

Nature, Man and Flowers  
Kado as philosophical ikebana

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## Preface

*Kado* is a concept that emphasises the philosophical aspect of *ikebana*, or traditional Japanese flower arranging culture. *Ka* means “flowers,” and *do* means “way.” Thus, *kado* means “the way of flowers” or “the way through flowers.” This way leads to the truth, and consequently, the way itself is the truth. In *kado*, it is the practitioner’s goal to find this way through arranging flowers as the symbol of nature. We might therefore call it “dynamic Zen.”

*Kado* originated in the medieval period in Japan (12th-16th century), and its philosophical aspect developed through the pre-modern period (16th-19th century). However, after the modern period, this aspect has been extremely diluted. As a substitute for it, the *ikebana* view—which regards flower arranging as art—has prospered. In the 1930s, Shinko Ikebana Sengen (Declaration of New Ikebana)

was drafted with intent to demolish traditional *kado* thinking. Since this time, *ikebana* has been used as an inclusive term meaning “flower arranging culture.” In 1956, Ellen Gordon Allen established Ikebana International, and there are now more than 100 chapters all over the world. In 1966, Nihon Ikebana Geijyutsu Kyokai (Japan Ikebana Art Association) was founded as an umbrella organisation of various schools. In this way, the trend to call flower arranging culture “*ikebana*” instead of “*kado*” has been generalised.

Today, while many artistic *ikebana* works are exhibited, the intellectual accumulation of this culture remains insufficient. One of the reasons is that, following modernisation *ikebana* was redefined as art, despite its philosophical background as *kado*. Unfortunately, this definition of “art” was very superficial, for it was just an imported concept from the Western world. Artistic concepts or theories popular in Europe have been acritically introduced apart from the context of art history.



Of course, the artistic aspect of flower arranging culture, namely *ikebana*, should not be denied, and should be valued as a part of traditional flower arranging culture. However, it is just a part and not the whole picture of this culture. This book aims to emphasise the other part, *kado*, and redress the balance of interpretation of this traditional culture. Our standpoint is to regard this culture as a philosophical or religious way, not as so-called art.

The structure of this book is as follows. The first chapter is an overview of the history of *kado*, the second chapter explains its traditional regulations. Finally, the third chapter, considers the thoughts which have been the basis of the concept of *kado*.

I hope this book will be of some help in developing our knowledge and understanding of this flower arranging culture.

This book is the culmination of my research to date. I should like to acknowledge the great support given me by Inoue Naoko,

Himeno Yukiko, Otaguro Hitomi, Kurokawa Seiko, Mikami Junko, Sato Ai, and my parents Inoue Shinji and Hiroko. I am also indebted to the help by Osumi Kazuo and Naoto for their valuable advice. I must also thank Margaret for her proofreading. My biggest debt, however, is to my wife Keiko and daughter Hertha.

27 October 2021  
Kitashirakawa

INOUE Sahei Osamu

## Chapter 1

# The History of *Kado*

### Origin

There is an old temple called Daikaku-ji in a western suburb of Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan. In that temple, the following story about the origin of *kado* has been passed down. In the early 9th century, Emperor Saga, who built a detached palace in this place, picked chrysanthemums that bloomed on a small island in the Osawa-no-ike pond, and put them in a flower vase after returning to the palace. The chrysanthemum arrangement naturally contained the function of *sansai*, that is, three factors of Heaven, Earth, and Man, and the emperor said that hereafter one who arranges flowers should follow this arrangement.

These three factors are components of a cosmic view that originated from ancient China. In this view, the flower arrangement

does not only represent the beauty of flowers but is a symbol of the universal principle and the function of man in it. As a result of this story, the Daikaku-ji temple (also called the ex-imperial palace of Saga because it is the predecessor of the palace of Emperor Saga) is regarded as the birthplace of *kado*.

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1. Daikaku-ji temple and Osawa-no-ike pond