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# Sōtō Asian Art

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*Natural Nha Trang Vietnamese Black Oil Kynam Agarwood Beads*

天然野生 - 越南芽莊黑油奇楠沉香

## Introduction

### 介紹

Soto Asian Art is specialises in Chinese, Indian, Himalayan-Tibetan and Southeast Asian art from the 8th to 16th centuries.

A specialist Asian art dealer with a strong emphasis in gilded bronze, copper, and ancient stone sculptures. Our collection consists of, Yixing teaware, Vietnamese incense beads, Indian cairn sandalwood, ceramics, cloisonne ware.

Build upon over 30 years of experience in Asian art. Our collection is tailored for investors, collectors, institutions, scholars in private sales, private client management, and dedicated personalise services in Asian Art.

Soto Asian Art only handles the finest pieces for our collection.

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Team

團隊

**Li H.Kei**

F o u n d e r , 創 辦 人

*Mr Li H.Kei is an impassioned collector. With over 30 years devotion in Asian art, his know-how and practical expertise go beyond theoretical understanding.*

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**Jason Li, 李浩川**

D i r e c t o r , 主 任

*Mr Jason Li, manages overall operations, business and relationship development within Soto Asian Art. Jason graduated with dual Master Degrees (MSc) from Aston University, and Imperial College London, U.K.*

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Natural Nha Trang Vietnamese Black Oil Kynam Agarwood Beads

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Total Beads Weight : 130.11gram (g), / Total Length : 131.1cm

Bead Diameter : 14.0mm/ Number of Beads : 108

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Natural Nha Trang Vietnamese Black Oil Kynam Agarwood Beads (1)

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*Sinkage Verification: Resin Heavy*

*Natural Nha Trang Vietnamese Black Oil Kynam Agarwood*

- *Slice weight: 0.93g (gram)*
- *Bead, 14mm weight: 1.28g (gram)*

## 天然野生 - 越南芽莊黑油奇楠沉香

Throughout history in China, the four renowned aromatic fragrant (大名香) have been written extensively by scholars and collectors. Agarwood, Indian Sandalwood, Ambergris, and Musk, each has its own merits and unique properties. The distinctive characteristic of agarwood (沉香) is the world's most expensive wood and highly sought-after among collectors owing to its exceptional rarity, its cultural values and religious significance; in addition, it is considered by scholars as the leader among the four fragrant.

Trees of genus *Aquilaria* (incense tree produce agarwood) produce a dark aromatic resin at wounds, a reaction against natural weathers in storms, lightning strikes, heavy rain, and gusty wind or wounds produced from wildlife; attacks from ant hives, insects, and forest animals. The accumulation of dark aromatic resin through repetition over hundreds of years at wounds will produce the resinous wood enter into the under the trade name "agarwood".

## Sōtō Asian

## Art

The categories of agarwood (沉香) are classified as follows: 沉水香, 棧香, and 黃熟香. Agarwood (沉水香) as the name suggests in Chinese as 'Water Sinking Agarwood', it sinks in water. Agarwood (棧香), when immersed in water, will submerge halfway vertically (in a state of neither sink nor float). Agarwood (黃熟香) will float on water.

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Natural Kynam (Kyara) Agarwood (天然野生奇楠沉香)

The 4 different processes in the formation of agarwood are as follows; (1.) Tree Lifecycle (also known as fallen or snags agarwood) (熟結), (2.) Artificial Cultivation (生結), (3.) Natural Weather Occurrence (脫落), and (4.) Wildlife Occurrence (蟲漏). The processes in (2.) Artificial Cultivation (生結), (3.) Natural Weather Occurrence (脫落), and (4.) Wildlife Occurrence (蟲漏) requires external strains, either environmental or insect and fungal infection (3.) (4.) or artificial man-made cultivation (2.) for the formation of the fragrant resin.

The process of build-up and infusion of dark aromatic resin in the fragrant wood through a period of several hundred or even a thousand years, with the tree enters the final twilight stage of its lifecycle without the assistance of external strains; the natural ecological occurrence of fallen deceased incense tree (1.) Tree Lifecycle (also known as fallen or snags agarwood) (熟結), is the only process that often produces the highest quality of agarwood. The fallen deceased incense tree will undergo a further several hundred years of natural decomposition in the surrounding soil before the resinous wood transforms into high-quality natural agarwood (優質天然野生沉香).

