

## **Reevaluation of *Wagashi*'s Characteristics: How Heian Period Literature Influenced Edo Period *Wagashi***

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### **Abstract**

This research examines the influence of Edo period *wagashi* (Japanese confections) and Heian literature. For the study, the author has selected *Kashifu*, a document that preserves information about *wagashi* which provides clear names and illustrations of *wagashi* from the Edo period. This study explores the connection between the names and designs of *wagashi* and their intended links to historical literature. Previous research has discussed the influence of poems on *wagashi*, but the influence of prose is still undefined. Therefore, this research considers poetry and prose when examining the connections between the names and designs of *wagashi*. The results suggest a direct and indirect relationship between the names and designs of Edo period's *wagashi* with poems and prose works from the Heian period. The direct connection is indicated by descriptions in the texts of the Heian period. On the other hand, the indirect relationship is evident from adaptations of Heian literature in literary works created after the Heian period, demonstrating that these works are incomplete without references to Heian literature.

*Keywords:* *wagashi*, Japanese literature, Heian period, Edo period, Japanese prose

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## Introduction

In Japan, there are various types of sweets, including *yougashi*, *nanbangashi*, *wagashi*, and “Chinese” sweets. The distinction of *wagashi* from other types of sweets is especially marked by its distinct Japanese characteristics, as discussed by Maruyama and Kobayashi (1970), Nakayama (2006), and Tanaka (1996). However, some unresolved aspects remain regarding whether the traits of *wagashi* discussed in those studies can be applied to the components of existing *wagashi*. But what exactly is *wagashi*? To have a better understanding of *wagashi*, below is one of its definitions in dictionary:

It refers to uniquely Japanese sweets or Japanese-style sweets, including *manju*, *yokan*, *rakugan*, *gyuhi*, *senbei*, and *ame*, which have developed a Japanese flavor by incorporating both *namagashi* (fresh sweets) and *higashi* (dry sweets). The term *wagashi* was established in contrast to Western confections, distinguishing sweets made with butter and milk from those made with shellfish, fruits, and mountain herbs, all cultivated in an environment where meat consumption was prohibited. It began to be called *wagashi* after the Meiji era. A characteristic of *wagashi* is the rich integration of seasonal themes.<sup>1</sup> (Shogakukan, 1994)

It can be seen that *wagashi* is recognized as “Japanese sweets,” giving it a Japanese-style aspect to the confections. Therefore, it is possible for *Kara* sweets (a type of Chinese sweets) such as *manju* to enter the category of *wagashi* by later assigning them a Japanese-style name. However, the dictionary also points out that “the characteristic of *wagashi* is the rich integration of seasonal themes,” meaning that there is a sense of seasons unique to Japan, that can also be taken as an abstract characteristic. On another dictionary, *wagashi* is defined as such:

Japanese confections, which refer to traditional Japanese sweets, have been primarily influenced by techniques from China and Europe until the Edo period, with many adapted to Japanese styles. These sweets typically use main ingredients such as rice, wheat, various shell powders, starches like kudzu and bracken root, beans including adzuki and soybeans, and sugar. They do not include any meat or dairy products, using only a small amount of plant oil when baking and shell powder mixed with water; spices are also minimal. From a taste perspective, these confections have been developed to complement green tea, which gained popularity through the tea ceremony. They are characterized by their beautiful colors and shapes, utilizing leaves and plants to reflect a rich sense of the seasons.<sup>2</sup> (Heibonsha, 2007)

Heibonsha (2007) stated that techniques from China and Europe were adapted to create what is currently referred to as *wagashi*, similar to how Shogakukan (1994) compared *wagashi*'s contrast to Western sweets. Additionally, Heibonsha (2007) also mentioned that confections suitable for tea ceremonies can rightly be called *wagashi*. After that, the characteristic of *wagashi* possessing a sense of seasonality is brought up once again.

