

Lesson for Intermediate and Advanced Learners

Shoka

Work and commentary :
Associate Professor

Katsuhito Kurata

【Lesson 88】

“Gokajo”

In the course of getting diplomas through teachers, Ikenobo practitioners are granted the *densho* (book of flower traditions) “*Shoden* (Elementary)” upon promotion to “Instructor of Ikebana, 3rd Grade.” Getting “*Shoden*” in their hands must be a great experience for many disciples to be welcomed in a world of longstanding tradition, although the *densho* may look difficult upon initial inspection.

Included in the first half of the *densho* is the “*Gokajo* (Five Traditional Articles).” The five articles are: “*Shochikubai* Arrangements” (combining pine, bamboo, and Japanese plum), “*Sanganofune* (or *Mitsunofune*) Arrangements” (three-boat arrangements), “*Mimono*, *Hamono*, *Tsurumono* Arrangements” (arrangements using floral materials featuring berries, leaves, or vines), “*Shoka Sakura*” (*shoka* using Prunus), and “*Shoka Momiji*” (*shoka* using colored maple). The selection of the five articles is unsystematic, potentially causing students confusion when they begin studying the contents of the *densho*. The unsystematic grouping owes to the fact that each article was taught separately until the Edo Era (1603-1868). The first appearance of each article in the *densho* “*Montei Karidomecho*” is as follows:

“*Shoka Sakura*” and “*Shoka Momiji*”—January 1806

“*Sanganofune*” and “*Shochikubai*”—May 1806

“*Mimono*, *Hamono*, *Tsurumono*”—April 1807

As you can see, the articles first appeared in the *densho* at different times. Later, during the Meiji Era (1868-1912), these articles were combined as “*Gokajo*.” This was with the intent of speeding up the processes of study and of diploma applications, as well as of

meeting various needs of the times. Consequently, “*Gokajo*” became a comprehensive guideline for studying *shoka*, including different perspectives to observe plants, the long-lasting historic development of *shoka*, the significance of tradition, and fundamental techniques.

The techniques introduced in each article demand high-level skills. Accordingly, not many Ikenobo practitioners, whether beginners or experienced, would have frequent opportunities to compose any of the arrangements included in “*Gokajo*.” Teachers must also study the arrangements in “*Gokajo*” themselves and explain their experiences and feelings in a simple and easy-to-understand manner to their students who are to study “*Shoden*.”

The sample work is a “*Shoka Sakura*” arrangement. ■



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