

# ‘Method from Persia’: Study on the Origins of the ‘Three Myrobalan Decoction’\*

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**Abstract:** *sanlejiang* 三勒漿 (three myrobalan decoction) is a kind of fruit drink that originated in India and was introduced into China via Persia in the Tang dynasty. It was made up of three kinds of fruit (*sanguo* 三果), respectively *halila*, *balia* and *amola* in Persian and *haritaki*, *vibhitaka*, and *amalaka* in Sanskrit. It was a fashionable drink of the upper classes in the Tang dynasty. During the Song dynasty, two kinds of soup from the south associated with it, *germinalia chebula* and *phyllanthus emblica*, were also well-known in the north. In the Yuan dynasty, the drink was made popular again for a short time by Xu Guozhen 許國禎 (active 1280s). With the Ming and Qing dynasties, it disappeared as a drink in daily life, but the related knowledge was passed on from generation to generation through the written Word, as people tried to preserve the historical memory of the Tang dynasty. The three kinds of fruit had an important position in the diet and medicine of ancient India, with corresponding mythological descriptions. In Persian and Arabic medical literature as well as in Huihui prescriptions 回藥方, *sanlejiang* is frequently recorded as a medicine or beverage, indicating that it was popular in Persia and the Arab areas. This was different in many respects from its transmission on Chinese soil because of the differences in the relations among

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\* Translated by Jack Hargreaves.

Persian, Chinese and Indian cultures. As a cultural transit area, Persia not only offered a second chance for this Indian beverage to be transmitted to foreign parts, but also left the Chinese with a good impression of things Persian. For this reason, the transmission and absorption of dietary customs among China, India and Persia reflect the differences, preference and interaction among the three areas.

**Keywords:** *sanlejiang* 三勒漿, Xu Guozhen 許國禎 (active 1280s), Huihui prescriptions 回藥方, Persia

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Recent health and wellbeing trends have triggered an explosion in the range of new medicinal products available, with many companies favouring for their marketing focus ‘folk remedies’ styled after ancient prescriptions, as a means to maximise their profits. One such remedy is the ‘three myrobalan decoction’ (Ch. *sanlejiang* 三勒漿), a medicine originally from Persia, which certain pharmaceutical companies have started to promote as their signature product. In this section, the intent is not to query the effectiveness of the medicine’s modern variant, but rather to unpack the medicine’s origins and development through cultural exchange. Research on material culture is central to understanding Sino-Foreign communications throughout time, as exemplified within Berthold Laufer’s *Sino-Iranica*<sup>1</sup> and Edward Schafer’s *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*.<sup>2</sup> The story of the ‘three myrobalan decoction’ alone can enrich our knowledge of how dietetic customs once spread between regions and how they featured in daily life, which in turn should provide a sturdy foundation of evidence on which to construct a history of Sino-Foreign material cultural exchange in the Middle Ages.

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<sup>1</sup> Laufer, *Sino-Iranica*.

<sup>2</sup> Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*.

# 1. The ‘three myrobalan decoction’, ‘three myrobalan soup’, and ‘three fruit decoction’ of the Tang Dynasty

The Sui and Tang dynasties were periods of frequent cultural exchange, which saw a diverse array of customs around eating and drinking introduced into China. Fruit wines at the time were predominantly made using grapes or, less commonly, blends of three myrobalan fruits (Skt. *tri-phalā*).<sup>3</sup> The earliest extant record of a ‘three myrobalan decoction’ comes from the *Tang guoshi bu* 唐國史補 [Supplement to Official History of Tang Dynasty] written by Li Zhao 李肇 (active 810s–820s) in the middle of the latter dynasty:

Of alcohols, there is *fushui* 富水 liquor from Yingzhou 郢州, *ruoxia* 若下 liquor from Wucheng 烏程, *tukuchun* 土窟春 liquor from Xingyang 滎陽, *shidongchun* 石凍春 liquor from Fuping 富平, *shaochun* 燒春 liquor from Jiannan 劍南, dried grape wine from Hedong 河東, *lingxi* 靈溪 and *boluo* 博羅 liquor from Lingnan 嶺南 [the south], *jiuyun* 九醞 liquor from Yicheng 宜城, *penshui* 湓水 liquor from Xunyang 潯陽, *xishiqiang* 西市腔 liquor from Jingcheng 京城 [the capital], and *langguanqing* 郎官清 and *apqing* 阿婆清 liquor from Hamaling 蝦蟆陵. There is also a three myrobalan decoction, made using a method from Persia. The three myrobalan are emblic myrobalan, beleric myrobalan and chebulic myrobalan. 酒則有郢州之富水, 烏程之若下, 滎陽之土窟春, 富平之石凍春, 劍南之燒春, 河東之乾和蒲萄, 嶺南之靈溪、博羅, 宜城之九醞, 潯陽之湓水, 京城之西市腔, 蝦蟆陵郎官清、阿婆清. 又有三勒漿類酒, 法出波斯. 三勒者謂庵摩勒、毘梨勒、訶梨勒.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> There is a wealth of research about alcohol available, for example: Koga, *Wain no sekaishi*; Trombert, ‘Zhongguo beifang de sute yicun’; Ge, ‘Huren suixian putaojiu’. Chen, ‘Tulufan wenshu zhong de “zuo”, “kujiu” yu putaojiu de zhonglei’.

<sup>4</sup> *Tang guoshi bu* 1.197.

Cited in the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 [Extensive Records of the Taiping Era] (*juan* 333) compiled by the Song Dynasty scholar Li Fang 李昉 (925–996) and others, this passage serves as a record for numerous wines from the middle Tang.<sup>5</sup> The ‘wine-like three myrobalan decoction’ refers to a beverage resembling wine, made by blending and fermenting three kinds of imported fruit, *Phyllanthus emblica*, or emblic myrobalan (Ch. *anmole* 庵摩勒; Skt. *āmalaka*), *Terminalia bellirica*, or beleric myrobalan (Ch. *pilile* 毘梨勒; Skt. *vibhītaka*), and *Terminalia chebula*, or black- or chebulic myrobalan (Ch. *helile* 訶梨勒; Skt. *harītakī*). Whether Persia presented the method for producing the apparently delicious drink as a gift to China is unclear.

### 1.1. Tang Dynasty brewing method for the three myrobalan decoction

Han E 韓鄂 (active at the end of Tang) included a comprehensive description of the fermentation method for the three myrobalan decoction in his work, *Sishi zuanyao* 四時纂要 [Important Rules for the Four Seasons], which he completed at the end of the Tang Dynasty (and beginning of the Five Dynasties):

To make three myrobalan decoction: prepare the black myrobalan, beleric myrobalan and emblic myrobalan, keeping the pits, three *liang* of each. Pound until the size of *madou* [sesame seeds]; they should not be too fine. Thoroughly mix together one *dou* white honey and two *dou* freshly drawn, clean water in a jar of *five* *dou* capacity, then mix in the powdered three myrobalan fruits to stir. Seal tightly with multiple sheets of clean paper to preserve. After three to four days, stir again. Use clean cloth to wipe away the moisture and condensation. After the fermentation is complete, do not open. Tightly seal. It takes thirty days for the process to complete, when the decoction will be sweet and enjoyable, and its consumption quickly inebriates the drinker; it aids digestion and helps with

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<sup>5</sup> *Taiping guangji* 233.1785.

trapped wind and constipation. It is best to ferment the beverage in the eighth month [August], in other months the quality will not be as high. 造三勒漿: 訶梨勒、毘梨勒、庵摩勒, 已上並和核用, 各三大兩。搗如麻豆大, 不用細。以白蜜一鬥、新汲水二鬥, 調熟, 投乾淨五鬥甕中, 即下三勒末, 攪和勻。數重紙密封。三四日開, 更攪。以乾淨帛拭去汗。候發定, 即止。但密封。此月一日合, 滿三十日即成, 味至甘美, 飲之醉人, 消食、下氣。須是八月合即成, 非此月不佳矣。<sup>6</sup>

This patently detailed account of the brewing process echoes the aforementioned comparison of the decoction to alcohol by describing it as ‘sweet and enjoyable, [...] its consumption quickly inebriates the drinker’. Content from this work was reproduced by both Wu Yi 吳懌 (a.k.a. Wu Cuan 吳攢) of the Southern Song in his *Zhongyi biyong* 種藝必用 [Everyman’s Guide to Agriculture] and Gao Lian 高濂 (active 1590s) of the Ming Dynasty in *Zunsheng bajian* 遵生八箋 [Eight Essays on Cherishing Life] (published in 1591), which reads:

The *Important Rules* states: ‘This month is suited for making three myrobalan decoction, the other months are not ideal. Use black myrobalan, beleric myrobalan and emblic myrobalan with the stones included, beat until the size of *madou* 麻豆 [sesame seeds], three *liang* in total. Mix together one *dou* honey and two *dou* freshly drawn, clean water in a jar and add the three myrobalans. Stir some more, then tightly seal for three to four days before stirring again and wiping away moisture with a clean cloth. For the fermentation to complete leave for a total of thirty days. The flavour is delicious; consumption aids digestion and relieving trapped wind and constipation. 《纂要》曰: ‘是月宜合三勒漿, 過此月則不佳矣。用訶梨勒、

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<sup>6</sup> ‘*Qiu Ling juan zhisi-bayue*’, Miao, colla. & annot., *Sishi zuanyao jiaoshi*, 195. Li Hongbin 李鴻賓 also discusses the origins of myrobalan, the channels through which it spread, and uses, including how to use it to decoct spirits and soups. See Li, ‘Dagu wenshu suojian bintie toushi zhuwu bianxi’. I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to Professor Li Hongbin for providing me with this text.

批 (昆) 梨勒、庵摩勒三味, 和核搗如麻豆大, 用三兩, 次用蜜一鬥, 以新汲水二鬥, 調勻傾甕中, 即下三勒, 熟攪, 密封三四日後開, 又攪之, 以乾淨布拭去汗, 候發定, 密封共三十日方成。味甚美, 飲之消食下氣。<sup>7</sup>

The *Yuding yueling jiyao* 御定月令輯要 [Imperial Stipulations on Monthly Ordinances], edited by Li Guangdi 李光地 (1642–1718) of the Qing Dynasty, quotes certain parts of this passage in *juan* 16.<sup>8</sup> While these three versions contain only slightly different descriptions of how to prepare the ‘three myrobalan decoction’, each of them uses distinct narrative wordings, and between them, the recommended date for starting fermentation changes between the eighth and the ninth lunar months. This variance amounts to more than a few words, suggesting that the content in the *Zunsheng bajian* was taken from a copied version of the original text rather than the *Sishi zuanyao* itself. As a result, it is possible that, although records continue through until the Ming and Qing dynasties, actual brewing of the beverage came to an end prior to the *Zunsheng bajian*’s publication, the process becoming little more than memory.

## 1.2. The ‘three myrobalan decoction’ on the Tang banquet table

Named among the ‘famous wines’ of the Tang Dynasty, the three myrobalan decoction must have been one of the choice wines in the capital and naturally occupied a place on the banquet table. One kind of ‘three myrobalan soup’ even featured in a poem by Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846), ‘Jixian Beidu liushou Pei Linggong bing xu’ 寄獻北都留守裴令公並序 [Missive to Chancellor Pei Linggong with Preface]: ‘For the ten days of fast, instead of the usual fine liquor I consume, I prepare a three myrobalan decoction which I drink with my friend Liu Yuxi to our heart’s content’ (為穆先陳體居易每十齋日在會, 常蒙以三勒湯代酒也, 招劉共藉糟劉夢得也).<sup>9</sup> The poet lived

<sup>7</sup> *Zunsheng bajian* 5.165.

<sup>8</sup> *Yuding yueling jiyao*, *SKQS* vol. 179: 482.

<sup>9</sup> Zhu, colla. & annot., *Bai juyi ji jianjiao*, vol. 4: 2319, 2320.

during a similar period of the middle Tang to Li Zhao, and his three myrobalan soup should be the same as the latter’s three myrobalan decoction; the two names are interchangeable. The ten days of fast (Ch. *shizhairi* 十齋日) are ten days of abstention which a Buddhist cultivator must respect every month.<sup>10</sup> The practice already existed in China by the early Tang and had become commonplace by Bai Juyi’s lifetime since the Tang imperial court officially made its observance obligatory.<sup>11</sup> In the ‘Ji zhongshu Wei xianggong wen’ 祭中書韋相公文 [Comemorializing Lord Wei (Wei Yingwu 韋應物, 737?–791), an inner secretarial court gentleman (zhongshu lang 中書郎)], Bai Juyi records, ‘In the early Changqing era (821–824), fellow mid-level secretary official (Ch. *zhongshu sheren*) Wei Xianggong and I used to visit the Vinaya Master at Puji 普濟 Temple to receive the eight precepts for the ten days of abstention, since it was our interest in Buddhism that brought us together’ (長慶初, 俱為中書舍人日, 尋詣普濟寺宗律師所, 同受八戒, 各持十齋, 繇是香火因緣, 漸相親近).<sup>12</sup> Evidently, the repentance ceremonies on each of the days of fast not only were gatherings for colleagues but also extended to ‘intimate’ meetings between officials who practiced Buddhism where acceptable food and drink were shared. Such events and feasts were essential for figures of middling-to-high social standing wanting to network. Pei Linggong’s 裴令公 (i.e., Pei Du 裴度 [765–839]) home ‘meetings’, for example, were likely frequented by members of the scholar-official class (Ch. *shidafu* 士大夫). Pei would not have served the ‘three myrobalan decoction’ to just anyone; his home must have been quite the exclusive venue. Ultimately, Bai Juyi’s account above is helpful in two ways: for one, it is evidence of beverage being ‘wine-like’; also, it indicates that the drink was brought out for guests of high standing and, therefore, probably rarely featured at gatherings

<sup>10</sup> The ten monthly days are: the 1st, 8th, 14th, 15th, 18th, 23rd, 24th, 28th, 29th, and 30th. On those days, monastic and lay followers attend repentance ceremonies at Buddhist temples and must also abide by a vegetarian diet in order to refrain from killing.

<sup>11</sup> *Tang huiyao* 41.855–857.

<sup>12</sup> Zhu, colla. & annot., *Bai Juyi ji jianjiao*, 6: 3714.

among the average citizen, hence the particular attention Bai Juyi pays to the beverage.

Clearly, the scholar-officials of the Tang had the chance to enjoy the three myrobalan decoction, but it remains difficult to determine whether the beverage had become popular throughout society by that time. However, it is unlikely, since the three necessary ingredients typically had to be imported from abroad, limiting its production and establishing it as a luxury good, a status symbol probably exclusive to the imperial court and aristocratic circles that had not yet reached wider society.

Students of the Imperial Academy (Ch. *taixue* 太學) also sampled the three myrobalan decoction. The *Shantang sikao* 山堂肆考 [Extended Investigations of the Mountain Hall] from the Ming Dynasty contains an entry on a ‘three decoction’ (Ch. *sanjiang* 三漿): ‘Tang imperial banquets for successful exam candidates included a three myrobalan decoction, namely, black myrobalan, emblic myrobalan, and black olive myrobalan (Ch. *wulanle* 烏欖勒). Also served were six courses and three decoctions. One Tang poem goes: “The immortals cooked six dishes in a begemmed cauldron, the jade woman gifted the emperor a pot of a three decoction” (唐宴進士有三勒漿, 謂訶梨勒、庵摩勒、烏欖勒也。又禦食有六膳、三漿。唐詩: ‘仙人六膳調神鼎, 玉女三漿捧帝壺’).<sup>13</sup> The quoted poem comes from the ‘Songshan shicong shiyan yingzhi’ 嵩山石淙侍宴應制 [Banquet at Shicong, Songshan; Poem Commissioned by the Emperor] by the early Tang writer Shen Quanqi 沈佺期 (656?–714?). The ‘three decoction’, here, probably refers to a heavenly wine taken by a female deity to the celestial palace, rather than to an actual three myrobalan decoction. Further evidence of students consuming the drink can be found in Qing Dynasty scholar Chen Yuanlong’s 陳元龍 (1652–1736) work the *Gezhi jingyuan* 格致鏡原 [Mirror Origins of Investigating Things and Extending Knowledge], in which the author cites Yang Shen’s 楊慎 (1488–1559) *Sheng’an waiji* 升庵外集 [Outer Collection of Sheng’an]: ‘Emperor of Daizong of Tang gifted a three myrobalan decoction to students of the Imperial Academy;

<sup>13</sup> *Shantang sikao*, 235.654.



the liquid shone brightly like wine made with grapes and had a sweet and heady flavour' (唐代宗以三勒漿賜太學諸生, 其光色灼灼, 如蒲桃桂醕, 味則溫馨甘滑).<sup>14</sup> Although published at a similar time to the *Shantang sikao*, the *Shengzhai waiji* did not take its descriptions of the beverage from its contemporary but from a Yuan Dynasty poem, 'Sanlejiang ge' 三勒漿歌 [The Three Myrobalan Decoction Poem] by Wang Yun 王惲 (1227–1304). In the Tang Dynasty, students who had been successful in the imperial examinations (Ch. *jinshi* 進士) were awarded with multiple sumptuous feasts, including the Qujiang banquet (Ch. *qujiangyan* 曲江宴), Cherry banquet (Ch. *yingtaoyan* 櫻桃宴), and Shaowei banquet (Ch. *shaoweiyan* 燒尾宴). Students of the Imperial Academy were rarely furnished with such grand dining, however, the emperor occasionally awarded them the chance to sample under his watchful gaze the impressive food and drink typically served at these events. That Emperor Daizong of Tang gave the court's three myrobalan decoction to imperial scholars further suggests that the wine was exclusive to the higher echelons of society.

