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Incense Burners Group B6

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Incense burner-
Gandhara

Bronze, 1st-2nd century.

Metropolitan Museum of Art

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Incense_burner_Gandhara_1st-2nd_c.jpg



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Present-day
relevance and
contemporary
usage

01

Overview

(Tamanna)

What is Incense? Incense Burner?

01	Latin	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Incendere• To Burn
02	Chinese	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Xiang 香• Not only incense, but also fragrance, scent, aroma, perfume and spice
03	Sanskrit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dhupa धुप• Incense, perfume, Ritual offering of incense

01	Incense	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sweet Smell when Burnt
02	Censer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vessel for Holding Incense
03	Incense Burner	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Incense + Censer

Direct Burning



Agarbatti (incense Sticks)
Shutterstock

<https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/holder-burning-incense-sticks-smoke-on-1618331581>



Dhoop (incense Cones)
Shutterstock

<https://www.shutterstock.com/search/incense+cones+burning>

Indirect Burning (Non-Flammable Incense)



Aroma Burner
Soapstone, Marble
Amazon

<https://www.amazon.in/Soapstone-Diffuser-Tealight-Lavender-Lemongrass/dp/B08VHF9S7D>

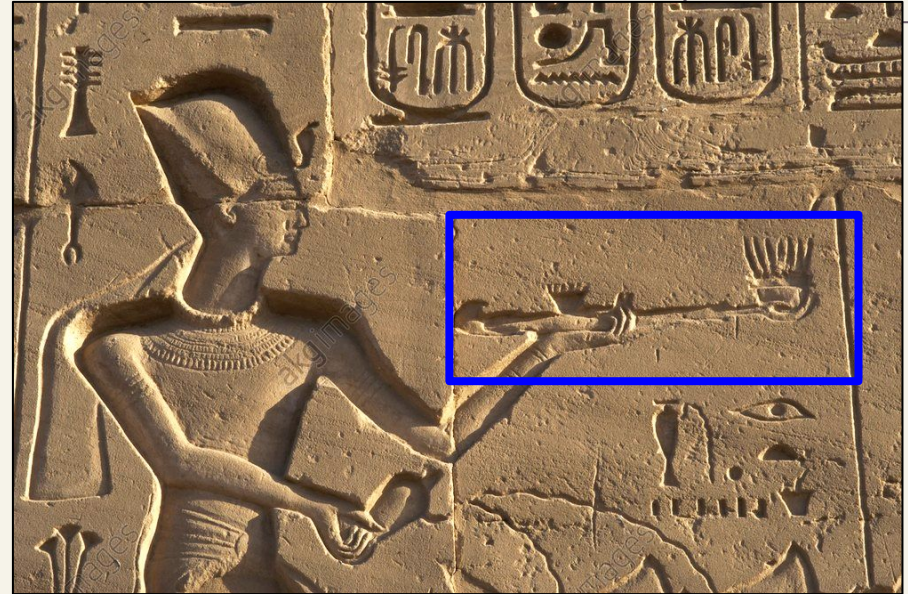


Indirect Incense Burner
Arabia: Yemen
Limestone, Sabaic inscriptions
2nd-1stC BC
British Museum

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1915-0710

Egypt and Mesopotamia

- Fragrant materials like **frankincense** and **myrrh** are found in :
 - Egyptian mummification processes
 - Resin balls found in prehistoric Egyptian tombs in El Mahasna
- **Usage:**
 - Fumigation ceremonies by priests
 - Offering to gods and fending off demons (especially in greek and roman cultures)



Pharaoh Ramesses II making an offering with incense burner to an Egyptian god.
Karnak Temple, 19th Dynasty
2000–1700 BC

