

## Popular Culture or Drug : Controversial Qat in Yemen

著者 (英)	Reiko Otsubo
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## Popular Culture or Drug: Controversial *Qat* in Yemen

**Reiko Otsubo**

Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa  
Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

**Summary:** Qat, whose fresh leaves produce a stimulant effect, is largely cultivated and consumed in Yemen and the East African countries. In Yemen, where there is little entertainment, chewing qat in the afternoon is very common among Yemeni people.

Nevertheless, many foreign economists criticize the use of qat as a product that has a negative influence on the Yemeni economy. European countries are starting to treat it as a drug. In addition, even inside Yemen, there are now movements opposed to its use.

However, all the movements against qat have developed ignoring the opinions of qat users themselves and the current status of its use. In this presentation, I report on the type of criticism against al-qat from within as well as outside Yemen. Subsequently, I propose that qat users have a deep knowledge of its use and that the practice of chewing qat is fundamental to local Yemeni society.

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**Keywords:** Yemen, qat, coffee, stimulant, drug

## 1. Introduction

Qat is cultivated and consumed in certain areas of Yemen and East Africa. Its fresh shoots contain tannin, vitamins, and cathinone which has stimulating effects like amphetamine<sup>1)</sup>. In Yemen, where there is little entertainment, chewing the fresh shoots in the afternoon is very common among Yemeni people.

The production and the consumption of qat in Yemen increased during the 1970s. The rural areas were short of male labors because they went to Saudi Arabia, where the economy was flourishing due to oil-price rise and the boom in the construction industry, and qat was substituted for cereals and coffee, for the former was much easier to produce than the latter two<sup>2)</sup>. The financial prosperity caused by remittance enabled the rural people to construct feeder tracks from their remote villages to the main roads by bulldozers they bought. Mass out-migration and the domestic labor shortage caused inflation in Yemeni wages in the cities, where people could afford qat transported from the rural areas by feeder tracks and highways. There was a substantial shift towards a predominantly cash economy in both the cities and the rural areas. All these brought the increasing production and consumption of qat (Weir 1985a: 20–22).

“Chew qat” is an English expression, and *khazzan al-qāt*, “store qat”, is used in Yemen. When you chew qat, you will swallow the juice while storing leaves in either side of your cheeks. Sometimes the cheek becomes big enough to make the skin color paler. This “exotic” style made many anthropologists pay attention to qat during the 1970s. Most of them approve of qat, while there are many criticisms of qat from various points of view.

The aim of this paper is to investigate criticism of qat both by non-Yemenis such as anthropologists, economists and pharmacologists, and Yemenis who love/loved or don't/ didn't love qat. There has been a controversy over qat by non-Yemeni experts, and the people who cultivate, sell and buy qat are excluded from the debate. We should understand the qat phenomenon from the perspectives of farmers, marketers, or consumers. In the section 2 we will see criticisms from outside of Yemen. In the section 3 we will see criticisms from inside of Yemen; scholars, governments, and people. We will notice that criticisms from outside are literally outside Yemen; it does not matter how people consume or they think of qat. We will find that Yemenis, whether they love qat or not, have knowledge enough to tell advantages and disadvantages of qat, and there will appear pro-qat movements, when qat will be a popular culture in Yemen.

## 2. Criticisms from Outside

### 2.1 Criticism by Anthropologists

There are many qat studies which are based on research done in the 1970s, when anthropological research started there<sup>3</sup>). Anthropologists argued qat with various social and economic changes which were brought about by “opening the country”. Kennedy (1987)<sup>4</sup>) did research in the cities such as *Ṣan‘ā’*, *al-Ḥudayda*, and *Ta‘izz*, and the rural areas, and analyzed qat in the perspectives of history, agricultural economy, and botany; therefore, he paid less attention to local uniqueness. Gerholm (1977) and Weir (1985a)<sup>5</sup>) did research in the rural areas, *Manāha* to the west of *Ṣan‘ā’* and *Rāziḥ* in northern part of Yemen respectively, and they revealed the local uniqueness. Makhlouf (1979), not treating qat as a main theme of her ethnography, described female qat gatherings in *Ṣan‘ā’*<sup>6</sup>).

