

Advances in the Cultivation and Popularity of Chrysanthemums in the Edo Era

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INTRODUCTION

From the Nara era to the early part of the Heian era (700 to 750), the chrysanthemum (*Dendranthema*) was introduced from China to Japan and became acclimated. Chrysanthemum had been cultivated as a medicinal plant, but subsequently became an ornamental one. It is mentioned in innumerable literary works, especially Japanese poems, and also used in other works of art as a symbol of the fall season.

The importation of chrysanthemums from China did not occur just once, but many times during this period when Japan was on friendly terms with China. From horticultural literature written in the early part of the Edo era (1603-1868), there is limited evidence that some cultivars, for example 'Kinsangindai', retained the same name as used in China.

From the Muromachi era to the Adzuchi-Momoyama era (1400 to 1600), the growing popularity of ikebana (Japanese flower arranging) promoted the horticulture industry, so that more and more beautiful flower material was required. But there are no specific horticultural writings from the period and all the knowledge we have comes from the traditions of ikebana, from Buddhist priests, and the diaries of court nobles.

During the Edo era there were two popular periods in the cultivation of chrysanthemums — during both the breeding and evaluation of chrysanthemums developed in a truly Japanese style.

THE FIRST PERIOD — CHANGES IN THE COLORS AND FORMS OF CHRYSANTHEMUMS

The first period was from the Enpo to Kyoho eras (1680-1730). This boom period started from Kyoto and spread to Osaka and Edo (the ancient name of Tokyo). At first, the collecting of different cultivars was the most important interest. Before long exhibitions called Kikuawases were held in urban areas. In the first year of the Kyoho period (1716), Kikuawase were held 14 times in Kyoto the most times ever recorded for 1 year. There were at least 70 to 80 exhibitors in each exhibition, the largest exhibition had 160 exhibitors and 280 exhibits.

During this boom time, according to a common price list from two shops in Temna Osaka Shingikunaawari daizukecho, the highest sale price for a new cultivar of chrysanthemum was about 525,000 yen and the lowest about 12,500 yen. This shows that the breeding of new cultivars was very lucrative.

There were many flower forms produced in this period, but the size of flower was only 15 to 17 cm in diameter until 1700. By 1720, chrysanthemums over 30 cm in diameter had been bred and the models for the flower forms known today were set in this era.

Most chrysanthemum cultivation took place in gardens, from where cut flowers were sent to the exhibitions, using bamboo containers for flower vases. Containers for cartage, especially over long distances, were devised which enabled the cut flowers to remain in top condition even over 20-day journeys.

THE SECOND PERIOD — THE BEGINNING OF CHUGIKU COMPETITION AND KIKUNINGYO

After the Kyoho period (1716-1735), the cultivation of chrysanthemums continued sporadically, however, from the Bunka to the Kouka period (1802-1852) it became popular again. This later boom has two distinctive features. The type chugiku, a regular-sized chrysanthemum, was the most commonly grown and it did not gain the same level of interest as the previous boom period. Chugiku is a medium-sized chrysanthemum (15 to 18 cm in diameter) with various types of petals. When it reaches full bloom, some petals turn inside out, others twist and turn, or stand up, and finally they revert to the original form. Not only flowers but also the mode of flowering were the subject of competition. Exhibitors included samurais, rich merchants, and others. It was most popular during the Bunsei period, when two or three exhibitions were held in Edo each year. The printed ranking lists, chugiku hana kuraizuke, as a competition record remained. Chugiku (called edogiku today) was brought to other regions and improved in types like Isegiku, Sagagiku, Higogiku, and so on. These chrysanthemums belong to the spray type, and are without doubt the main cultivars used for cut flowers in the world today.

The second main area of interest was kikuningyo (chrysanthemum figures). Many horticulturists and gardeners lived in Sugamo, Somei, Koishikawa, Mejiro, and Shirogane, which are suburbs of Edo, and they constituted huge gardening centers. In these areas, making figures using chrysanthemums modeled on forms such as animals (topiary) became very popular. During the fall season it was a popular entertainment to visit these areas to enjoy these chrysanthemum figures, after that the figures became the subject of a story and drama. These were arranged within haiku or kyogen and published in booklets or kawaraban (local newspapers) like *Sugamo Meisangiku no shiori* and *Kikushiorichikamichi*.

In the Ansei period (1854 to 1859), atsumono (which means thick petals) types were bred and tairingiku (which means big chrysanthemum) became popular. But when subsequent political changes took place, interest in chrysanthemum culture waned.

SUMMARY

When the chrysanthemum was introduced from China, its flower size was at most 10 cm in diameter. But during the next 200 to 250 years, we made many forms of chrysanthemum such as tairin (over 30 cm in diameter), chugurui (changing form in bloom), and it was also used in topiary and as food. It is easy to see that the prosperity of the Edo region and its culture are closely associated with the chrysanthemum.