

## Events

## A Short History of *Wagashi* from the Kaleidoscope of Books (25) *Wagashi*

This is a partial translation of the small digital exhibition "*Wagashi*" in Japanese.

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### 1. Introduction



A *hishi-mochi* (diamond-shaped *mochi*) is illustrated in this picture from *Fuzoku nishikie zaccho*, illustrated by Miyagawa Shuntei; NDL Call No. 寄別 2-9-2-1;

\* Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)

*Wagashi* is the name of a style of confectionery that is well loved in Japan for its delicious flavor and appetizing appearance evocative of the changing seasons. The small digital exhibition *Wagashi* presents a brief introduction to

the history of *wagashi*, traditional events and customs involving *wagashi*, and depictions of *wagashi* in both literature and the visual arts.

The digital exhibition itself comprises three sections: a brief history of *wagashi*, traditional events and customs involving *wagashi*, and *wagashi* in Japanese literature. This article presents some content from the first of these. Please enjoy this sampler from the world of *wagashi* via the NDL digital collections.



Many kinds of *hishi-mochi* appear in this picture of *hina ningyo* (dolls associated with *Hinamatsuri*, or the Girl's Day) from *Omochoe*, illustrated by Ichiryusai Kunimori; NDL Call No. 寄別 3-1-2-4;

\* Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)

### 2. A time when the word confection referred to fruit

Although the word *kashi* means "sweets" in modern Japanese, it originally referred to fruits and nuts. The

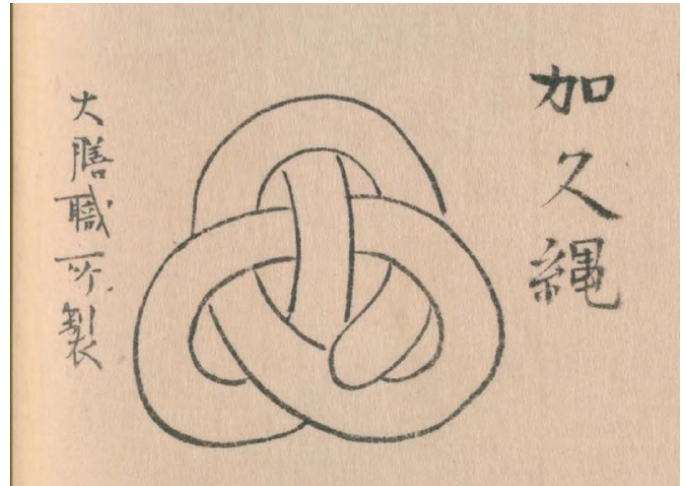


Japanese-Portuguese dictionary *Nippo jisho* (NDL Call No. 869.3-N728), which was published in 1603, says the word "quaxi" (*kashi*) refers to "fruit, especially after meals." Today, for example, the word *mizugashi* (literally, water fruit) can refer either to fruit-based desserts or fresh fruit and harkens back to the days when *kashi* meant fruit.



A picture of fruit from *Kishubun sanbutsu ezu* (Illustrated Dictionary of Products from Kishu)  
NDL Call No. 859-96  
\* Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)

Although the word *kashi* originally referred to fruit, sometime around 8th century, during the Nara period, *kashi* began to be used to refer to processed sweets. A major influx of foreign culture from Tang-dynasty China and elsewhere resulted in the introduction of exotic cuisine, such as *karakudamono* (Tang fruit). These "fruit" were made by adding flavoring and sweetener to rice powder, which was then cooked in frying oil. These confections came in a great many shapes and flavors, and although some are still made today, they are generally used only as offerings.



A drawing of *kakunawa*, an example of Tang fruit;  
*Funabashi kashi no hinagata*, published in 1885; NDL Call No. 丑-49; \* Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)

