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An Analysis of Early Globalization: The Introduction of the Utilization of Incense and Scents in Japan and the Influence from the Eastern World

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Introduction:

Japan is a country that is deeply rooted in culture and tradition. While many of the current cultural and societal practices that are so prevalent in Japan are inherently Japanese, most of them are based off of heavy influence from other Asian countries such as China, Korea, and India, and some more modern customs are even based off of those from countries much farther, such as England and the United States. Many of these practices having origin stemming from the influence from other countries' customs that have become more "Japanized", such as the traditional tea ceremony from China or the more modern Christian-style wedding that has rapidly gained popularity in Japan, have been studied in depth and have been accredited with opening up Japan's doors towards globalization. However, one category of influence that hasn't received as much recognition as having much importance is incense.

According to Kiyoko Morita, author of *The Book of Incense* (1992), which was the first English-written book that deeply divulges into Japan's relationship with incense, and which is the source that I will be primarily referring to in this thesis, the olfactory sense is one of the most important, yet least appreciated, of the five senses. However, Japan has a huge background of utilizing basic scents in all ranges of societal practices. Scent is a staple in Japanese practices centered around religion: incense is almost always burned during Buddhist funerals, and it is frequently used during religious festivals and shrine visits as a spiritual ward and cleanser by people of the Shinto. Furthermore, the importance of scent can be found in secular practices too, such as Shinrin-yoku, or forest bathing. I have gathered information from first and second-hand sources and have conducted interviews with many of the editors and authors of those sources in order to examine the impact that the integration of scents from

other countries has on both historical and modern aspects of the globalization of Japanese society. Readers of this paper will learn about different influential topics, such as the Chinese monk, Ganjin, who was accredited with being the first contact that the Japanese had with aromatic trade with another country, or the influence that India had on the various customs related to scents and incense that the Japanese would adopt and make their own. Furthermore, I will explain how the incense ceremony has become a pivotal representation of Japanese culture, and how this important aromatic history has shaped Japan's modern society.

Historical Background:

The first account of incense being prevalent in Japan was recorded in the *Nihon Shoki*, the most extensive record of ancient Japanese history, in which a large log of agarwood, soon after named *Jinkō* (沉香) – *jin* meaning submerged and *ko* meaning scent, drifted ashore on Awaji Island in the year 595 of the Asuka Period. This specific piece of *Jinkō* became known as *Ranjatai*. Those who found the log began burning it as firewood, only to realize that it procured a sweet, elegant scent of which they had not ever smelled before. They decided to bring it to Prince Shōtoku, who had an affinity for all things Chinese, and thus, had a newfound inclination to bring forward more practices rooted in Buddhism. He knew that incense burning was deeply rooted in Buddhist beliefs, and began striving to preserve those new Buddhist ideals that he was trying to disseminate throughout Japan. However, the incense he sought for was not indigenous to anywhere on the Japanese islands, so he began importing incense and other aromatics from China and the Korean peninsula. After this, the phrase *Jinkō* began being used synonymously for “a type of resinous, aromatic tree” (Shoyeido, 2011).

As Morita states, prior to the finding of *Jinkō*, the usage of scents had very little significance throughout Japan. This can be easily understood simply by the lack of material written about the topic compared to the following topics of Japanese culture. The incense ceremony, *Kōdō*, which is one of the three classical Japanese arts of refinement¹, along with flower arranging, *Kadō*, and tea ceremony, *Sadō*, had not been established until the sixteenth century during the Muromachi Period. *Sadō* had quickly spearheaded the boom in Japan's adoption of Chinese culture, and therefore became a more prominent figure of refinement and practice over *Kōdō*, which took a bit more time to become more practiced throughout Japan (Chadogu, 2014).

