

Analysis of the Origin and Main Schools of Japanese Ikebana

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Abstract

The art of Ikebana in Japan originated from China, and through its development and evolution over 500 years, has incorporated Japan's unique qualities of delicacy, conciseness, and cleanliness. Along with Kōdō (incense appreciation), Shodō (calligraphy), Uta (poetry), and Chado (tea ceremony), Ikebana has become a significant part of Japanese culture. Various Ikebana schools each with their unique features have emerged to present day, including notable schools like Ikenobō, Ohara-ryū, Sōgetsu-ryū, and Mishō-ryū. This study introduces the concept and origins of Ikebana, and highlights the development of the four major Ikebana schools, aiming to grasp the overall development trajectory of Japanese Ikebana.

Keywords

Japanese Ikebana; Schools; Flower Arranging; Nature.

1. The Concept of Japanese Ikebana

In Japan, flower arranging is called Ikebana. It stands alongside Kōdō, Shodō, Uta, and Chado as an essential part of Japanese culture. Japanese Ikebana, also known as "kadō (the way of flowers)" or "arranging flowers" or "making flowers alive" or "Japanese flower art", is simply understood as the arrangement of natural or deliberately cultivated flowers and plants in a container to capture the essence of life and beauty. Ikebana elevates the art of flower arranging to its highest plane. In a deeper sense, Ikebana is an "art and 'do' (way)" combination, where "do" not only means field but also refers to the pursuit of a spiritual high, as described by the word "sought after." Since the publication of the "Floral Biography" about flower arranging in the Muromachi period, flower arranging and "illumination" are often linked, viewing "flower arranging" as an "act of contemplating the relationship between nature and people." Ikebana distinguishes itself from flower arranging not only in the production of floral art but also in the process of flower arranging. Modern day Ikebana culture encompasses elements from Shinto and Buddhism, decoration aimed at room aesthetics, and self-expression prevalent in modern arts.

2. The Origin of Japanese Ikebana

2.1. Initial Flower Arrangement Activities

The spiritual origin of Japanese Ikebana can be traced back to the Asuka Jidai period and the Japanese deity belief. They believed that deities resided in the trees and forests of nature, or that these places were the dwelling sites of deities. Therefore, they worshipped nature, and held reverence to every flora and fauna. This belief also worked its way into and influenced the Japanese Ikebana culture. The initial form of flower arrangement in Japan originates from Chinese ancient Buddhist activities. During the Tang and Song dynasties in China, there existed a tradition of offering fresh flowers to the Buddha. This tradition was introduced to Japan along with Buddhism during the Sui and Tang Five Dynasties. The floral arrangements made by monks, placed in vases and offered before Buddha images, became the earliest form of Japanese flower arrangement, which laid the foundation for the formation of numerous schools in later

Japanese Ikebana. This is documented in Japanese historical records like the Kojiki and the Manyoshu. Based on this, the spirit of offering to the gods and praying has also been embodied in today's Ikebana. For example, in modern flower arrangements, branches are displayed in the depth of field, precisely because it is considered that the work should also face the god behind it. The original point of Ikebana thought is also based on this religiosity.

2.2. Formation of Ikenobo and the Establishment of Japanese Ikebana

Buddhism was introduced to Japan in 540 AD. Shotoku Taishi, who loved Chinese Buddhism, sent Ono no Imoko to China as an envoy to study Buddhism. Ono no Imoko visited China three times and brought the custom of offering flowers before the Buddha and the utensils for the offering back to Japan. After returning to Japan, he lived in Kyoto Rokkakudo's Ikenobo, considered himself "Senmu", was devoted to Buddha worship, actively spread Buddhism, and offered fresh flowers to Buddha. He established the rules for altar flower arrangement, expanded the Chinese tradition of offering flowers to Buddha in Japan, and formed the earliest form of flower arrangement in Japan. Subsequently, it gradually form the first school of flower arrangement in Japan— Ikenobo.

In the book "The Oral Transmission of Ikenobo Senou", the 28th head priest of Rokkakudo, Senou, recorded his philosophy of ikebana and for the first time organized the theoretical system of Japanese ikebana art. In the preface, he wrote: "Inserting flowers into a vase is just to appreciate beautiful flowers, and if you do not understand the wit of grass and trees, you can only keep flowers alive." He emphasized that it is not enough to simply appreciate flowers in a vase. One must understand the nature and charm of plants and show the original shape of flowers and plants in nature. Thanks to Senou, this concept of ikebana has been formally established and recorded in historical documents, and has consolidated Ikenobo as the most fundamental and largest school of ikebana in Japan.

Throughout the long years that followed, many other schools broke away from Ikenobo to form their own schools, but Ikenobo has always been recognized as the origin of the Japanese ikebana. Therefore, when talking about other schools, suffixes such as "school" and "branch" are added after the name of the school. These suffixes are not added after Ikenobo, it is directly called "Kadou Iemoto Ikenobo", meaning the "source of Japanese ikebana".