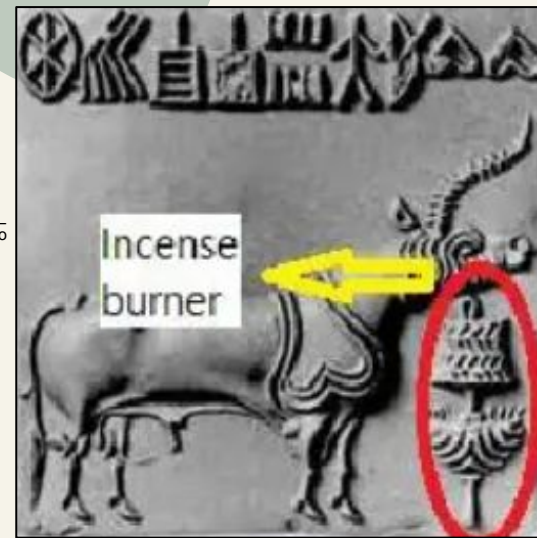
<https://www.akh-images.com/archive/-2UMDHUX4DD99.html>

India

- **Time Periods:**
 - Indus Valley Civilization (3300–1300 BC) (oils were used for fragrance)
 - Rig and Atharva Veda (written in 1500-500 BC) (oldest sources about incenses)
- **Usage:**
 - Frankincense used in Wedding rituals
 - Medicinal purposes (Ayurveda)
 - Later: religious purposes in Hinduism and then Buddhism

Unicorn stamp-seals
Mohenjo-daro
3300–1300 BC
Academia

https://www.academia.edu/42077733/The_incense_burner_and_Indus_seal_inscriptions



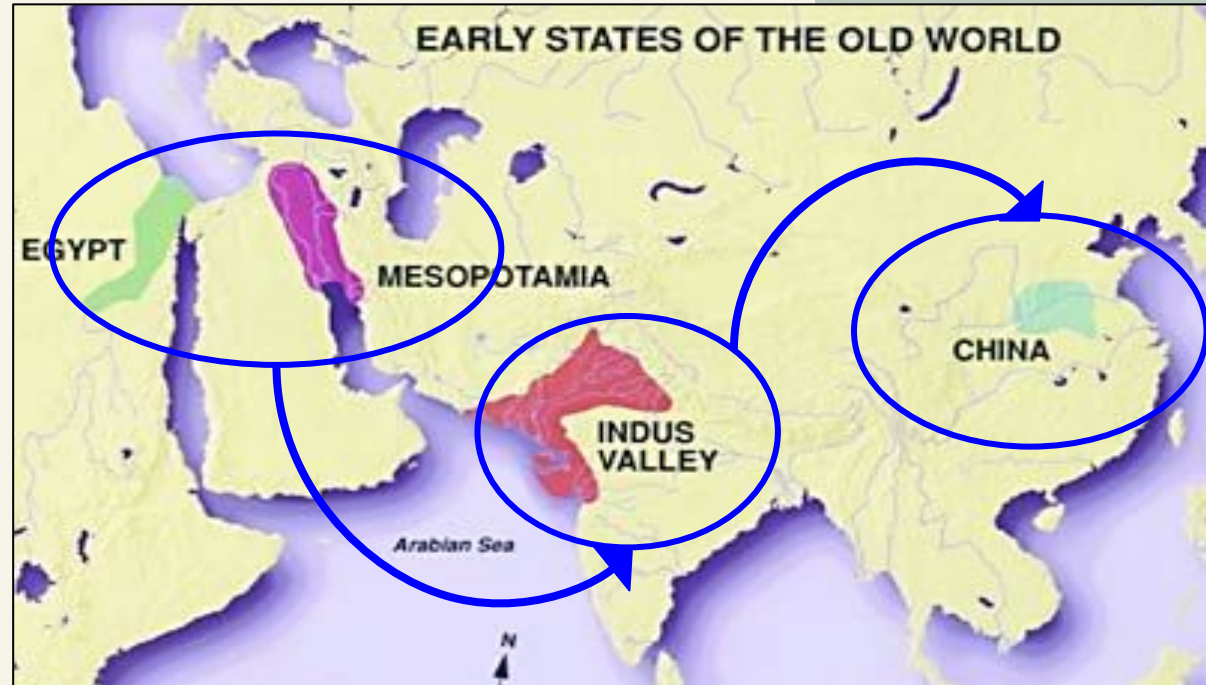
Unicorn stamp-seals
Mohenjo-daro
3300–1300 BC
British Museum

<https://www.bmimages.com/preview.asp?image=00975786001&itemw=4&itemf=0001&itemstep=1&itemx=20>