The Basis of Contemporary Globalization:

Globalization is essentially defined as the furtherance of the interconnection between societies or groups to the point where certain events in one part of the world have an increased effect on the people and societies of a different part of the world. The world has without a doubt been becoming more globalized, but Japan's current global relationship with the United States is relatively new, becoming what it is now only after the ending of World War 2 (Matsubara, 2012). This brought not only immense political and economic change, but also fostered the growth of the social changes that are mentioned in this paper. Interestingly, the effects of globalization that Japan had instilled on other countries prewar and during the war was done so from a neocolonialist approach, meaning that it used coercive pressure, in this case mainly militaristic and economic, to control other countries and regions. Rather, Japan's

¹ Depending on the source, *Shōdō* (Calligraphy) may be considered art of refinement.

global influence on the United States is a form of Contemporary Globalization, which focuses on post-World War 2 struggles, leading to a gradual increase in cultural flows due to the sharing and accepting of goods, symbols, and various ideologies, i.e. *Kōdō* and *Shinrin-Yoku*, which will be further explained later in this paper (Morita, 1992).

Through taking a more in-depth approach towards disseminating the idea that the incorporation of the stress of the importance of scents from Japan to the United States has had a profound effect on both countries, we can concretely understand how this phenomenon is in fact an important example of Contemporary Globalization.

Ganjin:

One of the most important figures pertaining to the propagation of Chinese culture into Japan was the priest Ganjin (*Jianzhen* in Chinese). In the year 742, he was invited by a Japanese emissary to travel to Japan as a lecturer. However, due to many unfavorable conditions, including an infection that eventually rendered him blind, it took him five tries and nearly ten years to successfully reach mainland Japan, where he became the presiding monk of Tōdaiji temple in Nara prefecture (Morita, 1992). He, along with the monks who made the journey to Japan with him, set out to propagate Buddhism through the teachings of Buddhist faith and the introduction of different Buddhist practices like religious sculpture, and Ganjin himself is credited with creating a smaller temple near Tōdaiji called Tōshōdaiji, where he began teaching the new school of Buddhism that he established called Ritsu Buddhism, which focuses on Buddhist monastic rules.

Besides various Buddhist practices and ideologies, Ganjin is also widely recognized for establishing one of the first cases of direct international exporting that Japan had experienced by introducing various types of Chinese spices which were completely unheard of by the Japanese, in addition to a new type of blended incense and the recipes that came along with it, all which had been widely recognized and used throughout mainland China for centuries. The Chinese had been using incense as a secular practice for the majority of their history, and the Japanese began utilizing it in a similar fashion. Notably, the courtiers were the ones who propagated the usage of incense the most. During the Heian Period, Japan had very little contact with the rest of the world other than China, which was a rapidly growing civilization at the time. The Japanese people and government revered China as incredibly exotic, exciting, and overall a society of refinement through the cultural emulation of which Japan would be able to eventually be on the same level (Nipponkodo, 2018). Aside from the adoption of the Chinese form of writing known as *Kanji* and the integration of Chinese laborers brought forth by Prince Shōtoku during the late 6th and early 7th centuries, Ganjin's introduction of these inherently Chinese bits of culture was one of the main triggers that began Japan's early globalization, despite not being as recognized as such by many sources.

Food Preparation:

One aspect of Japanese culture in which incense and scents play a large part is the celebration of certain festivals and the preparation and consumption of food during those festivals. Food has a huge role in nearly every major holiday or festival in modern Japanese culture, yet the connection to scents during these holidays is utilized sometimes unknowingly, especially during ceremonies that are conducted around the importance of nature.