3. The Iemoto System and Main Schools of Ikebana in Japan

There are two to three thousand small and large schools of ikebana art in Japan. Currently, there are over a hundred that are still active in the field of ikebana, the most representative of which are Ikenobo, Ohara, Sogetsu, and Mishoryu. These four major schools have gone through years of challenges but are still active on the stage of the Japanese ikebana world, making an indelible contribution to the inheritance and development of ikebana. These major schools have similarities and distinct characteristics in their establishment, development, and ikebana styles and philosophies. In the division and inheritance of Japanese ikebana schools, the Iemoto system plays a role that cannot be overlooked.

In 1757, Baba Bunkou mentioned the term "Iemoto" in the book of "Kinsei Edochomonshuu" and expounded on its concept, believing that "Iemoto" is the most authoritative and orthodox skill inheritor and their family in a certain cultural field, also known as "Soke". There are different Iemoto in different factions of Japanese ikebana, and the successors of each school must be authorized by the Iemoto of that school to inherit ikebana skills. Therefore, although the Iemoto system is highly centralized, it is conducive to effectively regulate ikebana skills and protect the inheritance and development of ikebana culture. With the continuous development of ikebana skills, more and more schools have emerged in Japan, and a systematized Iemoto group has appeared.

As the times change, all schools' Iemoto have continued to make the inheritance of ikebana a constant purpose, use various media to expand Iemoto influence, and strive to popularize ikebana art extensively. As it spread worldwide, the Japanese Ikebana, the representative of the Oriental flower arrangement, began to absorb the romantic and abstract Western art, with various flower arrangement schools presenting a blooming scene of diversified styles and novel concepts, making Japanese Ikebana more free, romantic and imaginative in planning flower types and selecting materials, and possessing a strong spirit of the times. This symbolizes that the Japanese Ikebana is marching towards the world.

3.1. Ikenobo or Ikenobo School

The ancestor of traditional Japanese flower arrangement is Ikenobo, also known as the source of Japanese flower arrangement, and many schools are branched from Ikenobo's main branch. The monks of Rokkakudo lived by the pond, hence the name "Ikenobo", which is the origin of the name of this school. The idea of Ikenobo is not to make beautiful flowers look good, but to preserve the natural posture as it is. For instance, wilting leaves, branches, leaves eaten by insects, and faded flowers can equally create "beauty" as beautiful flowers.

The main types of flowers of the Ikenobo are represented by "Tatebana" and "Ikebana," which are also the source of various flower styles such as throwing flowers (Nageire), holding flowers (Moribana), and free flowers (Jiyuuka). The current Iemoto of Ikenobo is Sen'ei Ikenobo, the 45th Iemoto of Ikenobo. He has brought flower arrangement forms to life, published the new wind form of Ikebana and the new wind form of Tatebana, adding a touch of new style to Japanese flower arrangement, making the expression of Ikenobo more colorful and more adaptable to modern living environment.

"Tatebana" originated in the 16th century, was shaped in the 17th century by Sen'ei Ikenobo, the second generation Iemoto, and is the most important flower type in Ikenobo, representing a vertical flower, with an extraordinary, solemn and noble temperament and shape, imitating natural landscapes with an abstract meaning through the space extension of branches, fully reflecting the rhythmical beauty of nature. "Tatebana" takes an odd number of branches, with 9 being the most common. There is a certain order and rules when arranging, and it cannot be placed in reverse. The overall shape is vertical and slightly cylindrical, and the focus of the flower arrangement composition is on the formation of lines, valuing beauty of lines.

The meaning of "Ikebana" is growing flowers, which uses one to three kinds of rare flowers to express the survival posture of the plants rooting in the earth and expressing the power of nature. "Ikebana" originated in the 18th century during the Edo Era (Edo Jidai), and it was the flower arrangement in the period of Sen'ei Ikenobo, which rapidly spread. Ikebana mainly consists of three main branches to form a crescent shape or an unequal triangle, this asymmetrical flower type is the main style characteristic of Ikebana. It uses three branches to figuratively describe heaven, earth and man, with the main branch representing heaven, symbolizing the spiritual realm; the secondary branch represents earth and man, with earth symbolizing the material realm and man symbolizing the space between heaven and earth, harmonizing heaven and earth. Ikebana seeks interest in flowers and trees, fully demonstrating the birth beauty, natural beauty and color beauty of the branches and flowers.

3.2. Sogetsu-ryu or Sogetsu School

Sogetsu-ryu was established in 1927 by Soufu Teshigahara. Born into a family of Ikebana (traditional Japanese flower arranging), he studied traditional flower arranging with his father and later created his own school "Sogetsu-ryu".

The characteristic of Sogetsu-ryu is its "freedom". In Sogetsu-ryu, the aim is to combine the art of flower arranging with contemporary life, advocating for the natural and reflecting new life. Rather than using the term "flower arranging," words such as "change" are used, indicating that

Sogetsu-ryu is not bound by form or tradition and aims to show a diverse world through individual expression.