### 3. The emergence of *wagashi* in the Heian period

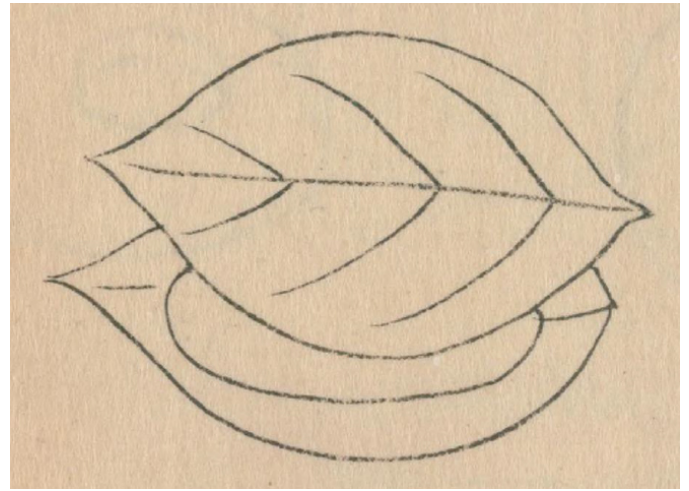
The *Wakana* chapter of *Genji monogatari* (NDL Call No. 新別け-2) which is set in the Heian period, includes mention of a food called *tsubaimochii*, which was served to Imperial courtiers after a game of *kemari* (a ball game). *Kakaisho* (NDL Call No. 本別 3-26) is a book of commentary on *Genji monogatari* that was written during the Muromachi period, and which explains *tsubaimochii* was made by adding a sweetener called *amazura* to sticky rice flour and wrapping it with camellia leaf. Although originally a Tang fruit, *tsubaimochii* was gradually absorbed into Japanese culture, and is one of the earliest examples of *wagashi*.





A scene depicting *kemari* from the *Wakana* chapter of *Genji monogatari*; *Genji gojuyujo*; Illustrated by Gekko; NDL Call No. 寄別 7-4-1-6;

\* Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)



A drawing of *tsubaimochii*; from *Shukozu*, edited by Fujiwara Sadamoto; NDL Call No. 834-4;

\* Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)

#### 4. Latest foreign culture introduced by Buddhist monks

*Wagashi* developed rapidly during the Kamakura period and thereafter, often thanks to impetus provided by Buddhist monks who studied in Song-dynasty China and brought back the latest recipes in addition to religious doctrine. To modern Japanese, green tea and *wagashi* are inseparably associated with each other, but this custom arrived at Japan around this period. *Kissaorai* (NDL Call No. 辰-44) is an anthology of letters about tea drinking that was assembled during the 14th century, and which provides one of the earliest descriptions of serving green tea and sweets together



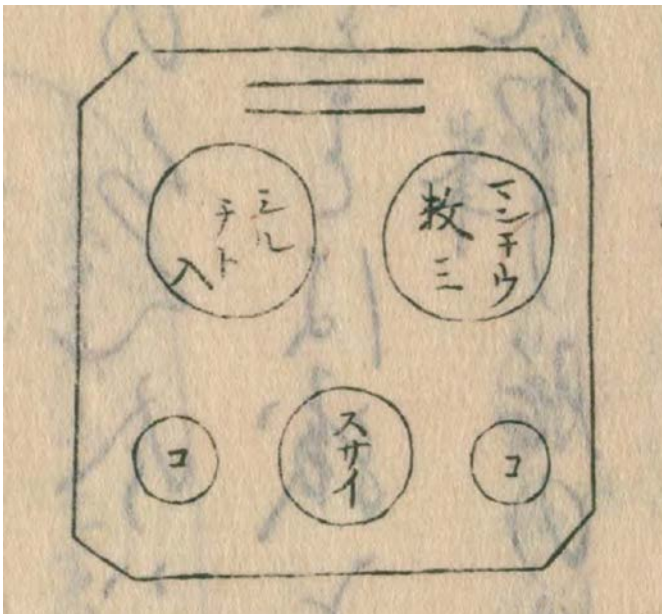
*Bokie ekotoba* by Jishun

This scene depicts a poetry reading held during the Nanboku-chō period in the mid-14th century, and is from *Bokie ekotoba*, which depicted the life of Kakunyo, the third caretaker of Hongan-ji Temple. In the kitchen across the corridor, servants are preparing for the tea ceremony that will be held afterwards. A Buddhist monk is walking along the corridor with a big tray in his hands, which is assumed to be full of confectionery to be served with green tea. Although it is not known exactly what kinds of *wagashi* were served during tea ceremonies at this time, records from the Sengoku period (16th century) indicate that fruit and knotted kelp were served, among other things. NDL Call No. ㏽-169; \* Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)



No discussion of the foods that were introduced by Buddhist monks and led to the development of *wagashi* can be complete without mentioning *tenjin*. In China, light meals taken between regular meals were called *tenjin*, which in modern China is now pronounced dim sum. In Japan, where people took only two meals a day, in the morning and in the evening, *tenjin* soon came to refer to a light lunch. At the same time, *tenjin* also refers to the specific types of food that were served. In *Teikin'orai* written by Gen'e (NDL Call No. WA16-69), *yokan*, *udon* and *manju* are described as *tenjin*. *Yokan* and *manju*, of course, are now two of the best known types of *wagashi*.