Kynam (Kyara) (天然野生奇楠沉香) is the rarest type of agarwood and the most expensive aromatic substance on earth, rarer than diamond, titanium, and platinum; originates in the jungles of Vietnam and China. Only one form of fungal bacteria is present during normal decomposition and formation of natural agarwood (優質天然野生沉香). But under rare circumstances, two forms of fungal bacteria are present during the decomposition phase. The presence of two forms of fungal bacteria will transform natural agarwood (天然野生沉香) into the most prized Kynam (Kyara) (天然野生奇楠沉香). Rich in oil with a deep but pure aroma fragrant, Kynam can only be found in the roots, and centre section of the tree stump of a naturally deceased incense tree [(1.) Tree Lifecycle formation].

*The 4 different processes in the formation of agarwood:*

- *Tree lifecycle (熟結): the incense tree has undergone hundreds of years of countless wounds. The build-up of dark aromatic resin, produce at wounds as a reaction against fungal infection result in blockages in the xylem vascular system, the tree enters the final twilight stage of its lifecycle. The natural ecological occurrence of fallen deceased incense tree often produces the highest quality of agarwood.*
- *Artificial cultivation (生結): artificially scratch the incense tree with a sharp blade, knife or an axe, and pave the tree with fungi. The artificial scratches wounds will produce artificial induce dark aromatic resin.*
- *Natural weather occurrence (脫落): wounds produce from presences of a forest fire, storms, lightning strikes, heavy rain, and gusty wind, will produce the natural dark aromatic resin.*
- *Wildlife occurrence (蟲漏): wounds produce from ant hives, bees, insects, and forest animals, will produce the natural dark aromatic resin.*

*Genuine high-grade agarwood composes of a smooth exterior glossy surface in dark red-brown colour, mixed with black and yellow interlaced texture. By employing a microtome knife for cross-section examination, the composition of agarwood in cross-section has the appearance of greyish brown colour with a dense cluster of yellow dot texture, commonly known as sesame spots (芝麻點). Ordinary (low – mid grade) agarwood does not emit fragrance at room temperature but releases fragrance when burn or roast in an incense furnace. High-grade agarwood will emit a light fragrance intermittently when handling (skin temperature of person's hands) in room temperature; with frequent handling, over time the fragrance will be more mellow and lustrous. When burn or roast, it releases a strong sophisticated fragrance with the formation of agarwood oil in the process.*

*Agarwood grade is determined by the level of oil content, colouration, weight and surface texture. Higher the oil content, darker the colouration, greater resin heavy (weight), sleeker the surface texture, the higher the grade of the agarwood. Conversely, if the agarwood composes of high oil content, dark colouration, sleek surface texture, but lacks resin heavy (weight), it will be deemed as low grade.*

*Aquilaria (agarwood), found in Southeast Asia regions in Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, Laos; however the highest quality of agarwood derived from Hainan Island in South China and Vietnam.*

*Highly revered in seminal texts of Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam, agarwood is considered as the attainment of the three aims of human life (三界靈氣之物), namely “religious merit, worldly prosperity and sensual enjoyment”. Throughout ancient times, Buddhists use agarwood for transmutation of ignorance during Buddhist chants, incantations, and meditation practices while Tibetan monks use it to clam the mind and spirit.*

## 天然野生 - 越南芽莊黑油奇楠沉香

*In the ancient text written by Bodhidharma (達摩祖師), the founder of Zen Buddhism in China, “Treatise on the awakening of the nature of mind” (悟性論), has metaphorically described the nature of agarwood:*

佛在心中 · 如香在樹中 · 煩惱若盡 · 佛從心出 · 腐朽若盡 · 香從樹出。

*A symbol of noble status in ancient China, agarwood serve as an exclusive favourite of emperors, Imperial household, high officials while also being one of the psychological dependencies of the literati class, such as scholars and bureaucrats, valuing as precious as diamonds and germs. It is used during formal diplomatic occasions, often served as major gifts for national relations. During Song dynasty, agarwood recognises as the King of Perfumes, it present sign of wealth, and social status, with an old saying, goes by - “A slice of Vietnamese agarwood worth more than ten thousand blocks of gold” (一片越南沉香值萬金).*