Shen Zinan 沈自南 (active 1630s–1650s) of the Qing Dynasty references a poem named 'Sanlejiang' 三勒漿 [Three Myrobalan Decoction] in his *Yilin huikao* 藝林匯考 [Research on the Collected Arts], which reads, '*Xiangyan lu* 湘煙錄 [Record of Xiangyan]: Zheng Tian's 鄭畋 (825–883) poem "Sanlejiang": Fragrant like the tuo 陀 flower, its flavour is headier even than peppers steeped in liquor' (《湘煙錄》: 鄭畋《三勒漿》詩: 卉體陀花物外香, 清濃標格勝椒漿).<sup>15</sup> Zhengtian passed the imperial examination in the Huichang era of the Tang Dynasty, before progressing through the ranks of officialdom up to chancellor. For him to have written a poem about the three myrobalan decoction tallies with his rank and the established trend of the time, even though there is no direct mention of the drink in the poem, of which the original title was 'Jinshi he ren yinjiu' 禁直和人飲酒 [Drinking with Others in the Imperial Palace]. That said, whatever wine was being consumed in the palace must

<sup>14</sup> *Gezhi jingyuan*, *Siku leishu congkan*, vol 1031: 22.318.

<sup>15</sup> 'Yinshi pian' 飲食篇 [Cuisine], *Yilin huikao* 5.226.

have been taken from the imperial supply and certainly of the highest quality. It was Min Yuanjing 閔元京 (of the Ming) who changed the poem's name in his Ming Dynasty work, *Xiangyan lu*, based perhaps on his perception that the poem's contents could refer to the beverage.

### 1.3. The 'three fruit decoction' in Tang medical texts

In the early Tang Dynasty, when Su Jing 蘇敬 (599–674), among others, revised the *Xinxiu Bencao* 新修本草 [Newly Revised Pharmacopoeia], the entry about 'beleric myrobalan' became: 'Beleric myrobalan, bitter, cold, non-toxic. Used similarly to emblic myrobalan. From the Western Regions, and Jiaozhou and Aizhou in the south (Ch. *lingnan* 嶺南). The Rong 戎 peoples know it as the three fruits' (毘梨勒 味苦, 寒, 無毒. 功用與庵摩勒同. 出西域及嶺南交、愛等州. 戎人謂之三果).<sup>16</sup> The final sentence likely means that beleric myrobalan is one of the three fruits, alongside emblic myrobalan and black myrobalan, rather than it being referred to as the three fruits by itself. Most Chinese translations of Buddhist scripture group them in this way as well. The Tang Dynasty Chinese translation of the *Suvarṇaprabhāsaṭṭamarāja sūtra* [*Sūtra* of Supreme Golden Light; Ch. *Jingguangming zui shengwang jing* 金光明最勝王經], produced by the monk Yijing 義淨 (635–713), provides an example in *juan* nine, titled 'Chapter of Relieving Disease' (Ch. 'Chubing pin' 除病品):

又三果三辛	There are also three fruits and three spices,
諸藥中易得	commonly found in many medicines;
沙糖蜜酥乳	sugar, honey, ghee and milk
此能療眾病	Capable of curing many illnesses. <sup>17</sup>

Despite there not being an equivalent sentence in extant Sanskrit versions of the *Suvarṇaprabhāsaṭṭamarāja sūtra* (Ch. *Jingguangming zuishengwang jing* 金光明最勝王經),<sup>18</sup> translations of the term 'sanguo'

<sup>16</sup> Shang, colla. & annot., *Xinxiu bencao*, 194.

<sup>17</sup> *Jingguangming zuishengwang jing*, T no. 665, 16: 9.448c1–2.

<sup>18</sup> Bagchi, ed., *Suvarṇa-prabhāsa-sūtra*, 95–96.

三果 (‘three fruits’) can be found in the *Mahāmāyūrividyārājñī* (Ch. *Kongque wang zhou jing* 孔雀王咒經) series; these are presented in the table below:

TABLE 1 Translations of ‘three fruits’ (Ch. *sanguo* 三果)

Sanskrit	Saṅghabhara’s translation of the <i>Mahāmāyūrividyārājñī</i> (Ch. <i>Kongque wangzhou jing</i> 孔雀王咒經)		Yijing’s translation of the <i>Mahāmāyūrividyārājñī</i> (Ch. <i>Da kongque zhouwang jing</i> 大孔雀咒王經)		Amoghavajra’s (705–774) translation of the <i>Mahāmāyūrī Vidyārājñī Sūtra</i> (Ch. <i>Fomu dakongque mingwang jing</i> 佛母大孔雀明王經)	Notes
	Transliteration	Bridge term	Transliteration	Semantic translation		
<i>Triphālā</i>	<i>dilipoli</i> 底梨頗里	Three Fruits (Ch. <i>sanguo</i> 三果)	<i>shilifali</i> 室里發里	Three Fruits (Ch. <i>sanguo</i> 三果)	<i>dilipoli</i> 底哩頗哩	tri-phalā

*Tri-phalā* is the corresponding term found in the *Ārya-Mahā-Māyūrī Vidyā-Rājñī* (Ch. *Kongque mingwang jing* 孔雀明王經),<sup>19</sup> ‘tri’ meaning three, and ‘phalā’ meaning fruit. Saṅghabhara (also, Sajghavarman or Savghapāla, Ch. Sengqiepoluo 僧伽婆羅) and Yijing’s translations into Chinese are literal and precise: *san* 三 means three and *guo* 果 means fruit. *Juan* two of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinayavibhaṅga* (Ch. *Genben shuo yiqie you bu pi’naiye song* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶頌), as translated by Yijing, contains a Buddhist system of medicinal classification in which the three fruits are one category.<sup>20</sup> Analysis of Chinese scriptures, however, shows the name to derive from long before Yijing’s time, at least as far back as the Six

<sup>19</sup> Takubo, *Bonbun Kujaku Myōōgyō*, p.27.

<sup>20</sup> *Genben shuo yiqie you bu pi’naiye song*, T no. 1459, 24: 2.637.

Dynasties even, from when we have the Chinese version of the authoritative book of rules, the *Vinayamātrkā sūtra* (Ch. *Pinimu jing* 毘尼母經), which lists the ‘three fruits, *belile* 呵梨勒, *pixile* 毘醯勒, and *amole* 阿摩勒’,<sup>21</sup> as medicinal components. Chinese translations of scriptures contain sundry and various translations and transliterations of the three fruits’ names.

The *Fanyu zaming* 梵語雜名 [A Miscellaneous Collection of Sanskrit Terms], a Tang Dynasty collection of Sanskrit terms by Liyan 禮言/利言 (of 8th c.), lists the Chinese phonetic renderings for each of the fruits, namely, ‘*belile*—*belidaxi* 賀唎怛繫, *pixile*—*weifeidajia* 尾吠怛迦, *anmole*—*amoluojia* 阿摩囉迦’.<sup>22</sup> They are transliterations of *baritakī*, *vibhītaka* and *āmalaka*, respectively. Attached to the record of these words in the *Tang Fan liangyu shuangdui ji* 唐梵兩語雙對集 [Tang-Sanskrit Bilingual Collection] is the note that ‘these *deng* 等 are named the three *deng* 等’ (此等名三等),<sup>23</sup> however since this appellation does not appear in any other text, it is possible that *deng* should have been written *guo* 果.

Sun Simiao’s 孫思邈 (541/581–682) *Qianjin yaofang* 千金要方 [Invaluable Prescriptions] details an ‘elaphure antler pill preparation’ with the chief components of elaphure antler (or milu antler, Ch. *mijiao* 麋角), betel nut palm (Ch. *binglang* 檳榔), pith of the rice-paper plant (Ch. *tongcao* 通草), and ginseng (Ch. *renshen* 人參); ‘the instructions for consumption: take with three fruit decoction on an empty stomach; if three fruit decoction is unavailable, wine will also work. Start by taking thirty pills and add one extra every day until at fifty pills per day. Take twice daily, for a total of one hundred days’ (空腹取三果漿以下之, 如無三果漿, 酒下亦得. 初服三十丸, 日加一丸, 至五十丸為度. 日二服, 初服一百日).<sup>24</sup> Later generations were unclear as to what exactly the ‘three fruits’ referred, which resulted in erroneous rewritings of this prescription, like that found in *juan* 223 of the Ming compendium the *Puji fang* 普濟方 [Prescriptions for Universal

<sup>21</sup> *Pinimu jing*, T no. 1463, 24: 3.817a29.

<sup>22</sup> *Fanyu zaming*, T no. 2135, 54.1238a14–16.

<sup>23</sup> *Tang Fan liangyu shuangdui ji*, T no. 2136, 54. 1243a27.

<sup>24</sup> Li, colla. & annot., *Beiji qianjin yaofang jiaoshi* 19.693.

Relief]: ‘Take with fruit juice on an empty stomach; if no fresh fruit juice is available, wine will also work’ (空腹取果漿以下之, 如無鮮果漿, 酒下亦得).<sup>25</sup> From ‘three fruit decoction’ (Ch. *sanguo jiang* 三果漿) to ‘fruit juice’ (Ch. *guojiang* 果漿) and ‘fresh fruit juice’ (Ch. *xian guojiang* 鮮果漿), the departure clearly results from more than a simple error at the word level; a semantic shift has taken place. As for the relationship between ‘three fruit decoction’ and ‘three myrobalan decoction’, Xu Wenjing 徐文靖 (1667–?) from the mid-Qing offers this explanation: ‘The name ‘three myrobalan’ is derived from ‘three fruits’. Alternatively, since it is a mix of emblic myrobalan, black myrobalan [and beleric myrobalan], it is called the three myrobalan’ (意三勒以三果而得名。或曰: 合庵摩勒、訶梨勒為之, 故曰三勒).<sup>26</sup> It is an interesting insight, however, it fails to provide any information about the origin of either name.

American historian Edward Hetzel Schafer (1913–1991) points out:

The three classical myrobalans of India were collectively called triphalā, the ‘Three Fruits’, in Sanskrit; in Chinese they were named the ‘Three Fruits’ and also the ‘Three *\*-raks*’, *\*-rak* being the final syllable of each of their names in the Tocharian tongue, an important Indo-European language of Central Asia; it was from this direction, it seems, that the Chinese obtained their names.<sup>27</sup>

Tocharian is divided into at least three dialects, namely Yanqi 焉耆 or Karasahr, Qiuci 龜茲 or Kuchean, and Balujia 跋祿迦 or Baluka (Bharuka), each with its own distinctive features.<sup>28</sup> Schafer does not specify from which of the three dialects the three myrobalans’ names are derived and assigns their Tocharian renderings as *\* arirāk*, *\* virirāk*, and *\* amalāk*, according to Berthold Laufer’s reconstruction in *Sino-Iranica*.<sup>29</sup> Checking Douglas Q. Adams’ *A dictionary of Toch-*

<sup>25</sup> *Puji fang* 223.3470.

<sup>26</sup> *Guancheng shuoji* 25.467.

<sup>27</sup> Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, 145.

<sup>28</sup> Ji, *Tuholuo wen yanjiu*, 192–193.

<sup>29</sup> Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, 145n55.

*arian B* brings up a reference to *amalāk(ā)*, a type of medicine with the scientific name *Emblica officinalis Gaertn* [aka *Phyllanthus embilca Linn*]. Its name is a mix of Tocharian B with the Sanskrit *āmalaka*. Arirāk is another medicine in the book, which has the scientific name *Terminalia chebula Retz*; the name is derived from the Sanskrit *harītakī*. The dictionary contains no term related to *virirāk*. It does, however, include a collective title for the three myrobalan, *tr̥phāl* or *tr̥ppāl* (< Skt. *triphalā*), meaning ‘three fruits’.<sup>30</sup> Volume one of *A Dictionary and Thesaurus of Tocharian A*, a collaborative effort led by Gerd Carling, includes no mention of \*arirāk or \*amalāk, or even anything remotely close.<sup>31</sup> Seemingly there exists some linguistic link between the name ‘the three *le*’ (three myrobalan, Ch. *sanle* 三勒) and Tocharian B (Kuchean); specifically, *le* might correspond to the range of final syllables, *rāk*, *lāk*, *phāl*. The link with Persian is much clearer, since the three corresponding words share the same final syllable ‘*la*’—*halīla*, *balīla*, and *amola*—which means that the individual Chinese names of the ‘three *le*’ are not necessarily derived directly from Tocharian B and perhaps come from Persian words influenced by Tocharian. By comparison, it is much more obvious that the Chinese name for the ‘three fruits’ (*sanguo* 三果) has its roots in Indic culture, given how closely the Chinese translation and Sanskrit term *tri-phalā* align in terms of their meaning. So, both ‘three *le*’ (the semantic translation and the transliteration) and ‘three fruits’ (the semantic translation) derive from Sanskrit, meaning it is important to have a clear idea of this origin in order to gain a full picture of the names’ significance.

#### 1.4. ‘Tuode flower’ and the ‘three *le* decoction’

Starting in the Tang Dynasty, it became the norm for any medicine that arrived anew in China from abroad to be recorded in *Materia Medica*. These records were maintained from the Xinxiu bencao to Chen Cangqi’s 陳藏器 (681–757) *Bencao shiyi* 本草拾遺 [The

<sup>30</sup> Adams, *A Dictionary of Tocharian B*, 18, 22, 491.

<sup>31</sup> Carling, *Dictionary and Thesaurus of Tocharian A*, vol.1.

Materia Medica Revision], from Zheng Qian’s 鄭虔 (691–759) *Hu bencao* 胡本草 [Hu Materia Medica] to Li Xun’s 李珣 (1025–1098) *Haiyao bencao* 海藥本草 [Overseas Pharmacopoeia], and from the *Kaibao bencao* 開寶本草 [Materia Medica of the Kaibao Era] and *Bencao tujing* 本草圖經 [Illustrated Classic of Materia Medica] of the Song Dynasty to Tang Shenwei’s 唐慎微 (of 11th c.) compendium, the *Zhenglei bencao* 證類本草 [Classified Materia Medica]. This final text includes the following entry: ‘*Tuode* flower (Ch. *Tuodehua* 陀得花), sweetly flavoured, warm, non-toxic; cures all illnesses of wind and blood; should be steeped in alcohol before consumption. Grown in the western countries, it is brought here by foreign *Hu* 胡 peoples who pick the flower in order to ferment it for alcohol, which they call the three le decoction. Cited’ (陀得花: 味甘溫, 無毒, 主一切風血, 浸酒服。生西國, 胡人將來, 胡人采此花以釀酒, 呼為三勒漿。今附).<sup>32</sup> This entry was taken from the *Kaibai bencao*, just as any description of the medicine published after the Tang Dynasty text is a direct copy of that original reference. *Juan* 462 of the *Puji fang*, for example, simply echoes that ‘*Tuode* flower was called the three myrobalan decoction by *Hu* 胡 peoples’ (陀得花, 胡人呼為三勒漿).<sup>33</sup> No additional information is provided by the entries in *juan* 21 of Li Shizhen’s 李時珍 (1518–1593) *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目 [Compendium of Materia Medica] or *juan* 99 of the *Yuding peiwenzhai guang qunfangpu* 御定佩文齋廣群芳譜 [Imperially endorsed Extended notes of the Peiwen Study on all Various Herbs] from the Qing Dynasty. Entries identical to the one found in the *Zhenglei Bencao* are included in the two illustrated Ming Dynasty pharmacopeia the *Bencao pinhui jingyao* 本草品彙精要 [Materia Medica Containing Essential and Important Material Arranged in Systematic Order], edited by Liu Wentai 劉文泰 (active 1488–1505) in the sixth year of the Hongzhi 弘治 era (1503), and the *Buyi lei gong gaozhi bianlan* 補遺雷公炮製便覽 [Lei Gong’s Guide to Drug Preparation with Addenda], completed in the 19th

<sup>32</sup> *Zhenglei bencao* 9.240.

<sup>33</sup> *Puji fang* 426.537.



year of the Wanli era (1591), with the addition of coloured images as the only difference.<sup>34</sup> The images, however, do not depict the flower's actual appearance but an imagined scene involving two *hu* people picking flowers with a wine jug at the ready nearby. Clearly, they are nothing more than the artists' portrayal of the available text. Since any information about the medicine published in Ming Dynasty literature is quoted from an earlier source, it is highly likely that the original description was for a time the only reference to the flower, strongly suggesting that the flower had fallen out of use.

There is, however, a relevant entry in the 'Law of Food' (Ch. *shixian* 食憲), *juan* 25 of Gu Qiyuan's 顧起元 (1565–1628) *Shuolüe* 說畧 [Concise explanations] from the same dynasty: 'Foreign monks collect the *laituo* flower for making wine, which they name the three *le* decoction or *dalasu*' (番僧來陀花造酒, 名曰三勒漿, 一名打辣酥).<sup>35</sup> Here, the '*laituo* flower' (Ch. *laituo hua* 來陀花) most likely refers to the *tuode* flower, in which case the reference to *dalasu* 打辣酥 is an obvious error. *Dalasu* (or *dalasu* 打刺酥, *dalasu* 大辣酥, *dalasun* 答刺蘇, *dalasun* 打刺孫) is a transliteration of the Mongolian word *darasu* or *darasun* (meaning wine and rice wine, respectively).<sup>36</sup> Gu Qiyuan appears to have mixed together words with distinct roots without explicitly indicating their distinct origins.

*Juan* one of Yijing's translation of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Bhaiṣajya-vastu*, the *Genben shuo yiqie you bu pi'naiye yaoshi* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶藥事 [Skt. *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya-bhaiṣajya-vastu*], provides a list of 'medicinal flowers: *poshejia* 婆舍迦 flower, *hongpo* 紅婆 flower, *tuodeji* 陀得雞 flower, *long* 龍 flower, and lotus flower (Ch. *lianbua* 蓮花)' (花藥者: 謂婆舍迦花、紅婆花、陀得雞花、龍花、蓮花).<sup>37</sup> The Sanskrit equivalents are '*Puṣpa-bhaiṣajya: vāśika-puṣpa, nimba-, dhātukī-, saṭi-, padmakeśara-*'.<sup>38</sup> A quick check reveals that

<sup>34</sup> Chen & Liang, 'Yiyu de xingxiang'.

<sup>35</sup> *Shuolüe*, SKQS vol. 964: 25.787b.

<sup>36</sup> Fang, *Gudian xiqu wailai yukao cidian*, 234–237.

<sup>37</sup> *Genben shuo yiqie youbu pi'naiye yaoshi*, T no. 1448, 24: 1.1b17–18.

<sup>38</sup> Bagchi, ed., *Mūlasarvāstivādavīnaya-vastu*, vol. 1: 2.