Most anthropologists who did research on qat in the 1970s approve of qat, or strictly speaking, qat gatherings. The exchange of information and constructing, reconstructing and maintaining of social relations in the gatherings are positively evaluated. There people discussed a wide range of topics including politics, economics, and theology, and politicians reached a political agreement in the qat gathering. A woman seeking a girl for her son’s bride could find her or ask other women in the gathering<sup>7</sup>). Qat gatherings were an important means of welcoming strangers and home members into a community who had been away for long periods of time, for example, on pilgrimages, trading expeditions, working in Saudi Arabia or in government posts elsewhere in Yemen. A qat gathering marked the assimilation of an individual into a new tribe. It could play a part in the restoration of normal relations between tribes after they had been suspended by political or legal disputes (Makhlouf 1979: 27; Swanson 1979: 40; Weir 1985a: 125–128; Kennedy 1987: 236).

### 2.2 Effects on Mind and Body

On the other hand, some anthropologists (Swanson 1979; Zabarah 1982; Kennedy 1987) and the other experts, especially economists and pharmacologists, regard qat as a burden on mind and boy, families, and Yemeni economy. We will see and investigate the “bad” effects in detail.

There is some evidence that qat use may be associated with acute myocardial infarction, bronchitis, tachypnea, dyspnea, oral cancer, stomatitis, esophagitis, gastritis, and so on. The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) insists that evidence is based on a limited number of case reports, and some pathologies are associated with alcohol or tobacco intake and not directly linked to qat use (ACMD 2013: 35–38).

The main psycho-neural effects are said to be wakefulness and suppression of

appetite (World Bank 2007: 2). The appearance of the effects, however, varies greatly between individuals, and I have never heard a consumer complaining all the appearances and many long-distance taxi drivers and factory workers on night duty chew qat in order to keep them awake. One consumer interviewed on the matter even stated that without qat he could not sleep at night (Otsubo 2005: 185).

It is true that not a few people are chewing qat all day, but reports of prevalence of dependence vary considerably. The issue of physiological and/or psychological dependency is also difficult to clearly ascertain (ACMD 2013: 34).

We can say that most “scientific” results above are based on the research done in the laboratory or in the study room. Scientists miss three points; chewing, tobacco, and water. Ironically chewing itself has not been investigated in the research on qat. It is known that chewing gum may reduce feelings of anxiety and stress. A qat gathering continues for 3–5 hours, and during it people are moving their jaws. Chewing for a few hours as well as ingredients of qat should be focused.

Second point that should be considered is the effect of tobacco. Many qat users smoke tobacco or sometimes water pipe during the gathering. The room for the gathering is inclined to be closed and not to be ventilated. It is obvious that secondhand smoke may affect the participants’ health, but ACMD (2013) is the first to point out that.

Third point is the effect of drinking much water. During the gathering qat users drink 2–3 liters of water. As humidity is extremely low in *Ṣan‘ā*, drinking great amount of water is good for health, which has not been investigated, either.

### **2.3 Effects on Families**

Qat consumption influences a family budget. Poor households allocate as much as 28% of their income to qat (World Bank 2007: 2). Qat chewing consumes a significant amount of the family income, especially among low-income groups, leaving smaller portions of income to be spent on food and other daily items that are badly needed by the family (FAO 2002: 2).

It is very interesting, however, that according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the portion of qat both in the family budget and expenditure of food decreases after 1977. The portion of qat in the family budget accounts for 16.38% in 1977, 12.6% in 1987, 12% in 1992, and 9.85% in 1998. The portion of qat in the expenditure of food accounts for 26.28% in 1977, 23.2% in 1987, 19.56% in 1992, and 19.5% in 1998 (FAO 2002: 70). It can be said from the results that qat has come not to strain the family budget. According to the family survey by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications in Japan, the portion of culture and entertainment accounts for 10.9% in 2008<sup>8</sup>). It is appropriate to say that the portion of qat in Yemen, where there is little entertainment, is not

large compared with the portion of culture and entertainment in Japan.

