



JAPAN INFORMATION
AND CULTURE CENTER
在米国日本大使館広報文化センター

TEACHING TUESDAY

FUMIKOU

A relatively unknown element in the tradition of *kōdō*, or the Way of Fragrance, are *fumikou* (文香). These fragrant, folded paper sachets are slipped into envelopes along with letters, releasing a soothing scent when the envelope is opened and permeating the paper of the letter. Made from beautifully designed Japanese paper with a bit of incense inside, these small, artistically folded packets are made to elicit feelings of joy and happiness in the recipient.

Originally used during the Heian period in love letters and *musubi-fumi* (knotted letters), they were used to express deep affection from the sender to the receiver. As *kōdō* became an important symbol of aristocracy amongst the aristocrats, courtiers began devising ways to include the scents in letters. Because letters to women were often screened before reaching their final destination, infusing the letter with a special scent, especially an appropriate seasonal flower, often helped convey feelings that couldn't be said directly.

Fumikou were revived in modern times as an add-in for thank-you letters and summer greetings. Now they are often given in souvenirs, and are considered a fun way to brighten people up, rather than their original romantic meaning. They are also folded in fun shapes, like flowers and origami designs. Common scents include sandalwood, cloves, and cinnamon, often mixed with dried flowers and tree bark. There are many varieties of fumikou, and they are typically available in packs of three to five for only 500 yen.