China

- **Time Periods and types:**
 - Neolithic (2000 BC): pottery - tripod
 - Xia, Shang, Zhou, Han: Bronze (later precious metals and gems)
- **Usage:**
 - Worshipping



Early Civilizations & the Foundations of
Human Culture
Kearns High Media Center

<https://kearnsmedia.weebly.com/early-civilizations--the-foundations-of-human-culture.html>

02

Xia, Shang, Zhou and Han Dynasty

(Nicole)

**Xia,
Shang,
Zhou
Dynasty
(2100BC-256BC)**



Houmuwu Ding, Shang Dynasty
He Nan, National Museum of China

Ding form 鼎

General features: Three or four legged, with a deep bowl (can be rectangular or rounded) usually with two ears. Made with bronze.

Special meanings: Round Sky Rectangle Earth 天圓地方
More and more rectangular Dings were found in mid-late period of Shang Dynasty-from functional cooking purpose to ritual purpose

Function:

- 1) A Pivotal role in ancient ritual activities such as sacrifices, feasts, and funerals
- 2) To mark the user's identity level.
- 3) Not yet related to Buddhist ceremonies



Houmuwu Ding, Shang Dynasty
He Nan, National Museum of China



Da Ke Ding, Western Zhou Dynasty
Shaanxi, Shanghai Museum

Han Dynasty (206BC-220AD)



5

Bronze Boshanlu with Tray,
Eastern Han Dynasty, Victoria and Albert Museum.

Late Han/Eastern Han: Hill censor/ Boshanlu

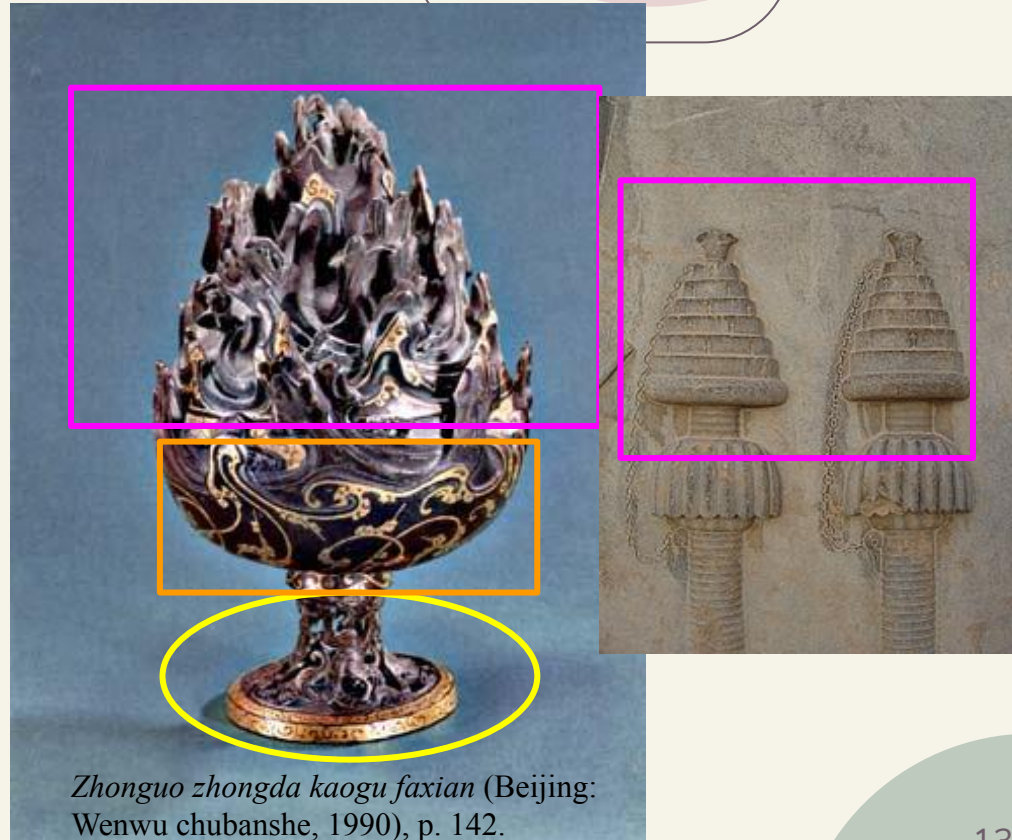
Single-circular leg with a thin neck to support the **'mountain shaped' burner lid**, usually with the plate absent.