## **2.4 Impact on Yemeni Economy**

### **Loss of Labor Force**

Chewing qat is said to be a waste of time because it takes several hours. People just sit, chew, smoke and talk in the gathering. Qat chewing encroaches on 27% of the total working time in the Yemen economy (FAO 2002: 16).

It is not to be denied that qat plays a major role in the Yemen economy. Qat's contribution to GDP of around 6% in 2005, including both its direct and indirect effects, is equivalent to two-thirds of the contribution the oil makes to the economy. One in every seven working Yemeni are employed in producing and distributing qat, making it the second largest source of employment in the country, exceeding even employment in the public sector. Qat represents only 10% of cultivated lands but generates around a third of agricultural GDP. Nearly one-third of the agricultural labor force is engaged in qat production (World Bank 2007: 1). Indeed there are not so many Yemeni people who do not work but just chew qat every afternoon, and there are more Yemeni people who chew qat while working, who work without qat or after chewing qat for a shorter time, or who chew qat only in the weekend (Otsubo 2005).

According to the survey on comparable time use by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications in Japan, people in Japan and European countries spend 4 and a half hours in free time a day besides sleep, meals, and work. It is not fair to say chewing qat for several hours is too long for Yemeni people, who have little entertainment except qat.

### **Food Security**

Yemen's food staple self-sufficiency ratio for the base year 1961 has been estimated at 90%: this ratio had fallen to 38% by 1992 (Tutwiler 2007: 224).

The dramatic increase in production resulting in the vast expansion of qat fields has led to the displacement of food crops. Economists have expressed concern about food security and self-sufficiency in Yemen. While qat cultivation has provided an important source of rural incomes, it has precluded other and more sustainable forms of rural economic activity. The area under qat has expanded 13-fold in the last three decades, displacing exportable coffee, fruits and vegetables, sorghum and other foodstuffs. Exports of other cash crops have fallen while food imports have increased, due to the inroads made by qat in the rural economy (World Bank 2007: 2).

It is dangerous to jump to a conclusion that qat fields have encroached on cereal fields. Qat is often blamed for the expansion of fields and the reduction of food staple self-sufficiency ratio in Yemen. It is true that the food staple self-sufficiency

ratio has fallen, and according to the Yemeni Statistical Yearbooks, crop acreage of qat increased 15 times during the period from 1970/71 to 2005. Crop acreage of vegetables and fruits, however, increased 6 times and 20 times respectively during the same period. As for production, production of qat increased 1.4 times during the period from 1995 to 2005. Production of cash crop and fruits increased 1.6 times and 1.9 times respectively. In contrast, production and crop acreage of sorghum and barley decreased sharply. As for coffee, the crop acreage increased 3 times during the period from 1970/71 to 2005, and the production increased 1.3 times (Otsubo 2014). Therefore, coffee in Yemen has not been substituted with qat although many pointed out the opposite (Zabarah 1982; Stevenson 1985: xiv; FAO 2002: 2). The mention that qat drove out the other crops including coffee is nothing but misunderstanding (Otsubo 2014).

Qat is much more profitable than the others. Revenue per hectare per year of qat is 250,000 YR (Yemeni Riyal), that of grapes is 90,000 YR, that of bananas is 80,000 YR and that of vegetables is 50,000 YR in 1991 (Fara' et al. 2002: 78). Qat revenue per hectare is estimated at close to 20 times that of cereals (Fergany 2007: 8). A farmer interviewed on the matter stated that qat of 1 *rubna* ( $\approx 11 \times 11$  m) makes 80,000 to 100,000 YR. It costs 25 to 30% of the revenue for necessary expenses, such as irrigation water, chemical fertilizers, agrochemicals, watchmen at night and bullets for them<sup>9</sup>). Legumes and vegetables fetch profit of only 10% of qat. It would not be easy to make farmers cultivate less profitable crops without subsidies.

