Dagashi

Kosaku Ishibashi's Love Affair with Traditional Hometown Sweets

LIXIL GALLERY

9 March – 22 May 2018

Foreword

Fuki-ame (blown candy), karinto (fried dough cookies), nejiri-okoshi (twisted rice brittle), karumera-yaki (foam candy) . . .

Since Edo times, dagashi sweets of many varieties flourished in every region of Japan. Called "dagashi" to distinguish them from high-grade "jogashi" confections using white sugar, they were enjoyed as a local "hometown taste" reflecting the region's climate, history, and seasons. This exhibition explores the world of dagashi sweets in Japan, based on records created by Kosaku Ishibashi (1900-1976). As the second-generation proprietor of the "Ishibashi-ya," a venerable dagashi shop, Ishibashi was troubled by the disappearance of many dagashi varieties after the war. Traveling high and low in Japan, he endeavored to preserve dagashi for future generations.

This exhibition shows the great appeal and variety of dagashi sweets through 200 historical materials. They range from drawings of local confections made by Ishibashi during his travels to his booklets containing textual records and his models of dagashi created on the basis of five folklorist categories. While showing Ishibashi's character as a researcher who tried many methods of recording and preserving dagashi, the exhibition invites you to enjoy the shapes and colors of exquisitely made candy-craft models in the actual sizes. We hope the items abundantly displayed will convey the passion of Kosaku Ishibashi's research and depth of his love for dagashi, and that the exhibition becomes an opportunity to know the fascinating story of Japan's dagashi traditional hometown sweets.

We wish to extend our warmest appreciation to everyone whose efforts have made this exhibition possible.

LIXIL GALLERY

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Dagashi Traditional Hometown Sweets and Sendai

Toshietsu Sato, Chairman,The Folklore Society of Tohoku

Dagashi traditions rooted deeply in local culture have been handed down in every region of Japan. Confections such as Kumagaya, Saitama's gokabo rice cakes, Tokyo's kaminari-okoshi rice brittle, and kuro-pan brown-sugar cakes and kiri-ame hard candy were sweets familiarly known to the people in their regions of production. Still, the variety and distribution of dagashi sweets in Japan was never well known. It was Kosaku Ishibashi, a Sendai, Miyagi dagashi craftsman, who in the late 1950s and early 1960s researched the dagashi confections of each region, recreated them, analyzed them, and recorded and preserved them.

Kosaku Ishibashi (1900-1976) was the second-generation proprietor of the dagashi confection shop "Ishibashi-ya," established in 1885. Ishibashi in 1931 set about reviving the dagashi traditions that were dying out, compelled by his love for dagashi and sense of crisis over the rapid disappearance of the confections amid the changing times. On attempting to recreate ame hard candy and dagashi sweets for preservation, however, his models melted or grew moldy. Hence, utilizing skills he had acquired in ame-zaiku (candy craft), he crafted dagashi models in clay. He then put his children in charge of his business and traveled around Japan with his wife searching out local dagashi confections. The clay models of dagashi sweets and dagashi souvenir dolls he collected in this way during 30 years he d isplayed in exhibitions and in books such as his Dagashi fudoki ("Dagashi Record," 1965) and started a craze, first in Sendai and eventually around the nation.

The dagashi Kosaku Ishibashi loved so deeply were simple hometown confections, made using ingredients such as grain, starch syrup and brown sugar, that had been produced throughout Japan in the Edo (1603-1868) and Meiji (1868-1912) periods. They were classified in five categories: "faith dagashi" sold at temples and shrines, "road dagashi" sold to travelers as souvenirs, "toy figure dagashi" for giving to children, "medicinal dagashi" having curative effects, and "ocha dagashi" for serving with green tea. As the Japanese diet increasingly diversified after the war, however, the many varieties of dagashi died away almost to the point of extinction. In Sendai, three venerable dagashi shops in business for over 80 years, including the "Ishibashi-ya," continued selling dagashi sweets, and "Sendai dagashi" came to be sold at Sendai department stores and airport souvenir shops. In this way, dagashi, whose value Ishibashi extolled to the world as a precious "folk resource," came to be seen as a viable product, attractive to people today.