‘tuodeji flower’ is a translation of *dhātukī-puṣpa*, *puṣpa* meaning flower. The *tuodeji* flower is the same as the *tuode* flower, therefore the latter must also be a phonetic translation of the Sanskrit *dhātukī*- (>*dhātakī*-) with the final syllable *kī*- omitted. The *Siddhasāra*, written by the Indian physician Ravigupta in the mid-seventh century, contains a selection of prescriptions calling for the *tuodeji* flower (Si.7.20.1–5). They are as follows:

In that (connection), as for the method of treatment for terminating the emergence of flood, wild snake gourd (*paṭolaṃ*), nutmeg flower (*mālatī*), neem (*nimbaṃ*), two kinds of sandal (*candana-dvayaṃ*), and bird cherry (*padmakam*) mixed together;  
prickly red amaranth (*taṇḍulīyaṃ*), Malabar nut (*vṛṣaṃ*), lodh (*lodhraṃ*), black earth (*kṣṇa-mṛṇ*), and jasmine (*madayantikā*) mixed together;  
root of *kākolī* and *kṣīra-kākolī* (*kākolīya*), the two kinds of *sar-sa-parilla* (*śārive dve*), liquorice (*yaṣṭī-madhu*), and root of asparagus (*śatāvarī*) mixed together;  
nut grass (*bhadrā*), emblic myrobalan (*āmalaka*-), flower of the fulsee flower tree (*dhātakī*-), bark of kurchi (*kuṭaja-tvak*), and oldenlandia (*parpaṭa*) mixed together;  
if (one takes) equal portions of whichever may be appropriate among these (*ete*) four (*catvāraḥ*) mixtures of drugs, cools the liquid (obtained) from boiling them (*kvātha*-), and mixes it with sugar (*sitā*-) and honey (*kṣaudra*-), it is the best (*sattamāḥ*) (remedy) for removing (*nudanty*) quickly (*drutaṃ*) the disease of blood ejection (*rakta-pittaṃ*), and it is to be drunk (*pītā*) very cold (*su-śītalāḥ*). (Si.7.20.1–5)<sup>39</sup>

It aligns with the application of *tuode* flower given in the *Kaibao bencao* as a cure for ‘illness of wind blood’ that these prescriptions were intended to treat ‘the disease of blood ejection’ conditions. The only reasonable explanation why ‘*Hu* peoples... pick the flower in order to ferment it for alcohol, which they call the three *le* decoction’

<sup>39</sup> Emmerick, *The Siddhasāra of Ravigupta*, vol. 2: 161.

is that they added the flower into the ‘three *le* decoction’ during the fermentation process as a supplement to the three fruits, a method which undoubtedly came from the western countries.

### 1.5. The ‘three myrobalan decoction from Hehan’ in histories about wine

The list of ‘Wine Names’ that comprises *juan* 233 of the *Taiping guangji* includes reference to a ‘three myrobalan decoction from Hehan 河漢’ (河漢之三勒漿)<sup>40</sup>, which was taken from the *Tang guoshi bu*. *Juan* 44 of the *Tianzhong ji* 天中記 [Records of Heaven] similarly states that ‘Hemo 河漢 has a wine-like three myrobalan decoction’ (河漢又有三勒漿類酒)<sup>41</sup>, information that it cites from the *Guoshi bu* 國史補 [Supplement to Official History of the State]. *Shuofu* 說郛 [City of Tales] *juan* 66, ‘Chapter Nine: Foreign Regions’, states: ‘Persia has a wine-like three myrobalan decoction, made of emblic myrobalan and beleric myrobalan’ (波斯國有三勒漿類酒, 謂庵摩勒、毘梨勒也).<sup>42</sup> *Yilin buikao*’s chapter on ‘Food and Drink’ (*juan* five) reads: ‘According to ‘Summons of the Spirit’ (*Zhaobun* 招魂) from *Chuci* 楚辭 [Verses of Chu]: ‘Stewed turtle and roast kid, served up with sugarcane sauce’. The *Hanshu* 漢書 [Book of Han]: ‘Sugarcane sauce in a large cup of wine’. Tang banquets for *jinsshi* students included myrobalan decoction, which contained black myrobalan, emblic myrobalan and beleric myrobalan. There were more kinds of wines than those made with cereals’ (按《楚辭·招魂》: ‘臠鼈炮羔, 有柘漿些’. 《漢書》: ‘泰尊柘漿’. 唐宴進士有三勒漿, 謂訶梨勒、庵摩勒、烏欖勒也. 則漿不止用粟米爾).<sup>43</sup> Another text that cites the *Tang guoshi bu* for relevant information is the *Gezhi jingyuan*. *Juan* 22 of the book explains: ‘The wine-like three myrobalan decoction is made with a method from Persia. The three myrobalans are black myrobalan, emblic myrobalan (Ch. *anmole* 庵摩勒), and

<sup>40</sup> *Taiping guangji* 233.1785.

<sup>41</sup> *Tianzhong ji*, *SKQS* vol. 967: 44.129b.

<sup>42</sup> *Shuofu*, *SKQS* vol. 880: 66.331d.

<sup>43</sup> *Yilin buikao* *SKQS* vol. 859: 5.226c.

black olive myrobalan (Ch. *wulanle* 烏欖勒) (《唐國史補》: 三勒漿類酒, 法出波斯, 三勒者謂訶梨勒、菴摩勒、烏欖勒也).<sup>44</sup> Both the *Yilin buikao* and *Gezhi jingyuan* refer to *wulanle* 烏欖勒 (Chinese black olive) in their list of ingredients, as does the *Shantang sikao*, even though the fruit is entirely distinct from *beleric* myrobalan.<sup>45</sup> This conflation appears to be the result of fairly indiscriminate copying from an array of encyclopaedia.

*Yuzhi tang tanhui* 玉芝堂談薈 [Collected Talks from Yuzhi Hall] *juan* 29 provides a guide for ‘A thousand days of drinking’, which includes the following beverages from foreign territories and the border regions:

In Wuyan 烏丸 there is *dongqiang* 東薑 liquor. Heling Kingdom 訶陵國 has *liubua* 柳花 and coconut liquor. Byzantine Persia has *rouzhi* 肉汁 liquor. Funan has pomegranate liquor, and sugarcane and *tugua* 土瓜 root liquor. Chitu Kingdom 赤土 has sugarcane liquor. Nanman Kingdom 南蠻 has betel nut liquor. Beiting Kingdom 北庭 has horse milk liquor. Dawan 大宛, Dongshi 東師, Suyi 粟弋 and other territories of the Western Regions all have grape wine. Cambodia (Ch. *zhenla* 真臘) has *pengmitang* 朋蜜糖 liquor, *ya* 芽 liquor and *si* 四 liquor. Persia has three myrobalan decoction, *baolingjiao* 包棱角 liquor, *tangjian* 糖鑑 liquor and *lingjiang* 菱漿 liquor. The love of drinking is universal. 至烏丸有東薑酒。訶陵國有柳花酒、椰子酒。波斯拂林有肉汁酒。扶南安石榴酒、甘蔗土瓜根酒。赤土國甘蔗酒。南蠻檳榔酒。北庭馬湏酒。西域大宛、東師, 無論粟弋各國俱有葡萄酒。真臘有朋蜜糖酒、芽酒、四酒。波斯有三勒漿酒、包棱角酒、糖鑑酒、菱漿酒。醉鄉日月, 華夷共之矣。<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> *Gezhi jingyuan*, *SKQS* vol. 1031: 22.318a.

<sup>45</sup> *Guibai yuheng zhi*, *SKQS* vol. 589: 381b: ‘Chinese black olive, resembles an olive, black in colour, with soft and sweet flesh. *Fanglan* 方欖, also a type of olive, with three or four points, from Liangjiang 兩江 and Zhoudong 州峒’ (烏欖, 如橄欖, 青黑色, 肉爛而甘。方欖, 亦橄欖類, 三角或四角, 出兩江、州峒).

<sup>46</sup> *Yuzhi tang tanhui*, *SKQS* vol. 883: 29.691b.

Likewise, there is a record of popular alcoholic beverages from successive periods in *juan* 52 of the *Guangdong tongzhi* 廣東通志 [Chorography of Guangdong], originally found in the *Waiguo mingjiu ji* 外國名酒記 [Record of Foreign Wines]. Given the area's role in maritime trade, it was common for ships to arrive carrying alcohol from abroad:

Wuyan 烏丸 has *dongqiang* 東薑 liquor. Heling Kingdom 訶陵國 has *liubua* 柳花 and coconut liquor. Byzantine Persia has *rouzhi* 肉汁 liquor. Nanman 南蠻 Kingdom has betel nut liquor. Funan has pomegranate liquor, and sugarcane and *tugua* 土瓜 root liquor. Chenxi has *diao teng* 釣藤 liquor. Chitu 赤土 Kingdom has sugarcane liquor. Cambodia (Ch. *zhenla* 真臘) has *mingya* 明芽 liquor. Persia has three myrobalan decoction. Siam's (Ch. *xianluo* 暹羅) liquor is the best. 烏丸有東薑酒。訶陵有柳花、椰子酒。波斯拂林有肉汁酒，南蠻有檳榔酒，扶南有安石榴酒、土瓜根酒，辰溪有釣藤酒，赤土有甘蔗酒，真臘有明芽酒，波斯有三勒酒。以暹羅酒為第一。<sup>47</sup>

Although the 'three myrobalan juice' features in many of these records of fine alcoholic beverages, it seems that certain people felt the drink to be a far cry from any sweet alcoholic nectar of legend. Take *juan* 20 of *Muzhai youxue ji* 牧齋有學集 [Collected works of Qian Qianyi] for example, which in the preface to 'Poem from a Hall on a Hill' (Ch. *xiaoshantang shi yin* 小山堂詩引) explains, 'skimming through *Jiupu* 酒譜 [Wine List], there are a number of drinks recorded therein by Li Zhao, like *fushui* 富水 from Ying 郢, *ruoxia* 若下 from Wucheng 烏程, and even Jiuyun 九醞 and three myrobalan brews, that are completely unexceptional and unworthy of praise' (因是流觀《酒譜》，如李肇所記郢之富水、烏程之若下，以迨九醞、三勒之屬，皆人間凡酒，無足道者)。<sup>48</sup> But since when have mortals been known to drink of heavenly amrita?

<sup>47</sup> *Guangdong tongzhi*, SKQS vol. 564: 52.414.

<sup>48</sup> *Muzhai youxue ji* 20.388.

## 2. The ‘three fruits’ as a drink and a myrobalan soup from the Tang and Song dynasties

### 2.1. Black myrobalan ‘can be drunk’

The earliest suggestion that any of the three fruits is suitable for drinking comes from the Western Jin botanist Ji Han’s 嵇含 (263–306) *Nanfang caomu zhuang* 南方草木狀 [Herbs and Trees of the South], which in its middle volume explains: ‘Black myrobalan, its tree resembles the *Bauhinia acuminata*, its flowers are white, and its fruit are olive-shaped. The skin of the fruit bears six roads and is joined with the flesh; it can be drunk and will turn the drinker’s white hair black. It comes from Jiuzhen 九真’ (訶梨勒, 樹似木椀, 花白, 子形如橄欖. 六路, 皮肉相著, 可作飲, 變白髭發令黑. 出九真’).<sup>49</sup> The ‘six roads’ (Ch. *liulu* 六路/陸路) are the six vertical edges along the surface of the fruit. In the *Haiyao bencao*, Li Xun points out, ‘Physicians call the fruit the six-road black myrobalan, which is a reference to its six edges’ (方家使陸路訶梨勒, 即六棱是也).<sup>50</sup> Xiao Bing 蕭炳 (905–959) also mentions this detail in the *Sisheng bencao* 四聲本草 [Materia Medica in Four Tones]: ‘Brought in on Persian ships, it has six roads and is black; the thicker the skin the higher the quality’ (波斯舶上來者, 六路, 黑色, 肉厚者良).<sup>51</sup> P3644 of the Dunhuang manuscripts, *Leishu xizi* 類書習字 [Encyclopaedia Calligraphy], states that the black myrobalan with six roads, or six edges, is the highest quality. At least up until the early Tang Dynasty, the fruit tended to be called *bezi* 訶子 instead of *belile* 訶梨勒, the generally accepted reason being that once Shi Le 石勒 (274–333; r. 330–333) rose to power and founded the Later Zhao state, a naming taboo (Ch. *biwei* 避諱) was enforced requiring the fruit to be given

<sup>49</sup> *Nanfang caomuzhuang*, Wang, colla. & annot., *Han wei liuchao biji xiaoshuo daguan*, 261.

<sup>50</sup> Shang, colla. & annot., *Haiyao bencao*, 63.

<sup>51</sup> The *Sisheng bencao* 四聲本草 [Materia Medica in Four Tones] has been lost, for extracts see the cited entries in the *Zhenglei bencao*, 14.342.

a different name to his.<sup>52</sup> This was not an isolated instance either, as Shi Le's reign saw a number of foreign products acquire new names, including *luole* 羅勒 and *busui* 胡荽, or sweet basil and coriander, the latter because Shi Le considered himself of *Hu* background.

Black myrobalan is chiefly used to reduce phlegm and ease eructation. In the Tang Dynasty, it was drunk to this end. The poet Bao Ji 包佶 (? –792) wrote 'Bao Ji xie Li libu zeng helileye' 包佶謝李吏部贈訶梨勒葉 [Bao Ji Thanks Minister Li for his Gift of Black Myrobalan Leaves]:

一葉生西徼  
齋來上海查  
歲時經水府  
根本別天涯  
方士真難見  
商胡輒自誇  
此香同異域  
看色勝仙家  
茗飲暫調氣  
梧丸喜伐邪

幸蒙祛老疾  
深願駐韶華

This leaf grows in a land far to the west,  
Crossing seas to reach here.  
The journey took a year,  
As if it came from the other side of the world.  
It is a rare thing,  
Praised by the foreign merchants.  
Its perfume comes from an exotic place,  
Its colour enough to please the immortals.  
To drink its tea regulates *qi*,  
To take a pill of it the size of a *Semen firmianae*  
removes evil influences.  
It can cure years-long illnesses,  
I pray that I can live a long life.<sup>53</sup>

Gifting each other with medicine was common practice among the Tang officialdom, and many contemporary poets described the act in their work.<sup>54</sup> This particular poem describes not only the provenance of the black myrobalan leaves but also their impressive effectiveness, which became a considerable source of pride for *hu* merchants who sold the good.<sup>55</sup> Fan Jiawei 范家偉 has suggested that since 'to drink its tea regulates *qi*', the leaves of the fruit's plant could be brewed

<sup>52</sup> *Shiwu jiyuan* 10.533.

<sup>53</sup> *Quan Tangshi* 205.2142.

<sup>54</sup> Fan, *Zhonggu shiqi de yizhe yu bingzhe*, 288–297.

<sup>55</sup> Chen, 'Shanghuzhe zikua'.

into a tea for drinking, one example of which is myrobalan soup (Ch. *hezi tang* 訶子湯).<sup>56</sup>

The leaves were not the only part of the plant that could be steeped as a tea, the fruit itself could be mixed and boiled with other medicinal ingredients for consumption. Wang Tao 王燾 (670–755) of the Tang Dynasty prescribed ‘heating with salt as a remedy against all wind illnesses caused by *qi*’ (燒鹽通一切氣尤療風方).<sup>57</sup> This he cited from the *Jinxiao* 近効 [Effective Formulas] and included in *juan* seven of the *Waitai miyao fang* 外臺秘要方 [Essential Arcane Prescriptions from the Imperial Library], adding that ‘boiling down black myrobalan, betel nut palm or millet gruel and adding salt can cure all illnesses. Wei Tejin often used this formula, to great effect’ (如煮訶梨勒、檳榔及茶湯，用此鹽，療一切病。韋特進用之極効驗).<sup>58</sup> So, salt needed to be added for the medicines to be effective. The *Jinxiao*’s full title is *Jinxiao fang* 近効方 [Effective Formulas].<sup>59</sup> The work serves as an extensive record both of foreign prescriptions associated with officials and of prescriptions that included medicinal ingredients from abroad. Pills of black myrobalan, for example, which ‘Secretary Xiao of the Ministry of Rites attained and claimed on using them himself were highly effective’ (禮部蕭郎中處得，云自服大効)<sup>60</sup>, are just one of the many included therein. The formula that calls for ‘heating [black myrobalan] with salt as a remedy against all wind illnesses caused by *qi*’ was one experimental prescription tried by the official Wei *tejin* 韋特進 (i.e., Wei Juyuan 韋巨源 [631–710]). Despite not being a virtuous minister, Wei Juyuan was a recognised connoisseur of fine foods as well as an official, so it is no real surprise that his pantry contained black myrobalan with which to boil salt for concocting a medicine of sorts. Zan Yin 詹殷

<sup>56</sup> Fan, *Zhonggu shiqi de yizhe yu bingzhe*, 295.

<sup>57</sup> *Waitai miyao fang*, *SKQS* Vol. 736: 7.246a.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Gao Wenzhu 高文鑄 has verified that ‘this book was completed approximately between 705 and 713CE’. See Gao, ‘“Waitai miyao fang” yinyong shumu wenxian kaolüe’, p.993.

<sup>60</sup> *Waitai miyao fang*, *SKQS* Vol. 736: 7.246b.



(797?–859), a contemporary of Wei, also described boiling tea and powdered black myrobalan in water to make a drink for treating indigestion and trapped wind.