A common example of the connection of food and scents during Japan's festivals is *Hanami* known in English as Cherry Blossom Viewing, which takes place all throughout Japan during the weeks that the cherry blossoms are in their peak bloom. *Hanami* is one of the most widely-celebrated festivals in Japan and is traditionally celebrated outside while having a picnic under the cherry blossom trees. The majority of the food, mostly sweets, are made with cherry blossom-derived ingredients, ranging from teas steeped from the flowers themselves to *mochi* flavored with the essence of the flowers and wrapped in the *sakura* leaves that have been pickled. While eating the foods during the celebrations, the entire experience is rooted in the amalgamation of the taste of those foods and the sight of the flowers, but the smells emitted from both the foods and the flowers themselves combine with everything else to make the occasion much more unique. Many people in turn use this almost as a form of therapy, as will be explained in the following section, by enveloping themselves in the delicate aromas of their surroundings, which have become known as the scents that stereotypically stand for the welcoming of spring.

Shinrin-Yoku:

Shinrin-Yoku also known as Forest Bathing, is a form of holistic therapy established in Japan which capitalizes on the fact that the olfactory sense has healing and restorative powers. Unlike many other forms of the utilization of scents such as incense or even the aforementioned celebration of festivals which have been instilled into Japanese society for centuries, *Shinrin-Yoku* was only established in the 1980's.

Shinrin-Yoku is a very simple practice that has profound physical and cultural benefits in which all one must do is take a walk through a forest and take deep breaths. The aromatics produced by the different flora produce mixed with the scent of the fresh, natural air produce physical and mental healing properties that many health scientists, both Japanese and now even a handful of South Korean, have proven, stating that simply being in natural areas can have countless positive effects on one's spirit and body. Inhaling these simple organic scents support natural killer cells which are the main factors in the human immune system that fight cancer, and by simply breathing these aromas in is linked to boosting your immune system, increasing focus levels, reducing blood pressure, and even accelerating the recovery process from illness and surgery (A.N.F.T.G.P., 2017).

Within the past decade, ideas and forms of holistic therapy inspired by *Shinrin-Yoku* have become more and more widespread throughout the world, especially in the United States. Japanese scientists are currently using their research to further propagate its prevalence, making it a lesser-known but still vital form of Japan's effect on outward globalization through aromatics.

Varieties of Japanese Incense:

As previously stated, *Jinkō* is the staple ingredient for the majority of Japanese incense. However, thanks to the introduction of countless other botanicals and spices from the rest of the Eastern world, the Japanese have been able to create their own unique blend of incense which, while they may smell like they are from a separate country, are indeed Japanese by nature.

When the Japanese first started using incense, there were very few ingredients that were actually indigenous to Japan. Those that were indigenous included essentially only cloves and coniferous trees such as pine or cypress, from which one would be able to acquire resin, needles, and bark, all which had their own unique scent despite coming from the same tree. Additionally, there were ingredients made from animals that are no longer used anymore. These were usually used in very expensive high-quality incenses that were used for very special occasions. The two main ingredients indigenous to Japan that derived from animals were musk, which came from the Musk Deer and ambergris, which was a resin derived from the Sperm Whale. Additionally, another form of musk was frequently used which was produced by the Civet Cat, however that was not an ingredient indigenous to Japan (Nishida, 2015).

In the sixteenth century, once foreign incense ingredients began gaining popularity throughout Japan, incense connoisseurs categorized the different *Jinkō* into groups based off of which country each one came from. Each of these groups were named after derivations of the Japanese pronunciation of the names for the regions from which each one came. This resulted in six categories being made: *rakoku* (Thailand), *manaban* (the Malabar coast of India), *manaka* (Malacca), *sumotara* (Sumatra), and *sasora* (Not quite as concretely defined, but thought to be in the Western region of India). The sixth group is the only group that is not named after the region from which it came is *kyara*, of which the etymology is further described in the following section (Nipponkodo, 2018).

When Japan began importing more aromatic woods from regions such as these, they began creating important trade relations with other countries with which they had no previous

relationship. These trade relationships are still strongly upheld today, as these six groups of incense varieties are still referenced in incense culture.