2 Kosaku Ishibashi (1900 – 1976)

Dagashi confections craftsman. Elder son of Kojiro Ishibashi, who operated the “Ishibashi-ya” candy shop in Sendai. After taking over as second-generation shop owner, he fell absorbed in the culture of dagashi confections that had fascinated him since childhood. Around 1930, he began actively researching dagashi on the side while making and selling candy products. Soon, alarmed that so many varieties of dagashi were being lost amid Japan’s modernization, he set out traveling. Visiting every region of the country, he conducted time-consuming interview surveys and assiduously researched dagashi in connection with people’s lifestyles and diet. His travels, starting in Tohoku, eventually took him from Hokkaido to Kyushu. During nearly a half century, he completed surveys in Japan’s major cities while recording detailed information in drawings and text. Some 1,000 clay models of dagashi, created by Kosaku based on historical research, are now preserved at The Museum Meiji-Mura. His publications include Dagashi no furosato (“Dagashi hometowns”) and Michinoku no dagashi (“Dagashi in Northern Japan” ; both Mirai-sha), and Dagashi fudoki (“Dagashi Record”) (Seikajiken-sha).

3 Dagashi Pilgrimage

According to Kosaku, dagashi confections are defined by history and local seasons and customs. He therefore traveled to regions throughout Japan, conducted surveys, and recorded his research in booklets. Lacking good reference materials, he made slow progress in his dagashi pilgrimage. Still, after much trouble and hard work, he obtained the information needed from talking to people. The pictures and texts in his booklets convey to us the joy of his encounters with old-time dagashi.

4 Dagashi Classifications

Dagashi can broadly be divided in three types, Kosaku states in his first book, Dagashi fudoki (“Dagashi Record”) published in 1961. These are, first, dagashi confections that spread throughout the country via Kyoto, Nagasaki, and Edo; second, traditional confections fostered in accord with local customs and beliefs; and third, confections created by each region’ s people using ingredients on hand. In many cases, he writes, these confections were conveyed to other regions by travelers and peddlers. Dagashi could furthermore be divided in six classifications, depending on their function and value: Faith, Ocha (Teatime), Toy Figure, Child-rearing, Medicinal, and Road Dagashi. Based on knowledge obtained during his travels and his own memories of seeing migrant craftsmen in Sendai, long ago, Kosaku identified elements common to the different dagashi and endeavored to classify them. He later revised these to five classifications: Faith, Medicinal, Road, Toy Figure, and Ocha (Teatime) Dagashi.

5 Faith Dagashi

A foremost example of faith dagashi are “O-sagari” confections offered to the gods. In this category, Kosaku included three types: engi-kashi (auspicious cakes) sold before the gates of temples and shrines as prayers for health, longevity, and good luck, gyoji-kasha (seasonal event cakes) eaten at seasonal junctures and New Years and during the Buddhist “Higan” and “Bon” holidays, and hiki-gashi (ornamental gift cakes) for expressing personal congratulations at anniversaries and weddings, and condolences at memorial services. Besides their role as offerings to the gods—the origin of all dagashi confections—faith dagashi drew worshippers to temples and shrines and became local specialty goods. Their nutritious efficacy was also touted as divine favor, and many came in shapes pleasing to children. Faith dagashi, in this way, combined the aspects of Road, Medicinal, and Toy Figure Dagashi.

