



"Masayoshi Chino put his white overalls on, rolls up the sleeves, and his deft fingers are immediately ready to make the most extraordinary sweets."

THE SWEETTOOTHED'S
Paradise

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"菓子是人なり (kashi wa hito nari)". Freely translated "The Master Animate His Art".



Five cups of colouring essence, which could be blended into several colours.



Grandpa's old vessels are still often used.



Colours are toned from dark to light or vice versa, it's like magic when the anko paste almost comes to life.

LINKS

<http://chino-ueda.sub.jp/index.php>

<http://www.city.ueda.nagano.jp/hp/index.html>

It's a bit chilly in the little shop we find ourselves in – located in the city of Ueda, a small town 250 kilometres northwest of Tokyo. We are immediately served hot green tea and some of the most delicious sweets with it, so the warmth quickly finds its way into our bodies. Our host Masayoshi Chino takes his time to answer all our questions, and he doesn't mind telling us about his work and his background – while two of his daughters curiously study the guests from far away, and disappear behind their father as soon as their "espionage" is discovered.

MASAYOSHI IS THE THIRD generation owner of this little shop and bakery, which was started by his grandfather 80 years ago.

"Grandpa was an entrepreneur and wanted to make something unique for its time and as the business is still alive one has to say he succeeded," says Masayoshi. "Actually, I didn't have any plans whatsoever to walk in my grandfather's and father's footsteps. Instead I went to Tokyo to study Economics for four years.

Still, I started to think that I should at least try to discover the profession I had in my blood, so to speak. So for two years, alongside my university studies, I went to an evening school, Wagashi education school. Even though I had often been with my father in the bakery as a child it was in Tokyo I first realized that this was a rather interesting and creative profession. On top of that, it was good fun!"

WAGASHI IS THE COLLECTIVE NAME for this traditional handicraft that Masayoshi practices, and it means something like "Japanese confection". Wagashi are exquisite and very beautiful Japanese sweets. They are also very traditional using ingredients mostly from different plants. Mainly anko is used, a sweet paste from beans, but sometimes also mocha, a sticky dough made from rice. One type of Wagashi is Jounamagashi, a non conserved sweet that has to be consumed rather quickly. They are often served at Japanese tea ceremonies, where they should symbolize a season with seasonal colours, plants or flowers. The shape and look are very important. Jounamagashi is Masayoshi's main business, where he combines traditional and his own modern designs.

WE ARE INVITED to the room behind the shop, where all the sweets are produced. It is even colder in there, quite the opposite from a European bakery. Inside that room, we found what

could be called creative chaos. The small space is filled with tools, dough and colouring essences alongside different machines, a fridge and a freezer. Everything seems to be in a mess, but Masayoshi knows where to find every little item. It is obvious that this is the place where he is in his element. He put his white overalls on, rolls up the sleeves, and his deft fingers are immediately ready to make the most extraordinary sweets.

WHEN MASAYOSHI STARTS to work, things happen very quickly. With experienced hands he forms sweets of different shapes and colours. First he rolls the anko paste into different sized balls. Soon one ball enfolds the other, smaller one. Sometimes the colour of the inside anko can be seen through the translucent cover layer. Colours are toned from dark to light or vice versa and sometimes only the outside layer can be seen. It's like magic when the anko paste almost comes to life, and it all looks so easily done. That is of course just an illusion. Many years of practice is necessary to accomplish this. Most of the work is done only with hands and fingers, but sometimes a few tools are used as well. "This is my best friend" says Masayoshi and shows an unremarkable piece of cloth, that looks like a handkerchief. "With its help I can achieve different shapes and patterns rather easily." Some irons, a few punches and five cups of colouring essence, which could be blended into several colours are also important tools for the final result.



Samples from the Master's gallery. Copyright: Masayoshi Chino.



Masayoshi Chino, the third generation owner of Okashidokoro Chino, a little shop and bakery started by his grandfather 80 years ago.

WHAT WE HAVE JUST WITNESSED is only the final step in the sweet production. Anko, the main ingredient is also made here in the bakery. It is not too complicated, but it takes rather a long time to achieve perfection. Mostly made by modern machines, some manual work is also required. Grandpa's old vessels are still often used.

MASAYOSHI'S CLIENTS ARE primarily tea houses in the city, where his delicious sweets are served during traditional tea ceremonies. However, Masayoshi is always open for new ideas and is happy to offer his products to modern customers as well. His interest in art and music has opened up different sales opportunities.

"For example, at an art exhibition opening my products could be served and at some concerts wagashi has been included in the entrance fee!" he says.

FINALLY, WHAT DOES A MAN deeply involved in a family tradition think of the future? Does he hope some of his own children will take over the business when it is time for him to retire?

"I have no idea what my children will do when they grow up," Masayoshi says. "If they one day would like to get into this business I would be happy, but it's not important to me. I only hope that they will do something that they enjoy and that they will get as much pleasure from their jobs as I do!"

GLOSSARY

Wagashi – An exquisite confection, often made of sweet bean paste. It is served at traditional tea ceremonies. Wagashi is also very popular as a present in Japan.

Anko – A bean paste, often made of Azuki beans. The beans are boiled and then mashed; thereafter you add sugar and honey.

Mochi – Dough made of sticky rice. It is made

by crushing the rice in a traditional "mortel". The dough is then formed into different shapes.

Okashidokoro Chino – Masayoshi's lovely shop, 5 minutes' walk from Ueda train station. It sells confections of the best quality.

Ueda – Town in Nagano district, about 250 km northwest of Tokyo. There are around 160,000 inhabitants.

HOW TO GET THERE

Train from Tokyo to Ueda – A return ticket with the Bullet Train *Shinkansen* is JPY 7,500 (approximately GBP 60).