

Lesson for Intermediate and Advanced Learners

Shoka

Work and commentary :
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【Lesson 85】

Shoka Shofutai Expressions: Isshuike, Nishuike

Meeting the needs of the times, Ikenobo continually seeks to develop ikebana styles able to elucidate the “natural appearance of each plant of fields, mountains and waterside,” in the manner of the styles that have been handed down to Ikenobo practitioners for generations.

There are two styles of *shoka*: *shofutai* and *shimputai*, both consisting of up to three kinds of plants. These have been transmitted as “styles that convey the vigor of the plants with dignity, using only a small number of branches.”

Shoka shofutai was established in 1879, when then-headmaster Ikenobo Sensho was appointed a teacher at Kyoto Prefectural Girl's School. It was the first in-school ikebana class in ikebana history. The Headmaster Sensho published “*Hana no Shiori*,”* a basic textbook written for beginners, which replaced the conventional oral teachings. Here, *shoka* floral patterns were classified into *shin*, *gyo* and *so* patterns. In addition, *shoka* arrangements were redefined as “*shoka shofutai*,” which made it easier to learn and to teach the structure.

Shoka shofutai (conventional *issuikie* and *nishuikie* arrangements) are composed in line with the natural order, such as seasons, growing environment, climate, *shussho* (intrinsic, specific properties of plants) and heliotropism, all of which require close observation of the plants growing in nature in Japan. *Isshuikie*, composed with a single kind of plant, is essentially considered optimal. Branches of the single kind of plant are arranged in harmonious order, conveying the

plant's vigor. Meanwhile, *nishuikie* is composed using two kinds of plants. A *nishuikie* arrangement symbolically portrays landscapes in the foreground and background by means of the encounter between two plants growing in the same environment, the plants resonating beautifully while also contrasting with each other. Plants regarded as *kimono* (woody materials) are stronger than *kusamono* (grassy materials). *Tsuyomono* (materials having qualities of both *kimono* and *kusamono*) are classified in between, leading to the rule that *kimono* should be positioned higher at the rear of the arrangement and *kusamono* lower in front of the *kimono*. In a *nishuikie* arrangement, a small *kusamono* material (with a stem, leaves and small flowers) is used as *nejime* (*tai* unique to *nishuikie*) and positioned on the *kyakui* (guest side), following the forementioned rule. This rule indicates consideration for things behind one.

In *shoka shofutai*, a vase symbolizes the ground while water signifies an expanse of ground, a pond or a swamp. In addition, the *mizugiwa* represents the vitality of plants, being the point at which the vigor of the plant used is concentrated. An arrangement consists of *shin*, *soe* and *tai* (said to represent man, heaven and earth, respectively), which are composed to appear like a plant that receives sunlight from one direction and bends while growing in the direction of the light. Here, the arrangement must reflect the distinct characteristics of the floral materials used.

Isshuikie and *nishuikie* arrangements are representations of beautiful forms, in which the vigor of plants is demonstrated. In an arrangement, a plant extends its roots into the ground, and grows in the environment in which it finds itself according to the laws of nature. In other words, plants retain their natural qualities while also being abstracted in an arrangement.

The focus of *shofutai* is not in forming plants into certain structures. What is important in *shofutai* is to maximize the *shussho* of each plant and the appeal of their natural appearance, based on prescribed patterns.

* “*Hana no Shiori*”: A book introducing basic structures of *shoka shofutai*. It is still utilized as a guideline for *shoka* creation, under the new title “*Hana Kagami: Shoka Shiori no Maki*.”