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“Children as consumer: sweets and snacking in the construction of confectionary
consumer culture in modern Japan”

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With the development of a mass confectionary consumer culture during the early twentieth century, producers, vendors and consumers of sweets in Japan were confronted with a problem: children. Influenced by western science, medical practitioners worried about the impact of Japanese confections on children's diets. For a growing number of parents, who took this warning to heart, the behaviour and practices of their children became a major concern, with mothers tasked with the responsibility for keeping close watch over them. Despite the offer of nutritious western-style confections and the institution of specific times for snacking, however, children steadfastly refused to accept the 'sophisticated' tastes of adults. They chose instead to shop and eat in the notoriously unhygienic *dagashiya* (sweets shop) and shared the same food with 'disrespectable' children from squalid neighbourhoods, deliberately trampling upon and destabilizing adult notions of civility. Companies such as Morinaga and Meiji were also perplexed about what to do. For Morinaga, keen to contribute to a modern economy, western sweets were targeted at middle class adults whose public activities would be enhanced by eating such products as pocket milk caramel or chocolate; but the confectioner was frustrated by the reality that children took to their products. For many adults, children, especially Japanese ones, were not consumers at all because they had no control over their desires and based their purchasing decisions on irrational criteria, while in advanced societies such as the United States, it was argued, children were educated to make informed choices. Yet, as the twentieth century unfolded, the desires of children, as well as their purchasing power, became increasingly difficult to ignore. Taking up the example of modern Japanese society, this paper assesses the impact of children, or adult thinking about the relationship between sweets and children, on the formation of modern confectionary consumer culture.