

TORAYA

Traditional Japanese Confectioner Since 16th Century

By Toraya Confectionery Co.



Toraya's main store in Akasaka, Tokyo



"Taori-zakura" (Cherry Broken by Hand): a "wagashi" cake embodying Japanese people's love for cherry blossoms, as shown in the following passage. "The cherry blossoms singing the praises of spring are too beautiful to enjoy by myself. I wish I could break a branch off and take it home with me."

Founding of Toraya

Toraya Confectionery Co. is a maker of *wagashi* (Japanese-style confectionery) founded in Kyoto about 500 years ago. Although exactly when it was inaugurated is not clear, records show Toraya purveyed to the imperial household, then in Kyoto, during the reign of Emperor Goyozai (1586-1611). Since it takes some years for a company to win a reputation good enough to become a purveyor to the imperial household, it is safe to assume Toraya was founded sometime in the first half of the 16th century.

From that time on, Toraya conducted business near the Imperial Palace, but when the imperial household was moved to Tokyo in 1869, it followed suit and opened a new store in the new capital while it continued to do business in Kyoto as well. Toraya is still a purveyor to the imperial household. Today, Toraya's main office is in Tokyo, but its Kyoto store remains one of the important business bases because this ancient imperial capital is the birthplace of not only Toraya but also the culture of *wagashi*.

The present head of Toraya is the 17th generation from Kurokawa Enchu, who died in 1635 after bringing new prosperity to the business. Since Enchu, the Kurokawa family has always owned the business and, unlike many other traditional Japanese business operators, has never set its senior employees up under the same brand name.

History of Wagashi

Wagashi is traditional Japanese sweets. The term is used to distinguish them from Western sweets which were introduced to Japan in the second half of the 19th century.

Wagashi developed in Kyoto and took its present form in the second half of the 17th century when Japanese tea ceremony reached its zenith. In tea ceremonies, hosts pay attention to every detail, including implements, artwork and sweets. Therefore, people worked hard to devise attractive designs and names for sweets as well. Sweets were designed to conjure up the beauty of the four seasons, scenes from classical literature and so forth by their designs and names. Thus, *wagashi* has become an extremely refined form of culture. An old illustrated confectionary book has been passed on from generation to generation at Toraya. Titled "*Okashi no ezu*" (Pictorial Book of Confectionery) and compiled in 1695, the book shows the designs and names of sweets in the period of the perfection of *wagashi*.

Wagashi passes on to the present what people in that period of dramatic developments of Japanese culture loved, enjoyed, wished and cherished. Their thoughts are embodied in the delicately colorful *wagashi* found in Toraya stores today.



"Okashi no ezu": a catalog kept at customers' homes for placing orders. It includes "wagashi" still made today.



"Hina-seiro": lacquerware delivery boxes made in 1776

A written record of sweets delivered for a retired emperor's trip in 1635. This is the oldest record of imperial orders kept at Toraya.



Toraya shop on St-Florentin Street, Paris, opened in 1980 to spread Japanese culture through “wagashi.” Today, 70%-80% of its clients are French people.



Gallery at Toraya Tokyo Midtown Shop

Toraya Today

Today, Toraya has some 80 stores, including one in Paris. In addition to being served in Japanese tea ceremonies, Toraya's sweets are used for gifts and enjoyed in homes, often to celebrate the traditional seasonal festivals that live on in the lives of Japanese people.

While carrying on its tradition of *wagashi*, Toraya has always thought about its roles appropriate to the times and challenged to fulfill them as well as taking over what it has done in the past.

In 1973, Toraya established an archive called “Toraya Bunko” in a bid to pass on the traditional Japanese culture carried by *wagashi* to the present and the future. It holds old documents and implements that have been passed down at Toraya. It also collects materials and conducts research relating to *wagashi*, publishes a journal carrying research papers, holds exhibitions on themes associated with *wagashi*, and reports on its activities.

In an attempt to introduce *wagashi* abroad, as an important form of Japanese culture Toraya opened its store in Paris in 1980. For a quarter century since, Toraya has been serving Parisians the same *wagashi* as those served in Japan, and little by little *wagashi* has been taking root there. As healthful sweets made only of ingredients of vegetable origin except for eggs and because of their delicate forms and elegant names, *wagashi* has been steadily attracting an increasing number of fans.

New Role for Next Generation

For centuries, Toraya has concentrated on making the most delicious sweets with the best ingredients available at the time. However, it thought that its natural mission is to create new values only “Toraya of today” can create, in addition to passing past creations on to the future. Based on that reasoning, it created a new brand, “Toraya Cafe,” in 2003.

Toraya Cafe offers innovative sweets not bound by the traditional genres of *wagashi* and *yogashi* (Western sweets). They represent “a new dimension in the world of sweets” offered by Toraya and transcend the barrier between *wagashi* and *yogashi*. For example, it seeks a new harmony between *an* (traditional sweet bean paste) and chocolate, a combination of different ingredients which so far had never been used together.



“Fondant” (bonbon) of sweet red bean paste and chocolate, both of which are made from beans and of the same family of colors. Their combination creates a stunningly harmonious taste. Flavored with cinnamon and port, it is moist and rich.

Toraya is also working to spread traditional Japanese values widely. For example, Toraya established a gallery for the first time in its history at Toraya Tokyo Midtown Shop when the *wagashi* store opened in 2007 in one of the newest commercial complexes in Tokyo. In addition to the introduction of Japanese culture through *wagashi*, which the company has been carrying on, the gallery aims to spread other facets of traditional Japanese culture. Toraya will join hands with artisans who make objects associated with the *wagashi* culture such as *urushi* (Japanese lacquerware), *furoshiki* (wrapping cloth), *mizuhiki* (ceremonial paper strings) and *karakami* (paper with printed patterns, often used for *fusuma* sliding doors). Toraya will thus seek to publicize their values by adding new features that make them attractive for use in modern day-to-day living. It is the new Toraya store that shoulders this new responsibility.

In Conclusion

In every generation, only things and events that move people's hearts and society's “air” (or spirit) have won recognition and have been passed on to the following generation. So we believe it Toraya's mission to do its best for what is right, what should be done now and what Toraya is uniquely qualified to do. We believe that only by winning customers' trust step by step in this fashion, Toraya will be able to boost its reason for existence in society and win greater trust and reputation. **JS**

(All photos by Toraya Confectionery Co.)