

# The Dissemination of Palm Leaf Manuscripts in China and Its Cultural Influence

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## Dissemination of Palm Leaf Manuscripts in China

Before the introduction of paper into South Asia and Southeast Asia, palm-leaf was an ideal recording material for Buddhist sutras due to its advantages of light weight and wear resistance.

The contents recorded on palm leaves not limited to Buddhist sutras, but also included other contents, such as literature, grammar, drama, medicine and astronomy, etc. [1], which are called palm leaf manuscripts. Subsequently, palm leaf manuscripts, as the material carrier of Indian Buddhist culture, was introduced into China along with Indian Buddhism. In the 1st to 10th century, the ancient Indian Buddhists carried a large number of Sanskrit palm leaf manuscripts and traveled to Tibet in China and Nepal to preach Dharma, and most of them were introduced in Tang Dynasty [2].

Chinese Buddhists also traveled to the ancient India to learn Buddhism and bring back many palm leaf manuscripts. With the spread of Buddhism in China, palm leaf manuscripts have entered China.

## Distribution of Palm Leaf Manuscripts

The palm leaf manuscripts introduced into China are mainly divided into two major parts, Sanskrit and Pali.

The Sanskrit palm leaf manuscripts are mainly distributed in Tibet of China, which was introduced from India and Nepal from the 7th century to the 17th century, especially from the 8th century to the 14th century. There are nearly 1000 kinds of manuscripts, which are mainly preserved in Potala Palace, Norbulingka, Tibet Museum, Tibet Archives. The Sanskrit palm leaf manuscripts in Tibet are not only abundant in number, but also complete in content, and have high literature value.

The palm leaf manuscripts, a Pali language family, is mainly distributed in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, and introduced from northern Thailand and Myanmar. Its content is mainly the Buddhist Sutra copied and engraved in Pali, besides, there are many legends, stories, poems and historical biographies, etc. Mantu Buddhist Temple in Xishuangbanna has the largest collection of palm leaf manuscripts.

In addition, there are several palm leaf manuscripts in Jiuhua Mountain of Anhui Province, Emei Mountain of Sichuan Province, Dayan Pagoda of Xi'an City, Putuo Mountain of Zhejiang Province, National Museum of China and National Library of China.

## The Development of Palm Leaf Manuscripts in China and its Cultural Influence

After Sanskrit palm leaf manuscripts were introduced into Tibet, local Buddhists translated and copied them in Tibetan, which promoted the sinicization of Indian Buddhism. With the development of Buddhism in Tibet, the upper lamas gradually took control of the local political power, and finally formed a unique Tibetan Buddhism with the combination of politics and religion, which had a far-reaching impact on the politics, law, culture, morality and other aspects of life in Tibet.

The spread of palm leaf manuscripts in Dai nationality promoted the creation of Dai characters and formed palm-leaf culture with national characteristics. Palm leaf manuscripts is the oldest and core part of Dai palm-leaf culture, the main carrier of palm-leaf culture, and can be said to be the foundation of Dai culture. Numerous palm leaf manuscripts have become an encyclopedia of Dai society, forming a unique local national culture [3].

In addition, palm leaf manuscripts also introduced the book binding form, blessed one clip outfit, into China. The appearance of the blessed one clip outfit plays an important role in the history of Chinese books development, which not only enriches the mounting forms of Chinese books, but also promotes the transition of books from scroll binding to album binding.

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