The original style of *manju* that came to Japan as *tenjin* was quite different from the present-day *wagashi*. It was most likely not as sweet and contained no bean jam. There is a schematic diagram in "Sogoozoshi" (NDL Call No. 127-1), a very detailed manual of table manners and other etiquette from the Muromachi period, that shows the proper placement on a serving tray of chopsticks as well as individual bowls containing three small *manju*, soup, and pickled vegetables.



This illustration shows the placement on a serving tray of chopsticks as well as individual bowls of three *manju*, soup, and pickled vegetables.

"Sogoozoshi" from *Gunsho ruiju*; NDL Call No. 127-1; \* Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)

*Shokunin utaawase ehon* (NDL Call No. よ-12) contains an illustration of a *manju* vendor from the Muromachi period. The text over his head describes his wares as "sugar *manju* and vegetable *manju*, well steamed." Vegetable *manju* is made by filling a Chinese steamed bun with vegetable jam, and resembles very closely modern dim sum. On the other hand, sugar *manju*, as the name suggests, is thought to have been a steamed bun made with sugar paste, and it considered one of the original

forms of *wagashi manju*. This is how *wagashi* gradually developed from what was originally dim sum.



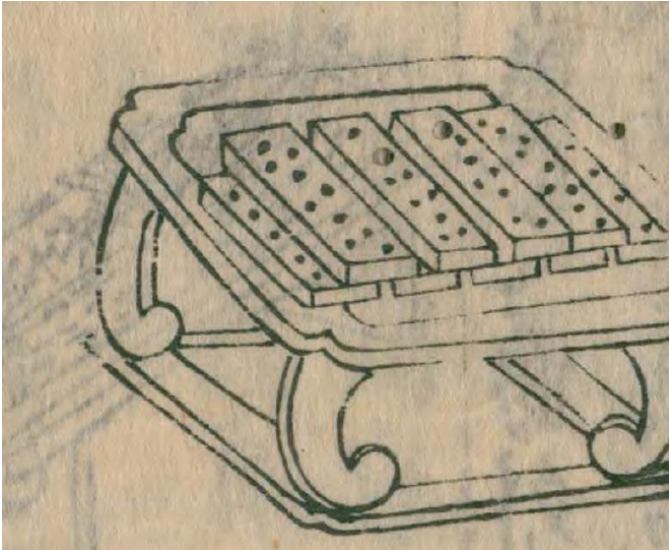
This picture of a *manju* vendor is thought to be a duplication of the one in *Shichijūichiban shokunin utaawase*. *Shokunin utaawase ehon*; Illustrated by Ban Nobutomo; NDL Call No. よ-12; \* Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)

## 5. *Wagashi* and the Portuguese

The Portuguese played an essential role in the development of *wagashi*. During the Age of Discovery, merchants and missionaries from Portugal and other European countries came to Japan to initiate trading and spread the Christian religion. At the same time, they were the first to bring to Japan European confections, such as a type of sponge cake that became known castella and is still popular in Japan today. One major impact of this was a loosening of the prevailing religious taboo against the eating of chicken eggs. In fact, the only modern exception to the rule that *wagashi* must be made of plant-based ingredients is the use of chicken eggs.

The Portuguese were also involved with the development of the modern idea that *wagashi* are sweet. Until the Muromachi period, sweeteners were limited to honey, *amazura*, which was produced from sweet arrowroot, and *mizuame*, which was a glutinous starch syrup made from rice and other grains. From 1543 to 1641, when trade with Spain and Portugal was at its peak, the Portuguese began to import sugar on a regular basis. Later, during the Edo period, sugar was increasingly imported from China and Holland. The use of black sugar

from the Ryukyu Islands and *wasanbon*—sugar produced in the Sanuki region in Japan—also increased at this time, as Japanese people continued to enjoy the taste of *wagashi* produced with this precious imported commodity. Thus, the flowering of this part of Japanese culture can be traced back to the coming of merchants from Portugal.