### **Loss of Foreign Currency**

Coffee can earn foreign currency but qat cannot because import and export of qat are prohibited. So, economists condemn qat for not earning foreign currency, though, as we have seen, coffee fields and coffee production are increasing according to the Yemeni Statistical Yearbooks.

Coffee has been an old substitute for qat since the 1970s (Gerholm 1977), and FAO says that coffee and grapes are the two main crops considered to be competing with qat (FAO 2002: 20). It is true that the growth conditions of qat are similar to those of coffee, but the conditions are not entirely the same and qat can grow in the severer conditions; qat can endure frost damage and a drought more than coffee. Qat can be cultivated in higher fields than coffee (Weir 1985b: 73; Kopp 1987: 369), and qat fields can be seen more than 2,000m high. I have seen fields in which qat and coffee were mixed and coffee was dying because qat was absorbing much water and minerals. That qat is stronger than coffee is mentioned as early as 1940s (Scott 1942: 235).

I interviewed a farmer who had switched coffee to qat because he had wanted to earn much money, but switched to coffee again because soil was not suitable for

qat (Otsubo 2000). I know a village where coffee cannot be cultivated because of severe weather but almonds can be substitute for qat (Otsubo 2014: 123). Thus, switching to other crops is not so simple as mentioned. Each area has each feature, and we must not neglect that.

Estimate coffee production if all the qat fields were used for coffee based on the date of the Yemeni Statistical Yearbook 2005. Qat acreage is 123,933 hectares and its production is 121,399 tons, so production per a hectare is 0.98 ton. Coffee acreage is 28,821 hectares and its production is 11,331 tons, so production per a hectare is 0.39 ton. If all the fields for qat were used for coffee, the production would be 48,334 tons. So, the total coffee production would be at most sixty thousand tons. According to FAO, Brazil, whose coffee production is 2,140,000 tons comes top, and Ethiopia, whose production is 170,000 tons, comes in the tenth, and Cameroon, whose production is 60,000 tons, the twentieth in 2005; Yemen would come in around twentieth place in the world coffee production (Otsubo 2014: 128). Glorious past of the port Mocha was too far.

So far, we have investigated negative effects that qat seems to cause and their problems. Although qat production and consumption do have some negative effects, some effects are based on anecdotal results, and qat appears to be used as scapegoat for the social, economic and actual ills of Yemen (Anderson et al. 2007: 114). It reminds us of the fact that alcoholism was the root of all social problems such as syphilis, cholera, tuberculosis, and crimes in the 19th century France (Nourrisson 1990).

### 3. Criticisms from Inside

#### 3.1 Controversy by Scholars

Although qat has grown for centuries in Yemen, it did not give rise to much controversy in Yemen, unlike coffee, which did excite much controversy in Mecca and Cairo in the 16th century (Hattox 1985). Many Yemeni scholars would rather chew qat and write poems in which they praise it. In Ethiopia, qat was associated with Islam and Muslim rituals, and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church traditionally prohibited qat (Anderson et al. 2007: 2), while Yemen did not see qat associated with a certain religion, religious sect or ethnic group.

Regulations of qat appeared in the early stage of the introduction. *Aḥmad b. 'Alwān* (d. 665/1267), a religious scholar and Sufi, asked the ruler at that time to legally ban the habit of qat chewing because it prevented Yemenis from performing their prayers, especially the afternoon (*'aṣr*) and sunset (*maghrib*) prayer periods (al-Motarreb et al. 2002: 403).

A Zaydi imam, *al-Imām al-Mutawakkil 'alā Allāh Yaḥyā b. Sharaf al-Dīn* (d. 965/1558) thought that qat should be prohibited, and ordered his son *Mutahhar* to

have qat trees rooted. *Al-Imām* was sure that eating qat (*akl al-qāt*) made people unrestful (Ibn al-Qāsim 1968: 689). Compared qat with hashish and opium, *al-Imām* thought the three materials brought about intoxication like alcoholic drink, and prohibited them (al-Ḥibshī 1986: 7–18).

