

Photo:
Yoshimi Ito



Fusion of vision and sound

Japanese Traditional Culture

It is said that traditional Japanese flower arrangement was introduced as cultural accomplishment based on the teachings of Buddhism and Confucianism. After the Second World War, some flower schools adopted a method including a Western aesthetic sense. Yet, in Japan a majority of women learn flower arrangement just for the purpose of getting a sense of manner, but not for seeking a sense of design. Even if a student seeking to learn design in flower arrangement asks her teacher some questions, no proper answer would be returned.

Historically in Japan, the art is cultivated by sensitivity, and that is why schoolmasters would not teach basic theory. The sensitivity of the art is to be learned by students just watching their teacher's performances. In other words, the concept of the art must be learned not in theory but by practice and training.

“Hanadome”

A New Flower Arrangement Coexisting with Nature (2)

By Yoko KASAI

Fundamentally the art has been regarded as something that could not be expressed in words and phrases, but by continuous practice and training, which will lead learners to achieve their goal.

In the Western world, the total concept is introduced in the first place, and then everyone is oriented to create his or her own art based on the concept introduced. We cannot ignore the difference in Oriental and Occidental art because of their historical and climatic backgrounds. Traditional art objects are mostly based on motifs of nature. Think of traditional music instruments, ditty boxes, Buddhist statues, buildings, flower vases, etc. All of them are made of wood. Traditional earthenware is made of local clay, which provides different local colors in the products. The development of such earthenware has enabled the growth of the flower art. Because of the material used, namely clay, earthenware can keep water clean, compared with other vessels.

As Japan consists of many islands making a long but narrow shape stretching from east to west and from north to south, the blessing of nature differs from region to region. *Shinto*, Japan's traditional religion, teaches people to respect nature in the belief that gods reside in the woods and forests that seasonally put out buds, leaves and flowers, some beautifully colored. Culture is what has emerged out of such blessings of nature in a country and has since undergone changes.

In traditional tea ceremony, different materials are used depending on seasons. Scroll pictures, tea cakes and tea sets are all changed seasonally.

A similar thing is found in Japanese flower arrangement. Flowers used for the arrangement are different by season. Traditional poetry such as *waka* and *haiku* is required to include a *kigo* or season word. In this manner traditional culture could not be developed without consideration to the season. The four seasons in Japan have cultivated a different style of culture from other countries.

Style of Hanadome Arrangement

Hanadome is not a way of courtesy or behavior. It is based on individual design.

From ancient times flowers have been loved by people regardless of social status or nationality. *Hanadome* is a kind of design to be enjoyed by every flower lover without any difficulties. People are first puzzled by difficulty in setting flowers in a vase because they are just fascinated by the

Photo: Yoshimi Ito



Hanadome as interior design

beauty of flowers, forgetting how to design. After learning the basic concept of design, one will catch on to the way to make an artistic arrangement. The basic concept of design is not only required for flower arrangement. It is also a way to understand other categories of arts.

Western-style flower arrangement is designed basically by paying attention to colors of flowers, while Japanese flower arrangement must be performed in consideration of the space where flowers are placed as well as their shape and line. Every flower has its own feature of color, line, shape, form, texture and space. All of them are the elements of design constituting the beauty of flowers. Therefore design must be created in consideration of those elements. *Hanadome* is a method to make use of elements of each flower to convey natural beauty. The design of *Hanadome* starts from this concept.

Theory of design containing geometric patterns was introduced in Greek philosophy derived from the providence of nature, which is adoptable in any world of art. In Japan, regardless of the style of flower arrangement, few schools teach basic theory of design. Sometimes people think the basic design of Western-style flower arrangement is to place flowers geometrically in a planar way such as triangular or round shapes.

Basic Concept of Design

It will be easy to comprehend any type of flower arrangement if you apply the providence of nature. Bring back to memory your childhood when you draw a triangle without any advice of the teacher. You must have drawn two dots first to fix the bottom line and then put another dot above the bottom. No wonder why you did not

draw the triangle the other way around. Needless to say, a sense of “safety feature” worked there. It is the sense of balance every each individual has. We sense stability in this way. This sense is applicable to the art of flower arrangement.

All of the objects surrounding us fundamentally consist of triangles or circles or of their aggregation. Design is principally based on the shape of triangles and circles. A triangle shows its image of stability because of the long bottom line. A circle shows its stability because of its round shape. Design must be made up on a stout and large bottom, and it will present an image of stability. The stability is the balance or harmony of arrangement. The vase and flowers must be well balanced to create beauty of arrangement. The volume and scale of flowers used and their colors are also a key factor to constitute beautiful arrangement.

Hanadome starts from the above concept by physically fixing flowers in the vase without using any kind of oasis or a pinholder called a *kenzan*. The difference in Western-style flower arrangement and that of Japanese traditional one is found whether it is steric or planar. Today, however, sometimes a planar Western style and sterically designed traditional arrangement are presented.

The difference of shape and form also stems from how to grasp the space, in other words where to place the arrangement. Traditionally in Japan, arranged flowers have been placed in a *tokonoma* (alcove) that is set up specifically for its purpose, surrounding its three sides by walls, where the arrangement is observed only in one direction. Meanwhile, Western-style flowers are placed on a table or a fireplace with open surrounding space.

Between Japan and the Western

Image: TNM Image Archives

Source: <http://TNMArchives.jp/>



Katawaguruma ditty box (a national treasure possessed by Tokyo National Museum)

world, there is a different view toward open space. In Europe, the space is taken as vacuity. Consequently design is created merely with substance or entity. In Japan, on the contrary, art is created based on the balance of vacuity and substance, which is named *yin* and *yang* respectively. This concept is found in various art objects and paintings such as *fusumae* (screen drawing). The space where nothing exists is interpreted as if there would be something called none. Another example to comprehend this *yin* and *yang* is shown in a seme put on a piece of gold-relief lacquerware named a *katawaguruma* ditty box made in the Heian era (794-1192). The seme drawn on the box shows a single-handed wheel cart as *yang* and the blank space as *yin*. It is a beauty of balance that can be seen in traditional flowers arranged in *tokonoma*.

In *Hanadome*, the same concept is introduced likewise. If the surroundings of the arrangement were in a noisy atmosphere, the beauty of balance might not be created. The sense of contrast of *yin* and *yang* is introduced in *Hanadome* design. It will be found in the contrast of flowers among themselves, and flowers and stems with their surrounding space. The space creates a three-dimensional arrangement.

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