



Two Straits Chinese Betel-nut or sireh containers, Solid Silver, 19th century
£1,200.00

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These two Straits Chinese silver Betel-nut bowls were used for chewing betel 'quid' or 'chew'. Betel-nut or sireh consisted of shaved areca nut with lime paste wrapped in green betel leaf. For flavour various spices, herbs and even tobacco was included. Chewing betel quid is most famous for causing black teeth and red stained lips. An extremely popular practice across Asia and Oceania, chewing betel quid was common from antiquity to 1945, with it being banned in Thailand due to being viewed by the government as 'uncivilised'. The practice has practically become non-existent.¹

Among the various immigrant communities of Straits Chinese, Peranakan Chinese immigrants in Malaya and Singapore were alone in adopting the Hindu-Malay custom of chewing betel-nut leaves. Wealthy Straits Chinese merchants and traders commissioned Straits silversmiths to produce these intricate silver utensils for the practice. Small circular boxes were typically designed for travel.²

These two silver betel-nut containers are intricately engraved with floral patterns. The top of the lids include gold gilded silver, which is decorated by designs of swirling foliage and with a floral star shape around a circular centre. Decorated with rounded patterns which perfectly align with its globular form, these beautiful betel-nut containers are fine examples of an ancient practice which is now rarely partaken in.

Measurements:

Width: 6 cm

Height: 5cm

Weight: 116 grams

Origin

Chinese

Antique ref: 10102