If we summarize both definitions of *wagashi*, it seems that the term *wagashi* was derived more from the need to distinguish it from Chinese and European confections. Furthermore, both sources note that *wagashi* embodies a sense of seasonality, reflecting a seasonal feeling unique

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<sup>1</sup> Translated verbatim from the original Japanese work (Appendix Quote A) with Google Translate

<sup>2</sup> Translated verbatim from the original Japanese work (Appendix Quote B) with Google Translate

to Japan. However, the concrete depictions of which seasons contribute to this Japanese sensibility remains unclear.

The portrayal of these definitions can be found in pictorial *wagashi* menus from the Edo period (1603–1869). From the menu, it can be said that their seasonal designs and names suggested something that was already commonly used, for example, as found in flower-inspired sweets. And thus, it is worthy to delve the origins of the shared common sense of seasonal influences in Edo period Japanese sweets and how they were reflected in the designs and names of the confections.

In general, characteristics of *wagashi* in the Edo period can be stated as follows based on its commonalities (Maruyama & Kobayashi, 1970; Nakayama, 2006; Tanaka, 1996):

1. The design, colors, and names of *wagashi* reflect the seasons.
2. The names of *wagashi* are chosen to emphasize their design.
3. *Wagashi* is greatly influenced by Japanese literature, particularly poetry.

The characteristics above mentioned that *wagashi* are greatly influenced by Japanese literature. However, there are still areas of discussion lacking in the relationship between *wagashi* and seasonal-aware literature. Notably, it concerns what kind of literature was chosen to express the sense of the season. For example, a *wagashi* named *Tatsudanagashi* has been preserved in an Edo period document called *Kashifu* (lit. “records of sweets”), in which its design reflects autumn leaves. Why has this *wagashi*, named after a place, been designed in the shape of autumn leaves? According to *Gazou de Tanoshimu Edo no Shokubunka* (2021) exhibition, one of the connections between its name and shape traces back to the *Kokin Wakashu* (Collection of Old and New Japanese Poems), whereas a poem describes an autumn in *Tatsudanagashi*.

It can be concluded that the gap between *Tatsudanagashi*'s shape and name are connected by the help of Japanese literature, which also incorporates a seasonal feeling into the *wagashi*. Nonetheless, the third characteristic refers explicitly to Japanese literature, primarily poetic forms, while excluding prose. Despite this, if literature has indeed provided seasonal feeling to *wagashi*, then prose should not be overlooked in this possibility. To support this, this study will focus on a particular *wagashi* component and examine its literary influence by considering both poetry and prose equally.

This study will also investigate the origin of *wagashi* names as part of its connected characteristic with Japanese literature. However, *wagashi* names that will be subject of this study do not include confection names. For example, the simple word *mochi* is one of the names that always refers to confections or food. Even so, in *teika mochi*, although it indeed ends with *mochi*, there is the name *teika*, which is not recognized as food. In this context, the name *teika* can significantly influence the design of *wagashi* depending on the image it conjures, unlike *mochi*, which is already recognized as food. By researching names like *teika*, which comes before a name recognized as confections, this study can anticipate the impacts and pathways of how this name was used during that era.

### ***Kashifu and Wagashi***

*Kashifu* is an anonymous document about traditional Japanese sweets published in the Edo period (1603–1869). This document is housed in the *Kanō* Collection at Tohoku University Library. It comprises two volumes with 75 pages in total, each measuring 13 cm in height and 20.5 cm in width. The content consists solely of illustrations and names of Japanese sweets in

color. The first volume includes 240 kinds of sweets, while the second volume contains 139 kinds. There are 16 kinds of sugar sweets, 53 kinds of *mochi* sweets, 6 kinds of *yokan*, and 12 kinds of *manjū*. The remainder consists of sweets that do not fall into these categories.

Other than *Kashifu*, various forms of documents on *wagashi* have survived from the Edo period, in which some of them include tables of contents, names, and methods of preparation. Meanwhile, the *Kashifu* is an example where the names and illustrations of *wagashi* can be seen. Since this research does not need to know the ingredients and techniques of *wagashi* making, this study primarily uses *Kashifu* as a resource on *wagashi* to analyze the names and shapes or the colors associated with those shapes.

