate with god and pray for god.

## **7. Conclusion**

Sandalwood, as a natural plant, is recognized and utilized by humans due to its natural aroma and wood-material properties. Sandalwood, in particular, is commonly employed in Buddhism and has deep connections with Buddhism. Sandalwood is a key bearer of material culture in Buddhism. At the same time, it expresses the spiritual meaning of Buddhism. Historically, China was a significant user of sandalwood, with a huge amount of sandalwood and its products consumed by the Buddhist culture. Sandalwood, as the building material of Buddhist architecture, the material of Buddha sculptures, and the original material of Buddhist supply, has left numerous tangible evidences for Buddhist culture. Sandalwood interacts with the disciples by its scent, employs its medical properties to treat all living beings, and uses its aroma to perfume the Buddhist land for thousands of squares. It has become synonymous with Buddhism, demonstrating the richness and transition of sandalwood from plant to person. Sandalwood, a material and cultural oneness, has evolved from a plant to a cultural tree. Buddhism was enhanced by sandalwood, and sandalwood was sublimated by Buddhism. Sandalwood and Buddhism have emerged as a compelling case study in material culture studies.

## 8. Acknowledgement

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## Notes & References:

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- <sup>10</sup> Cheng Linsheng, "On the Use of Sandalwood Incense in Buddhism," *the Voice of Dharma*, Gen. No.407, 2018(7).pp48-53.
- <sup>11</sup> The four famous incense in Chinese culture are agilawood, sandalwood, ambergris and musk, among which sandalwood ranks second.
- <sup>12</sup> Kieschnick John. *The impact of Buddhism on Chinese material culture*. Princeton University Press,2003,p1.
- <sup>13</sup> Fieldwork method mentioned here is not strict in the sense of anthropological methods, namely staying in these places not for a long time, but use my own travel time made a special trip to visit these places and interview some monks and local people to understand the sandalwood and its stories in these temples. This field trip was conducted in 2016-2018.
- <sup>14</sup> Regarding the time when Buddhism was introduced into China, there are generally two views: "folk view" and "official view". On the "folk view", it is generally believed that Buddhism was introduced into China in the late Warring States period(B.C.475-B.C.221) during the Qin Shihuang era. According to the record in "Samantapasadika"(*Shanjian Lyv Biposha*,善见律毗婆沙), in the time of King Asoka, after the third gathering of Buddhism, King Asoka sent Great MahArakkhita to the Han world(China), and sent Majjhima to the border state of the snow-capped mountains; in the "History of Indian

Buddhism”, the eminent monk Samanta propagated the Dharma in China in Dharma Ashoka times; Nanyu Buddhism History book says that Majjhima was sent to China. On the “official view”, in the “Book of Later Han Dynasty, Western Regions Biography”, “The Emperor Ming dreamed that the golden person grew up and had a bright top, so he asked the ministers. Replied, ‘God in west, named Buddha, 17 feet high and golden color.’ The emperor then sent an envoy to Tenjiku(India) to ask about Buddhism, and Buddha was pictured in Chinese paintings.” In 67 A.D., the mission invited two eminent monks, Kāśyapamātanga and Dharmaratna, from the Western Regions, and brought Buddha statues and Buddhist sutras back. Emperor Ming of the Eastern Han Dynasty established White Horse(*Baima*, 白馬) Temple in Luoyang, and placed the Buddha statues and sutras in the temple, which is the first Buddhist temple in China.

<sup>15</sup> Complete Poetry of the Tang, Vol 96, No.69.

<sup>16</sup> Complete Poetry of the Tang, Vol 171, No.17.

<sup>17</sup> Complete Poetry of the Tang, Vol 741, No.12.

<sup>18</sup> Complete Poetry of the Tang, Vol 746, No.9.

<sup>19</sup> Complete Poetry of the Tang, Vol 837, No.15.

<sup>20</sup> Complete Poetry of the Tang, Vol 837, No.55.

<sup>21</sup> Huiyi Foyi, *The Origin of the Buddha Statue: the Statue of Udayana King*, <http://fo.sina.com.cn/culture/painting/2017-05-23/doc-ifyetwsm0849336.shtml>, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017, the author search and read it on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Institute of Chinese Buddhism Culture, *The Adhiam sutra(two volumes)*, Beijing: Religious Cultural Press, 1999, pp.480-481.

<sup>23</sup> Xuan Zang, Bian Ji, *Records on the Western Regions of Tang Dynasty*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1985, pp.468-469, 1026, 1041.

<sup>24</sup> [Japan]Shi Yuanren, [China] Bai Huawen, *Notes of Pilgrimage & Study in Tang*, Shijiazhuang: Huashan wenyi Press, 1992, p63.

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<sup>27</sup> *Renewing the Biography of the Eminent Monk*, from Taisho Tripitaka, No.2060, Vol. 50, p687.

<sup>28</sup> Archaeology team of Famen temple of Shaanxi Province: “Excavation Bulletin of Fufeng Famen Temple Tower underground Palace of Tang Dynasty”, *Cultural Relics*, No.10, 1988, pp.1-37.

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<sup>30</sup> *Buddha telling Zhantan Tree sutra*, from Taisho Tripitaka, No.805, Vol.17, p750.

<sup>31</sup> *Abbreviated Meaning of the Prajnaparamita Scripture and the Great Blissful Amoghasamadhi of True Reality of Vajrasattva Bodhisattva and the Other Seventeen Holy and Great Mandalas*, from Taisho Tripitaka, No.1004, Vol.19, p618.

<sup>32</sup> *Mahāvaiṣṭhīya Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra*, from Taisho Tripitaka, No.278, Vol.9, p778; No.279, Vol.10, p432.

<sup>33</sup> Li Peiyi, *Miraculous Sandalwood*, Wuhan, Normal University of Central China Press, 2011, p18.

<sup>34</sup> *Fugai Zhengxing Sutra*, from Taisho Tripitaka, No.1671, Vol.32, p736.

<sup>35</sup> *Gathering on Top of Giant Buddha Tuoluonie Sutra*, from Taisho Tripitaka, No.946, Vol.19, p173.

<sup>36</sup> *The lotus sutra*, from Taisho Tripitaka, No.262, Vol.9, p53.

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<sup>37</sup> *Susiddhikara mahātantra sādhanopāyika paṭala*, from Taisho Tripitaka, No.893, Vol.18, p609, p622.

<sup>38</sup> *Buddha on the top is superior to duoluoni in reciting ritual*, from Taisho Tripitaka, No.972, Vol.19, p368.

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<sup>42</sup> *Mahā-Vaipulya-Buddhāvataṃsaka-Sūtra*, from Taisho Tripitaka, No.279, Vol.10, pp.115-118.

<sup>43</sup> *Samgharakṣa Sūtra*, from Taisho Tripitaka, No.194, Vol.4, p122.

<sup>44</sup> *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya Sundries*, from Taisho Tripitaka, No.1451, Vol.24, p347.

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