Lesson for Intermediate and Advanced Learners

Free Style

Work and commentary / Professor
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【Lesson 25】

The Meaning of Learning Free Style

With the beginning of the new year upon us, let us think again about the origin of ikebana. When did it begin? In what styles did people arrange their flowers, and what kinds of floral materials did they use back then? What about vases and *hanadome* (flower supports)? Did they display the flowers not only in formal situations but also for other occasions? These kinds of questions are unending.

Flowers are often displayed at annual events such as New Year and seasonal festivals, as well as at ceremonial Buddhist or Shinto occasions such as weddings and funerals. These are occasions where people get together to wish one another happiness, or to pay their respects. In order to express or lift them up, our ancestors put these feelings of theirs into the flowers they arranged. They used a style similar to what we might now call "free style," as it is one in which we can express our thoughts most easily, and also because it does not have as many rules and restrictions for us to fret over.

Flowers arranged for these formal occasions should not be artistic. Our old masters have handed down the teaching that in such cases, flowers should be arranged to look as if they have grown by themselves in nature.

Now, what about *hanadome* and floral materials? As for *hanadome*, it is surmised that people wedged flowers between stones, appreciating their ephemeral life, like in the movie "*Hana Ikusa* (Flower and Sword)" released in 2017. You can also find some scratches made by stones inside vases used for *rikka* back in those days, indicating that stones were used as *hanadome*.

There is an article about "fan flower" in the oldest *kadensho* (book of flowery tradition) in Japan, "*Kao Irai no Kadensho*." A fan flower is a work arranged during the party after a *renga* (linked poetry) meeting, by placing flowers directly into the sand. The arrangement was given its name, and tastefully so, because it very much resembled a fan. I believe we need to always start from understanding, through examples like this, what our ancestors thought about flowers.

In this work, floral materials are positioned into the sand. Yellow Sarcandra glabra are positioned separately to the right and left, stretching lithely. Red Sarcandra glabra and pine are added in the lower section to bring some variation of color to the work. They stand straight up, reflecting a wish for happiness in the new year. Another reason to stand these materials upright is that they might fall down if positioned at too much of an angle. Moss is positioned in the lower left section, making the *sashikuchi* (the position of the cut stems of floral materials placed in the vase) the high point of the work.

＊Japanese text and picture: p.30-31