

# THE OYATSU COMPANY AIMS TO BECOME GLOBAL Ambassador for Japanese Snacks

AS JAPANESE FOOD CULTURE CONTINUES TO GAIN INTERNATIONAL ACCLAIM, THE OYATSU COMPANY IS POISED TO BE ONE OF ITS MOST CELEBRATED AMBASSADORS, BRINGING THE JOY OF BABY STAR RAMEN TO FANS EVERYWHERE. *By Bernard Thompson*

**I**n recent years, Japanese food has become a global sensation, driven by unique flavors, traditional craftsmanship and a growing number of restaurants internationally, as well as an increasing influx of tourists to the country. “Recently, the Japanese yen has seen depreciation, which has also resulted in an increased number of inbound tourists,” notes Tadashi Yokoyama, president of The Oyatsu Company Ltd. “People are learning that Japanese food culture is excellent, which is why Japanese food has expanded rapidly.” Amid this rising interest, The Oyatsu Company, a 76-year-old snack producer known for its iconic Baby Star Ramen, is riding the wave of Japanese food’s popularity while championing sustainability, cultural collaborations and a new chapter in e-commerce.

Founded in 1948, The Oyatsu Company built its reputation by repurposing excess

ramen noodle pieces, embodying the Japanese concept of *mottainai*, or “waste not.” The brand’s flagship product, Baby Star Ramen, a dry noodle snack seasoned with various flavors, has captured the taste buds of consumers across generations. “Baby Star Ramen is our staple product, born 65 years ago. It is still loved by many people of all ages,” says Yokoyama. With an expanding lineup, from different flavors to varieties that pair well with alcoholic beverages, Baby Star has become a household staple in Japan and a promising product internationally.

The Oyatsu Company’s commitment to sustainability runs deep. By transforming crunchy pieces of ramen noodles into snacks, the company established itself as an early advocate of sustainable practices before they became mainstream. Today, it remains dedicated to reducing waste and contributing to a circular economy, a sus-

tainable approach that aligns with a global emphasis on environmental responsibility in the food industry.

The Oyatsu Company’s growth trajectory took a significant leap when investment firm Carlyle acquired it in 2014. Under Carlyle’s ownership, the company experienced 25 percent growth in consolidated sales, quadrupling its international sales and expanding into 34 markets. Yokoyama attributes this growth to increased production efficiency, streamlined marketing and R&D improvements. The company’s performance was so impressive that it earned a spotlight in a 2023 case study by METI (Japan’s Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry).

In 2022, The Oyatsu Company was acquired by D Capital, a move Yokoyama views as essential for international expansion and e-commerce growth. “With D Capital, we want to strengthen our position in overseas markets. Regarding the domestic market, we would

# I ❤️ BABY-STAR



**“If we can increase the opportunities for foreigners to enjoy Baby Star Ramen, I would be very happy.”**

**Tadashi Yokoyama**

President, The Oyatsu Company Ltd.



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like to expand our e-commerce business,” Yokoyama explains. D Capital’s support, paired with The Oyatsu Company’s improved organizational structure, is positioning the company to meet new demands and broaden its customer base internationally.

The Oyatsu Company’s journey to international markets has been steady and strategic. Its presence in Taiwan, bolstered by a local factory established eight years ago, has given the company a solid foothold in the region. “Before that factory’s establishment, we exported our products to Taiwan and Hong Kong for about 40 years,” says the president, highlighting how the company capitalized on its market presence in Asia.

The Baby Star brand’s ambitions now extend to Western markets, particularly North America. “In May of this year, we established a local company in the U.S., so we are about to expand in that market,” Yokoyama shares. “Our original chicken flavor product is the most popular in Japan, but we have a lot of different flavors that can be exported to other markets. This includes spicy chicken, yakisoba [Japanese fried noodles], barbecue and others. These varieties have sold well in other countries. In North America, we have four different flavors—soy sauce, red chili, tonkotsu and wasabi.”

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Japan’s e-commerce market has become the fourth largest in the world. The Oyatsu Company aims to capitalize on this growth, especially through products catering to health-conscious consumers. Its Body Star line, designed as a convenient protein snack, has found a niche among those seeking healthier, ready-to-eat options during remote work. “Products such as our Body Star line were meant for people working remotely, so we would like to utilize these products to expand our e-commerce,” Yokoyama says. The simplicity of these snacks—which don’t require added water or milk—has made them a hit domestically. With plans to extend this line globally, The Oyatsu Company’s e-commerce offerings align with trends in health and convenience.

The firm’s unique approach to brand building includes an extensive series of pop culture collaborations that have reinforced Baby Star Ramen as a fun, ubiquitous brand. From high-profile partnerships with New Era and Reebok to collaborations with Family Mart, 7-Eleven and popular franchises like *Demon Slayer* and *Street Fighter*, The Oyatsu Company has solidified Baby Star Ramen’s presence

across food, fashion and entertainment. The president explains the thinking behind these collaborations: “The general theme is finding Baby Star Ramen everywhere. Despite our brand awareness being almost 100 percent domestically, we are trying to increase the opportunities for consumers to look at Baby Star Ramen.”

