



Nature in Hanadome

Japanese culture is always linked with nature. In any age, culture has been nurtured by nature. The beauty of nature is visually introduced by color.

Japanese Color Sense

Color is a major element of design that is applicable to *Hanadome* arrangement. Affection for color varies according to cultural backgrounds. In Japan, for example, a combination of red and white is regarded as a blessing color. On the contrary, in the world of Christianity, the combination means blood and death. It is often said that the preference for color in one country is not always favored in another country. The preference for color also varies with changes in ages. It is affected by physiological or mental actions, and it is said that it is connected with our mental structures.

In Japan, emotion to nature determines the combination of colors. Hue, value and intensity are known as the three dimensions of color, which are commonly expressed in words such as deep/dilute, light/dark, flashy/humble, etc. In Japan, names of colors are expressed by natural objects, i.e. cherry rose, wisteria violet, nightingale-colored, prune brown, madder red, etc. Colors are also

“Hanadome”

Natural Color Provides Mental Comfort

By Yoko KASAI

expressed with phrases like warm-feeling, cool-feeling and reposing, changing with seasonal variations and natural things. The phrase “natural color” is usually used to describe some mild warm color of medium intensity and medium value. The influence of natural color has been demonstrated by Japanese poetry such as *waka* and *haiku*. The use of branches and coloration that convey the impressions of nature in flower arrangement have been matched with one’s own feelings. Particularly the color combination of flowers and grasses provides the feeling of nature. Nature is not an existence in opposite direction to human beings, but it coexists with us. That is why the beauty of nature provides us mental comfort.

Why Are People Attracted by Hanadome?

It is because *Hanadome* provides natural color combination, or nature itself, where the individual character of each flower is represented in a natural way.

Beauty in natural color was already found in court ladies’ clothes of the Heian era in the 9th to 12th centuries and in the costume of beauties depicted in *Ukiyoe* Japanese woodblock prints of Kitagawa Utamaro in the late Edo era (1603-1867). Aesthetic feelings in the Heian era included the sense of beautiful coloration sensitive to the four seasons, and it was reflected in daily life by adopting proper colors in costume. The word *kasanerome* or layering of clothing of different colors is an expression to deliver impressions of natural grasses and flowers. In those days people of high society expressed the color of the season by showing various colors of layered clothes on the collar or hem. For expressing emotion toward

the beauty of nature, it was important to match the coloration of clothing with that of natural objects. When wearing such *kasanerome* costume in each season, they showed gradation of lightness and darkness using the value and intensity of color. Gradation is rhythm that was born in Asia. At Horyuji temple built in the 7th century, we can see a primitive technique of gradation on its wall painting. The sense of the season found in *kasanerome* also represented the world of lyrical beauty. Combination of blue and white was called *kasanerome* of *unohana* or a kind of deutzia that represents the early summer season, and *hototogisu* or a little cuckoo staying on *unohana* is often referred to in the famed Japanese *waka* anthology *Kokinshu*.

In Europe, colors are used differently from Japan. In “The Red and the Black” written by Stendhal in the 19th century, red is said to represent republicanism and black the world of Christianity. Thus the sense of color in Europe, where Christianity is a dominant religion, is fundamentally different from that of Japanese culture that respects nature.

Cultural Tradition in Coloration

Traditionally in Japan, people regard it well refined to act conservatively, while flashy semblance is seen as indelicate. Such a disposition to respect simple turnout for maintaining one’s dignity was set up by *samurai* society during the Kamakura era

Photo: The Museum Yamatobunkakan (owner of the scroll)



Clothing in Heian era: Portrait of the poetess Kodai-no-kimi depicted on a fragment of “The Thirty-six Poets and Poetesses” scroll (Important Cultural Property)



Image: TMM Image Archives Source: <http://Tmmarchives.jp/>

Clothing in Edo era: One of Kitagawa Utamaro's Ukiyoe paintings titled "Fragrances of flowers" (possessed by Tokyo National Museum)

(1192-1333) after the aristocratic society of the Heian era lasting nearly four centuries. Coupled with the influence of *zen* Buddhism featuring simplicity, the art to draw *suibokuga*, or black-and-white ink painting, became popular at that time. The fading gray color of *suibokuga* indeed depicts hazy mountains and forests far away.