*Throughout periods in Tang, Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties, over-harvesting of Hainan agarwood, and burning in excessive quantities are prevelant. The lack of civil governance in harvest management, illegal agarwood trespassers and plantations security, has resulted in full depletion of Hainan agarwood resources. By Kangxi period of Qing dynasty, a local government official from Yazhou District in Hainan, Zhang Yushi (張擢士) submitted a proposal for effective agarwood harvest management, however, the proposal rendered inadequate, in A.D. 1622 – 1722, the rare Chinese Hainan agarwood has officially extinct due overharvested.*

*Like South China Hainan agarwood, Vietnam agarwood co-exists as the finest in the world. Grown in South-Central Hue region (中南部順化), Hui'an County (惠安), and Nha Trang (芽莊) Vietnam; South-Central Hue region agarwood known for its flowery honey fragrance (蜜香 · 花香), Hui'an County agarwood consist mixture of medicinal fragrance (藥香), while Nha Trang agarwood comprise a blend of fruit, flowery and medicinal fragrance (果香 · 花香 · 藥香).*

*Vietnamese Aquilaria crassna (蜜香樹) is the primary source of premium agarwood in Vietnam. According to Northern Song dynasty (A.D 960 – 1127) medicine practitioner, Tang Shenwei (唐慎微) literature “証類本草”, all agarwood specimen from Yazhou District China (中國崖州), Guangdong Province (廣東), Taiwan (台灣), and Asia Pacific countries derived from a general Aquilaria sinensis (白木香樹). While the general Aquilaria sinensis (白木香樹), agarwood exhibit durable properties; Vietnamese Aquilaria crassna (蜜香樹) agarwood display a soft dense properties, allowing cambium layer of the tree secrete light sweet flowery fragrance, which also permits Vietnamese harvesters establish the accurate tree category through its fragrance.*



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## 天然野生 - 越南芽莊黑油奇楠沉香

*The light sweet flowery fragrance and soft dense properties of Vietnamese Aquilaria crassna (蜜香樹) often preyed upon by ants and bees in the forest; which lead higher frequency of wounds to occur inside the agarwood tree, with the formation of resin at wounds by bacteria and fungi. Both Vietnamese Aquilaria crassna (沉香) (agarwood) and Vietnamese Aquilaria agallocha Roxb (奇楠), layman's terms Kynam (premium grade agarwood) (Sanskrit: Targara) considered as the finest in the world, moreover it serves as the foundation in Vietnam agarwood industry. Regularly encompass in ancient literature from Chinese and Vietnamese scholars, Vietnam agarwood has obtained a legendary status among collectors through its associations in Buddhism and Asian arts.*

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*Vietnam agarwood is divided into two categories: Ripe Incense (熟香) and Raw Incense (生香).*

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*Ripe Incense (熟香) is sub-divided into three top categories: Yellow Earth Agarwood (黃土沉), Red Earth Agarwood (紅土沉), Black Earth Agarwood (黑土沉)*

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*Yellow Earth Agarwood (黃土沉) also known as Vietnam Yellow Oil (越南黃油) is high in oil content, high in density, and consists of sweet fruit fragrance. Red Earth Agarwood (紅土沉) derived from Red Clay Forest District in Vietnam; reddish-brown in colour, consist of a strong blend of sweet, chilly, and almond fragrance. Red Earth Agarwood (紅土沉) is considered to be rare, and most precious among the three sub-categories of Ripe Incense (熟香) agarwood. Black Earth Agarwood (黑土沉) presents in two types, original Black Earth Agarwood and Kynam Black Oil Agarwood (黑油奇楠). Kynam Black Oil Agarwood (黑油奇楠) is the premium version of Black Earth Agarwood, also known as Vietnam Sea Agarwood (南海沉). Grown in unique Black Earth soil (黑土) and in close proximity from water; consist of strong sea salt fragrance, when burn, Kynam Black Oil Agarwood emit a mellow sea salt aroma.*

