



JAPAN INFORMATION
AND CULTURE CENTER
在米国日本大使館広報文化センター

TEACHING TUESDAY

FORTUNE COOKIES

Due to its popularization by Chinese-Americans, many people believe that the fortune cookie originates from China. But the cookies actually do not exist in China – because they were based off a traditional Japanese cookie-cracker called tsujiura senbei or “fortune crackers”.

Tsujiura senbei (辻占煎餅) can be traced back as far as mid to late 19th century Japan. An 1878 book “Moshiogusa Kinsei Kidan” includes a story about an apprentice who makes such cookies. The senbei are a local tradition in Kyoto, where many confectionaries used to include little fortunes. The look and taste are also different from the fortune cookies Americans are used to; they are bigger, browner, and not as sweet, as the batter is made of sesame and miso rather than vanilla and butter. The fortunes are also not stuffed inside, but are pinched in the cookie’s fold, like Pac-man.

Tsujiura senbei are still sold in Kyoto, and also in Kanazawa, Ishikawa as lucky items to start the New Year. But as the popular quote goes, “The Japanese invented the fortune cookie, the Chinese advertised it, and the Americans tasted it.”