These partnerships keep Baby Star top of mind in daily life, creating a connection with both Japanese and international fans. Yokoyama’s enthusiasm for these collaborations is palpable, reflecting The Oyatsu Company’s commitment to blending innovation with nostalgia. “We want Baby Star Ramen to appear everywhere in people’s daily lives. To this end, we have collaborated with many products, from sake and beer to T-shirts and gold,” he says.

From sustainable practices and strategic acquisitions to bold overseas expansions and inventive collaborations, The Oyatsu Company has crafted a unique path to international success while staying true to its roots. For Yokoyama, the future holds exciting possibilities: expanding the company’s reach, enhancing its e-commerce presence and ensuring that Baby Star Ramen remains a beloved staple both in Japan and worldwide.





# DRIVING CHEESE EXPORTS with Local Market Adaptation

WITH INNOVATIVE CHEESE PRODUCTS, ROKKO BUTTER IS EXPANDING INTERNATIONALLY, WHILE ADDRESSING ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS. KNOWN FOR QUALITY AND CREATIVITY, ITS QBB BRAND PUSHES BOUNDARIES THROUGH MARKET-SPECIFIC PRODUCTS AND SUSTAINABILITY.

By Sasha Lauture and Bernard Thompson

**R**okko Butter, a leader in Japan's cheese industry, has long-standing recognition for its innovative products. Its flagship brand, QBB, is a major presence in the domestic market, selling over 200 million units of its bite-size Baby Cheese annually. Known for pioneering products like the world's first stick-type cheese and Japan's first individually wrapped sliced cheese, QBB is a staple in Japanese households. Now, the company is setting its sights on bolstering its international reach.

Since 2017, Rokko Butter has focused on expanding its overseas exports, currently shipping products to nine countries, primarily in Asia. A key target for growth is Vietnam, a country with a young and dynamic population. "It's essential to capture overseas demand for long-term growth," says President Hiroyasu Tsukamoto. With 86 percent of the population under 60 and a growing economy, Vietnam presents an important opportunity, as its consumers value high-quality Japanese goods like Rokko Butter's unique product lineup.

One of the company's key international strategies has been adapting its products to local tastes and formats. Tsukamoto notes, for example: "Based on consumers' needs in Southeast Asia and other regions, we've launched a compact-size, candy-shaped cheese." This ability to localize offerings, while maintaining the quality that defines Japanese food, is a cornerstone of Rokko Butter's global ambitions.

Expanding internationally comes with challenges, particularly in human resource development. Tsukamoto explains that employee training for overseas markets requires substantial investment, as staff need to be proficient in areas like international trade, contract management and marketing. Addressing these needs, Rokko Butter has developed detailed programs aimed at equipping employees with the skills they need.

Rokko Butter's focus on sustainability as part of its international strategy has led the company to introduce eco-friendly packaging solutions—utilizing biomass materials and FSC-certified paper—and commit to minimizing food waste, converting production losses into animal feed and other sustainable uses. What's more, the firm's efforts to reduce its environmental impact have prompted it to launch Plant Made, a cheese substitute created from plant-based ingredients.

Looking forward, Rokko Butter has ambitious plans to further its international expansion. In addition to its Asian presence, the company aims to enter new markets in North America, Europe and eventually South America and Africa. Expanding into these regions will require the continued development of localized products, as well as innovations such as shelf-life extension for longer shipping times. Despite the challenges ahead, Tsukamoto remains confident in Rokko Butter's ability to become the world's leading processed cheese manufacturer by continuing to innovate and adapt to changing global demands.



**"Vietnam is the market with the greatest potential for growth."**

**Hiroyasu Tsukamoto**  
President, Rokko Butter Co., Ltd.

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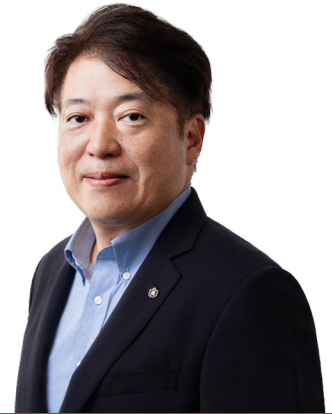
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# SWEET TRADITION: Senjakuame's Century of Candy



**Hideo Yoneda**  
President, Senjakuame Honpo Co., Ltd.



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SENJAKUAME HONPO BLENDS JAPANESE CANDY TRADITION WITH PROGRESSIVE VALUES, FOCUSING ON NATURAL INGREDIENTS, SUSTAINABILITY AND GLOBAL EXPANSION. SIGNATURE PRODUCTS LIKE THE FIRM'S 100% PURE HONEY CANDY SHOWCASE ITS COMMITMENT TO HEALTH AND QUALITY. *By Sasha Lautre and Sean McBride*

**F**or nearly a century, Senjakuame Honpo has been blending Japan's rich confectionery heritage with bold innovation. Founded in 1925, this Osaka-based candymaker draws inspiration from the Kamigata Kabuki spirit—preserving tradition while embracing modernity. “We’ve always pushed ourselves to challenge the status quo while respecting our roots,” says Hideo Yoneda, the company’s fourth-generation president. The firm’s ethos revolves around its three



products is tough,” says Yoneda, “but our research has helped us unlock the potential of natural ingredients.” This dedication to innovation extends to Senjakuame Honpo’s product design, with the firm’s star-shaped candies and uniquely textured gummies setting it apart from competitors. Senjakuame Honpo is also making strides in sustainability with products like *Mijukumono desuga*, a type of candy crafted from upcycled under-ripe fruits that would otherwise be discarded. “It’s our way of showing compas-



core development pillars: natural ingredients, health-conscious products and innovative manufacturing methods.

