

Rakugan

Rakugan is a type of traditional Japanese confectionery made of pressed sugar molded into different shapes. The sweets are colored with *matcha* green tea powder, cinnamon, or other ingredients, and are often served alongside green tea. Because of the relatively simple mixture of ingredients—usually only sugar, glutinous rice flour, water, and coloring—*rakugan* generally last up to a year. This makes them ideal for use as offerings at temples.

Confectioners use extra-fine sugar grown and processed in Japan to make *rakugan*. They mix it with the other ingredients, then compress it in a wooden mold.

Although there are many dry sweets made this way, the name *rakugan* is believed to have originated in the Katata area north of Otsu, noted particularly for the Ukimido Hall. The area and the temple famously appear in *Wild Geese Returning Home at Katata*, one of the Eight Views of Omi, a set of traditional scenic images of beautiful places that are popular themes of poetry and art. *Rakugan* means “descending geese,” and one theory is that the name came about because white sweets topped with sesame seeds resembled the scene. Today, an image inspired by the famous view is stamped on the *rakugan* when the sweets are molded.

As *rakugan* became more popular across Japan, confectioners began molding them into different shapes based on the seasons or local surroundings. One confection shop in Katata still makes traditional *rakugan*. The store even has a wooden *rakugan* mold made more than a century ago. As few artisans today know how to make the molds, concessions to technology have been made, and some modern molds are formed using 3D printers.