

Buddhist Altars as Assets

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Research on butsudān (Buddhist altars) has focused primarily on their origins. On the other hand, there has been little interest in the aspect of butsudān as a commodity with value that is bought and sold. In this paper, we have examined the spread and distribution of butsudān (Buddhist altars), focusing on the aspect of “commodity” and “asset” through the written history of butsudān. In the 17th century, butsudān altars became popular, and later they were also distributed as secondhand goods. In the 19th century, butsudān altars were used as mortgages for bank loans or as collateral for fundraising because of their asset nature. However, the above facts suggest that (1) butsudān altars were moved out of the hands of their original owners through trade-in, resale, and pawn sales, (2) a market for used butsudān altars had developed, and (3) owning a large butsudān was connected to holding collateral that could be redeemed for cash. (3) The possession of a large Buddhist altar was associated with the trust that the owner was holding collateral that could be converted into cash.

Key words: Butsudān, second hand market, assets