Betel Nut Beauty in Taiwan: Chinese Tourists’ Perspective

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Abstract—Tourists’ eyes will often be attracted by the unique phenomenon of the roadsides: betel nut beauties (pronounced as binlang xishi in Mandarin), if they drive on the roads of Taiwan. Sitting in the neon-lit glass stalls with attractive dress on the roadsides, betel nut beauties usually sell betel nuts to the passing truckers or car drivers with much of their efforts. Moreover, in order to attract peoples’ eyesight and increase the sales volume, the young girls are in skimpy clothing to promote betel nuts or beverages to their customers. Therefore, when the Chinese tourists come to Taiwan, to see the unique betel nut beauty phenomenon has become one of their greatly interested things or even a “must see”. This paper describes betel but beauties in Taiwan, explained why the Chinese tourists like to see them in Taiwan and proposed propositions for examination.

Keywords—Betel nut, betel nut beauty, Chinese tourists, tourism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Driving on the roads of Taiwan, tourists’ eyes will often be attracted by the unique phenomenon of the roadsides: betel nut beauties (pronounced as binlang xishi in Mandarin). Sitting on a bar stool in a neon-topped glass booth, betel nut beauties usually wear skimpy clothing and hawk with efforts toward the passing truck drivers, pedestrians or tourists. Selling a kind of mild narcotic and date-like fruit, betel nut beauties like to give a sweet and suggestive smile when passing off betel nuts, cigarettes or drinks to the customers. For most of the girls are young and beautiful, the public named them after the legendary beauty of ancient China. They go into the industry for it’s easier to get relatively higher pay with low degree in the society like Taiwan. It is estimated that there are thousands of young girls are engaged in the industry [1]. With the age ranged from their late teens to early twenties, betel nut beauties have formed a popular and distinct culture in the cities and countries in Taiwan.

Betel nut is originally the seed of a tropical plant, Areca catechu palm tree. Chewing betel nut is a popular scene in Taiwan, as the plant is chewy and with the features of mild and stimulant, truckers or taxi drivers take it as tobacco substitute or breath freshener in the long way driving, blue-collar workers also regard chewing it as a daily habit [2]. Therefore, it is also called “Taiwanese chewing gum”. In the recent years, the planting area of betel nut has surpassed sugarcane to be the second largest crop in Taiwan, after rice [3]. Meanwhile, being regarded as the cash crop, betel nut has been contributed a great amount to Taiwan’s economy in the past decades. For the consumption keeps going higher and higher in the past years even the behavior is controversial, stall owners started to hire young girls with the attempts to provide better service to customers.

However, as the competition is fierce, to be more attractive, girls had to wear even less. Even criticisms come from various sides of the society, the practitioners argue that they are doing a decent job; they are only selling merchandises to those who need them. As a result, the phenomenon made by betel nut beauty has become a unique popular culture in Taiwan even though no one exactly knows when it started from. Recently, when the Chinese tourists come to Taiwan, many of them rushed to see betel nut beauties [4]. Therefore, the study is to review the relationship between betel nut beauties and Chinese tourists from the perspective of tourism.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Betel nut and betel nut beauty

Betel nut is the seed of a tropical plant, Areca catechu, which is originally produced in Southeast Asia and widely planted in the countries such as Ceylon, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Philippines, India, South China, and Taiwan. In Taiwan, vendors sell betel nuts by stuffing them with lime paste and wrapping them with betel nut leaves. Truckers, long-distance drivers, or blue-collar workers like to take it as a stimulant or daily. Though the Department of Health [5] kept warning that chewing betel nut is harmful to health, it still seemed to be one of the basic level workers’ hobbies in Taiwan.

For the demand amount is heavy, vendors started to run the business. On the other side, the sale of betel nuts in Taiwan contributed a high percentage to agriculture and economy annually (see Table I for reference); some people also regarded it as “green gold”. Meanwhile, in order to survive in a keen-competitive market and increase the sales volume, vendors hired young girls in skimpy clothing to promote betel nuts or beverages to passing truck or car drivers.

Though betel nuts can be found in many countries, as stated above, one can only see betel nuts in Taiwan [6]. Actually, the existence of betel nut beauty in Taiwan arose some different comments, however, no matter how the society criticized, the betel nut beauties argued that they make money only by their own force, they did not against any regulations, so no one can

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