According to Chinese formularies, brews of black myrobalan with other medicinal ingredients have mostly been used over time to treat dysentery, diarrhoea caused by cold, coughs, and loss of voice. The ‘Chuanxin fang’ 傳信方 [Transmitted Trustworthy Formulas] (completed 818) by Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842) contains an account of General Linghu 令狐 using ‘black myrobalan to cure dysentery’, the prescription for which involved, ‘Take three fruits of high quality black myrobalan, two black myrobalan skins removed by drying, one raw black myrobalan skin, pummel into powder together and consume with one *liang* of hot water’ (用訶梨勒三枚上好者, 兩枚炮取皮, 一枚生取皮, 同末之, 以沸漿水一兩合服之).<sup>61</sup> It is possible that the general in question was Liu Yuxi’s close associate Linghu Chu 令狐楚 (766–837). There are also Song Dynasty formularies that advise boiling down to a soup either the fruit’s skin, the fruit once cored and roasted, or a part-roasted full myrobalan fruit to be administered as a treatment for diarrhoea caused by cold, vomiting and excessive phlegm, a cough, or loss of voice. The oil of the fruit can also be cooked, one example of which comes from Hu Sihui’s 忽思慧 (a.k.a. He Sihui 和斯輝 [active 1330s]) ‘Chinese cinnamon *qatiq* cakes’ (Ch. *guangui kete bing’er* 官桂渴忒餅兒) recipe in the *Yinshan zhengyao* 飲膳正要 [Principles of Correct Diet] from the Yuan Dynasty.<sup>62</sup>

## 2.2. Faxing Monastery’s Myrobalan soup in the Tang and Song dynasties

The most peculiar of the black myrobalan beverages consumed in the Tang Dynasty has to be the soup from Guangzhou’s Faxing

<sup>61</sup> ‘Chuanxin fang’ 傳信方 [Transmitted Trustworthy Formulas], Tao & Tao Hongyu, colla. & annot., *Liu Yuxi quanji biannian jiaozhu*, 1431.

<sup>62</sup> Buell et al., *A Soup for the Qan: Chinese Dietary Medicine of the Mongol Era as Seen in Hu Szu-hui’s Yin-Shan Cheng-Yao, Introduction, Translation, Commentary, and Chinese Text*, 371.



Monastery 法性寺 (also, Guangxiao Monastery 光孝寺). Within the monastery’s grounds there used to be a number of key Buddhist symbols introduced into China from India, like a Bodhi Tree and the ordination platform of Huineng 慧能 (638–713), the Sixth Patriarch of Chan.<sup>63</sup> The *Tujing bencao* 圖經本草 [Illustrated Classic of Materia Medica] contains a detailed description of the monastery taken from the *Lingnan yiwu zhi* 嶺南異物志 [Record of Foreign Matters in Lingnan] and originally written by the imperial examination graduate Meng Guan 孟管 (d.u.) in the Yuanhe 元和 era (806–820) of the Tang Dynasty:

The *Lingnan yiwu zhi* reads: Guangzhou Faxing Monastery contains forty to fifty black myrobalan trees in front of its main hall. Their seeds are small, but their flavour is smooth. The fruit bears six roads. Every year the provincial government offers the fruit as a tribute to the imperial family, using only the fruit from the monastery. Faxing Monastery has one old well; dipping a wooden stick in the water and licking it, the water is not salty. When the fruit are ripe, guests who arrive are received with a black myrobalan soup prepared by a monk. The method involves five freshly-picked myrobalans, with a pinch of liquorice root; cut the fruit and boil with water from the well; once boiled the soup looks like freshly steeped tea. Since the name of the monastery has changed to Ganminggu 乾明古 Monastery, the trees are still there, six or seven of them left. It remains an important custom in the south sea region to make this soup, but the method has changed.<sup>64</sup>

So well-known was the myrobalan grown by Faxing monastery, it sufficed as the prefectural government’s annual tribute to the emperor and was given to important guests of note. It was a widely loved product in the south. The monk’s considered the myrobalan soup

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<sup>63</sup> For information regarding Guangxiao Monastery’s myrobalan and bodhi tree, see Luo, *Tangdai Guangzhou Guangxiao si yu Zhong Yin jiaotong zhi guanxi*, 147–161.

<sup>64</sup> Hu & Wang, colla. & annot., *Tujing bencao*, 372.

a perfect gift for visitors because of how much its colour resembled that of fresh tea. Decocting and serving the soup to arrivals to a degree reflected a commonplace Tang Dynasty custom upheld by monasteries which required that 'guests drink tea on their arrival and drink soup as they depart' (客至則啜茶, 去則啜湯).<sup>65</sup> The monastery probably assigned a monk specially to prepare the soup and tea.<sup>66</sup> Monasteries definitely played a role in the formation of regional customs at that time. Qian Yi's 錢易 (968–1026) *Nanbu Xinsbu* 南部新書 [New Book of the South] from the Northern Song Dynasty gives a more detailed account of this particular custom:

Myrobalan soup. Guangzhou's mountains villages all grow black myrobalan trees, and Faxing Monastery in the city has forty to fifty trees in front of its main hall, with very small seeds but a smooth flavour and six roads on their skin. Every year Guangzhou gives the fruit as imperial tribute, using only the fruit from the monastery. There is an old well beneath a tree in the west monastic quarters; dipping a root in to try the water, it is not salty. When the fruits are ripe, the monks boil this soup with which to welcome guests. Pound five fruits of fresh myrobalan and one *cun* of liquorice root, and boil with water from the well until the colour is that of fresh tea and the flavour like milk. Taking the soup aid digestion, constipation and trapped air and is unmatched by other soups. East of the main hall stands the ordination platform of Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch of Chan, beside which there is a *bodhi* tree. Masters who come to worship there and guests who come to drink the black myrobalan soup are not ordinary people. Recently, Li Yigeng 李夷庚 (960–1033) visited from Guangzhou and could prepare the soup, which scholars and officials all vied to taste. 《嶺南異物志》云: 廣州法性寺佛殿前有四、五十株, 子極小, 而味不澀, 皆是六路。每歲州貢, 祇以此寺者。寺有古井, 木根醺水, 水味不鹹。每子熟時, 有佳客至, 則院僧煎湯以延之。其法用新摘訶子五枚, 甘草一寸, 破之, 汲井水同煎, 色若新茶。

<sup>65</sup> *Shuofu*, SKQS Vol. 877: 35A.539c.

<sup>66</sup> Liu, 'Tang, Song shisu shehui shenghuo zhong de cha yu tangyao'; 'Tang, Song siyuan Zhong de cha yu tangyao'.

今其寺謂乾明古寺,尚在舊木,猶有六七株。南海風俗,向貴此湯,然煎之不必盡如舊時之法也。<sup>67</sup>

The soup's concoction methods and applications recorded above are on the whole identical to those laid out in the *Lingnan yiwu zhi*. Where the texts differ is in the additional information that the *Nanbu Xinsbu* gives about the soup's effectiveness, specifically, in stating that other soups cannot compare to the monastery's speciality. Those lucky enough to sample the soup had to be very important people. The biography of Zhang Jian 張鑒 (947–1004), which comprises *juan* 277 of the *Songsbi* 宋史 [Book of Song], tells of its subject's time as the prefectural magistrate of Guangzhou in the first year of the Xianping era during Emperor Zhenzong's reign. It explains that one of his assistant prefectural magistrates (Ch. *tongpan* 通判) was named Li Yigeng 李夷庚 (960–1033),<sup>68</sup> perhaps the very same Li Yigeng as in the passage above. Li Yigeng was posted in Nanhai 南海, Guangdong and, being of 'uncommon standing', he was a natural candidate for being taught how to prepare Faxing Monastery's soup. When Li travelled from Guangzhou to the capital, Kaifeng, since he was an official that could 'prepare this dish', scholars and officials visited him in droves wanting to experience a bowl of the soup, confirming, for one, that the soup truly was of the highest quality and, also, that even in as prosperous and metropolitan a city as Kaifeng where, according to the *Dongjing menghua lu* 東京夢華錄 [Dreams of Splendour of the Eastern capital], hot beverages and decoctions of sundry kinds abounded (many of them soups made with medicines and spices), none were as good as myrobalan soup.<sup>69</sup> This is just one example of the disparities between northern and southern cuisine in the Song Dynasty. Faxing Monastery's technique for brewing the soup found its way into public knowledge by dint of the interactions between the monastic and secular, 'worldly' communities and of the

<sup>67</sup> *Nanbu Xinsbu* 7.107–108.

<sup>68</sup> See Zhang Jian's official biography at *Songsbi* 277.9417.

<sup>69</sup> For information regarding Song Dynasty medicinal herbs and hot waters, see Zheng, *Yaolin waishi*, 146–154.

prevalence of health and wellbeing concerns in the Tang and Song. Unfortunately, while the black myrobalan trees in what is now Guangxiao Monastery have stood the test of time, the soup is no longer. The verse written by Zhang Zhizhong 張之洞 (1837–1909) at the end of the Qing Dynasty captures this sentiment well in his poem titled ‘Yi lingnan caomu·Yuyuan hezi shu’ 憶嶺南草木·虞苑訶子樹 [The Yuyuan Myrobalan Tree: Remembering the Trees and Plants of the Southern Lands]:

兵火殘美蔭	The fires of war destroyed the lush foliage,
艱難存一株	Leaving only one lucky tree;
棱棱綴秋實	In autumn the ridged fruit ripened,
苦澀不可咀	But the bitter flavour was inedible. <sup>70</sup>

### 2.3. Beleric myrobalan: ‘a decoction, which is very hot’

Beleric myrobalan can be used as a standalone medicine outside of its concoction with black myrobalan and emblic myrobalan. *Juan* 53 of Tang Dynasty monk Huilin’s 慧琳 (737–820) *Yiqie jing yinyi* 一切經音義 [Pronunciation and Meaning in the Complete Buddhist Canon] explains: ‘*Pixile* 鞞醯勒 (the first character is pronounced that the initial is *bi* 婢 and final is *mi* 迷. The second character is pronounced that the initial is *xing* 馨 and final is *xi* 奚. This is a fruit’s name. Also, *pilile* 毘梨勒, a type of myrobalan. It is from abroad)’ (鞞醯勒上婢迷反; 下馨奚反; 果名也。或雲毘梨勒, 即訶梨勒之類, 皆從外國來).<sup>71</sup>

The *Zhenglei bencao* notes: ‘Tang pharmacopeia explain: the [beleric myrobalan] tree resembles a foreign peach, its fruit the shape and size of a foreign peach. Its stone resembles that of black myrobalan, but rounder and shorter, and the fruit has no ridges. It is used in the same way as black myrobalan. Cited from the *Tang bencao* 唐本草’ (《唐本》注云: 樹似胡桃, 子形亦似胡桃。核似訶梨勒, 而圓短無棱, 用亦同法。唐本先附).<sup>72</sup> And ‘Your servant Yuxi 禹錫

<sup>70</sup> Yuan et al., ed., *Zhang Zhidong quanji*, 10536.

<sup>71</sup> *Yiqie jing yinyi*, T no. 2128, 54: 53.659a22.

<sup>72</sup> *Zhenglei bencao* 13.331 (SKQS vol. 740: 13.668d).

respectfully note that the *Yaoxing lun* 藥性論 [Notes on Medicine Property] teaches: beleric myrobalan van warm the stomach and intestines, dispelling cold from the body. *Fanzhong* people make of it a decoction, which is very hot, and can be used to dye the hair black’ (臣禹錫等謹按《藥性論》云: 毘梨勒, 使. 能溫暖腸腹, 兼去一切冷氣. 蕃中人以此作漿, 甚熱, 能染鬚髮變黑色).<sup>73</sup> The ‘*fanzhong* peoples’ (Ch. *fanzhong ren* 蕃中人) are foreign *hu*. Considering that beleric myrobalan ‘is very hot’ as a decoction, on top of what Sun Simiao explains about the three fruit decoction in the *Qianjin yaofang*, it is reasonable to conclude that a beleric myrobalan is suitable for drinking. However, neither source confirms that the beverage is alcoholic or tincture-like. Regardless, from a wellbeing perspective, there was little substantial difference in the middle ages between a decoction prepared for general consumption and one prepared for medicinal purposes when the core ingredients were the same.

#### 2.4. Boiled Indian gooseberry and an Indian gooseberry ‘mixed soup’

*Āmalaka* (*Anmole*, emblic myrobalan) has been transliterated in multiple different ways into Chinese, *amole* 阿摩勒 and *anmoluo* 庵摩洛迦果 only two among the many versions. Saṃghabhadra (Ch. Sengqiebatuoluo 僧伽跋陀羅 [of 5th c.]) explains in a note, absent from the Pāli original, which he added to his Southern Qi Dynasty translation of the *Samantapāsādikā* (Ch. *Shanjian lü piposha* 善見律毘婆沙; *juan* 17): ‘*Amole* is Indian gooseberry (Ch. *yuganzi* 餘甘子). Grown in Guangzhou, it is as large as a Hedge Prinsepia Nut (Ch. *ruizi* 蕤子)’ (阿摩勒者, 餘甘子也. 廣州土地有, 其形如蕤子大).<sup>74</sup> In the opening *juan* of *Genbenshuo yiqie youbu pi’naiye zashi* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶雜事 [Skt. *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya-sudraka-vas-tu*], Yijing likewise added two glosses. The first is: ‘Indian gooseberry, from Guangzhou, can be used to wash hair, and is referred to in the

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> *Shanjian lü piposha*, T no. 1462, 24: 17.795a22–23.

west as *anmoluoja guo* (餘甘子, 出廣州, 堪沐髮, 西方名‘菴摩洛迦果’也).<sup>75</sup>

The second reads: ‘In Sanskrit, this is *Āmalaka* (*anmoluoja*); here, it is Indian gooseberry, common in Guangzhou, and different from the aforementioned *anmoluo* 菴沒羅; to avoid confusion from the close pronunciations, make special note of the difference indicated here’ (梵云庵摩洛迦, 此云餘甘子, 廣州大有, 與上菴沒羅全別, 為聲相濫, 人皆惑之, 故為注出, 是掌中觀者).<sup>76</sup>

*Anmoluo* refers to mango, or *āmra* in Sanskrit. Elsewhere in the same section, Yijing provides a comment on how to distinguish between the two: ‘*Āmra* is as big as a peach, is difficult to judge when ripe, and has four differences. *Anmoluoja* is the same size as the Chinese date, its sole use is as a medicine’ (此果大如桃, 而生熟難知, 有四種差別不同. 菴摩洛迦大如酸棗, 唯堪為藥).<sup>77</sup> Why was the *anmoluoja* fruit also given the name *yuganzi*, which approximately means ‘sweet end fruit’? Chen Cangqi explains in the *Bencao shiyi*: ‘When people consume its fruit, the flavour begins sour and ends sweet, hence its name *yugan*’ (人食其子, 先苦後甘, 故曰餘甘).<sup>78</sup>

Before launching his eponymous rebellion, An Lushan 安祿山 (703–757) had long occupied a place of privilege as the favourite courtier of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang 唐玄宗 (712–756) and his consort Yang Guifei 楊貴妃 (719–756), and with such favour came a wealth of valuable gifts. According to records in the *Youyang Zazu* 酉陽雜俎 [Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang], among the presents were varieties of beverages enjoyed in the imperial court, such as *sangluo* wine (Ch. *sangluo jiu* 桑落酒), clear wine (Ch. *qingjiu* 清酒), boiled Indian gooseberry (Ch. *yuganjian* 餘甘煎), *wushu* soup 五術湯, and *jinshiling* soup 金石凌湯, many of which were intended to ‘nourish life’.<sup>79</sup> Despite being of *hu* origin, An Lushan appears to have adopted the Han approach to self-care and taken medicines

<sup>75</sup> *Genbenshuo yiqie youbu pi'naiye zashi*, T no. 1451, 24: 1.207b4.

<sup>76</sup> *Genbenshuo yiqie youbu pi'naiye zashi*, T no. 1451, 24: 1.210b24–25.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 209c20–21.

<sup>78</sup> Shang, colle. & annot., *Bencao shiyi jishi*, 836.

<sup>79</sup> *Youyang zazu* 1.31–37.

with a mind to extending the length of his life.<sup>80</sup> It is also known that boiled Indian gooseberry gifted to other distinguished ministers. In his ‘Xie ci yao jin zhan deng zhuang’ 謝賜藥金盞等狀 [Letter of thanks for the gift of medicine, gold and more], Yuan Xian 苑咸 (710–758) wrote: ‘The right imperial steward Yuan Siyi gifted me on imperial orders a gold bowl full of medicine, including ginseng honey, Indian gooseberry soup, and two plates, and requested that the middle assistant secretary Fu Chaojun teach me the precious method’ (右內給事袁思藝奉宣聖旨賜臣藥金盞一匙, 並參花蜜、餘甘煎, 及平脫合二, 兼令中使輔朝俊親授昨所賜金方法者).<sup>81</sup> Northern Dynasty scholar and official Zhou Qufei 周去非 (1135–1189) similarly mentions in the *Lingwai daida* 嶺外代答 [Insights about the Regions Beyond the Mountains]: ‘Southern Indian gooseberry has a better taste than olives, and it is mostly sold in the north. Once ripe, the fruit drops to the floor, covering it like *huai* 槐 tree fruit and elm pods. Locals dry it for making a delicious soup’ (南方餘甘子風味過於橄欖, 多販入北州. 方即時, 零落藉地, 如槐子、榆莢. 土人乾以合湯, 意味極佳).<sup>82</sup> Natives of the south used Indian gooseberries as one ingredient in a soup of dried fruit which often features in Song Dynasty poetry. One poem that mentions it is Wang Shipeng’s 王十朋 (1112–1171) ‘Yuanzhang zeng yuganzi yong qian yun’ 元章贈餘甘子用前韻 [Before using the Indian gooseberry gifted by Yuanzhang]:

端因坡句聲名重	The fame of Su Dongpo’s poetry [about the India gooseberry]
正類梅詩氣韻長	Shows it will sing on as long as Mei Yaoc-hen’s poetry.
回頰已輸崖蜜味	The aftertaste is sweeter even than honey,
返魂終共雪芽香	Taken with <i>xueya</i> 雪芽 tea its perfume will shake a person to the core. <sup>83</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Shen, ‘An Lushan fusan kao’.

<sup>81</sup> *Wenyuan yinghua* 630.3260.

<sup>82</sup> *Lingwai daida jiaozhu* 8.303.

<sup>83</sup> ‘Yuanzhang zeng yuganzi yong qian yun’, *Wang Shipeng quanji* 21.367.