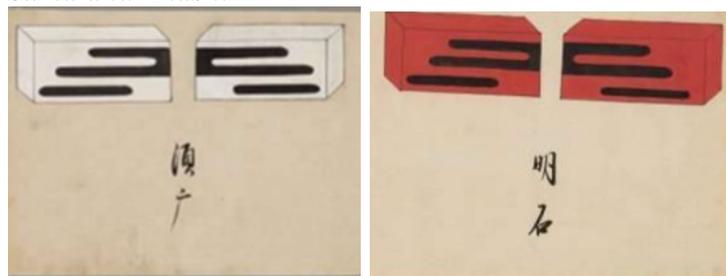
As a reference for *wagashi*, it has already been noted that *Kashifu* has a relationship with poetic literature. Gazou de Tanoshimu Edo no Shokubunka (2021) exhibits *Kashifu* as an illustrated book used when ordering *wagashi*, similar to a catalog. Furthermore, they also suggest that *wagashi* consumers are likely to be educated. The exhibition also stated that many of the *wagashi* are inspired by *waka* poetry, particularly from the *Kokinwakashu* (Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems) (Gazou de Tanoshimu Edo no Shokubunka, 2021).

The *wagashi* in *Kashifu* are usually named after locations, meanwhile their designs use many Japanese flowers and leaves, rising a question between the connection of their shapes and names. However, as remarked in Gazou de Tanoshimu Edo no Shokubunka (2021), although not consumed by the nobility, these Edo period sweets were enjoyed by those who had developed a literary sensibility. These findings support the author's hypothesis of linking the gap between the design of *wagashi* and its name with literature. In that case, it aligns with aforementioned definitions that noted the seasonal sensibility of literature embodied in Japanese sweets.

### ***Wagashi* Directly Related to Heian Literature**

**Figure 1**

*Suma and Akashi*



Source: *Kashifu* (n.d.)

To represent Japanese sweets directly related to Heian literature, the author has chosen the *wagashi* “Suma” (Figure 1, left) and “Akashi” (Figure 1, right). Both *wagashi* are named after locations, and have the same pattern of black clouds, but with different base colors: white and red. As my supervisor, Matsumoto Ooki said, the reasoning behind the base color of “Akashi” can be assumed from its name, as the kanji of “aka” (明) in “Akashi” means red. Additionally, the white and red colors of the “Suma” and “Akashi” might be influenced by the Genpei War, a war between Minamoto and Taira clan. After the war, which broke out from 1180 to 1185, many things in Japan were colored red and white, following the flag color of Minamoto clan (white) and Taira clan (red). Because “Suma” and “Akashi” mostly comes in a pair, it became a natural understanding that since “Akashi” is red, then “Suma,” as its partner in various

literature, shall be white. But I want to approach this issue from a different perspective, even though there are a lot of possibilities regarding the connection between its name and design. Also, to identify the reason behind the white color in “Suma,” there is a need to analyze these *wagashi* as a pair, with the idea originating from historical Japanese prose.

Many literary works use Suma and Akashi together. It might be because the two of them were geographically close, and it was easy to connect the two to give some realistic approaches through the stories. However, in the history of literary works, when these places were named together in a story, some elements would represent Heian literature, namely referencing prose literature from the Heian Period (794–1185), *The Tale of Genji*. For example, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, there is a Japanese prose anthology, in which one of the prose is titled *Mumyou Zoushi*. The anthology itself is built as a commentary of other Japanese prose, and there is a part where they noted *The Tale of Genji*'s story. It features the character of Lady Murasaki, also mentioning Suma and Akashi in its passage.