Excavated from **Tomb of King Jing, Zhongshan**

General features: a mountain shaped lid, neck, single-circular leg

Specific features:

1. **Lid:** **Flame-shaped mountain peaks**, with trees, animals, and immortals carvings
2. **Bowl:** **swirling gold inlay** suggestive of waves
3. **Neck & leg:** **Three dragons** emerging from the leg to the bottom of the bowl to support the burner.





03

Tang Dynasty

Tang Dynasty

(618-907)

Censers in Lotus flower shape



Design features

Five-legged silver censer with flower ribbon chains and tortoise decorations with plate

Excavated from **Famen Temple**

General features: a lid, body and circular dish

Specific features:

- 1) Lid: lotus flowers and tortoise
- 2) Body: floating cloud and five unicorn legs
- 3) Bottom: Engraved words with Xiantong Tenth Year
- 4) Circular dish: two long-tailed phoenixes with Rui Cao



<http://www.studioarts.co.uk/links/hintsandtips/gildinggoldleafhintsandtips.htm>



<http://www.chineseculturalstudiescenter.org/xinge-interview-1.html>



<http://www.studioarts.co.uk/links/hintsandtips/gildinggoldleafhintsandtips.htm>

Design techniques: Hammering



<http://www.studioarts.co.uk/links/hintsandtips/gildinggoldleafhintsandtips.htm>

Lay gold and silver
flakes on the top as gilt

Influenced by the western culture

➔ Molding ➔



https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202007/17/WS5f1151a9a31083481725a4f0_8.html

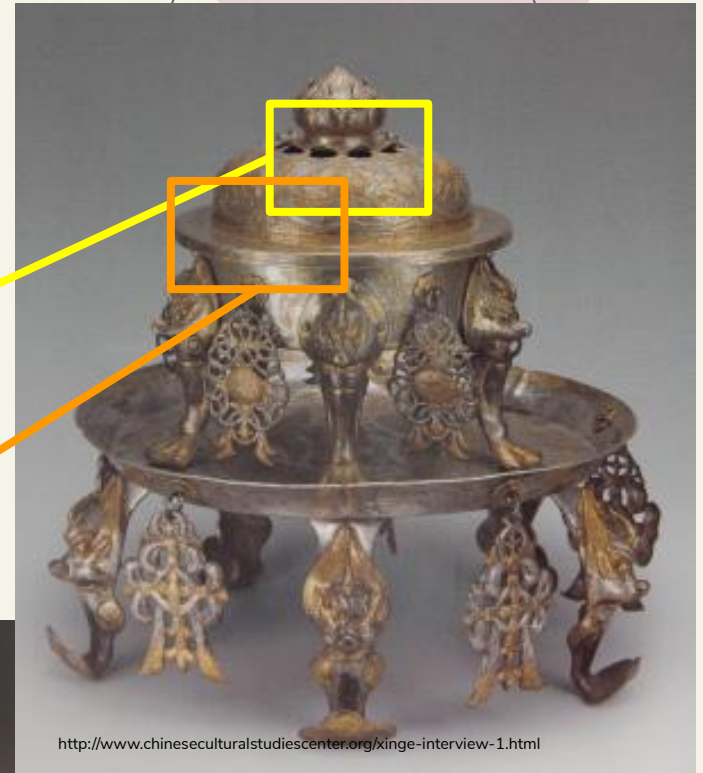
Hammering

Functions

- 1) Enhancing the effect of smoke
- 2) Representation of purity, peace and luck
- 3) Representation of social status
- 4) Buddhism meaning



<https://world.taobao.com/item/625193697975.htm>



Ming Dynasty

(1368-1644)

Xuande Bronze Censer (宣德爐)

The most significant type of censer developed in Ming Dynasty.



Xuande Bronze Censer, Ming Dynasty, Xuande Reign 1426-1435
Source: National Palace Museum Taiwan
<https://twgreatdaily.com/V931PGwB8g2yegNDVsMa.html>

Factors Contributed to the Origination and Development of Xuande Bronze Censers



Xuande Emperor, Ming Dynasty, 1426-1435
Source: The Palace Museum
<https://www.dpm.org.cn/court/lineage/226252.html>

Emperor Xuande

- A sincere patron of **Vajrayana Buddhism** who is very **passionate about censers**.