India's Influence:

Unbeknownst to many, the Indian culture has had a rather sizeable influence rather exclusively on Japan's use of scents. In addition to an abundance of spices that were introduced to Japan, India influenced Japan's world of scents in many ways, from words that were formed from ancient languages to practices that are still being observed today. In fact, Morita explains that the roots of the practice of "listening" to incense, as it is known in Japan, can be traced back to a section of the fourteen-volume Mahayana Sutra of Buddhism in which the bodhisattva Monju, who was a Buddhist saint intellect and wisdom, and Yuima-kitsu, a wealthy Indian Buddhist Layman, have a conversation regarding it. During this conversation, Yuima is told that everything is fragrant like incense in Buddha's world, and that the terms "fragrance" and "incense" are synonymous, and that Buddha's words of teaching are in fact incense. Thus, bodhisattvas listen to Buddha's words but in the form of incense, rather than smelling them (Morita, 1992).

As mentioned in the *Historical Background* section, *Jinkō* was the first recorded example of incense that Japan had ever experienced. Contrary to the large amount of Japanese words and phrases that were established off of the base of the Chinese language, the etymology of the phrase *Jinkō* is actually derived from the Sanskrit word *aguru* meaning "heavy", of which the character *Jin* also holds meaning. The way that one would be able to tell if a piece of *Jinkō* was of a high enough quality to use as incense is if it would be heavy enough to sink in water

due to the high amounts of aromatic oils and resins in it, thus the derivation from the meaning of *aguru*. *Ranjatai*, which arrived at Awaji Island by washing ashore, was able to do so rather than sink because it was much less resinous, and therefore was later realized to be a less valuable and slightly more common form of *Jinkō* (Morita, 1992).

Another important aspect of Indian culture that made its way to Japan was the establishment of the form of incense usage known as *Soradaki*. Unlike *Sonaekō* (*sonae* meaning to give as an offering) which was the traditional way of burning incense for a religious purpose, whether it be as an offering to gods or deities at a temple, or to purify a loved one's soul at a funeral, *Soradaki* (*sora* meaning open air and *daki* meaning to burn incense) was practiced as a secular form of enjoying incense. Popularized especially during the Heian Period by nobles and courtesans but influenced from the way the Indian people had already been using incense, *Soradaki* refers to the usage of incense for practical and leisurely reasons. The most common form of *Soradaki* is the burning or warming of loose incense and incense sticks in the home. This was commonly done to give a clean and pleasant aroma to the room, or if done for religious reason, would also have been done to purify the house of any unwanted spirits.

Another form of *Soradaki* which holds roots in Indian custom was the mostly imperial practice of imbuing one's clothes with incense, especially the sleeves of one's gown, as a way to provide opulence and regality to one's image, similar to the way the modern world uses perfumes and colognes. The Indians also had a practice of using resin and oil-infused natural spreads on their faces and bodies in order to cool their skin down while deodorizing at the same time. This carried over into Japanese practice with certain *Geisha* and *Maiko*, who would use white makeup that was sometimes imbued with subtle incense fragrances in order to give

off a slightly alluring aroma to their clients while still being able to achieve the classic look of pale skin. These practices were very important to many aspects of Japanese culture, especially within the artistic community. The inclusion of the pale skin of an aristocrat or the depictions of people simply sitting around an incense burner were very commonly represented in the most popular form of Edo Period art known as *Ukiyo-E*, which were woodblock prints depicting what court life was like during that time (Hachijo, 1999).

The Establishment of Incense Schools and *Kōdō*:

When *Kōdō* was established towards the end of the Muromachi Period, it started off as an art form similar to *Sadō* in the sense that it was mainly practiced by those of a higher social status. It was different from the more informal usage of incense which developed during the Heian Period as mentioned above. However, it was not until the middle of the Edo Period (from 1603 to 1867) that *Kōdō* garnered such popularity. This happened primarily because the Tokugawa Shogunate, who were the leaders of Japan during this time, followed closely the art forms which the Ashikaga Shogunate had patronized during their rule throughout the fifteenth century. These art forms included *Nō* theater, artistic pottery, playing the *Koto* (Japan's national instrument similar to a long zither) and the classical aesthetic arts (Koju, 2016).

