

Lesson for Intermediate and
Advanced Learners

Shoka

Work and commentary :
Professor

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【Lesson 89】
“*Shichishuden*”

“*Shichishuden* (Seven Special Teachings)” is included in the *densho* (book of flower traditions) “*Shoden* (Elementary).” It follows the “*Gokajo* (Five Traditional Articles)” discussed in the last month’s issue. As its title suggests, the “*Shichishuden*” introduces seven floral materials to which special techniques or structures are applied. The seven floral materials are: *basho* (Japanese banana), *hasu* (lotus), *suisen* (narcissus), *omoto* (*Rohdea japonica*), *tsubaki ichirinike* (single flower arrangement of a camellia), *botan* (tree peony) and *asagao* (Japanese morning glory).

In *shoka*, it is considered most appropriate to compose a work using a single kind of floral material while respecting the *shussho* (intrinsic, specific properties) and appearance of the individual plant. Here, the floral material used must be a flowering plant. Yet, it is also permitted to use a flowerless plant as *shin* and *soe* and add to them a different plant, one with blooming flowers in the season. Essentially, floral materials are arranged following the constraints of *shoka*. However, some floral materials are difficult to arrange following these constraints, among them the seven floral materials listed above.

Now, let us consider why these seven plants were selected for inclusion in the “*Shichishuden*.”

The “*Shichishuden*” contains various teachings and the wisdom of our predecessors, which have been handed down for generations. Each of our predecessors composed arrangements from varied perspectives including aesthetics, and thus their works are stylistically different. The creation of these pluralistic arrangements led to the invention of unconventional floral patterns

eventually perfected as special teachings. As we study the special teachings contained in the “*Shichishuden*” to deepen our understanding, we constantly discover fresh perspectives and thus become aware of how far we have yet to go.

We should always respect the approaches of our predecessors in selecting these seven materials, and we should apply what we learn from the *densho* to ikebana works of modern days. I believe that is what our predecessors desired when composing the *densho*.

Originally, each of the seven teachings was taught separately. Their first appearance came in March 1805 in the *densho* “*Montei Karidomecho*.” From this fact, we can assume that they were compiled as “*Shichishuden*” at the end of the Edo Era (1603-1868). Just like the “*Gokajo*,” the seven teachings in the “*Shichishuden*” reveal how Ikenobo ikebana has been flexible while adapting to the times.

The sample work is “*shoka botan*.” The *densho* states that *botan* (tree peony) is considered a dignified flower and therefore admired as *kao*, the king of flowers. The *densho* also dictates the colors and positioning of flowers and buds, as well as the use of *hanadome*. ■