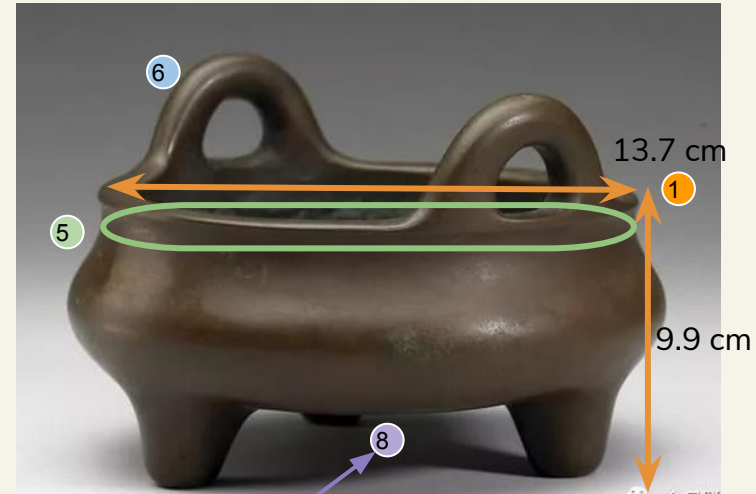
Social culture and development of Bronze

- **Ancient bronze** became a very **popular culture** as it is the **connoisseurship of high education level, social status and good & superior taste**.
- **Rapid development of bronze alloying techniques** in late Yuan - Ming Dynasties facilitated the replacement of other materials.

Ming Dynasty marks the **proliferation of bronze censers**, with the **globular tripod censer** as the most venerated type.

Design features - Quaint and Solemn (古樸莊重)

- 1) **Size and weight:** Width ranges from 8cm-20cm and weight from 3-7 catty (斤).
- 2) **Material:** **Bronze** (alloy containing zinc, copper, tin, brass and other metals).
- 3) **Lid:** Usually **without a lid** for direct burning of incense sticks.
- 4) **Body:** **Globular**-compressed spherical shape, hollow.
- 5) **Rim:** **Lipped rim** with a **short neck**.
- 6) **Handles / Ears:** **Arched handles** (橋形耳)
- 7) **Legs:** **Tripod style**, 3 short and thick splayed legs for sturdy support.
- 8) **Carvings:** **Bottom inscriptions** of time period Daming Xuande Nianzhi (大明宣德年製)



Xuande Bronze Censer and Bottom Inscriptions, Ming Dynasty, Xuande Reign 1426-1435.
Source: National Palace Museum
<https://twgreatdaily.com/V931PGwB8g2yegNDVsMa.html>

Evolution of Craftsmanship based on designs from Xia, Shang Zhou Dynasties

Xia, Shang, Zhou Dynasties: Ding form (鼎)



Da Ke Ding, Western Zhou Dynasty
Source: Shanghai Museum

Ming Dynasty: Xuande Bronze Censer (宣德爐)



Xuande Bronze Censer, Ming Dynasty
Source: National Palace Museum

Can you spot the similarities and differences between the censers?

Evolution of Craftsmanship based on designs from Xia, Shang Zhou Dynasties

Xia, Shang, Zhou Dynasties: Ding form (鼎)



Da Ke Ding, Western Zhou Dynasty
Source: Shanghai Museum

Similarities and reasons

- Without a lid
 - Globular body
 - Lipped rim
 - Arched handles
 - Tripod style
- Cultural pursuit of the ancient traditional and quaint style as a new form of craftsmanship appreciation and social connoisseurship in Ming dynasty.