6 Medicinal Dagashi

Medicinal dagashi sweets contained nutritional supplements necessary for people with illnesses and women bearing children. In older times when medicinal herbs and barks were still commonly used, many kinds of candy using medicinal ingredients were made, such as candy products containing Korean ginseng. In Edo-period Japan, these were sold at apothecaries along with confections that helped stop toothaches and diarrhea. White sugar, consumed as an energy supplement, was so precious that a doctor’ s prescription was needed to get it. In the late 19th century, ordinary confection shops came to sell medicinal dagashi, not simply as nourishing treats but with advertisement of their medicinal efficacy. This ended with the amendment of the Pharmaceutical Affairs Law.

7 Road Dagashi

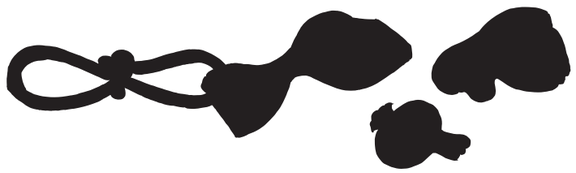
Road dagashi confections were served to refresh and restore tired travelers in inn towns along highways and also sold to travelers as food provisions and souvenir items. Today, green tea and sweets are still served when travelers arrive at a Japanese inn. During his dagashi research travels, Kosaku visited the makers of confections served at inns he stayed in, valuing them as a source of information. Concerning specialty goods eaten by travelers, he points out that their delicious taste was not the real issue. “Local specialty goods reflect people’ s sentiments, customs, and eating habits in that locality. It is important they be honest confections without embellishment (Dagashi fudoki [“Dagashi Record”]).

8 Ocha Dagashi for Serving with Green Tea

In his Dagashi fudoki (“Dagashi Record”), Kosaku wrote: “I do not know if confections served with green tea are meant to enhance the tea’ s taste or if they are served as a kindness. However, in as much as they are called Ochauke (“teatime”) confections, it means they are enjoyed as a companion to tea.” He also noted that, although pickled vegetables and dumplings made from sweet potato or grain flour also make good companions to tea, dagashi is filling, inexpensive, and enjoyable for everyone, and excellent when eaten with unpretentious bancha (coarse tea).

9 Toy Figure Dagashi

Among the different types of toy figure dagashi, kujihiki-mono confections were the most popular because of the excitement of opening them. Children’ s attention is hard to catch and they get bored easily, so confections featuring a fun surprise were devised. Kosaku felt that, because children associate eating with playing, there should be more confections that stimulate children’ s curiosity and imagination and awaken fantasy. As someone who knew the golden age of dagashi sweets, Kosaku imagined that their greatest appeal for children was the personal thrill of choosing from countless varieties and carefully managing their pocket money.



10 Candy Craft Dagashi

Handcrafted (saiku) candy was made using rice flour and ame (starch syrup and sugar). Shinko-zaiku candy figures using shinko (rice flour) as an ingredient were intended to be fun to look at, and apparently, Edo-period children did not eat them. There were three types: molded katanuki, hand-formed nerimono, and tsurimono hung from a stick. The shinko-zaiku maker, using the appeal of “craft” to lure customers, created nerimono in any shape the customer desired. Tsurimono figures hung by a thread from a bamboo stick were sold at festivals and seasonal events.
Ame-zaiku sweets, on the other hand, included both mayamono, candy wound on the end of a reed and inflated by blowing air through the opposite end, and hasamimono crafted using scissors. Refined confections made since long ago, such as Horaisan and Sanbaso, were made using scissors.

11 Customs of Selling Dagashi Sweets

Medicinal dagashi sweets contained nutritional supplements necessary for people with illnesses and women bearing children. In older times when medicinal herbs and barks were still commonly used, many kinds of candy using medicinal ingredients were made, such as candy products containing Korean ginseng. In Edo-period Japan, these were sold at apothecaries along with confections that helped stop toothaches and diarrhea. White sugar, consumed as an energy supplement, was so precious that a doctor’ s prescription was needed to get it. In the late 19th century, ordinary confection shops came to sell medicinal dagashi, not simply as nourishing treats but with advertisement of their medicinal efficacy. This ended with the amendment of the Pharmaceutical Affairs Law.