Yemeni scholars asked the lawfulness of qat, coffee and hashish to a Shafi'i scholar in Mecca, *Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥajar al-Haytamī* (or *al-Haythamī*) (d. 973/1565 or 994/1567). *Al-Haytamī*, not finding definite evidence that qat brought about intoxication, stated that qat should not be prohibited until medical evidence would appear (al-Ḥibshī 1986: 21–50).

*Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusayn b. al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad* (d. 1099/1687–88) followed *al-Haytamī*'s opinion. He stated that there was no religious reason to prohibit qat, and that doctors recognized that wine, hashish and opium caused about intoxication but there was room for argument about qat, quoting “O you who have believed, do not prohibit the good things which Allah has made lawful to you and do not transgress.” from Quran (5: 87) (al-Ḥibshī 1986: 51–103).

Reflection on some of these will make clear that there was several controversy on not only qat but also wine, hashish and opium. It is another matter whether the regulations and prohibition against them were successful or not.

Anthropologists came to Yemen to do research in the 1970s and wrote on qat, as we have seen, but the 1980s saw less anthropologists and results on qat. There are two Yemeni scholars who wrote on qat in the 1980s: *al-Mu'allimī*, a religious scholar, and *al-Maqramī*, a sociologist, hold an opposite opinion. *al-Mu'allimī* (al-Mu'allimī 1988) stands by qat, referring to many scholars, such as *Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh al-Shawkānī* (1173–1250/1760–1834), who chewed qat but did not feel the mind and boy changed. *Al-Shawkānī* stated that qat did have less effect than tea and coffee and condemned *al-Haytamī* for his ignorance about qat.

*al-Mu'allimī* also attacks the idea that qat is *ḥarām* (forbidden), quoting *Muḥammad 'Abduh* (1839–1905), an Egyptian Islamic jurist and liberal reformer, and his disciple *Rashīd Riḍā'* (1865–1935).

It seems that the reason *al-Mu'allimī* insists that qat is *ḥalāl* is in rivalry with anti-qat *fatwā* that scholars of Organization of the Islamic Conference submitted in 1982. In this *fatwā* qat was determined to be *ḥarām* like alcoholic drinks. Twelve religious scholars in Yemen also submitted a pro-qat *fatwā*, in which they affirmed that qat is *ḥalāl*, pointing out that qat, different from tea and coffee, has social and economic effects. They also requested the Yemeni government to spread this *fatwā* inside and outside the country.

On the other hand, *al-Maqramī* is critical of qat. He states that *Muḥammad Maḥmūd al-Zubayrī* (d. 1965), a Yemeni poet and activist of the Free Yemeni Movement, was also critical of qat. *al-Zubayrī* wrote an article in 1958, in which he told that qat controlled the life and economy in Yemen; he also criticized

Yemenis of putting off the prayer hour to chew qat (al-Maqrāmī 1987: 29).

*Al-Maqrāmī* introduces folk medicines with qat which are rarely referred to ethnographies based on the research in the 1970s, and points out economic losses caused by qat; 3 billion hours are wasted by qat chewing in a year (al-Maqrāmī 1987: 86).

### 3.2 Official Response to Qat

#### North Yemen

In 1972, Prime Minister *Muhsin al-'Aynī*'s Government passed a resolution to uproot qat trees on land owned by the state and at the same time promulgated the harm of the qat habit. Government employees were not allowed to consume qat at work. The resolution was backed by large scale mass media campaigns. Unfortunately, such action had very limited response from the public and was a total failure (Humud al.2002: 49; al-Motarreb et al.2002: 412).

The state-operated stations tried to decrease qat consumption. The Family Radio Program, which was broadcast for an hour daily, included wide ranges of subjects, among which were the negative effects of qat chewing upon the family. Since 1975, television has been a dramatic force of change in Yemen. There was a conscious attempt, on the part of the government, to schedule the more popular programs on the days and time where visiting is most intense, with the aim of substituting television for qat gathering and thus fighting the supposed detrimental effects of qat (Makhrouf 1979: 59–62). Although statistics are not available, it appears that the production and consumption of qat have been increasing in spite of the official campaign.