Displeasing matters. It is not even interesting that Lady Murasaki is not accompanied to **Suma**, while Genji has taken the **Akashi** lady as his mistress and caused her to send someone to talk about it without question. ‘Just like that boat far away from the shore (are you separating me like that boat is separating us?),’ she sarcastically said to Lady Murasaki, and Genji only showed her the outer cover of the Akashi lady’s letter.<sup>3</sup> (Matsuura no Miya Monogatari, ca. 1198–1202 / 1999, p. 217)

In this scene, Lady Murasaki is unable to meet Hikaru Genji. And so, Genji is criticized by Murasaki for taking Akashi no Kimi as a mistress. Additionally, the story after this reveals that a part of *Mumyou Zoushi* involves a painting created by Genji, which appears in *The Tale of Genji* after the Suma chapter. This work is believed to have been made during the Kamakura period (1185–1333), but it acknowledges various key elements from *The Tale of Genji*, namely “Murasaki,” “Akashi no Kimi,” the “Suma” chapter and “E Awase” chapter (the chapter after “Suma”), along with the pairing of “Suma” and “Akashi.” Therefore, it cannot be denied that *Mumyou Zoushi*, though a part of an anthology, demonstrates a connection to the awareness of *The Tale of Genji*.

In another literature, Suma and Akashi are illustrated with the motif of the moon. Nevertheless, the locations are still accompanied by mentions of *The Tale of Genji* such as the passage below, taken from *The Tale of Heike*.

As autumn gradually reaches its midpoint, the people living in the new city of Fukuhara seek to see the famous moon. Some reminisce about the past of the Genji Commander from the Tale of Genji while gazing at the moon along the shore from **Suma** to **Akashi**, or cross the Awaji Strait to see the moon at Isoshima.<sup>4</sup> (Heike Monogatari, ca. 1300/1994, p. 356)

*The Tale of the Heike* depicts the Genpei War, and it is a military chronicle written from a Buddhist perspective. In this reference of the story, there are “Suma” and “Akashi” that are added to the text, which then associated with Hikaru Genji, a character from *The Tale of Genji*, which narrates the story of Genji crossing from the shores of Suma to Akashi. This story is directly related to *The Tale of Genji*, in which the author of *The Tale of Heike* rewrote Hikaru

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<sup>3</sup> Translated verbatim from the original Japanese work (Appendix Quote C) with Google Translate

<sup>4</sup> Translated verbatim from the original Japanese work (Appendix Quote D) with Google Translate

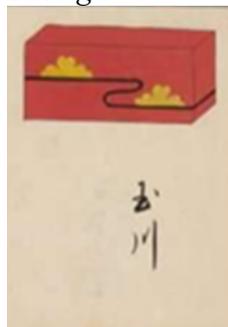
Genji's act of "gazing at the moon." Therefore, the impression of moonlight is associated with *The Tale of Genji* in this scene. Furthermore, Ihara (1974) mentions that "Additionally, to the people of ancient times, red was felt to be a shining, illuminating beauty, and it is known that they held an aesthetic consciousness of red." This suggests that red is interpreted as luminous, indicating that the red in the *wagashi* "Akashi" could be perceived as moonlight, analogous to *The Tale of Heike*. Also, Genji tries to leave Suma as he looks out for the moon, as if the moon is his guidance to Akashi, which is probably why Akashi is painted red.

Through that, it became clear that *Kashifu* is not a mere menu, but also a literary work—a media to express past literatures through the forms of *wagashi*. If we place *Kashifu* in the same place as another literary creation that tries to collide with Heian literature work, then we can assume that a part of *Kashifu*, in this case "Suma" and "Akashi," is directly related to Heian literature, just like how other literature incorporates *The Tale of Genji* to its narratives.

### Japanese Sweets Indirectly Related to Heian Literature

#### Figure 2

##### *Tamagawa*



Source: Kashifu (n.d.)

The Japanese confection named "Tamagawa" has a red background and features a line that curves like waves of water, with half-yellow autumn leaves or petals resembling Yamabuki flower. The name and design of this confection can be connected with the 159th poem of *Shinkokinshu* from Kamakura era (1180–1333).