Kōdō, which was a field originally dominated by elite men, became known as an art form suitable for practice by both aristocratic women and the newly emerging merchant class. It became so widespread that other traditional art forms began depicting *Kōdō* or referencing it in some way. A wide array of literature was written about *Kōdō*, or at least referenced it in some way, and many famous creators of *Ukiyo-E*. In fact, the spread of incense through *Kōdō* became

so significant that the word *Kyara*, meaning “incense wood of the highest quality” began to be used as a synonym for the upper class. Examples that Morita offers are a “*Kyara* woman” (伽羅女), which was a beautiful woman, or “*Kyara* sandals” (伽羅靴) which were a high-quality pair of shoes. During the Edo Period, one of the common practices amongst families would be to construct a box filled with incense paraphernalia that they would give to their daughters once they were married so that they would be able to practice *Kōdō* into their married life. It became so well-used during the Edo Period that in the majority of the Japanese historical culture exhibits in museums around the world are incense burners, lacquered incense boxes, and exquisitely decorated incense containers, which shows even further evidence that incense had become one of the staple aspects of Japanese history (Morita, 1992).

As *Kōdō* garnered its popularity more and more throughout Japan’s common people, it became more and more sought after by rising professionals. Gradually, many people who became known as incense connoisseurs began enforcing that *Kōdō* be governed by a set of rules, and also began writing specialized books on the topic. After it garnered more and more popularity, it became similar to *Sadō* in the sense that the most well-versed practitioners of the art form became known as “masters” and began developing more and more literature and conducting research on the entirety of it. Encyclopedic works were written in order to clearly disseminate the rules and ideologies behind it, and detailed catalogues which were similar to those written for *Sadō* were created to demarcate each tool, or *dōgu* (道具), used during a *Kōdō* session, describing what they were used for and what the standards should be for everything about them, from their purchase to their usage. The *dōgu* utilized during the tea

ceremony can be incredibly expensive due to the quality of materials used to create them and the craftsman whose work it is (Shikinobi, 2015).

The most prolific practitioners of *Kōdō* began in turn ensuring that the legitimacy of their practice be known throughout the country by dividing *Kōdō* into different schools, much like in the formation that *Sadō* had been created. *Sadō* is comprised of three main schools: *Omoto-Senke*, *Ura-Senke*, and *Mushanokoji-Senke*, while *Kōdō* was originally split into two main schools known as *Oie-Ryū* and *Shinō-Ryū*. *Oie-Ryū* was created for the aristocrats and samurai, or others of higher status or nobility, while *Shinō-Ryū* was developed for commoners to be able to more freely practice *Kōdō*. Unlike *Sadō*, of which the schools all originally pandered to the upper class, and focused on nobility and refinement, *Kōdō* was readily made available to nearly anyone who wanted to partake in it (Koju, 2016).

The Incorporation of Scents in Modern Japanese Society:

While the incorporation of incense and scents is extensively recorded throughout Japanese history, and its usage has more elegant connotations, the reason behind it may not seem as such. During the Heian Period where the focus was on elegance, refinement, and cultural practice, and even as far as into the Edo Period, there was not so much of a stress on hygiene, as it was with the rest of the world. Baths were seldom taken, and washing long hair was a very arduous task. Thus, the perfumes people used on their bodies and imbued into their pillows, for example, were used primarily for the sake of masking undesirable body odor, rather than solely because they had a pleasant aroma. However, that is obviously not the case anymore, and Japan is one of the main countries that has begun adapting its traditional usage