#### South Yemen

South Yemeni government made considerable efforts to control and reduce qat consumption, essentially through legislation. The 1977 Qat Law made different provisions according to circumstances. In *'Adan* and the lowlands of the *Lahj*, *Abyan* and *Shabwa* governorates, consumption was restricted to Thursday afternoons, Fridays and public holidays. In the qat growing areas there were no restrictions, while in *Ḥaḍramawt* and *al-Mahra* governorates, which did not have qat chewing cultures, consumption was forbidden. This Law appeared to be well observed, and qat disappeared from the markets when its consumption was not allowed. Heavy penalties were imposed on those found chewing when it was prohibited<sup>10</sup>.

There were, however, certainly some who attempted to conserve it and chew during the week, although stale qat was pretty foul. The asphaltting of the road to *Kirsh* brought the area where daily qat consumption was allowed within reach of *'Adan* for those whose determination to chew was great enough. Just over two

hours' drive away from 'Adan people could purchase and chew qat legally any day if they had a car, and could afford the time, petrol and qat (Lackner 1985: 119). An informant who sold qat at that time in 'Adan told me that he worked only for two days of the weekend and did not have to work in the other days. Another informant, who also sold qat there, stated that he sold qat on weekdays secretly when consumers called him to get qat (interviewed in August 2013).

Another measure was a law in 1981 preventing the expansion of qat growing to areas where it was not previously grown, and to prevent some of the qat fields replanted with the shrubs. Although statistics were not available it appeared that qat growers, if not expanded, at least retained their qat areas despite the law; this was largely because qat growing is by far the most profitable cash crop. It was also a major source of income for the state through the taxes which form a substantial proportion of its consumer prices (Lackner 1985: 120).

### **Unified Yemen**

North Yemen and South Yemen were unified in 1990. The unified government did nothing with qat but concealed the existence of qat itself on the Statistical Yearbook for 25 years. It is supposed that the authority recognized qat as a kind of a drug<sup>11</sup>). The series has been published almost yearly since North Yemen era, and data of qat acreage and production were vanished from it in 1973 and reappeared in the book published in 1997.

The unified government changed qat policy, hosted the National Conference on Qat in 2002, and asked FAO and World Bank to do research on qat (Gatter et al. 2002; FAO 2002: 3-4; World Bank 2007). It is clear that the government changed its attitude to qat and started to control and tax qat openly.

The World Bank suggests the government involve in a campaign to discourage qat consumption, boost the tax rate, inform consumers of adverse consequences arising from prolonged use, prevent the youth population from starting the habit, and develop alternative recreational facilities (World Bank 2007: 23-25). These suggestions are old and common ones.

There was a workshop on June 29-30, 2008 to review the outcomes and recommendations of the National Conference on Qat in 2002 (World Bank 2009). Qat cultivation and consumption have further increased in Yemen since the conference, and qat gatherings appear to start earlier each day and seem to continue for much more than hours. The government is fully aware of just how difficult it will be to combat qat. Suggestions the working group submitted are not new and revolutionary, and it is realized again that qat is profitable for farmers and an easy recreation for consumers; it is very difficult to find alternative crops which are drought resistant, require little water, have the ability to depend on water harvesting, generate yields in a short period of time and have a high productivity

and are thus economically lucrative. The working group suggests that recreational facilities and public parks be provided, which is also old and common.

### 3.3 Unofficial Response to Qat

Qat was consumed by distinguished persons such as scholars, sultans and wealthy merchants for a long time. It is in the 1970s that the populace started to chew qat daily. There have been not many opponents of qat among them. Anti-qat movements are latest and not so popular one, and pro-qat movements are almost nothing, though many Yemenis chew qat and live on it.

#### Anti-Qat Movements

There is an NGO named Al-Afif Cultural Foundation dealing with science and knowledge spread and cultural innovation and fighting qat damages<sup>12)</sup>. It published books on qat.