*Ancient Chinese literature often describes Vietnam agarwood (越南沉香) as Champa agarwood (占城沉香) and portrays the modern day Vietnam south-central Hue region (中南部順化), Hui'an County (惠安), and Nha Trang (芽莊) as a mountain of gold. During Ming Yongle, Xuande era (明朝永樂·宣德年間, A.D. 1403 - 1435), translator Ma Huan (馬歡) accompanied Admiral and court eunuch Zheng He (鄭和) and his fleet in an exploration voyage to Vietnam. In Ma Huan (馬歡) book, Yingya Shenglan (瀛涯勝覽), he described Vietnam agarwood and Kynam agarwood as follows:*

*“Traded with silver, the deep dark colour agarwood can only derive from mountains of Vietnam, a treasure like no other, the quality far exceeds of any country.”*

## 天然野生 - 越南芽莊黑油奇楠沉香

High-grade Kynam agarwood (上品奇楠沉香)

There are five main types of Kynam agarwood: Black Oil Kynam agarwood (黑油奇楠), Purple Oil Kynam agarwood (紫油奇楠), Green Oil Kynam agarwood (綠油奇楠), Gold Silk Kynam agarwood (金絲奇楠), and White Oil Kynam agarwood (白油奇楠).

Ordinary (low - mid grade) agarwood does not emit fragrance at room temperature but releases fragrance when burn or roast in an incense furnace. Kynam agarwood (奇楠沉香) will emit a light fragrance intermittently when handling in room temperature; with frequent handling, over time the fragrance will be more mellow and lustrous. Kynam (奇楠沉香) is the only category of agarwood that exceeds qualities of Water Sinking agarwood (沉水香).

Kynam is found in the roots, tree stump, and above the tree stump. When harvesting Kynam, it is often rich in oil content, and soft adhesive in nature. The harvest soft adhesive Kynam can be mould into incense beads by hand without the assistance of mechanical tools. Through a taste test, it consists a blend of mid bitter and spicy flavours. When drawing Kynam near the nasal cavity and breathing (inhale) deeply, the strong fresh fragrance often goes deep into the lungs.

Kynam commonly found in the heartwood section (芯材部位) of a deceased agarwood tree stump. The deceased tree has undergone hundreds of years of countless wounds attack from seasonal weathers and forest wildlife. The build-up of dark aromatic resin, produce at wounds as a reaction against fungal infection result in blockages in the xylem vascular system, the tree enters the final twilight stage of its lifecycle. The natural ecological occurrence of the fallen deceased tree often produces the highest quality of Kynam agarwood. The fungal bacteria will remain active in harvest high-grade Kynam and will continue to produce fragrance and oil for many centuries. As the harvest Kynam continue to mature over time, it will gradually grow darker; sleeker in surface texture, and the fragrance becomes more mellow and lustrous.

Kynam agarwood "sinkage" is determined by the level of oil content; high oil content Tagara will sink in water, moderate oil content Kynam will submerge halfway vertically (in a state of neither sink nor float), and low oil content Kynam will float on water. The solidity state of Kynam is affected by the storage environment; when exposing to the cool and air-conditioned environment, Kynam will likely become hard, dry, and lessen in fragrance.

Genuine natural uncultivated high-grade Kynam agarwood is hard and sleek. By employing a microtome knife for cross-section examination, the composition of Kynam consists of a dark aromatic resin with yellow interlace markings of different shapes, such as a circle, spots, and flaky. The uniqueness of natural uncultivated high-grade Kynam made forgeries and counterfeits agarwood impossible to replicate.

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The natural Vietnamese Black Oil Kynam agarwood beads necklace sew in the sacred number of 108 beads, represent the symbolic "Mala" in Tibetan Buddhism. The agarwood beads originate from Vietnamese Aquilaria crassna (蜜香樹) in Nha Trang (芽莊), Vietnam. The hard dark resinous wood beads are rich in oil, sleek in surface, mellow and lustrous in fragrance. The Buddhist prayer Black Oil Kynam necklace represents the highest grade in Black Oil Kynam agarwood, it is both a rare and a sacred object in the spiritual journey to enlightenment, clarity and grounding.

Contact

聯絡

## Soto Asian Art, 禪藏

Private viewings are conducted by appointment.

We are only able to accommodate viewings of artworks in a secured off-site facility in Central and Causeway Bay, Hong Kong.

Those wishing to make an appointment may send an email to **info@sotoasianart.com**, alternatively, an appointment can be made by phone **(+852) 93219101** or by WeChat (微信) **sotoasianart**.

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