The first line references, he notes, Su ‘Dongpo’s poem ‘Ganlan’ 橄欖 [Olive], which goes:

待得餘甘回齒頰	The aftertaste of Indian gooseberry
已輸崖蜜十分甜	Sweeter even than honey. <sup>84</sup>

In Su Dongpo’s words, this extraordinary fruit that grew in the south not only has an unmatched aftertaste, but ‘is an ideal pairing with tea’ (與茶最相宜).<sup>85</sup> So, drinking it was perfectly fine. When poet Qin Guan 秦觀 (1049–1100) was demoted to a post in Leizhou 雷州 in the second year of the Northern Song’s Yuanfu 元符 era (1099), the local sights quickly found its way into his poems. *Haikang shu shi shihou* 海康書事十首 [Ten Pieces about Haikang], for example, contains the line,

粲粲庵摩勒	Oh splendid <i>āmalaka</i> ,
作湯美無有	A soup of beauty like no other. <sup>86</sup>

Making a soup with *āmalaka* was popular in Leizhou, as was administering the soup as a medicine. The *Puji fang*, *juan* 252, explains, ‘To treat illnesses brought on by sulphur, take pork, duck broth and Indian gooseberry soup’ (治服硫黃發毒, 以豬肉鴨羹及餘甘子湯, 並解之).<sup>87</sup> Just like the myrobalan soup, which likely in terms of its quality benefitted from the region’s climate and conditions to become a widely loved beverage, *āmalaka* eventually became so popular that its name reached the north. That word of the drink spread in this way is one example among many of the growing influence that the southern regions’ culture boasted at that time.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Xu, annot., *Huaihaiji jianzhu*, 241–242.

<sup>87</sup> *Puji fang* 252.4163.



### 3. ‘The Three Myrobalan Decoction Poem’ and the recipe in the *Huibui yaofang*

#### 3.1. Three Myrobalan Decoction in the Yuan Dynasty

While myrobalan soup and Indian gooseberry (emblic myrobalan) soup both feature in Song Dynasty records, there are no traces of a ‘three myrobalan decoction’ to be found. The reason for this was layered. Increased and expanded trade along the Maritime Silk Road saw medicine importation from the Arab nations, India, and the countries of the South China Sea skyrocket far beyond that of previous dynasties.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, local cultivation of the three myrobalans had already long been established. So, the disappearance resulted not from issues with sourcing the raw ingredients but from changes in the customs of the time and in the availability of other medicines and spices. The constant influx of readily available medicines, herbs and spices meant that hot soups, tonics and other beverages were ubiquitous in the Song, in a wider range of varieties than ever before, and also with more convenient preparations than the three myrobalan decoction. No longer did consumers have to wait until the eighth lunar month for optimal results. Gradually, the excitement around the decoction faded, its name ‘never to be heard of again’ (不復聞於世).<sup>89</sup>

That is until the Yuan Dynasty, when the decoction reappeared. Wang Yun 王惲 (1227–1304), a writer and official of that era, authored a poem that gives an account of this resurgence, entitled the ‘Sanlejiang ge’ 三勒漿歌 [The Three Myrobalan Decoction Poem], which features in *juan* six of the *Qiuqian xiansheng daquan wenji* 秋澗先生大全文集 [The Complete Collection of Mr. Qiuqian’s Work]:

<sup>88</sup> There is an abundance of works dedicated to the aromatic medicines trade, here is just one example of note. Lin, *Songdai xiangyao maoyi shi*.

<sup>89</sup> *Qiuqian xiansheng daquan wenji*, *Sibu congkao*, vol 3: 27. There are slight discrepancies between this text and the version in the *SKQS* edition, for example, the non-quoted version does not include the final line.

The Three Myrobalan Decoction Poem (Foreword) 三勒漿歌 (序):

In the Dali era, Emperor Daizong of Tang visited the imperial academy to gift the students a three myrobalan decoction, after which its name was never to be heard of again. Today, in the Court of Imperial Entertainments (Ch. *guanglusi* 光祿寺), Mr. Xu brews a three myrobalan decoction from emblic, black, and beleric myrobalan; the liquid shone brightly like wine made with grapes and had a magnificent sweet and heady flavour. Mr. Xu recommended it to the emperor who was overjoyed at the gift, saying that the drink was unmatched by others, so thereafter it was often given to the imperial palace as a tribute. I wrote this poem in order to sing the praises of the country's rich produce from every corner and to express my respect and admiration for the emperor, wishing him a long life with three myrobalan wine. 唐代宗大曆間幸太學，以三勒漿賜諸生，此後不復聞於世。今光祿許公複以庵摩、訶、毘梨三者釀而成漿，其光色曄曄，如蒲萄桂醕，味則溫馨甘滑，渾涵妙理。及薦饗，天顏喜甚，謂非餘品可及，遂時供內府。不肖以沾瀝之餘，發為歌詩，於以見國朝德被四表，方物畢至之盛，詩公愛君之心，以湯液醪醴躋聖壽於無疆之休也。

The geography and climate of this golden world is peculiar, its precious gifts show us. Carried in a jade-green basket thousands of *li* to China, they appear as an offering in Buddha's temples and in our homes. The *Bencao tujing* contains records of the wondrous three myrobalans, which can it says cure sickness. How do people know it remains so effective to be unmatched in its decocted form by fine wines and liquors and sugarcane juice. People say that its brewing method is ancient, and to keep it in a jar it is like a spring cloud, which can rid the body of moisture. It is fragrant and tastes wonderful to drink, awakening one's spirit and improving the health. Mr. Xu must have learnt how to make it from the immortals, in order to bring it back into the world. The gods Yi Di and Qi Po clap in wonder at it, since it was not seen for five hundred years. Although vegetables and meat are delicious, in order to express one's respect and loyalty to the emperor the three myrobalans remain the best gift. With a colour like red Ganoderma and red like clouds, it is a wonder that such a drink cannot be found only in the heavenly palace. The light shines on the drink in its bowl, and the stars cannot but gasp

in awe. To drink it three times is to have ascend to them. With it sat so long in its golden pot, I almost do not want to drink it, how can someone of such little merit dare to drink it? 金天一氣何奇特, 異品珍材表馨德. 翠籠萬里入貢來, 赤佛堂西漢家邑. 異哉三勒見《圖經》, 祇解有靈能愈疾. 豈知用外藏妙理, 瓊醴蔗漿非所敵. 誰傳釀法自太古, 滿甕春雲元化濕. 就中至味真玄酒, 豁達靈根三益友. 許公得法神所傳, 一醺天成漢重酎. 儀狄拊掌耆伯驚, 五百年來未之有. 芹香背炙固區區, 推以愛君忠且厚. 彤芝蓋影擁紅雲, 湯網初收在靈囿. 月華冷落露盤冰, 三咽芳溫挹天門. 金壺漱澣久, 承案不能餐, 我輩何功食天祿?<sup>90</sup>

It is a poem full of lavish and excessive praise, even comparing the ‘three myrobalan decoction’ to a sweet *Osmanthus* wine from the fabled Moon Palace. The one responsible for reviving the decoction was Xu Guozhen 許國禎 (active 1280s), a physician of medical stock, ‘highly skilled at medicine’ (尤精醫術), who was ‘taken into the imperial palace to administer medicines’ (以醫徵至瀚海, 留守掌醫藥) and even treated the empress dowager.<sup>91</sup> He also oversaw the compilation of the *Yuyao yuan fang* 御藥院方 [Formulary of the Imperial Pharmaceutical Bureau], which has since been preserved. Kublai Khan (1215–1294), progenitor of the Yuan Dynasty (Ch. Yuan Shizu 元世祖), referred to him as Xu *guanglu* 許光祿, or Imperial Minister Xu.<sup>92</sup> How was Xu Guozhen able to reproduce a decoction ‘not seen for five hundred years’? Besides possessing an impressive knowledge in the classics, histories and medical science, Xu participated in the editing process of the *Dayuan bencao* 大元本草 [Materia Medica of the Great Yuan], which familiarised him with Western Territory medicines. In the 22nd year of the Yuan Dynasty (1285), Kublai Khan assigned Xu, alongside Seliemo 色埒默 (Saliman 薩里蠻), to gather medical resources and specialists in a diverse range of fields for updating and revising the *Materia Medica*.<sup>93</sup> Those

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 27–28.

<sup>91</sup> *Song shi* 168.3962.

<sup>92</sup> *Yuanshi* 168. 3962–3965.

<sup>93</sup> *Yuanshi* 13.271.

he recommended for their expertise in identifying medicines from the Western Territories and further afield included Han Lin 韓麟 (d.u.),<sup>94</sup> Luo Tianyi 羅天益 (1220–1290), and Dou Xingchong 竇行沖 (d.u.).<sup>95</sup> Khan requested the revision because the burgeoning medical exchange underway between the Central Plains and lands to the west meant that records needed updating<sup>96</sup> and in order to redress any and all omissions and deficiencies in previous editions.<sup>97</sup> As to the actual success of the project, there are mixed opinions in academia even today.<sup>98</sup>

The Imperial Court of the Yuan Dynasty had a fervent interest in the cuisine of the Islamic world, and court Dietician Hu Sihui recorded a great many of the culture's soups and beverages in his *Yinshan zhengyao*. Similarly, Zhu Danxi 朱丹溪 (1281–1358) notes in the *Jufang fahui* 局方發揮 [Expounding Bureau Prescriptions], 'Shelibie is a soup for drinking, made from the boiled juices of seasonal fruits. If too thick, heat until it is on a rolling boil, which southerners call decocting (Ch. *jian* 煎)' (謂之舍利別者, 皆取時果之液煎熬為湯而飲之。稠之甚者, 調以沸湯, 南人因名之曰煎).<sup>99</sup> *Shelibie* 舍利別 (*shelibā* 舍利八, *shelibie* 舍裡別, *shelibā* 舍裡八, *she'erbie* 舍兒別, *shalibie* 沙裡別, *shalibie* 吵哩別, *shelabo* 舍刺蔔, *shelibai* 攝裡白) is a transliteration of the Persian and Arabic word *Sherbet* (*Sharāb*);

<sup>94</sup> 'Zishan dafutai yiyuanshi hanging xingzhuang' 資善大夫太醫院使韓公行狀, *Zixi wengao*, 22.372–374.

<sup>95</sup> 'Yuan gu shangyi Doujun mujieming' 元故尚醫竇君墓碣銘, *Zixi wengao* 19.309–311.

<sup>96</sup> Xu Youren 許有壬, 'Dayuan bencao xu' 大元本草序 [Preface to the *Materia Medica of the Great Yuan*], Li ed., *Quan Yuanwen*, vol. 38: 100–102.

<sup>97</sup> Yao Sui 姚燧 (1239–1314), 'Nanjinglu yixue jiaoshou lijun muzhiming' 南京路醫學教授李君墓誌銘 [Epitaph to Medicine Professor Li on Nanjing Road], Li ed., *Quan Yuanwen*, vol. 9: 770–771.

<sup>98</sup> Chen, 'Hu bilie xiubencao', 35–36. Gao, 'Dayuan bencao yu chengtianrenhui ju yaofang', 56–57. Bo, 'Guanyu 'dayuan bencao' de shiliao', 68–71; Peng Shaohui, 'Yuandai guanxiu 'dayuan bencao' queyouqishi', 326–327.

<sup>99</sup> Wang, 'Tang zhongyao gulao jixing zhiyi de tangjiang huo shelibie', 33–34.

it was also called *keshui* 渴水, meaning a drink to quench thirst.<sup>100</sup> The diversity of soups and drinks welcomed and available in the Yuan capital of Khanbaliq was impressive, ranging from *shelibie* to *kumis* (Ch. *manaijiu* 馬奶酒; lit. mare’s milk wine) and from grape wine to *alaji* 阿剌吉 (Per. *araq*),<sup>101</sup> and leading Xu Youren 許有壬 (1286–1364) to say: ‘Cuisine in the capital is diverse, with cured meats from the north, alcohols from the west, seafood from the east, and fruits and vegetables from the south. There is every speciality from around the country’ (京城食物之豐, 北臘西釀, 東腥西鮮, 凡絕域異味, 求無不獲).<sup>102</sup> However, the ‘three myrobalan decoction’ never achieved its former status there. It was simply a matter of luck and circumstance in the first place that the medicine was revived at all, chanced on by a medical expert versed in the field’s classics and traditions who had been tasked with giving records a long overdue update. His gifts of the decoction to the imperial household never saw the drink become anything but rare, suggesting that the Mongol Yuan court did not consider it valuable enough to become commonplace. Hence, its absence from Chinese records compiled in the Yuan Dynasty of Islamic food and drink. In the end, Xu Guozhen’s contribution to keeping the ‘three myrobalan decoction’ alive only provided it with a final, brief hurrah.

### 3.2. Persian and Arab drinks in the Song and Yuan dynasties, and ‘*shalabi fang*’ in the *Huihui Yaofang*

In ancient Persia, the air was filled with the heady smells of fine wines, and throughout the Arab world, fruit was abundant, often

<sup>100</sup> See Maejima, ‘Sharibetsu kō’; Chen, ‘She’erbie yu she’erbiechi de zai tantao’. For research on the connection between the spread of *she’erbie* 舍兒別 and disciples of *yelikewen* 也里可溫 in the Yuan Dynasty, see Yin, ‘Yuandai Maxuelijisi jiazhu yu huihui yiyao wenhua’; *Yuandai Yelikewen kaoshu*, 115–121.

<sup>101</sup> Chen, ‘Yuandai dadu de yinshi shenghuo’; ‘Yuan dadu de jiu yu shehui shenghuo tanjiu’, 27–31.

<sup>102</sup> Xu Youren 許有壬, ‘Ruzhou ting yan(yan)yin shi si houxu’ 如舟亭燕(宴)飲詩後序, in Li, ed., *Quan Yuanwen*, vol. 38: 102.

made into various drinks, alcoholic and otherwise, along with herbs and spices. The most famous of these drinks to reach China amidst the influx which started at the end of the Five Dynasties was rose water (Ch. *qiangwei shui* 薔薇水; or *qiangwei lu* 薔薇露, or *Dashi shui* 大食水, 'Tazi water').<sup>103</sup> Zhou Qufei's *Lingwai daida* describes many of the 'Tazi' nation products and drinks popular at that time, including how the Kingdom of Malabar (Ch. *Maliba guo* 麻離拔國) 'turned grapes into wine, produced *sisu* wine 思酥酒 by boiling together sugar, medicines and spices, and made Mistura (Ch. *meisida-bua* 眉思打華) wine from honey, medicines and spices, all beverages which warmed the body and were good for the consumer' (以蒲桃為酒, 以糖煮香藥 為思酥酒, 以蜜和香藥作眉思打華酒, 暖補有益).<sup>104</sup>

Liu Yu's 劉郁 (active 1260s) *Xishi ji* 西使記 [Record of Embassy to the West] records that in the *Baodaguo* 報達國 (*budaguo* 布達國, Baghdad) caliphate, 'orange juice and sugar [were] drunk' (以橙漿和糖為飲).<sup>105</sup> Meanwhile, rose water was both used as a perfume and beverage. Prominent Southern Song poet Lu You 陸遊 (1125–1210) wrote in *Laoxue'an biji* 老學庵筆記 [Jottings from Laoxue Hall]: 'In the Shouhuang era, the imperial palace served a rose water wine, which when gifted to ministers is called *liuxiang* 流香 wine' (壽皇時, 禁中供御酒名薔薇露, 賜大臣酒, 謂之流香酒).<sup>106</sup> Drinking alcohol was a favourite pastime of the Persian and Arab peoples; most of what they brewed at that time was low proof. Al-sunel Ma'arri suggested in *Ghabus Name* that excessive consumption of alcohol would lead to poisoning and advised that people drink in moderation.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Tazi, or Tāzī, was the word for 'Arab' in ancient Persia. The Chinese rendering is Dashi 大食.

<sup>104</sup> 'Waiguo zhuanxia' 外國傳下 [Book of the Foreign Countries Lower Section], *Lingwai daida jiaozhu* 3.99.

<sup>105</sup> Liu Yu 劉郁 (active 1260s), 'Xishi ji' 西使記 [Embassy to the West], Li ed., *Quan Yuanwen*, vol. 5: 68.

<sup>106</sup> *Lao xue'an biji* 7.95.

<sup>107</sup> Ansu-Erma'ali [Keikavus], *Kabusi jiaohui lu*, chap. 11, *Lun yinjiu de guiju*, pp. 51–54.

The great Islamic physician Avicenna included a recipe for a ‘fruit beverage’ (Per. ‘Sifat Sharābi al-Fakihati’) in book five, chapter six of *The Canon of Medicine*:

This drink made from fruit juice strengthens the stomach and viscera, prevents vomiting and relaxes the bowels caused by bilious humour. It prevents morning sickness in pregnant women.

Its ingredients are the following, in equal amounts: Apple juice, Pear juice, Sour Pomegranate juice, Quince juice, Sugar as desired, and Sumac.

Boil down the ingredients over a low flame until the mixture thickens. Add sugar if you want to make it sweet. Boil down again. Filter and then store and use as needed.<sup>108</sup>

The *Huihui yaofang* 回回藥方 [Medical Formulary of Huihui (Muslim)] from the early Ming Dynasty contains a list in *juan* 36 of the varieties of ‘all fragrant soups’. One category is ‘medicinal soups’, under which there are five recipes: ‘Xikan gubin nisasada fang’ 西刊古賓尼撒答方, ‘Xikan gubin bozuli fang’ 西刊古賓卜祖黎方, ‘Zhulabisada fang’ 諸刺必撒答方, ‘Shalabiguli fang’ 沙刺必谷里方, and ‘Shatang mei guihua shu’ 砂糖梅桂花煎 (Powdered sugar plum and Osmanthus broth).<sup>109</sup> According to research by Song Xian 宋峴, ‘Xikan gubin bozuli fang’ and ‘Xikan gubin nisasada fang’ are both ‘vinegared honey electuaries’, the former containing ‘a number of medicinal seeds’ and the latter ‘a treatment for depression’;<sup>110</sup> ‘zhulabisada fang’ is a ‘cinnamon paste’ (肉桂膏) and ‘shalabiguli fang’ is the ‘medicinal water of the acacia plant’ (金和歡藥露). Given the category that it has been assigned in the Ming work, ‘zhulabisada fang’ should be a cinnamon liquid of some sort rather than a paste. The work also includes an entry on a *xikangubin* 西刊古賓 decoction made with *wensuli* 溫速黎, which is ‘a soup of wine vinegar boiled with shallots’ (Ch. *huihuicong* 回回蔥, lit. Muslim scallion)

<sup>108</sup> Avicenna, *The Canon of Medicine*, vol. 5: 77.