There is an English newspaper named Yemen Times which was more active in anti-qat promotion. It introduced a new café to spend in the afternoon instead of chewing qat (Yemen Times 2012: 1627), a wedding party without qat (Yemen Times 2012: 1635), and Facebook calling for afternoon without qat (Yemen Times 2012: 1538). It also says uprooting 200,000 qat trees and plant coffee trees in *Hajja* governorate (Yemen Time 2005: 847), switching qat to fruits in *Dhamar* governorate (Yemen Times 2010: 1341), and qat to coffee in *Dhamar* governorate (Yemen Times 2010: 1383). It suggests *Jatropha* to substitute qat, for it is more useful as biodiesel fuel (Yemen Times 2012: 1551).

#### Popular Wisdom

Opponents of qat argue that the practice of chewing promotes laziness, violence, and cultural decadence among users, but qat consumers also point out disadvantages as well as advantages of qat. They are not ignorant but well-informed of qat. Here are results of the questionnaire done in 2003 in *Ṣan‘ā’* (Otsubo 2005).

There are social advantages of qat. First qat has people come together. It is friends not relatives or members of the community or the tribe that come together. Some think chewing qat in the house is much better than walking around on the streets and being given to evil ways. Secondly chewing qat is an easy way to kill time. Qat consumers think this as a merit but non-consumers do not. Non-consumers consider qat chewing just a demerit or a waste of time, but they recognize the merit of coming together with qat, and they often attend the qat gathering, just drinking a few cups of tea. Thirdly qat consumers think that qat makes progress in their work. Students chew qat and study for the examinations.

There are advantages which affect bodies and souls. First qat builds up energies,

which seems to be based on their real experience. Secondly qat relaxes its consumers. Physical labors point out that qat elevates concentration and makes them less tired. Although insomnia is one of the bad effects and many scholars consider it a disadvantage of qat, night workers think the opposite way, for they chew qat to keep themselves awake.

There were more negative responses among non-consumers than among qat-consumers to the question “Is there any advantage of qat?” Qat consumers find more advantages of qat than non-consumers, while non-consumers do not find advantages and make positive efforts to find disadvantages of qat, though both qat-consumers and non-consumers find advantages and disadvantages.

There are disadvantages in social terms. First wastes of money and time are mostly pointed out. Some worry about family budget, others Yemeni economy. It should be noticed that not only non-consumers but also qat-consumers regard qat chewing as wastes of money and time.

Some point out effects related to qat cultivation; effects on water because much water is used for qat, effects on the bodies and the soils by chemical fertilizers and insecticides used for qat. Others point out that qat consumers tend not to take care of their families and children, and that they do not work.

As for health, qat makes you feel anxious and tired. It has bad effects on growing children, the pregnant and nursing mother. It causes malnutrition.

Insomnia and lack of appetite are well known symptoms caused by qat. Some point out that qat causes euphoria and exaggeration, but no one is assailed by hallucinations.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Experts from outside tend to carry a discussion with the premise that qat is a drug or something bad. They investigate qat literally outside Yemen; in the laboratory or in the study room. They do not care how people consume or they think of qat.

It is easy to imagine that scientists experiment on qat with many examiners and flasks and they never imagine the situation in which Yemenis chew qat for several hours, smoking and drinking much water and the room is always closed and ill ventilated. I have never read an article which investigates mastication for a long time, bad effects of secondhand smoke, and good effects of ingestion of much water, for drinking 2-3 liters of water for several hours is, I am sure, good for the health especially in dry *San ‘ā’* and during Ramadan night. It is ACMD (2013) that first mentions the effect of secondhand smoke.

The ACMD’s reports are very cool and scientific. It investigates many aspects and situations of qat in the United Kingdom and concludes that “without the necessary data and robust evidence to support proportionate intervention, the

ACMD does not recommend that qat be controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.” (ACMD 2013: 10)

Despite of the scientific investigation by the ACMD, the United Kingdom announced the ban of qat in July 2013. It is reasonable the decision was not scientifically but politically, for the Dutch government had already banned qat and the United Kingdom did not want itself to be the only “hub” of qat in Western countries. Thus, a drug is defined not scientifically but politically.