Let's hold the horse and let it drink more water. Oh, Tamagawa, where the dew of the Yamabuki flowers spills over.<sup>5</sup> (Shinkokin Wakashuu, 1205/1995, p. 64)

This scene refers to the dew falling from the Yamabuki flowers. Furthermore, annotations in the poem also stated that Ide no Tamagawa is a river name in Kyoto Prefecture noted for its Yamabuki flowers, a type of flower that is vibrantly yellow. Considering that there is a yellow *wagashi* named Yamabuki among the *wagashi* in *Kashifu*, it can be inferred that the floral design of "Tamagawa" in *Kashifu* borrows a similar shape and color. Additionally, the *wagashi* design also reflects the river mentioned in the poem.

Even though the description of "Tamagawa" is mostly related to *Shinkokinshu*, a passage as early as from the Nara Period (710–784), quoted from an ancient report on provincial culture, geography, and oral tradition called "Fudoki," also mentions Tamagawa, though in a different manner.

<sup>5</sup> Translated verbatim from the original Japanese work (Appendix Quote E) with Google Translate

In the west of the county office, there is a village called Shizuori. In ancient times, no one knew how to weave patterns. At that time, weaving was first done in this village. Therefore, the village was named Shizuori. To the north, there is a small stream. It is mixed with red stones. The color resembles amber, and it is very good for making flint. That is why it is named Tamagawa.<sup>6</sup> (Fudoki, ca. 700s/1997, p. 408)

The above scene begins with the emperor's story, discussing the creation of the world and the naming of what has been created. To the north of that village is a small stream with red stones mixed in, resembling the color of amber and named Tamagawa. This indicates that "Tamagawa," the *wagashi*, refers to the small stream. Moreover, it can be inferred that the red stones in that river connect to the red coloring in the *wagashi*. However, this scene does not mention flowers or autumn leaves, and Tamagawa is only mentioned as a location name.

Tamagawa's design can be concurred by using literature from Kamakura Period and Nara Period. However, there is a missing link in between; how does a location name end up being connected with flowers? To answer that question, below is a poetry work from Heian period:

I had heard rumors that the famous spot for 'Unohana' flower was Tamagawa, but it seems this name came from adorning 'Unohana' flower with dewdrops.<sup>7</sup> (Fujiwara, 1187/1993)

In the poem's annotations, there is a suggestion that the Tamagawa from Senzai Wakashuu is the Tamagawa in the country of Settsu, specifically in the district of Mishima, in contrast to Shizuori mentioned in *Fudoki*. This is the first time Tamagawa has been associated with scenery and ultimately, flower.

At first, in the Nara period literature story, Tamagawa was only a place name, but during the Heian period, the connection between Tamagawa and other things, in this case, flowers, was confirmed for the first time. And after that, in the Kamakura era, the connection between Tamagawa and Yamabuki, which has a yellow color, is shown, making the pattern in *wagashi* and its name connection understandable. Therefore, even though understanding Heian literature stories is not essential to comprehend the connection between Tamagawa and Yamabuki, Heian literature is still an important existence to the creation of this *wagashi* as it connects the development of Tamagawa's shared understanding from Nara Period to Kamakura Period. Thus, this part of *Kashifu* is indirectly influenced by Heian period literature.

### Conclusion

Japanese literature connected with *wagashi* can come from various periods, but it has the same point. In one way or another, all Japanese literature has a connection with Heian era literature, regardless of its literature type. Moreover, even though most research have found the connection of *wagashi* and Japanese poetry, this study has concluded that other Japanese literature, such as prose, also has a great influence in *wagashi* designs and names.