Castella in *Wakan sansai zue* written at the beginning of the 18th century; *Wakan sansai zue*; Edited by Terajima Ryoan; NDL Call No. 031.2-Te194w-s;  
\* Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)

## 6. *Wagashi* and the Rinpa school of fashionable design

The Edo period was a time when a wide variety of *wagashi* gained popularity. During the period from 1596 to 1644, different types of *wagashi* were given poetic names. And from 1688 to 1704, as this practice reached its peak under the influence of the Rinpa school of design, new forms of *wagashi* were created with poetic names based on classic literature and flavors related to the four seasons. *Onmushigashizu* (NDL Call No. を二-85), a sample book published by a *wagashi* shop, features many new designs of *wagashi* with poetic names, such as "Mountain Peaks at Dawn."



A *wagashi* design named "Mountain Peaks at Dawn"; *Onmushigashizu*; NDL Call No. を二-85;  
\* Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)

## 7. Enjoying *mochi* in Edo

Glutinous rice cakes, or *mochi*, are a ubiquitous element in celebrations of the New Year and other auspicious occasions in Japan, that is said to have been introduced from South East Asia together with rice cultivation. In ancient times, *mochi* was a favorite snack among the aristocracy, and during the Edo period, *mochi* or *mochigashi* became a popular food even for ordinary people. There are many instances of *rakugo* (comedy routines), *kyogen* (short comedic drama), and kabuki scripts that mention the various *mochigashi* produced at the time.





At the end of the year, ordinary people placed orders for *mochi* with *wagashi* shops, which samurai or wealthy merchant families pounded *mochi* at home. *Toyokuni junikagetsu*; Published by Tsutaya Kichizo in 1854; Illustrated by Toyokuni; NDL Call No. 寄別 2-8-1-6; \* Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)

In the late Edo period, there was an *awamochi* vendor who became quite well known for his humorous performances, called *kyokuzuki*, while pounding *mochi* with a mallet. A book on everyday life during the Edo period, *Morisada manko* (NDL Call No. 寄別 13-41), tells of a *kyokuzuki* performer who amazed audiences with acrobatic performances that including chanting as he swung the mallet and throwing round pieces of *mochi* into a dish from a distance. Kabuki performances featuring the pounding of *mochi* are still seen even today.



This *nishiki-e* depicts the kabuki program *Hana no hoka niwaka no kyokuzuki* which was performed at Ichimura-za, a major kabuki theatre in Edo, in February, 1861. The picture vividly depicts the two *awamochi* vendors pounding *mochi* in matching costumes. *Azuma nishikie*; Illustrated by Toyokuni; NDL Call No. 寄別 8-5-2-3;

\* Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)

## 8. Conclusion

This article presented a brief overview of the history of *wagashi*, with examples of the appearance of *kashi* in Japanese literature, the influence of China and Europe on the development of *wagashi*, and other aspects of *wagashi* that are still familiar today, as found in materials available at the NDL.

In the distant past, people recorded their love of *kashi* in a variety of literary works. The influence of these works can be seen in the many *wagashi* designs and poetic names created during the Edo period that were based on such classics. Stories featuring different types of *wagashi* as anthropomorphic characters have been written since the Edo period, which is a good indication of just how much a part of everyday life *wagashi* had become.

*Wagashi* are now highly appreciated for their beautiful forms and delicious flavor all around the world. We hope that this Kaleidoscope of Books (25) *Wagashi* will become an opportunity for even more people to learn about and perhaps even to sample the taste of *wagashi*, which is a uniquely Japanese tradition that incorporates a wide variety of influences from abroad.



Fashionable *wagashi* designs! *Onmushigashizu*;  
NDL Call No. を二 - 85;

\* Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)

(Translated by Yuko Kumakura and Kanako Ogawa)

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- [Kagami-mochi tells — From the records of a count' s family](#) (No. 203, December 2015)
- [Small exhibition in the Kansai-kan \(17\) "Tomorrow's dinner will be a full-course meal: Find the recipe you want to cook"](#) (No. 199, April 2015)
- [Tofu Hyakuchin: A Hundred Delicacies of Tofu - Enjoying taste of Edo](#) (No. 191, October 2013)