

The Impact of Trade on Daily Life in East Asia, 960-1600

Paper Abstracts

Valerie Hansen, “Chinese and Japanese Consumption of Incense Circa 1000”

Writing in 1000, Lady Murasaki portrays the life of uninterrupted leisure led by the super rich of Kyoto. The emperor, his courtiers, and court women consume large quantities of only one good from outside Japan: aromatics imported from the Islamic world and Southeast Asia, brought by Chinese merchants. When Genji plans a lavish party for his daughter the Akashi Princess, he decides to hold a contest for the person who can make the best fragrance, offering much detail about the types of incense the Japanese were importing, their containers, and their preparation. Across the Sea of Japan, the entire range of Chinese society consumed fragrant woods, tree resins, and incense, we learn from written sources, and consumption continued to increase in the following centuries. Some examples: Emperor Huizong (r. 1100-1126) ordered the lighting of hundreds of candles containing a chunk of aloeswood or camphor along with a piece of ambergris to intensify the fragrance. A Northern Song official steamed his sleeves in perfumed vapor every day before he came to work. And ordinary people snacked on musk-infused sugarcane at temple fairs. Surviving objects (including those made of incense), recovered from tombs or Buddhist crypts, offer information about the use of imported fragrance. The paper will examine how (or whether) material evidence supplements the information in textual sources.

Yiwen Li, “Wind from Foreign Lands: Japanese Folding Fans in China, 1000-1410”

In the early eleventh century, while the diplomatic relationship between China and Japan was suspended, a Chinese scholar-official saw a delicate Japanese folding fan at a temple fair in the capital Kaifeng. This folding fan was too expensive for him to afford, but he recorded his admirations in detail. Folding fans were Japanese inventions and first appeared in China during the Northern Song dynasty. They remained as rare and precious objects for centuries. Chinese literati were very keen on writing poems about the folding fans that they or their friends obtained from private traders or even Korean embassies. While the appreciation of Chinese objects in Japan has drawn much attention from modern scholars, we still know little about how the Chinese viewed Japanese objects. By investigating Chinese miscellaneous notes, poems, and paintings regarding folding fans from Japan, this study aims to show how the folding fans embodied the Chinese literati's imagination of Japan and how the Chinese view of Japan changed as relations between the Chinese and Japanese governments evolved. The increasing piracy in the late fourteenth century, however, led Zhu Yuanzhang, the founding emperor of the Ming, to criticize Japanese folding fans for their irregular shapes, which echoed with their king being immoral and the Japanese commoners being thieves. But after the tributary relationship was reestablished in 1400s, folding fans were among the most popular tributary gifts, and the Chinese considered folding fans sold by the Japanese as more authentic and valuable than those made in China.

Peter D. Shapinsky, “Dressing like a Pirate: Clothing as Symbolic Marker in the East Asian Maritime World c. 1350-1600”

In the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries, Japanese pirates controlled many of the sea-lanes linking the Japanese archipelago to the rest of the world. In the

fourteenth century, they devastated Koryo Korea. In the sixteenth century they threatened Ming China as multiethnic assemblages based in western Japan and along the Chinese coast. This presentation examines evidence related to one part of Japanese pirates' material culture: their sartorial choices. Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and Portuguese writers all ascribed to Japanese pirates distinctive appearances and the practice of dressing as people of another culture. For modern historians, these sources have helped fuel debates over whether these pirates were all Japanese or whether it is more accurate to consider them border-crossing, intercultural intermediaries. I consider Japanese pirates' choices in dress as symbolically rich social practices: part of a spectrum of survival strategies in the maritime world of East Asia, the product of hybrid societies expert in methods of organizing and communicating across cultural lines, and as performative practices made in dialogue with their representations by surrounding societies. Chinese and Korean authorities in particular used descriptions of Japanese pirates' flexibility in costume to signal the danger posed by those engaging in violence at sea and to code foreign seafarers as well as their own littoral peoples as threats to a fixed, agrarian social order. Pirates' successes with this sartorial shifting spawned imitation: rebellious denizens of the coasts of Korea and China in the same period adopted the look of Japanese pirates.