After the Azuchi-Momoyama era (1550-1600), influenced by newly introduced Western culture, persons in power tended to show their authority by applying gold or silver or bold colors. The *shogunate* of the Ashikaga family built Kinkakuji, the golden pavilion, and Ginkakuji, the silver pavilion, in Kyoto. Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who was in the position of *kampaku*, chief adviser to the emperor, introduced a pure gold tea house. Another instance is Toshogu Shrine in Nikko, north of Tokyo, dedicated to tycoon Tokugawa Ieyasu. Those constructions are typical examples of flaunting authority adopted by paramount leaders.

In the early part of the Edo era (in the beginning of the 17th century), a new aesthetic sense called *dote* (nifty, tony) became popular. In those days people liked to use florid and way-out objects. In the latter part of the era (the 19th century), the sense of *dote* got eclipsed and another aesthetic conception of *iki* (chic, cool) strutted by Edo

townspeople was introduced. *Iki* was principally represented by applying conservative colors such as brown, gray or indigo blue with a limited amount of bright color. As found in *Ukiyoe*, the coloration therein is grave. To depict *iki* appearance, simple patterns or stripes of some tones of golden brown, whitish brown, dark brown, light gray, cherish gray or iron blue colors were applied. The sensitive aesthetic conception of *iki* founded a starting point of design in the country that has been taken over up to date. The culture of *iki* is also developed in tea ceremony together with the senses of *wabi* and *sabi*, which respect simplicity and quietness to sublime a well-seasoned feeling.

While European flower arrangement places a greater importance on color, its traditional Japanese counterpart values the contrast of entity and empty rather than the gaiety of flowers. Lines of branches take the initial role of arrangement, putting a few colorful flowers in some auxiliary position. Therein the sense of *iki* is applied. *Iki* was a technical method inimitably created by new-rich townsmen in the Edo era when the national seclusion policy was enforced by the *shogunate* government.

Flowers produced in Japan mostly have somewhat lower color saturation and luminosity than those of Europe where the climate is dry. In a sense, Japanese flowers are tender to human eyes like rainbow colors. When arranging flowers, people pay less attention to the colors of each flower, but take more consideration on coloration brought about from natural space and the lines of design. This concept has been cultivated by the natural climate and historical background over the years. In the Edo era, downtown residents, though poor, still got the pleasure of potted plants placed in front of the gate. Such a tradition has been kept to date. In downtown Tokyo, you will find similar scenery along narrow lanes surrounded by modern buildings. The Occidental feeling of color was introduced to Japanese flower arrangement after the Second World War. Although Japanese culture is unique and inimitable, it has been cultivated for a long period of time under the

influence of other cultures from abroad.

Lately a variety of cut flowers are imported from various countries along with the spread of the Western-style arrangement. Western flowers definitely take an important role in natural design. Even if some flowers of thin stems might not be used for arrangement with *kenzan* or oasis, they take an integral position to construct *Hanadome* design because of their colors and lines.

The beauty of flowers contains the mystery of nature. Regardless of ages and places, flowers present comfort to people. Though the colors of natural flowers are dull and mediocre in comparison with artificially colored flowers, nobody would choose to ignore the splendor of natural color on the first glance of some burning red flowers. It is because natural color has a shading that provides a variety of tones. Such a delicacy is its fundamental character different from artificial products.

Hanadome applies different coloration in accordance with themes of arrangement. When designing as an interior item, arrangement corresponds to the colors and lines of furniture. At a Treschic Interior Flowers exhibition introducing *Hanadome* under the theme of ladies of "The Tale of Genji," arrangement was performed to express ladies' melancholy, delight and jealousy by the colors of flowers and lines of stems and branches.

In the world of design, red, orange and yellow are interpreted as expanding colors, while green, blue and violet are categorized in constricting colors. Red color is used to inspire people and yellow to call in luck. In Europe, red signifies love and passion, white denotes innocence or cleanness, and yellow symbolizes amulet. They say European floral language has come from the colors of flowers. The preference for color varies according to countries because of their different cultural backgrounds. In Japan, people like pastel color for its light soft tone resembling natural self-color. *Hanadome* design as well makes consideration of natural color, the size of flowers, texture, lines and space to make them well harmonized. **JS**

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