In general, the correlation between *wagashi* and Japanese literature can be divided into two categories: direct and indirect. Direct relation means that the names and designs of *wagashi* can be explained by just using Heian era literature. Even when seen from literature works after

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<sup>6</sup> Translated verbatim from the original Japanese work (Appendix Quote F) with Google Translate

<sup>7</sup> Translated verbatim from the original Japanese work (Appendix Quote G) with Google Translate

Heian era which contained many *wagashi* names and patterns, the explanation of their origins can only be retrieved by looking at Heian literature. Indirect relation means that the sweets' names and patterns can be explained just by using literature after the Heian period, but still has some common sense or information that are rooted in the Heian period. This standard of common sense is what connects the name and the design of the *wagashi*. And since the *wagashi* in this study is retrieved from *Kashifu*, a document recorded in Edo period, it can be concluded that Edo *wagashi* and Heian literature are interconnected.

### **Acknowledgements**

I declare that Faustina Ardisa has edited and proofread this research.

### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

I declare that Google Translate and Grammarly have been used to proofread and translate the original script in this research.

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## Appendix

### Original Text of Related Japanese Documents

#### Quote A

*Definition of Wagashi in Encyclopedia Nipponica (Shogakukan, 1994)*

日本特有の菓子あるいは日本風の菓子のことで、まんじゅう、羊かん、落雁（らくがん）、求肥（ぎゅうひ）、煎餅（せんべい）、飴（あめ）など生（なま）菓子、干菓子をくろめて日本的な風味を形成してきたものをいう。和菓子は洋菓子に対して生まれたことばであり、バターやミルクを材料に用いた菓子と、肉食禁忌の環境で育てられた穀類、果実、山草本位の菓子を区別して、明治以降に和菓子と称するようになった。季節感を豊かに盛り込んでいるのも和菓子の特徴である。

#### Quote B

*Definition of Wagashi in Encyclopedia of the World (Heibonsha, 2007)*

和風の菓子、日本の伝統的な菓子といった意味であるが、おおむね江戸時代までに中国やヨーロッパから製法と伝えられ、それを日本化したものが多い。米・麦その他の穀粉、葛（くず）粉・ワラビ粉などのデンプン、アズキ・大豆などの豆類、および砂糖を主材料とする甘味のものも多く、鳥獣肉、乳製品はまったく使わず、油脂も水溶きした穀粉を焼くときに少量の植物油をひく程度にしか用いず、香辛料の使用も少ない。食味の面からすると、茶の湯を中心として普及してきた緑茶の飲用ふさわしいものとして形成されており、色彩・形態の美しさとともに、草木の葉などを利用して豊かな季節感をもっているのが特徴である。（以下中略）

#### Quote C

*Excerpt from Mumyou Zoushi in Matsuura no Miya Monogatari (ca. 1198 – 1202/1999), chapter 18, p. 217*

心やましきこと。紫の上、須磨へ具せられぬことだにあるに、明石の君設けて、問はず語りしおこすること。『浦より遠に漕ぐ舟の』と厭はれて、文の上包みばかり見せたること。

#### Quote D

*Excerpt from Heike Monogatari (ca. 1300/1994), p. 356*

やう / \ 秋もなかぼになりゆけば、復原の新都にまします人々、名所の月をみると、或いは源氏の大將の昔の跡をしのびつつ、須磨より明石の浦づたひ、淡路の瀬戸をおしわたり、絵島が磯の月をみる。

#### Quote E

*Excerpt from Shinkokin Wakashuu (1205/1995), poem number 159, p. 64*

（一五九番歌） 皇太后宮大夫俊成  
駒とめてなほ水かはん山吹の花の露そふ井出の玉川

**Quote F**

*Excerpt from Fudoki (c. 700s/1997), Hitachi Province Fudoki chapter, p. 408*

郡西□里、静織里。上古之時、織レ綾之機、未レ在二知人一。于レ時、此村初織。因名。北有二小水一。丹石交錯。色似二琥碧一、火鑽尤好。以号二玉川一。

**Quote G**

*Excerpt from Senzai Wakashuu (Fujiwara, 1187/1993)*

(一四一番歌)卯花の歌とてよみ侍りける  
玉川とをとにきゝしは卯の花を露のかざれる名にこそありけれ