<sup>109</sup> Translation from Song, annot., *Huihui yaofang kaoshi*, vol. 1: 127.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.



and honey'.<sup>111</sup> Fragments of the *Huibui yaofang* manuscripts have likewise been found to contain rather a lot of different medicinal beverages and fruit drinks. At the very least, more than a dozen have been successfully identified, including a 'decocted medical drink' (Ch. *jianyao yinzi* 煎藥飲子), 'purple flower decoction' (Ch. *zihuar jian* 紫花兒煎), 'zufa medicine decoction' (Ch. *zufa jianyao* 祖法煎藥), 'zufa soup' (Ch. *zufa tang* 祖法湯), *beihayitutaishi shui* 黑哈亦土台思水 (Juice of Brahmin Ginseng), and a 'mawuwusuli decoction' (Ch. *mawuwusuli jianyao* 馬兀兀速里煎藥). The most common drinks included in the work are the aforementioned Sherbet (*Sharāb*, or she'erbie 舍兒別). Rendered in the *Huibui yaofang* as '*shalabi*' 沙刺必, '*shelabi*' 舍刺必, and '*salabi*' 撒刺必, the range of recipes are as follows: *shalabi fang* 沙刺必方, *shalabibunafusha* 沙刺必不納福沙 (purple flower water), *shalabinayinayi* 沙刺必納亦納亦 (green mint water wine), *shalabi'anluodi* 沙刺必庵羅的 (rose water wine), *shalabi-halila* 沙刺必哈里刺 (black myrobalan water wine), *shalabi fang* 舍刺必方, *shalabimushiqi* 舍刺必木失其 (musk soup), *shalabi'anguli* 舍刺必安古黎 (fig water wine), '*shalabi'anzhi'er* 舍刺必安祇而, which is fig soup', *shalabihabasulihadidi* (steel dust soup), *shelabisunbuli* 舍刺必笋卜黎 (spikenard soup), *shelabigezan'er* 舍刺必葛咱而 (foreign radish beverage), and *yinabusalabishui* 亦拏卜撒刺必水, 'which is dog grape water (Ch. *gou putaoshui* 狗葡萄水)'.

### 3.3. Myrobalan and myrobalan soup in the *Huibui yaofang*

The *Huibui yaofang* also contains the names of numerous types of myrobalan and their recipes: two myrobalan (Ch. *shuanghezi* 雙訶子; black and yellow myrobalan), *fanhezi* 番訶子, *nenhezi* 嫩訶子, *shuhezi* 熟訶子 (lit. ripe myrobalan), *amila* 阿米刺 (*amila* 阿迷刺 or *yuganzi* 餘甘子), *balila* 八里刺 (beleric myrobalan; Per. *Baleelaj*), *pingmian hezi* 平面訶子 (lit. flat myrobalan; beleric myrobalan), and, of particular note, Halilah Kābulī (Ch. *kebulile hezi* 可不里訶子). Efraim Lev and Zohar Amar offer a very similar summary in the *Practical Materia Medica of the Medieval Eastern Mediterra-*

<sup>111</sup> *Huibui yaofang*, 49.



nean *According to the Cairo Genizah*.<sup>112</sup> Geographer and biographer Yaqut al-Hamawi, too, in his *Dictionary of Countries* (Ar. *Muʿjam al-Buldān*, 1224), explains that in ‘Kûlam’ (Ch. Gulin 故臨; Quilon, Kollam) along India’s southwest Malabar Coast, ‘We found certain myrobalans, but the best were those from Kabul because Kabul sits far from the coast and all species of myrobalans can be found there. The trees from which the wind blows fruit to the ground are yellow myrobalan, of which the fruit is cold and has an acrid bite. The fruit which grows to full maturity on the tree before being picked is the Kabul myrobalan, which is sweet and warm. The fruit which stays on the tree through winter until it blackens is black myrobalan, a hot fruit with a sour taste’.<sup>113</sup> Andalusian pharmacist Ibn al-Bayṭār’s (1197?–1248) Arabic pharmacopeia, the *Compendium on Simple Medicaments and Foods* (*Kitāb al-Jāmi ‘li-Mufradāt al-Adwiya wa-l-Aghdhiya*; Ch. *yaodian* 藥典) provides more detail about the available kinds of black myrobalan: ‘Al-Baṣrī has stated that there are four myrobalan (halīlaj) varieties, namely, the Indian yellow and Indian black, the Kabuli black, which is a large variety, and the low-quality, thin-skinned kind attributed to ‘China’.<sup>114</sup> Similarly, Arab polymath Al-Bīrūnī (973–1048) recorded several varieties in the tenth century in his *Pharmacology in Medicine* (*Kitāb al-ṣaydala fī al-ṭibb*):

Halīlaj. It is *halīqūn* in Roman and *halīlī* in Syriac. It is said that in Hindī it *hawzbad* and *harayn*. Arrajānī says: ‘Some (varieties) are yellow, and some black, Hindī and *Kabulī*. It comprises four varieties- the yellow which is non-mature and the black, which is mature’.

Abū Jurayh says: ‘Many a perfumer purveys the yellow variety which

<sup>112</sup> Lev & Amar, *Practical Materia Medica of the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean according to the Cairo Genizah*, 83–86, 218–221.

<sup>113</sup> Ferrand, ed., *Relations de voyages et textes géographiques Arabes, Persans et Turcs relatifs à L’extrême-Orient du VIIIe au XIIIe siècles*, 227; for Chinese version, see Ferrand, ed., *Alabo bosi tujueren dongfang wenxian jizhu*, vol. 1: 247–248.

<sup>114</sup> Cited from Song, *Gudai bosi yixue yu zhongguo*, 19.

has become black as the black kind, although this is not well the case. The maturity of the chebulic myrobalan is related to its ripeness on the tree. The same applies to its kernel and grains. The Kabulī variety is thick and big. One variety is known as the Chinese. It is dry and slender. The beaked variety is preferred. The Kabulī variety that is large, filled, solid, and thick is good; it should submerge in water, and should be reddish. It is followed by the yellow variety which is heavy and fleshy, and neither wrinkled nor shrunken. It should be very yellow with a greenish tinge. Rāzī says: ‘There is a kind of the black variety that is greenish, heavy and fleshy’. Ibn Māsawaih says: ‘The pungent yellow variety is very yellow, reddish, heavy, fleshy, and Kābulī. When Mamūn Al-Rashīd was in Khurāsān after the conquest of Kābul, the king of that country embraced Islām and submitted himself (to the suzerainty of the caliph). When the governor of the caliph accompanied by an officer of the postal department went there, the king gave (the representative) scabrous chebulic myrobalana to be presented to the Caliph’.<sup>115</sup>

Al-Bīrūnī starts by introducing the names of black myrobalan in various languages, then cites four physicians’ findings about the fruit, those of Arrajānī, Abū Jurayh, al-Rāzī, and Ibn Māsawaih. He pays particular attention to the medicinal classifications and individual qualities suggested by the physicians.

Cyril Elgood’s notes on myrobalan, or *Hallilaj* (*belile*), in ‘Tibb-ul-Nabbi or Medicine of the Prophet’ read:

There are three species of myrobalan: the yellow, the chebulic, and the Indian. Other varieties are classified as one of these.

Myrobalan is cold & dry. Yellow myrobalan sets up a flow of bile, chebulic of phlegm, and Indian of spleen, when used as a decoction or as an infusion. The seeds and the electuaries and the yellow seeds cool the heat of the mouth. The chebulic myrobalan made into a syrup with honey increases the semen and hastens the appearance of

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<sup>115</sup> Said, ed., *Al-Biruni’s Book on Pharmacy and Materia Medica*, Part I, 329–330.

white hair. It is good for the aged and stimulates the sexual appetite. Tradition says that the myrobalan is one of the trees of Paradise. In it resides the cure of seventy diseases’.<sup>116</sup>

Finally, the *Huihui yaofang* describes a number of soups and decoctions prepared with the three myrobalans, chief among them an *amila ru* 阿米刺乳 (lit. *amila* milk), *mijian amila* 蜜煎阿米刺 (lit. honeyed, boiled *amila*), yellow myrobalan soup (*huangbezi tang* 黃訶子湯), ‘*matiboli halila fang*’ 馬體卜里哈里刺方 (which should be ‘*matibobei halila fang*’ 馬體卜黑哈里刺方, a black myrobalan soup), ‘*shalabihalila*’ 沙刺必哈里刺 (a black myrobalan fruit liquor), a ‘medicinal decoction for drinking’ and an ‘*afutimen tang fang*’ 阿福體門湯方 (which is a soup recipe involving the water from boiled Chinese dodder or *cuscuta* seeds with dried grapes) with yellow myrobalan. Evidently, myrobalan both comes in a variety of kinds and has diverse uses.

### 3.4. ‘*Yitelifei*’, ‘*yiteliefali*’, and ‘*yitelifeili*’ in the *Huihui yaofang*

There are a further three Chinese names for the ‘three myrobalan’ in the *Huihui yaofang*; they are *yiteliefali* 亦忒列法力, *yitelifei* 亦忒里肥, and *yitelifeili* 亦特里肥里.

Song Xian accurately linked all three to the Arabic term *Itṛīfal*, however he incorrectly identifies the term as referring to bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata* [L.])—the ‘sleep herb’ (Ch. *shuicai* 睡菜)—based on the *Yixue yu shengwuxue cidian* 醫學與生物學詞典 [The Dictionary of Medicine and Biology]. His error is evidenced by a footnote below the following entry in the *Huihui yaofang* on medical patches: ‘When this patch is first applied, each morning take either *xiao telifeili* 小忒里肥里 or *mahanibode’er* 馬哈你伯的兒. This patch ointment should be changed once every three days’ (方貼此藥, 每朝可服用小忒里肥里, 或服馬哈你伯的兒. 此膏三日一換為度). The footnoted is attached to ‘*xiao telifeili*’ 小忒里肥里 and explains,

<sup>116</sup> Elgood, ‘Tibb-ul-Nabbi or Medicine of the Prophet’, 117.

‘*xiao telifeili* is the name of synthetic medicine’ (小忒里肥里: 即凡合成的藥名),<sup>117</sup> which suggests that *telifeili*, or *Iṭrīfal*, is also made of component ingredients and thus cannot refer to bogbean. The correct definition of the word is that it shares a similar meaning to the Sanskrit *tri-phala*. *Iṭrīfal* and *iṭrīfal* can also be rendered as *iṭrīfil*. Poet and Galenic physician Abū Al-Faraj ‘Alī ibn al-Husayn ibn Hindū (? -1032) refers to this medicine in *The Key to Medicine and a Guide for Students* as well. Chapter ten of the introductory work is a list of nearly 60 compound formulas, one of which is *al-iṭrīfil*, defined as: ‘*al-iṭrīfil*: This is an Arabicised Indian term derived from the words *tarī bahl*, which means a mixture of three ingredients: myrobalan (*ihlīlaj*), berelic myrobalan (*balīlaj*) and emblic myrobalan (*amlaj*)’.<sup>118</sup> *Iṭrīfal* (*Iṭrīfil*) derives from the Hindi tara abhal. ‘Variants on the name occur as *ṭirāfal*, *tarfal*, and *ṭaranfal*’.<sup>119</sup>

There are several prescriptions labelled as ‘*yitelifei*’ in the *Huihui yaofang* as well. For example, ‘another *yitelifei* formula requires equal quantities of Cherokee rose fruit (Ch. *jinyingzi* 金櫻子) and the black, yellow, nen 嫩, and *pingmian* varieties of myrobalan, which should be ground into a powder and mixed with melted honey and butter into a paste. Each dose is one or two *qian*; consume before sleep’ (又亦忒里肥方: 黑訶子、黃訶子、嫩訶子、金櫻子、平面訶子各等分兩, 右一同搗羅為末, 用酥油煉蜜調成膏子, 每服一二錢, 臨臥而服).<sup>120</sup> This ‘*yitelifei* prescription’ calls for a number of myrobalan types and makes no mention of any bogbean. Oddly, Song Xian seems to have been aware of the dissimilarity, since below the *Huihui yaofang* entry for ‘*xiao yitelifeili*’ 小忒里肥里方, he inserted his translation of Avicenna’s record about the ‘little sleep herb’ (*Iṭrīfāl al-ṣaghīr*) from book five of *The Canon of Medicine*.

In that prescription, in fact, concocted mainly of the three myrobalans—kabuli, beleric, and emblic—this so-called ‘little sleep herb’

<sup>117</sup> *Huihui yaofang* 12.125.

<sup>118</sup> Ibn Hindū, *Miftāḥ al-ṭibb wa-minhāj al-ṭullāb*, / *The Key to Medicine and a Guide for Students*, 90.

<sup>119</sup> Nasrallah, *Annals of the Caliphs’ Kitchens*, 752.

<sup>120</sup> *Huihui yaofang* 30.359.

is of no relation to the actual ‘sleep herb’ (*Menyanthes*, Ch. *shuicai* 睡菜): bogbean. A more accurate dubbing would be ‘lesser three myrobalan prescription’ (Ch. *xiao sanle fang* 小三勒方), a name in the vein of that of *xiao yitelifeili*. Equally, a more suitable name for al-Itṛīfāl al-Kabīr, the ‘larger sleep herb prescription’ from book five of *The Canon of Medicine*, would be ‘larger three myrobalan prescription’.

Now, it is clearer what a number of the prescription names refer to in the *Huibui yaofang*. ‘*Yiteliefali afutimuni fang*’ 亦忒列法力阿福體木尼方 is a ‘three myrobalan and Chinese Dodder seed formula’; ‘*yiteliefali shatalazhi fang*’ 亦忒列法力沙他刺只方 is a ‘three myrobalan formula with bloodroot (Ch. *xiegencao* 血根草; fumaric, Ch. *yanhusuo* 延胡索); ‘*yiteliefali keshinlizhi fang*’ 亦忒列法力可失尼只方 is a ‘three myrobalan and coriander formula’; ‘*you yiteliefali mahangbad’er fang*’ 又亦忒列法力馬杭八的而方 is ‘a three myrobalan formula [named] *yuanyue* 圓月 (lit. full moon)’. There are a further three paste (Ch. *gaozi* 膏子) preparations to note in the work: a ‘*yitelifeili paste*’ 亦忒里肥里膏子 (a three myrobalan lambative), ‘*xiao yitelifeili paste*’ 小亦忒里肥里膏子 (lesser three myrobalan lambative), and ‘*da yitelifei paste*’ 大亦忒里肥膏子 (a greater three myrobalan lambative). There is a correlation between the *Huibui yaofang* entries about these greater and lesser myrobalan preparations and the original Arab medical compendium by Avicenna.

### 3.5. Three Myrobalan Formulas in Arabic and Persian Medical Literature from the Middle Ages

Following their Islamisation, Persia and the Arab nations became the focus of the world’s eyes, as reams of new literature came out of their flourishing medical cultures. Among the significant insights these works gave to the world were abundant prescriptions for concocting blends of *itṛīfāl* (*itṛīfīl*) and individual applications for any one of the three myrobalan. A brief inventory these resources is organised below:

Ibn at-Tilmīd was an eleventh century physician born in Baghdad. His dispensatory, *Al-Aqrābādhīn al-Kabir*, describes a ‘lesser’ (or ‘smaller’) and a ‘greater’ (‘larger’) three myrobalan prescription:

The smaller *iṭrīfal* which is useful against laxity and moistness of the stomach, haemorrhoidal cramps, it straightens the mind, and embellishes the complexion[.] Stoneless chebulic, yellow, and black myrobalan, beleric myrobalan, and emblic in equal parts. (This) is pounded, strained, mixed with sweet almond oil, kneaded with clarified honey, stored in a vessel, and a potion (may be made) by using three *dirham* (of it).

The larger *iṭrīfal* which increases the sexual potency of those who have a moist-cold temper[.] Stoneless chebulic and black myrobalan, beleric myrobalan, the ‘milk’ of emblic, black pepper, and long pepper three dirham of each; ginger, green-winged orchid, mace, Indian garden cress, parsnip, red and white wallflower, common ash, wild pomegranate seeds which are the seeds of *qilqil*, peeled sesame, white sugar candy, light-coloured poppy, and the two sea lavenders one dirham of each. (These ingredients) are brought together by pounding and straining, and (then) by kneading them with clarified honey which had been mixed before with cow’s ghee. (This) is stored in a vessel, and used.<sup>121</sup>

Like the ‘*xiao yitelifei fang*’ of the *Huibui yaofang*, the two remedies described above by Ibn at-Tilmīd serve as further evidence as to the three myrobalan medicaments’ diverse range of concoctions and applications. Three myrobalan prescriptions were also widely used, spreading to the Mediterranean Basin and Jewish regions of the Middle East. In *Practical Materia Medica of the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean According to the Cairo Genizah* by Lev and Amar, *Iṭrīfal* is attributed two meanings: one is of a purgative made of multiple ingredients, which evokes the Tang period story from the *Guangyi ji* 廣異記 [Extensive Records of the Strange] of General Gao Xianzhi 高仙芝 (? –756), who developed diarrhoea while carrying on his person some black myrobalan. Likely, he consumed a three myrobalan medicament. The other is of a long perennial herb named *Bitumen trefoil*, with leaves like clover and a profuse flowering. International trade was essential to three myrobalan medicines of any kind

<sup>121</sup> Kahl, *The Dispensatory of Ibn at-Tilmīd*, 211.

finding users in the eastern Mediterranean of the Middle Ages. Black myrobalan chiefly came from Asia and Africa (India, Myanmar, and Madagascar) while Kabul myrobalan came from Afghanistan.<sup>122</sup>

All the types of myrobalan feature at some point in diverse preparations in the books of Moses Maimonides, a Sephardic Jewish philosopher and physician who rose to prominence in the twelfth century. In one example, he lists Kabul myrobalan (*harad*), Indian myrobalan, and beleric myrobalan as the ingredients for a 'great *itrifal*' (Ch. *dasanle* 大三勒; great three myrobalan) preparation. He adds that the medicines can also be used to make a laxative electuary.<sup>123</sup> Below is Maimonides' entry for the 'great three myrobalan' found in the *Fī Tadbīr al-Sibḥah*:

As for the electuary to which this Servant has referred, it is a Great *İtrifal*; this Servant has compounded it previously for someone who needed it. It will improve the three digestions, strengthen all the members in general and the heart and stomach in particular. It will retard aging, dissolve the phlegm, prevent the vapors from ascending to the brain, strengthen all the senses and remove their lassitude, aid coitus, and dilate the soul. Its description is: take myrobalans, chebulic, Indic, and belleric, of each an ounce; emblic, two ounces; citron peel, oxtongue, stoechos flowers, cost and zedoary, of each an ounce; red rose petals, an ounce; samara of ash, wild carrot, asparagus seeds, carrot seeds, rocket seeds, the two behens, anise, mastic and balsam peel, of each half an ounce; cubebs, cardamons, cloves, cinnamon, galingale, long peppers, ginger, nard, doricum and aloes, of each an eighth of an ounce; piñon nuts, three ounces. The dry medications should be pulverized and sifted, the seeds and piñon nuts should be ground very fine, and the myrobalans should be rubbed over and over in half a pound of almond oil or pistachio oil, and the whole should be mixed and kneaded with three pounds of julep and two pounds of honey of bees from which the foam has

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<sup>122</sup> Lev & Amar, *Practical Materia Medica of the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean According to the Cairo Genizah*, 559, 362, 83.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, 220.



been skimmed, and placed in a wide vessel. The amount of it to be taken is four drams to half an ounce, in the winter time in hot water in which anise was boiled. In temperate weather it should be taken as an electuary. It should not be used in times of intense heat. Whenever it is taken, it should not be used frequently, but only once a week.