of scents to its modernity. During the mid-1990s, as Morita explains in a more modern example, construction and steel companies began establishing aromatic working environments by incorporating fresh fragrances into the ventilation systems. Many higher-end hotels, including ones in the United States, have also recently started doing this. This is recognized as a form of the aforementioned *Soradaki*, in which scents are being used for a completely secular form of enjoyment rather than the traditional *Sonaekō* in which it is used for religious reasons. In fact, the Japanese cosmetic company Shiseido has proven that different scents have different effects on worker performance. Lemon improves alertness, cedar relieves feelings of fatigue, floral scents help develop clearer concentration, jasmine reduces anxiety, and cinnamon keeps spirits high. These scents that are permeating throughout the newly-built office buildings are usually subtle enough where one can quickly become oblivious to them being there, but still prevalent enough to have them be proven effective.

Incense is increasingly being used for more and more purposes in Japan, and have garnered much popularity in the Western world, especially within the United States. As people in the United States usually use citronella candles to ward off bugs in the summertime, the Japanese tend to chiefly use a form of coiled incense known as *Ebi-Kō*. However, the most significant adoption and integration of scents has arguably been through the medical and psychological world (Nipponkodo, 2018). Many Japanese doctors burn incense for their patients who are suffering from psychological problems, and in the United States, Japanese-influenced healing and massage methods such as *Shiatsu* or *Reiki* are now widely practiced, during which aromatherapeutic oils and incense are frequently used. Incense is also used incredibly

frequently in Japan and the United States during meditations by a wide array of belief systems, be it Buddhism, Shintoism, Christianity, or even by people who are agnostic.

The Ten Virtues of Incense:

Because of these widespread usages of incense throughout the world, it has become essentially a part of one's lifestyle. Morita offers a list that a Zen monk during the sixteenth century is accredited with creating, known as the "Ten Virtues of Incense" which captures the exact purpose of the usage of incense in one's everyday life. They are as follows:

1. *It brings communication with the transcendent.*
2. *It purifies the mind and the body.*
3. *It removes uncleanliness.*
4. *It keeps one alert.*
5. *It can be a companion in the minds of solitude.*
6. *In the midst of busy affairs, it brings a moment of peace.*
7. *When it is used in large amounts, one never tires of it.*
8. *When it is used in small amounts, one is still satisfied.*
9. *Age does not change its efficacy.*
10. *Even when used every day, it does no harm.²*

Though these ten virtues were written five hundred years ago, and though the core values society had upheld during the Muromachi Period in which this list was created have greatly changed, the rules and effects in this list all still hold true. The importance of enriching one's life with even the most simplistic practices of surrounding oneself with aroma is still just as prevalent in modernity as it was historically (Morita, 1992).

² This list was translated into English by Kiyoko Morita in *The Book of Incense*

Conclusion:

Despite it not being inherently recognized as so by a majority of the Japanese population, the utilization of incense and scents in Japanese culture has had a profound effect on the globalization of Japanese society. Through the Japanification of many premodern and modern practices involving incense and scents from other Eastern countries, the Japanese have not only greatly shaped their own culture, but they have in turn shaped the culture of Western countries that didn't have much knowledge pertaining to the culture behind incense and aromatics. Because of their infatuation with aromatics, the Japanese have taken other countries' influence, such as India's practice of *Soradaki*, and made an inherently Japanese version which is widely practiced by all types of people in Japanese society. However, without the influence from those other countries, Japan would most likely not have had that part of their culture established.

Anthropologically, there is great interest behind Japanese culture and society, both modern and historical, and the fact that it differs so much from the Western world is a topic that intrigues many. However, the importance of the usage of incense and aromatics in Japanese culture is a very lightly-studied subject that not even many Japanese people are aware of. "Incense" has become such a household word and the incorporation of scents into one's daily life has become such a commonplace practice that many people simply do not realize the profound effects that these ideologies and practices stemming from the rest of the Eastern world have had on the globalization of Japanese society. It is, in a sense, a phenomenon that has taken its own unique shape after being molded by the influence of many different societies throughout countless centuries.

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