Ming Dynasty: Xuande Bronze Censer (宣德爐)



Xuande Bronze Censer, Ming Dynasty
Source: National Palace Museum

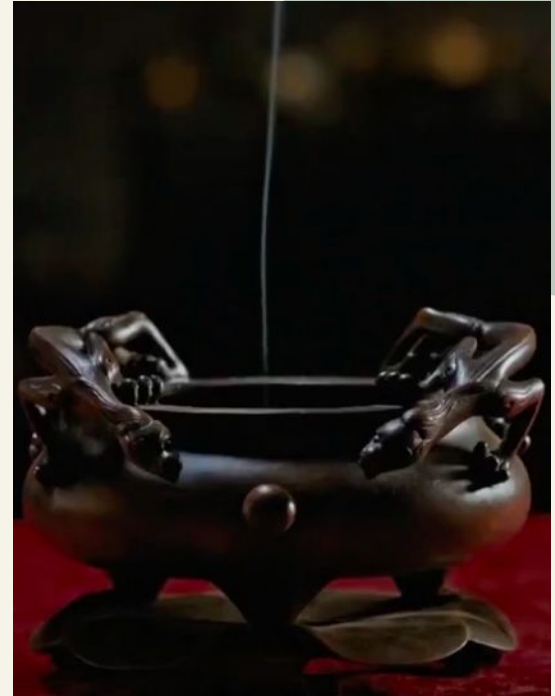
Differences and reasons

- **Material: Bronze as a connoisseurship** in Ming Dynasty
- **Carvings: No fancy carvings** due to the **pursuit of a solemn and decent style.**
- **Shape: Compressed body and shorter legs** give a lower center of gravity for a **more sturdy support and heavy feeling (厚重壓手).**

Functions and purposes

1. Direct Burning of Incense Sticks

- For **Buddhist rituals and worshipping** in temples and royal palaces.
- To create **fragrance and aroma in clothes** and costumes.
- To create an **atmosphere for literati and scholars to read and write** inside their study room (焚上一炷香, 营造「红袖添香夜讀書」的意境). As an art form namely **Xiangdao** (香道).



Burning of incense in Xuande Bronze censer
Source: The Great Shokunin
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ew-rLWatdX4>

Functions and purposes

2. Burning of censers - imitation of ancient patinas

- A form of **social gathering** and **aesthetic entertainment** for the **literati** and **upper class** people.
- **Burn censers over the flames**, which flames were started with **charcoal** and incense materials.
- **To observe** the **changes in colour** of censers due to the chemical reaction of Zinc.



Modern imitation of burning censers over flames.
Source: Zhonghua Guobaodangan, Yangshiwang (中華國寶檔案, 央視網)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8pc18Pdk5c>

Usage of censers by literati and upper class people is an **evolution of culture passed on from the Song Dynasty**. This function lasted until Qing Dynasty, Minguo and even present days.



05

Present-day

Worship - Fengshui



Bodhisattvas

- ❖ Highest priority
- ❖ Higher than incense burner

Ancestors

- ❖ Behind the bodhisattvas

Current problem - air pollution



=



Pictures from Freepik

https://www.freepik.com/premium-photo/burning-joss-sticks-incense-with-smoke_2984006.htm#page=2&query=burning+joss+incense&position=10

https://www.freepik.com/free-vector/cars-factory-big-city-making-dirty-smoke_5837846.htm#page=1&query=car%20factory%20big%20city&position=0

Electronic incense burner



節節高升-電子薰香爐 品香爐

沉香公主 Oud Pandia

HK\$ 520.9



台灣製電子薰香爐 圓滿爐 搭配樹脂型
木屑超好用 汝窯色

光之薩滿與優波羅花

HK\$ 434.0



節節高升-電子薰香爐 品香爐

沉香公主 Oud Pandia

HK\$ 520.9

Pros

- ❖ No pollutants
- ❖ Easier to control

A picture of electronic incense burner on Pinkoi
<https://hk.pinkoi.com/search?q=%E9%9B%BB%E5%AD%90%E9%A6%99%E7%88%90>

Innovative incense burners



A newly invented incense burner

<https://www.chinatimes.com/realtimenews/20200102003434-260405?chdtv>

Humidifier ♦
Air purifier

Same sandalwood smell
but no pollutant

Conclusion

- ❖ Deeper understanding of incense burners
- ❖ Try to appreciate it

Picture from Freepik: Front view of man praying at the temple with burning incense
https://www.freepik.com/free-photo/front-view-woman-man-praying-temple-with-burning-incense_12346819.htm



**Thank
you!**



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