These are the syrups and electuary which, this servant thinks, should always be found in the treasury of the prosperous kingdom of al-Afḍal, may God preserve it by lengthening the life of its king.<sup>124</sup>

This preparation can also be administered as a syrup similar to the Tang Dynasty period's three myrobalan decoction. It likely originates from Islamic medicine, despite having a name in the Indian style of Mahātriphalādi Ghṛta (Ch. *da sanguo su* 大三果酥; lit. great three fruit ghee) from Ayurveda's *Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdayam Saṃhitā*.

#### 4. Ancient India's decoctions with the three fruits and 'Supiluo jiang'

##### 4.1. Ancient Indian Alcohols and *Pānaka*

India is a tropical country with high fruit production and is consequently where many different alcohols and fruit juices, syrups and electuaries were made. Its alcoholic beverages are divided into three main kinds: *surā*, *maireya*, and *madhu* (grape wine);<sup>125</sup> or grain alcohol, fruit alcohol, and herbal alcohol. The *Arthaśāstra* further breaks down intoxicating drinks into six subsets: *medaka*, *prasanna*, *āsava*, *ariṣṭa*, *maireya*, and *madhu*.<sup>126</sup> The Ayurvedic internal medicine text the *Caraka-saṃhitā* lists ten different kinds of 'biomedical fermentation' (Skt. *sandhana kalpana*), including *surā*, *maireya*, a sugarcane ferment, grape wine, honey mead, and *sauvīraka*.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Bar-Sela, Hoff, and Faris, trans., 'Moses Maimonides'.

<sup>125</sup> *Apidamo fayunzu lun*, T no. 1537, 26: 1.458.

<sup>126</sup> Unni, trans., *The Arthaśāstra of Kauṭalya*, 322–323.

<sup>127</sup> Caraka, *Caraka-Saṃhitā*, vol.1: 209–210.

It was normal in ancient India for different castes to consume different drinks. Brahmins, for example, were forbidden from imbibing alcohol, as stipulated in the creed’s legal text, the *Manusmṛti*. The *Da Tang Xiyu ji* 大唐西域記 [Great Tang Records of the Western Regions] explains, ‘Grapes and sugarcane alcohols can be drunk by *kṣatriya*; grain alcohols can be drunk by *vaiśya*. Śramaṇa and brahmins can drink non-alcoholic grape and sugarcane beverages. Other castes and lowly castes have no relevant laws’ (蒲萄、甘蔗、刹帝利飲也；曲蘖醇醪，吠奢等飲也。沙門、婆羅門，飲蒲萄、甘蔗漿，非酒醴之謂也。雜姓卑族，無所流別).<sup>128</sup> Buddhist scripture is a rich source of relevant materials too. *Juan* 17 of the *Shisong lü* 十誦律 [The Vinaya in Ten Recitations] differentiates between two types of alcohol, that which is brewed using grain and that which is brewed from ingredients grown on trees, while *juan* 16 of the *Sifen lü* 四分律 [Vinaya in Four Parts] identifies four types, that of ingredients grown on trees, glutinous rice wine (Ch. *jingmijiu* 粳米酒), wine from old rice (Ch. *yumijiu* 餘米酒), and barley wine (Ch. *damaijiu* 大麥酒).<sup>129</sup> The *Mahāsaṅgha-vinaya* (Ch. *Mohe Sengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律 [Great Canon of Monastic Rules—the Vinaya of the Mahāsāṃghika school of Buddhism]), *juan* twelve, bases its classification around what happens to the alcohol when left for time, suggesting ten categories: ‘mixed, sweetened, stronger smelling, vinegary, sour, dirtied, yellow, cloudy, sedimentary, and clear’ (和、甜、成、動、酢、漬、黃、屑、澱、清).<sup>130</sup> It is a reminder of how differently each school of the religion viewed alcohol that the various books precepts vary widely in their categorisations.

Fruit syrups and decoctions were equally, if not more, varied than alcoholic beverages. Buddhist scripture classified them as *yāmakālika*, which were permitted to be consumed after noon and into the night by bhikkhus. Eight principal kinds of fruit juice are outlined in the canon, as in *juan* one of the *Genben shuo yiqie youbu pi’naiye yaoshi*; they are *coca-pāna*, *moca-pāna*, *kola-pāna*, *aśvattha-pāna*,

<sup>128</sup> Ji et al., colla. & annot., *Da Tang Xiyu ji jiaozhu*, 215.

<sup>129</sup> *Sifen lü*, T no. 1428, 22: 16.672a28–b3.

<sup>130</sup> *Mohe Sengqi lü*, T no. 1425, 22: 12.387a19–20.

*udumbara-pāna*, *kharjūra-pāna*, *parusika-pāna*, and *mṛdvika-pāna*.<sup>131</sup> However, the *Shisong lü*, *juan* 26, gives different translations of the names,<sup>132</sup> and the *Mohe Sengqi lü*, *juan* three, lists 14 kinds.<sup>133</sup> There are also cases where alcohols and fruit juices become difficult to distinguish from each other, a potentially precarious situation in ancient India, against which the *Bi'naiye* 鼻奈耶 [Vinaya *sūtra*] provides some guidance: irrespective of a juice's flavour, if to imbibe it leads to inebriation, then it is forbidden, otherwise, it is acceptable to drink.<sup>134</sup> From the Dunhuang manuscripts, P.2100 and S.2050, *juan* two of the *Sibu lü bing lun yaoyong chao* 四部律並論要用抄 [A Transcription of Abridged Revisions in the Four Kinds of Vinaya], also contain copies of all the lists of fruit drinks from the *Sifen lü*, *Wufen lü* 五分律 [Vinaya in Five Parts], *Mahāsaṅgha-vinaya*, and the *Shisong lü*. Besides the eight kinds of juice detailed above, there were other fruit juices that could be drunk. Tang Dynasty Monk Yixing's 一行 (683–727) *Da piluzhena chengfo jing shu* 大毘盧遮那成佛經疏 [Commentary to the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*], *juan* seven, summarises the characteristics of Indian syrups and juices in a short sentence, 'Mixed with spices and medicines, they are delicious and can cure illnesses' (雜以香藥, 美而愈疾), adding that Indian cuisine 'looks heavily to medical practices, and therefore possesses nourishing and preventative benefits' (多依藥術, 有養性防身之功).<sup>135</sup>

#### 4.2. Ancient India's Three Fruits as Medicine and as Alcohol

The three fruits (*triphalā*) referenced in Buddhist scriptures are not *yāmakālīka* but *yāvajīvika*, medicines which can be used at any point in one's life. The texts particularly emphasise the miraculous efficacy of black myrobalan. *Juan* nine ('relieving disease') in Yijing's translation of the *Suvarṇaprabhāsaṭṭamarāja sūtra* explains:

<sup>131</sup> *Genben shuo yiqie youbu pi'naiye yaoshi*, T no. 1448, 24: 1.1a27–b4.

<sup>132</sup> *Shisong lü*, T no. 1435, 23: 26.193a26–29.

<sup>133</sup> *Mohe Sengqi lü*, T no. 1425, 22: 3.244c4–9.

<sup>134</sup> *Bi'naiye*, T no. 1464, 24: 9.892a3–8.

<sup>135</sup> *Da piluzhena chengfo jing shu*, T no. 1796, 39: 7.659a6, 659a9.

訶梨勒一種	Only black myrobalan
具足有六味	Has all six flavours;
能除一切病	It can cure all illnesses
無忌藥中王	Deserves to be the king among medicines. <sup>136</sup>

In his work *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* 南海寄歸內法傳 [A Record of Buddhist Practices Sent Home from the South], *juan* three, Yijing goes one step further: ‘If every day you can ingest the juice from a fruit of black myrobalan, you will remain free of illness until your life’s end’ (又訶梨勒若能每日嚼一顆咽汁, 亦終身無病).<sup>137</sup> Declarations of myrobalan’s effectiveness even appeared in the Tibetan textbook the *rGyud bzhi*, in which there is a description of a myrobalan tree upon Mount Xiangmao 香茅 (Tib: ri bo spos ngad ldan) with ‘roots that cure osteopathic afflictions, a trunk that can treat muscular disease, branches to balance meridians, bark against skin disease, leaves that heal the major organs, flowers for the sensory organs, and fruit for healing the heart; the tree bears five kinds of myrobalan, with all six flavours, eight kinds of effect and the potency to remove illnesses in three ways, which makes for seventeen merits in total; it can cure all illnesses’.<sup>138</sup>

Buddhist scriptures provide only loose rules about the use and consumption of the five medicines (the *triphalā* alongside black pepper and long pepper). Essentially, whether ill or not, a person may eat them as they please, as prescribed in Yijing’s translation of *Mūlasarvāstivāda-ekasātakarman*, *Genben shuo yiqie youbu baiyi jiemo* 根本說一切有部百一羯磨 [One hundred and one Rituals of Mūla-sarvāstivāda].<sup>139</sup> As with the three peppers (black pepper,

<sup>136</sup> *Jingguangming zuishengwang jing*, T no. 665, 16: 9.448b28–29.

<sup>137</sup> *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan*, T no. 2125, 54, 3.224b20–21; Wang, colla. & annot., *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan jiaozhu*, 160.

<sup>138</sup> English translation is based on the Chinese version of Yutuo-yuandan gongbu (Yuthog Yonten Gonpo), *Sibu yidian*, 3: 樹根能治骨病, 樹幹能治肌肉之病, 樹枝能治經絡之病, 樹皮能治皮膚病, 樹葉能治腑器之病, 花朵能治五官之病, 果實能治臟器之病, 頂端有五種訶子成熟, 具備六味、八功、三消, 良效十七種, 可治萬病.

<sup>139</sup> *Genben shuo yiqie youbu baiyi jiemo*, T no. 1453, 24: 8.491a13–16.

long pepper, and ginger), the *triphalā* were common in India and appear in a great many prescriptions from the country. *Juan* two of the *Dafoding guangju tuoluoni jing* 大佛頂廣聚陀羅尼經 [Skt. *Padmoṣṇīśadhārāṇī sūtra*] describes one such formula which prolongs life;<sup>140</sup> *Juan* one of the *Qianshou qianyan Guanshiyin pusa guangda yuanman wu'ai dabeixin tuoluoni jing* 千手千眼觀世音菩薩廣大圓滿無礙大悲心陀羅尼經 [The Thousand-Hand Thousand-Eye Avalokitesvara Perfect Unobstructed Great Compassion *Dhārāṇī Sūtra*] offers a collyrium;<sup>141</sup> and the *Caraka-saṃhitā* contains not only a prescription for extending life but also a soup, ghee, powder, oil, alcohol, syrup and much more, all made with the *triphalā*.<sup>142</sup> The *Suśruta-saṃhitā* also describes a ghee, and the *Aṣṭāṅgahrdaya-saṃhitā* includes a formula for a long life, a ghee, and a greater ghee (*Mahātriphalādi Ghṛta*).

As an additive, powdered *triphalā* can be used to brew alcohol. The *Arthaśāstra* explains, 'A sour gruel or decoction of the bark of *meṣaśringī* (a kind of poison) mixed with jaggery (*guda*) and with the powder of long pepper and black pepper or with the powder of *triphalā* forms *Maireya*. To all kinds of liquor mixed with jaggery, the powder of *triphalā* is always added'.<sup>143</sup> Generally, *maireya* is brewed from the root, stalk, leaves, flowers, and fruit of the plant, without any need for an active agent like a fermenting grain. The process calls for *triphalā* to be powdered rather than fresh. The *Caraka-saṃhitā* recipe also requires the fruits' powdered form:

Powder of Triphalā, yavānī, citraka, pippalī, lauhabhasma, viḍaṅga—each 160 gm., honey 320 gm., old jaggery 4 kg. All together should be kept in a vessel of ghee within the heap of barley grains for a month. It is indicated in the diseases mentioned above [that is, heart disease, anaemia, sever swelling...].

<sup>140</sup> *Dafoding guangju tuoluoni jing*, T no. 946, 19: 2.165a15–b15.

<sup>141</sup> *Qianshou qianyan Guanshiyin pusa guangda yuanman wu'ai dabeixin tuoluoni jing*, T no. 1060, 20: 1.110b1–9.

<sup>142</sup> Caraka, *Caraka- Saṃhitā*, vol. ii: 24–25.

<sup>143</sup> Unni, trans., *The Arthaśāstra of Kauṭalya*, Part 1-& 2 Adhikaraṇas, 323–324.

The ariṣṭas beneficial in piles and anaemia are beneficial for those suffering from swelling too.

(Thus triphalādyariṣṭa).<sup>144</sup>

Esoteric Buddhist literature presents *triphālā* decoction as having ritual use. Juan one of Amoghavajra’s translation of the *Garuḍapāṭalaparivarta* (Ch. *Wenshushili pusa Genben da jiaowang jing Jinchiniao wang pin* 文殊師利菩薩根本大教王經金翅鳥王品) states, ‘There is another method which uses *anxixiang* 安悉香 butter and *triphālā* decoction; chant while heating the blend; everyone reveres this medicine’ (又法, 以安悉香酥, 和三果漿, 燒念誦, 一切人皆敬愛).<sup>145</sup> Also, *triphālā* juice can be used as a dye for monk attire.

#### 4.3. A ‘sauvīraka’ made of the *triphālā*

Outside of the alcoholic fermentations already discussed, Buddhist scriptures also describe the method for using *triphālā* to create ferments and decoctions. Juan 29 of the *Mohe Sengqi lü* describes one *sauvīraka* (Ch. *supiluo* 蘇毘羅; fermented barley water) drink:

To make *sauvīraka*, take barley and remove dirt and the beard, keeping the grains intact. Wash seven times in a rinse pan and leave on a clean plate. ...add black myrobalan, beleric myrobalan, emblic myrobalan, black pepper and long pepper, each one a *yāvajīvika* medicine, then cover with a clean cloth and seal tightly using a wooden cover. ...this is the method for preparing *sauvīraka*. 作蘇毘羅漿法者, 取麴麥輕擣, 卻芒塵土, 勿令頭破. 以水七遍淨淘, 置淨器中. ....以呵梨勒、鞞醯勒、阿摩勒、胡椒、葦芡如是比盡壽藥等置中, 以淨氈覆之, 以繩雞足繫, 以木蓋上. ....是名蘇毘羅漿法.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Caraka, *Caraka-Saṃhitā*, vol. ii: 193.

<sup>145</sup> *Wenshushili pusa Genben da jiaowang jing Jinchiniao wang pin*, T no. 1276, 21: 328a4–5.

<sup>146</sup> *Mohe Sengqi lü*, T no. 1425, 22: 29.464b21–c2.

The preparation is for the *sauvīraka* that the Buddha prescribed to Śāriputra for treating wind sicknesses. It likely came from a Mahāyāna temple, since its principal ingredient is a kind of barley grain, mixed with the *triphalā*, black pepper and long pepper. Juan eleven of the *Shanjian lü* piposha describes another medicinal juice made from the *triphalā*:

What is *sauvīraka*? The answer: first take emblic myrobalan, black myrobalan, beleric myrobalan and seven kinds of grain, take fresh polished rice, Indian gooseberry, broadleaf plant seeds, all wood fruits, all bamboo shoots, fish, honey, granulated sugar, rock salt, and three kinds of garlic and mix them all together, placing them in a jar or small container, sealing the top with mud and leaving to sit for three to four years. Once ready, it will be honey coloured and usable as a medicine. ...no medicine can compare to this one, it is the best. 何謂為蘇毘羅漿? 答曰: 先取阿摩羅、訶羅勒、鞞醯勒、穀者: 七谷, 取粳米為初作, 餘甘、蕉子、一切木果、一切筍、魚肉、蜜、沙糖、石鹽、三蒜, 如此之物悉合和為一, 或內缸或內小器皿, 頭蓋泥, 置三四年中待其熟, 熟時色如蜜色, 以此治病. ....一切諸藥無過此藥, 最為第一.<sup>147</sup>

This particular *sauvīraka* (Ch. *supiluo* 蘇毘羅) formula calls for an abundant range of ingredients alongside the *triphalā*, many more than the *Mahāsaṅgha-vinaya* one. It likely dates to the fifth century or earlier when it was commonly used by Theravadan monks, and it was apparently highly effective, the most effective even of a large number of medicines at its intended purpose. Pronounced the same, both the Chinese names correspond to the Sanskrit *Sauvīraka*/*Sauvīra* (Pā: *sovīraka*). They both contain *triphalā* and were used to treat diseases of wind and cold (Ch. *leng* 冷), however how they were concocted was different because of regional customs.<sup>148</sup> In the *Cara-*

<sup>147</sup> *Shanjian lü piposha*, T no. 1462, 24: 11.754b26–c5.