One of Senjakuame Honpo’s standout offerings is its 100% Pure Honey Candy, a product launched in 1995 that has become a global bestseller. Free from sugar or additives, this candy is made solely from honey, renowned for its health benefits. “This product captures our philosophy—simple, natural and thoughtful,” Yoneda explains. It’s not just the taste that makes it a winner—100% Pure Honey Candy won a Gold Award at the Monde Selection and has a loyal fan base, especially among those seeking a healthier treat. The candy’s unique formula continues to be a testament to the company’s commitment to quality.

Health-conscious consumers are a major focus for the company, with low-calorie and no-sugar options continually being developed. “Expressing flavors in no-sugar

and contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals,” notes Yoneda. The company’s environmental ethos extends to its partnership with the Nippon Foundation, donating a portion of the sales from Ocean Soda Candy to support children’s initiatives in Japan and participating in clean-up activities.



On the international front, Senjakuame Honpo has been exporting its confectionery for over 60 years to markets across Asia and the U.S. “Candy’s long shelf life makes it ideal for export,” says Yoneda, hinting at further expansion, including a bid to strengthen its U.S. presence and a push into halal-certified products for Southeast Asia. This nearly 100-year-old company’s ongoing innovation and attention to global trends make it one to watch.

With its focus on quality, innovation and thoughtful manufacturing, Senjakuame Honpo is not just preserving tradition—it’s taking candy into the future.



# Fuji Oil: Creating a Plant-Based Future

A company with global expansion ambitions, Fuji Oil is focused on fostering a sustainable future in the food industry, leveraging cutting-edge technology to create tasty, plant-based products. *By Cian O'Neill and Sasha Laurent*



Mikio Sakai,  
CEO, Fuji Oil Holdings Inc.



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Japanese plant-based food company Fuji Oil is on a mission to create a sustainable future for cuisine. CEO Mikio Sakai notes: "In a world with 10 billion people, food nutrition will be the key. We want to provide high-quality and delicious plant-based food to fulfill this mission."

Fuji Oil has a long history of producing vegetable oil for chocolate making. Sakai highlights the firm's strong presence in the compound chocolate industry, particularly in the North American market, where its subsidiary, Blommer Chocolate Company, creates innovative new products using oil and fats technology in response to rising chocolate prices.

Fuji Oil leverages its MIRACORE food technology to produce tasty plant-based alternatives that also address global food shortages. Sakai explains: "This technology combines plant-based oils, fats and proteins to create a satisfying taste experience similar to animal broth. It has applications in products like Japanese restaurant Ippudo's plant-based *tonkotsu* ramen and is also suitable for markets with halal restrictions."

The company aims to expand overseas to meet demand in Western countries, as well as Islamic nations with halal requirements.



Blommer unveils new products at IFT First, Chicago

# DAITO: 100 YEARS of Chocolate Craftsmanship

DAITO CACAO DELIVERS DIVERSE CHOCOLATE PRODUCTS, WITH ITS PRECISE PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES ALLOWING IT TO FIND THE PERFECT BLEND FOR ITS CUSTOMERS. *By Bernard Thompson*

**V**ariety may be the spice of life, but in the case of Japanese firm Daito Cacao, it is also the sweetness. With 100 years of experience, the company specializes in the B2B supply of an extensive range of chocolate for its customers to find the perfect fit.

As chocolate is often combined with an array of ingredients, Daito Cacao understands the importance of providing variety so its clients can find the perfect flavor balance of ingredients and chocolate. As company President Shigeyuki Takeuchi says: "For chocolate products to shine, we really need to have a wide range of cacao ingredients and chocolate at our disposal. We call this our Drawer of Variation."

Daito Cacao's ability to control its production line is the key to its diverse product range and ability to react to its customers' needs. There are four factors affecting taste and aromas in chocolate: the origin of the cacao beans, the roasting process, the conching process and the recipe. Being able to control and adjust all four of these factors gives Daito Cacao the ability to create an essentially unlimited number of aromas and tastes in its chocolate products.

As Daito Cacao celebrates its centenary, the company is set to use the manufacturing techniques it has cultivated over its 100-year history to continue to provide distinctive, safe and high-quality chocolate for years to come.



**"For chocolate products to shine, we need a wide range of ingredients at our disposal."**

**Shigeyuki Takeuchi**  
President, Daito Cacao Co., Ltd.



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