As we have seen, both qat consumers and non-consumers in Yemen know advantages and disadvantages of qat. Qat consumers point out wastes of time and money, burdens on family budget and the national economy, insomnia and lack of appetite, and these are what experts from outside have pointed out since the 1970s. They know them but it was not mentioned by experts from outside. They have had no chance to tell their knowledge. They have been forced into silence. It is not clear where they get information on qat, but it may be said that the qat gathering is one of the occasions.

Chewing qat was something like an obligation in the 1970s; chewing alone or not chewing qat were regarded as unsocial (Weir 1985a). Qat was a way to tie all members of the community together, and they, of all ages and social classes, had to attend the qat gathering. The ways of chewing qat are, however, various now. People chew qat with their friends, chew alone, chew and work, or give up qat.

In this trend of diversification, there started anti-qat campaigns by the common people. Their movements are not influential up to now, but it is obvious that they will be powerful. Those who are concerned in it are what is called the elite who have the Western sense of values.

It is expected, however, that a pro-qat movement will appear among those who like qat and know advantages of it in terms of production and consumption. Then qat will be a popular culture in Yemen.

## Notes

- 1) The effects of cathinone decrease when qat is consumed long after it is harvested; the fresher, the more effective. Therefore, qat was consumed only around the producing areas. With the development of transportation systems, qat began to be transported to the areas far away from the producing areas. Since the 1990s, when the civil war in Somalia was intensified, more Somali refugees and emigrants spread to Western countries and qat spread accordingly. Many European countries and America have put an embargo on producing, owning, and consuming qat (Anderson et al. 2007). The United Kingdom and Holland were the most tolerant countries in Europe, but recently changed their policy. Holland prohibited qat in 2012 and the United Kingdom in 2013. As for Yemen, Ethiopia, and Kenya, qat is not illegal drug.
- 2) Qat owes its popularity among farmers to relatively low production cost and is more

- drought resistant and requires less care than most competing crops (World Bank 1979).
- 3) Yemen, now the republic of Yemen, was two countries up to 1990. North Yemen was independent after the World War I as a kingdom ruled by Zaidis, one of the Shiah sects. Zaydi imams closed the country and the modernization was delayed. In 1962 the republican government started a revolution against the imamate, but the last imam survived and the civil war between the republicans and the royalists continued till 1970. Modernization started in 1970s in North Yemen and anthropologists rushed into the new field. South Yemen, independent in 1967 from the United Kingdom, was not suitable for cultivating qat, and a difficult country for anthropologists to do research. Therefore, qat studies in the 1970s were almost based on the research done in North Yemen.
  - 4) His book was published in 1987, but he did research in 1974–1976.
  - 5) Gerholm did research in 1974–1975, Weir in 1977 and 1979–1980.
  - 6) Makhlouf did research in 1974 and 1976. Other ethnographies on qat based on the research in 1970s were Swanson (1979) (research in 1973–1974), Stevenson (1985) (research in 1978–79), and Varisco (1986) (research in 1978–1979).
  - 7) Some Yemeni men told me that it was shameful of a man to ask any man about his daughter's bridegroom, make contact with the candidate, and talk to him about his daughter; it is a mother, not a father who takes the initiative in their children's marriage.
  - 8) The portion of culture and entertainment includes durable goods for culture and entertainment, books and printed matter, services for culture and entertainment.  
<http://www.stat.go.jp/data/kakei/2008np/gaikyo/pdf/gk01.pdf>
  - 9) Good qat arouses jealousy of neighbors, and the farmer needs to have a watchman stay at night in the watch house.
  - 10) It may be said that South Yemeni government was much excellent one than North Yemeni one, but it should be considered that qat fields in South were much less than those in North, and that South Yemeni people had alcoholic drinks legally unlike North Yemeni people.
  - 11) I asked this of a director of the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation in 2005, and he also had the same opinion.
  - 12) <http://www.y.net.ye/alafif/INDEX.HTM>

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