In its flower arranging styles, Sogetsu-ryu seeks balance in diversity and unity in variety. The materials used in the arranging process are not limited to organic matter such as flowers and leaves but boldly incorporate wire, plastic, glass, metal, and other materials. It has also incorporated the principles of light and shadow from Western painting and the lines, spatial principles, and aesthetic concepts of Japanese painting. The innovativeness of the Sogetsu School is also reflected in the vases used, proposing a new perspective that vases should be used freely for decoration. Compared to the flower arranging styles of traditional Ikebana schools, Sogetsu-ryu is closer to the realm and atmosphere of art.

Sogetsu-ryu represents modern Japanese Ikebana, emphasizing vivid forms, appropriate arrangements, and harmonious colors. It seeks a supernatural beauty through simulating nature, emphasizing the free creating with abstract, exaggerated and imaginative methods to achieve a perfect union of abstract beauty and natural beauty. With the changes in times, the space for Sogetsu flower arranging is not only in homes, public environments, and various events, but also in stage art, window design, etc. It is not constrained by place or conditions and displays works, flower arrangement concepts, and creativity of the new era.

3.3. Ohara-ryu or Ohara School

Ohara-ryu was founded during the Meiji era by Ohara Unshin, originally a sculptor who studied Ikebana under the Ikenobo school. While studying at Ikenobo, he researched natural landscape flower arrangement and western flower arrangement. By the end of the Meiji era, under the influence of Western culture, Western flower cultivation techniques and the increase of European style buildings influenced how flowers were arranged, and there was a change in living environment. This led to the emergence of the Moribana style of flower arrangement not restricted to niche decorations. Moribana style of arrangement involves placing flowers in a wide-mouth shallow base that resembles a water dish or a tall wide-mouth vase. This type of arrangement, akin to piling or loading flowers in a pot, took on the name Moribana, marking the beginning of modern Ikebana.

The second generation, Ohara Koun, organized and codified the Moribana and Binka styles of flower arrangement, thereby systematizing the expressive techniques and theories of Ikebana. With the efforts of the heads of the school in the succeeding generations, the Ohara School continuously adapted to the changing times. While inheriting traditional techniques, it has developed various Ikebana styles like Hana Ishyou, Moribana, Binka, Hanakanade, Hanamai, Rinpachou, Bunjinchou, and Zouke Ikebana. The materials used have also diversified to create a more liberal expression of the posture and tension of various flowers. Hana Ishyou, Moribana, and Binka also have different arrangement styles such as upright, slanted, spread out, arrangement, rotation, and hanging.

The Ohara School of Ikebana advocates naturalism, featuring a sense of the times and a fresh style, making it more approachable and relatable to everyday life, thus easily accepted by the public. Its characteristic is to understand nature first, then express it. The feelings and aesthetic consciousness towards flowers are displayed through the works. The natural growth form and life implied meaning of plants are endowed with personal emotions, which are seamlessly integrated with the state of "unity of man and nature", resonating with viewers and conveying a reverence for nature.

3.4. Misho-ryu or Unborn School

Misho-ryu is a school of thought that was born in Osaka during the late Edo period and was created by two Ikenobo professors, Mishosai Ippo and Mishosai Koho. "Misho", as the name implies, represents the state before something is born. It is interpreted that at the moment

when the flower material is placed in the vase, one should be able to feel the meaning of this flower before it is born and use this meaning as the realm of flower arrangement at the moment. This is also the unique philosophy of Misho-ryu flower arrangement that advocates nature and expresses Zen environment.

The Confucian fundamental thought of "heaven, earth, man" (three in one) is the principle of Misho-ryu flower arrangement. Misho-ryu calls flower arrangement "Kakubana", symbolizing "heaven is round, earth is square", and a right-angled isosceles triangle is its basic flower shape. Its flower shapes include "Shin" (serious and solemn like a person standing upright), "Gyo" (like a person's walking posture), and "Sou" (like a person's running posture). These three forms can each unfold into three stances, called "three forms and nine stances".

4. Conclusion

The art of Ikebana originated in China, but since its introduction to Japan, it has made significant strides and continues to exude its unique charm to this day. Over the years, starting with Ikenobo, a myriad of Ikebana styles have emerged. These styles each have their own distinct characteristics and strengths, and they have all played a positive role in promoting and spreading the culture of Ikebana in Japan. One of the main reasons that Japanese floral art was able to achieve its current spectacular success is its incorporation of both eastern and western influences. Continually absorbing the essence of Chinese and Western cultures, it integrates these influences with Japanese culture, evolving into one of the unique traditional cultural art forms of Japan- Ikebana. The philosophy embodied by Ikebana, the unity of heaven, earth, and man, shines with a philosophical light. Simultaneously, it consistently reflects the ideas of respecting nature, pursuing spiritual enlightenment, and the harmonious coexistence of all things.

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