



Fig. 2: The skill of preparing betel is transferred from generation to generation. The Mường (courtesy of Dr. Trần Tiến, Hòa Bình, 1999).

If you who are a *quan lang* bring in betel leaves, then, please, come in.

If you don't have betel leaves with you, please, come back tomorrow ...

Returning to the groom's family the procession (this time with the bride and some of her family members) must stop at the porch of the groom's house. The groom's relatives (mostly the groom's aunts and/or the groom's sisters) take in a hurry many betel boxes with plentiful well-prepared quids, rush to the guests, and offer them betel quids. Everyone is chewing betel and enters the reception chamber. The person who does not chew betel is not permitted to enter.

The groom's mother prepares the nuptial bed with a brand-new, attractive reed mat; she puts a pair of areca nuts at each corner of the mat and another pair of nuts at the mat's middle point. The newly married couple gather all these areca nuts, put them on a dish, and then put the dish on the ancestors' altar; they must chew all these nuts during their first night living together.

Three days after the wedding feast, the groom's family organizes a great feast aiming at recognizing the bride as a family member. After this feast, betel, areca, and other presents are distributed once again to acquaintances and family members; that is the last step of the wedding ceremony.

Nowadays the wedding ceremony is simplified, but the role of areca and betel remains the same as in the past.

The "Betel Roll Preparation" is a real art, with all respectful meanings of this word. A. Landes (1885b: 363) has already recognized that "It is a great art and it is not everyone who can prepare a betel roll that meets all the requirements [of a roll]. In Annam [then North and Central Vietnam] the roll is in regular form and smaller than that in our provinces [South Vietnam]. There people do not offer a whole plate full of betel leaves and areca but some rolls. Through the elegance [of these rolls] the skillfulness of great family ladies is discovered." In fact, ladies from high-ranking families could not cook rice and prepare dishes, but they should master the art of betel preparing. This skill is more important to ladies living in the Royal Palace. Before World War II and in cities like Hanoi, Nam Định, Huế the first thing a lady did in the early morning was shopping for completing the betel box (personal observation).

Some people can prepare the betel roll in varied forms, for example, *trầu cánh phượng* (in phoenix wing form), "in flying dragon form," "in sword form," etc. Every locality has its own style in *trầu cánh phượng* preparation. It is not a roll but a quid; the areca quarter forms the phoenix body, the betel leaf is cut to the bird's wings and the *vỏ* bark – the head. But their marvelous skill will be fully demonstrated when they prepare ordinary rolls: in regular cylinder form, with nice-to-see size, not too tight, not too loose, the roll is firm but not hard, attractive but not gaudy, and, more important, hundred rolls resemble one another. Otherwise, all other forms'