<sup>148</sup> *Shisong lü*, T no. 1435, 23: 56.417a8–9: ‘The method for making *Sauvīra* was explained by the Buddha in order to cure a monk of a cold sickness’ (蘇毘羅漿法者, 佛聽飲蘇毘羅漿, 為冷病比丘故).



*ka-saṃhitā*, *sauvīraka* is grouped among the alcoholic fermentations, ‘The *sauvīraka* and *tuṣodaka* are appetisers, digestive, alleviate disorders of heart, anaemia, and helminthiasis, are beneficial in grahaṇī and piles and are mass-breaking’.<sup>149</sup> These medicines appear relatively frequently in Ayurvedic literature, however no text confirms for certain that the *triphalā* are needed in their production. Regardless, neither the *triphalā* decoctions or *sauvīraka* made with the *triphalā* were highly alcoholic fermentations or distillations. In fact, they were labelled as ‘non-alcoholic’ (非酒醴之謂也).<sup>150</sup> Since drinking them did not induce drunkenness, the brahmans and *śramaṇa* of India, Buddhist *śramaṇa* included, could enjoy it, just as they could grape and sugar cane pulps.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

The Silk Road functioned as the main channel for Sino-foreign cultural exchange throughout the Middle Ages. Grape wine and grape juice were undoubtedly the most common beverages to make the journey. Records show that Master Xuanzang stopped in Kucha (Ch. *quzhiguo* 屈支國), during his mission westward to acquire scriptures, where he was entertained by the king and partook of his grape juice. The Turkic (Göktürk) khan received him in his tent and ‘ordered for alcohol to be served and music to be played. He drank with his ministers and the emissary and shared a grape juice with the Master’ (命陳酒設樂，可汗共諸臣使人飲，別索蒲萄漿奉法師).<sup>151</sup> But hundreds of other kinds of sweet pulps and juices travelled the Silk Road. Khotanese Buddhist monastics would buy them from laypeople’s homes: ‘Took out one thousand wen to pay Kong for the previously bought jar of sweet juice’ (出錢壹仟文，付孔家，充還先沽甜漿一甕

<sup>149</sup> Caraka, *Caraka-Saṃhitā*, vol. 1: 210.

<sup>150</sup> *Da Tang Xiyu ji*, T no. 2087, 51: 2.878b3–6.

<sup>151</sup> *Da Ci'en si sanzang fashi zhuan*, T no. 2053, 50: 2.227b14–15/Sun & Xie, colla. & annot., *Da Ci'en si sanzang fashi zhuan*, 28.

價).<sup>152</sup> Fortunately, tracing the spread and trade of various cuisines is possible thanks to the large amount of relevant literature unearthed by archaeologists. The following records have provided important insights into the history of beverages along the Silk Road:

(1) Hinduka's sugar cane brew. Dunhuang manuscript P.3303 *Yindu ganzhe zhitang ji ganzhe yumiao fa* 印度甘蔗製糖及甘蔗育苗法 [Indian method for sugarcane cultivation and sugar production] (also referred to as *Xitian Wu Yindu chu sanban ganzhe zhitang fa* 西天五印度出三般甘蔗製糖法 [Hindukan method for sugar production with sugarcane]: 'Hinduka knows three ways of making sugar from sugarcane... the leftover juices can be sued to make alcohol' (西天五印度出三般甘蔗 .....其下來水, 造酒也).<sup>153</sup> Sugarcane liquor is a typical alcoholic drink in India, which is still drunk in the form of jaggery wine, jaggery juice or sugarcane juice. Ji Xianlin 季羨林 (1911–2009) was one of the first to note that 'India developed the technique for making sugarcane wine very early on'.<sup>154</sup>

(2) Liquors and juices in *The Bower Manuscript*. The first of the Sanskrit manuscript fragments excavated in Kucha County (copied in approximately the sixth century) lists numerous kinds of alcoholic and juice-like beverages which were for consumption by the sick. 'He may drink mārḍvika, or madhu, or madirā and madhu in equal parts, or arishṭa, or śīdhu, or jagala, or agaja, or maireya, or whatever other strong liquor there may be; but he should drink these with water, or

<sup>152</sup> P. 2662–2; Chen, *Sitanyin suohuo Tulufan wenshu yanjiu*, 492.

<sup>153</sup> Li Zhengyu 李正宇 has already instructed that this means: 'Once the cane sugar has settled as sediment in the jar, the liquid (shageling, meaning sugar) can be used for making alcohol. Wang Zhuo 王灼 records in his *Shuangtang pu* 霜糖譜 [Record of Sugar] that after juicing sugar cane, 'the liquid can be used for pressing it again, after which the liquid can serve as a very tart vinegar'. Using sugarcane water to make vinegar is another method. This is perhaps the sour liquor (Ch. *suanjiu* 酸酒) spoken of in the Tang Dynasty'. *Shageling* 熬割令 (śarkarā) is 'stone honey' (Ch. *shimi* 石蜜), or sugar. See Li, *Dunhuangxue daolun*, 326.

<sup>154</sup> Ji, 'Yizhang youguan yindu zhitangfa chuanru zhongguo de cunhuang canjuan', *Tangshi* vol. 2: 511.

one at a time, lest there be any mixture of liquors. If he is not used to drinking liquors, he may drink warm water or sour kāñchika; or he may drink tushdaka or suvīraja, or fresh whey’.<sup>155</sup> The *Bower Manuscript* also contains a number of other medicinal spirits, like two kinds of ‘spirituous, medicinal powder’ and a ‘spirituous medical formula with honey’.<sup>156</sup> One similar honey liquor, *madhvāsava*, comes from chapter eleven (Si.11.17) of the Khotanese *Siddhasāra* (translated from Tibetan in the ninth century—the original is Sanskrit by Ravigupta). Pelliot Sogdien 19, a fragment of Sogdian language medical literature discovered in Dunhuang, also talks of using such herbs as Dill (*Anethum graveolens* L.) mixed with honey to concoct alcoholic beverages.

(3) *Triphalā* in a medicinal juice. The Khotanese language *Siddhasāra* and the Sanskrit-Khotanese bilingual *Jīvaka-pustaka* both contain a number of *triphalā* prescriptions not found in *The Bower Manuscript*. A fragment of a Sanskrit-Sogdian bilingual medical manuscript, archived as Mz639, also contains a prescription for making a collyrium with the *triphalā* (Sog. *Ṭṛphāl*; Skt. *phalatraya*) to cure diseases of the eye.<sup>157</sup> *The Bower Manuscript* then provides two syrup prescriptions for relieving coughs that require *triphalā* (Bo.2.476+477; Bo.2.590–592) and one formula named ‘śārdūla powder’ (Ch. *shimo gensan* 石墨根散) which uses *triphalā* and ‘may be taken with clear spirits of rice, or with some other intoxicating liquor, or simply with warm water’ (Bo.2.73). *The Bower Manuscript* also describes another formula ‘A Tonic Oil for an Errhine’ particular worthy of note:

Take one aksha each of each of the three myrobalans, and of indigo, blue lotus, sulphide of antimony, roots of long pepper, and leaves of Sahachara (*Barleria cristata*), bark of the Arjuna tree (*Terminalia Arjuna*) and fruit of Piṇḍaraka (*Vangueria spinosa*); also of a decoction of the root of the jāman tree, and of earth taken from the roots

<sup>155</sup> Hoernle, ed. & trans., *The Bower Manuscript*, 13–14.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Maue & Sims-Williams, ‘Eine Sanskrit-Sogdische Bilingue in Brāhmī’.

of a jāman tree, Bhṛīṅgaka (*Eclipta alba*) and pulverised iron. Boil all this slowly over a gentle fire in oil of beleric myrobalan, and then, after having administered a purgative, apply it as an errhine. For one month, the patient should eat only khichaṛī with sesamum-oil, and when he is thirsty, he should drink water in which the three myrobalans have been steeped, and the same should be used in any other case in which water is required. (Bo.2.768b–773a)<sup>158</sup>

Not only does this prescription make medicinal use of the *triphalā*, but it also indicates that the patient should drink water in which the three fruits have been steeped. The sheer frequency with which the *triphalā* appear in juices in these various medicinal records suggests that they were commonly used all along the Silk Road.

(4) Sweet beverages from Kuchean monasteries. Albert von Le Coq discovered a number of Sanskrit manuscripts at Kizil (approximately written between the sixth and seventh centuries), including a notice to provide the Sangha, specifically monastics, with alms of food. The notice describes *madhurapradāna*, the *dāna* of giving sweet goods, as including the giving of syrups, honey, sugar cane, grapes, and crystal sugar as well as medicines made of the ‘three peppers’.<sup>159</sup>

(5) Asafoetida liquor (Ch. *awei jiu* 阿魏酒). One Dunhuang medical manuscript, P3596, contains a prescription for a liquor that is effective at curing cardiac pain. Asafoetida was a foreign medicine, so this liquor must also have been imported.

Other relevant documents include a number stored by the Dunhuang Research Academy. Archive P.2629 ‘Guiyi jun yanei jiu poli’ 歸義軍衙內酒破曆 [Record of a Guiyi Army Master’s Alcohol], specifically, records, ‘On twenty first day paid black myrobalan Hu liquor’ (廿一日支納訶梨勒胡酒壹甕), which suggests that there used to be a Hu liquor drunk in Dunhuang—‘Black myrobalan Hu liquor’ (Ch. ‘*belile bujiu*’ 訶梨勒胡酒). Careful analysis of this

<sup>158</sup> Hoernle, ed. & trans., *The Bower Manuscript*, Vol.i, p.147.

<sup>159</sup> Ji, ‘Xiyu fojiaoshi’, 249–250. Also, Ji, ‘Duiyu xinjiang shengchan ganzhe he shatang de yidian buchong’.

passage's structure, however, reveals that it should refer to paying a jar of liquor to the *hu* who provided black myrobalan, as opposed to paying that *hu* person a jar of black myrobalan liquor. Shi Pingting 施萍婷 has pointed out that the 'alcohol record reads 'the hu person that paid in black myrobalan', which explains that the taxpayer was a hu individual and was perhaps a Persian merchant'.<sup>160</sup> Although it is not yet possible to confirm the existence of a foreign black myrobalan liquor in Dunhuang, it is not impossible that, since the Persian merchant provided one of the ingredients for a three myrobalan decoction, the beverage itself (or its production method) were transmitted along the Silk Road.

Black, beleric and emblic myrobalan were the three preferred medicinal fruits of India during the Middle Ages. Collectively named 'the three fruits', they could be decocted as medicines or simply used as juices. Prescriptions that combined the three were common not only in India itself but appeared in *hu* formulas (in Tocharian, Khotanese, Sogdian, Old Uyghur, and other languages) and in ancient Tibetan medical literature (such as the *sMan-dpavad ZLa-ba'I rGyal-po* and the *rGyud-bzhi*), while Central Plains medical literature rarely contained records of three ingredient compositions. In India, black myrobalan was revered as one of a number of miraculously effective medicines of mythical status. The *Older Sūtra of Parables* (Skt. *Samyukta avadāna sūtra*; Ch. *Za piyu jing* 雜譬喻經), a collection of parables or *avadānas* (Ch. *piyu* 譬喻) by the monk Daolüe 道略 (of Later Qin), contains the teaching that 'all plants are medicine' (草木皆可為藥喻), a parable in which black myrobalan is identified as 'the healer of all illnesses' (衆病皆能治). Those who consume it 'are cured of any sickness' (病皆當差).<sup>161</sup> Part two of *The Bower Manuscript*, 'Navanītaka' (Ch. *jingsui ji* 精髓集 [cream]), contains a depiction of Brahmā, one of the three central deities to Brahmanism, explaining the origin of black myrobalan to the twin Vedic gods of medicine, the Aśvinau: 'There fell a drop on the earth, when Śakra (i.e., Indra) drank of the ambrosia; thence that most excellent of

<sup>160</sup> Shi, 'Bensuo cang jiuzhang yanjiu', 25.

<sup>161</sup> *Za piyu jing*, T no. 207, 4: 522c3; 529c11.

medicinal plants, the chebulic myrobalan, took its origin'.<sup>162</sup> There are seven kinds of black myrobalan, none of which bring bad fortune; all of them are beneficial to the consumer's health. It is no surprise, then, that the eminent Tang Dynasty monk Yijing proclaimed that the plant 'deserves to be the king among medicines'. Clearly, black myrobalan's was not solely thanks to the Buddhist scriptures that lauded it, the Brahmins were actors in its spread as well.

With the introduction of black Myrobalan into China also came a significant downgrade in status for the plant. In Chinese medicinal pharmacopeia, it appeared beneath the label 'low grade trees' (Ch. *mubu xiapin* 木部下品). The *Ishinpō* 醫心方 [Formulas from the Heart of Medicine], compiled by Japanese physician Yasuyori Tanba 丹波康賴 (912–995), cites the *Luyan fang* 錄驗方 [Record of experimental formulas] in *juan* three: 'Indra used pills of black myrobalan six times... it is the supreme godly medicine' (帝釋六時服呵梨勒丸方.....是名最上仙藥).<sup>163</sup> Here, myrobalan has retained some degree of its former wondrousness, however, on the whole, black myrobalan was described as a commonplace medicine in the Tang and Song period medical formularies, wherein no longer did it have 'all six flavours' or 'was it able to cure all illnesses'; rather it was a medicine for 'regulating the *qi* and curing dysentery' (理氣治痢). Several kinds of prescriptions for compounds involving black myrobalan can be found in the Dunhuang medical manuscripts, including certain medicinal soups.<sup>164</sup> P.2662–2, 'Betel nut soup' (Ch. *binglang tang fang* 檳榔湯方) is one such example: 'Three fruits of black myrobalan, two betel nuts, powdered, to be consumed on an empty stomach' (檳榔湯方: 訶梨勒三顆、檳榔二枚、末、空腹服之). Myrobalan beverages also appeared in Tang and Song dispensatories. Black myrobalan, specifically, appeared both with medicines and with soups, because China practitioners of medicine experimented and found their own uses for the plant as their purposes required. Of course, each system of medical science had its own focus and notions of what was

<sup>162</sup> A Hoernle, ed. and trans., *The Bower Manuscript*, vol. ii, p.164.

<sup>163</sup> Gao, colla. & annot., *Yixin fang*, 88.

<sup>164</sup> Li, 'Qiantan Dunhuang yixue juanzi zhong de helile zufang', 29–31.

important, which led practitioners of different systems to view and use certain medicines in very distinct ways from each other. Tracing the evolution of black myrobalan's uses in different cultures reveals that the same medicine has taken numerous different applications, properties and levels of efficacy through time, with different peoples having very different ideas about it depending on their background and context.

India's black myrobalan found its way westward, reaching Persia and the Arab territories where it was paired with beleric myrobalan and emblic myrobalan, making the 'three myrobalans' of common medicinal use. The three were predominantly used in Indian, Persian, and Arab medicine, but rarely in Greek or Roman medical science. Records in Kautilya's political treatise the *Arthaśāstra*<sup>165</sup> suggest that use in India of powdered triphalā for brewing alcohol predates its use Persia, or at least far predates the introduction of the practice into Tang Dynasty China from Persia. Naturally, there cannot have been a single method of distilling alcoholic fermentations from the *triphālā*, especially since the course of the practice's transmission varied by era: (1) India—Persia—China; (2) India—Western Regions—China; (3) India—Persia—Arab nations—China. It is interesting to note that the *triphālā* were introduced into Persia at two separate times, and into China at three, and how they were used and adapted each time differed greatly since the respective localities' medical and medicinal culture had changed between instances. In earlier antiquity, the cultural trajectories of India and Persia were closely intertwined. The countries' languages (Avestan and Sanskrit) and their classical texts (the *Avesta* and *Vedas*) echo each other in many regards, and Persian medical science (and slightly later, Arab medical science) readily accepted and absorbed Indian formulas and concepts. By the middle of the eighth century, Tazi elders were well aware of black myrobalan's potency, 'for those who keep it at hand, all disease will disperse' (此物人帶, 一切病消).<sup>166</sup> Meanwhile, medicine in China had matured

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<sup>165</sup> Estimated to have been completed in the fourth century BCE, with extant versions compiled no earlier than the third century CE.

<sup>166</sup> *Taiping guangji* 414.3370.



by the time of the Han, Wei, and Six dynasties, thanks to the development of its principles of yin and *yang* and the five elements, and naturally there was some reluctance to adopt certain Indian medical concepts and beliefs based in Brahmanism. For example, rather than the Indian myths of the miraculous healing powers of myrobalan making it to China, instead it was the story of General Gao Xianzhi who developed diarrhoea from carrying the black myrobalan with him that became popular. Methods and ideas associated with the three myrobalans, therefore, were much more easily integrated into Persian medicinal culture than Chinese medicinal culture. Even the Tang imperial court's three myrobalan juice was brewed using techniques heavily influenced by Persian methods. In fact, Persia possessed the dual identity of recipient and promoter of Indian culture. After embracing India's practice of decocting *triphalā*, Persia transmitted the newly localised version of the custom to China, and from that point in the Tang until the Yuan Dynasty, the distribution and development of drinks made with the three myrobalan was strongly influenced by India's Brahmanism and Buddhism and Persia's culture pre- and post-Islamisation. These various belief systems guided how the beverages entered into people's diets. However, the drink became much less commonplace in China than it had been in Persia, to the extent that it eventually fell out of use, enjoying only a short-lived renown in the country due both to limited access to the ingredients and cultural differences. Importantly, understanding how such disparities and adaptations manifested in and effected cultural dissemination between ancient civilisations will have a great bearing on our ability to understand how to promote Chinese culture abroad in these modern times.

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### Abbreviations

- SKQS*     *Yingyin Wenyuange Siku Quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書.  
See Secondary Sources, Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan  
youxian gufen gongsi, comp.

*T Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. See Secondary Sources, Takakusu & Watanabe et al., eds.

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