Tsukuribana spread to the East

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The Egyptians and Chinese have excelled in the art of making “artificial flowers” (tsukuribana) for several thousands of years. In particular, the Egyptians used to make flowers out of linen and metal and did not use natural fresh flowers to make a corolla. The ancient Chinese also made flowers using silver and colored silk. We may well ask if these “artificial flowers” were accepted as substitutes for “fresh flowers”. The history of fresh flowers, that is, the development of the cultivation of plants and flowers for decoration, lies beneath the manufacture of “artificial flowers” and it is believed that “artificial flowers” spread as they both influenced each other. Consequently, it is not possible to view “artificial flowers” merely as substitutes for “fresh flowers”.

It is from this perspective that we may form an overview of “artificial flowers” seen in annual events in China and extant examples of “artificial flowers” and “fabricated objects” (tsukuri-mono) seen there today, and the process of their spread to Japan by means of such events as the “Ho-e” (a Buddhist occasion) and the “Kanbutsu-e”, which is part of the annual calendar of events at the imperial court.

These “artificial flowers” and “fabricated objects” developed under Chinese influences and then developed in a Japanese manner. However, lying at the root of the creation of “artificial flowers” we find not a simple substitution for “fresh flowers”, but a desire for a world in which there is an eternal absence of ruin or extinction which is expressed through “artificial flowers” and “fabricated objects”.

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