



HAL
open science

SUMIRE oshiroi , a japanese make-up from the end of the Meiji era

Louis Bonté, Frédéric Bonté

► **To cite this version:**

Louis Bonté, Frédéric Bonté. SUMIRE oshiroi , a japanese make-up from the end of the Meiji era. 2023. <hal-04294372>

HAL Id: hal-04294372

<https://hal.science/hal-04294372v1>

Submitted on 19 Nov 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



HAL Authorization

In Japan, an "oshiroi" is historically a white powder used to lighten the skin. The word oshiroi 白粉 is composed of the kanji 白 meaning "white" and the kanji 粉 "flour/powder".

This word has been preserved and today designates other cosmetic forms intended mainly to brighten the complexion. This "whitening/brightening" product, marketed at the end of the 19th century in Japan, was one of the first to claim the subtle fragrance of violets, hence its name SUMIRE meaning "violet". At the same time, two German chemists, Tiemann and Krüger, achieved the first synthesis of ionone, a terpene, the natural fragrance compound in violet oil.**(1)** It should be noted that this molecule also has recently demonstrated skin care properties, which may have contributed to the success of this product.**(2-3)**

We describe the history of this invention and its communication strategy. Sumire oshiroi is a blush sold in two forms, a liquid and a paste. It was manufactured in Tokyo at the end of the Meiji era. Advertisements, usually full-page, appearing in women's magazines (Jokan, Joshi Bundan), cooking magazines (Kuidōraku), or kabuki theater magazines (Engei gahō), tell us the name of its manufacturer. From 1902 to 1906 it's Isekichi-Sumiredō 伊勢吉寿美禮堂; then only Sumiredō 寿美禮堂. The address changes in 1904. It remains in Tokyo's Ryōgoku district, first in Yokoami and then in Motomachi. From 1907 onwards, two separate companies appear to have been formed.

On one side, Iseya Kichijirō 伊勢屋吉次郎 managed by Saitō Kichijirō 齋藤吉次郎 which focuses on the manufacture and sale of toothpaste powders; on the other Sumiredō 壽美禮堂 administered by Saitō Tetsutarō 齋藤鐵太郎 who exclusively manages the Sumire oshiroi.



Advertisement in Kuidōraku (1905) with the name Isekichi Sumiredō © University of California



Advertisement in Joshi Bundan (1910) with the name Sumiredō © University of California

In a series of advertisements published in English in The Japan Year Book, "a directory of general information and statistics on Japan and Japanese territories", Kichijirō reminds us that the original family business "Iseya" is "oldest factory of tooth powders and other toilet articles in Japan". (4) The precise founding date remains uncertain. The above-mentioned advertisements mention the dates 1680 or 1703. A Tokyo business directory (1907) gives the date as the 6th or 7th year of the Genroku era, corresponding to 1688 or 1689. (5)

Saitō Kichijirō (Isekichi) first maker of Sumire oshiroi

Iseya Kichijirō Cie, headed by Saitō Kichijirō, specializes in powdered toothpaste.

In the Edo period, the Japanese used the end of a bamboo or willow stalk as a toothpick. Toothpastes were made from sand, notably Boshu 房州砂, ash and charcoal.... A few years after the start of the Meiji Restoration (1867), under growing Western influence, the composition of toothpastes gradually changed. Carbonate of lime replaced sand. (6)

Kichijirō was a well-known industrialist. He registered his trademark logo on June 30, 1885. (7) In 1893, he participated in the Chicago World's Fair, and in 1904 in the St. Louis World's Fair (USA) as a manufacturer of powdered toothpaste. Its flagship items are Baiko-san 梅香散 Takarako 寶香, Nippon-san 日本散, the suffix San 散 being used at the time to designate toothpastes.

Saitō Tetsutarō

Tetsutarō was born in January 1873. He was the eldest son of Saitō Ikutarō 齋藤幾太郎, who worked in the import of Western cosmetics. He studied at a school in Ueno to become a dispensary pharmacist. He abandoned this project to join the family business, where he developed a Western-inspired blush. (8) This was the birth of Sumire oshiroi. This is first written with the kanji 壽美礼 then 壽美禮. A toilet powder and toothpaste of the same name Sumire are associated with the make-up. On June 30, 1899, Tetsutarō recorded the visual of the Sumire oshiroi label (9).



Visual of Sumire oshiroi label © Japan Patent Office

Manufacture and distribution of Sumire oshiroi

The products are sold in all haberdashers in Japan, but especially in Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya and Kyoto. In 1902, Sumire oshiroi was available in liquid form at a price of 10 to 25 sen and 12 to 20 sen in paste form. The liquid form is sold in a milky-white glass bottle with a tin stopper.

This is the Osaka branch of the Lion Cie, which serves as the main intermediary for the Kansai region. Lion is a famous company founded in 1891, marketing soaps and, from 1896, toothpaste powders before specializing in dental hygiene and toothbrushes.

On a July 1907 advertisement, 18 haberdashers in Tokyo, 3 in Nagoya and 1 in Kyoto are listed as intermediaries. In Tokyo are the famous stores of Hirao Sampei, Tanaka-Kaodō, Wakita, Sasaki....

Production and distribution of Sumire oshiroi and the toilet powder of the same name became the prerogative of Saito Tetsutarō from 1907 onwards. The name of the blush appeared on the front of Motomachi's offices as early as 1906.



Photo of Isekichi-Sumiredō offices in Motomachi published in Kuidōraku (circa 1906)

© University of California

The oshiroi comes in several new shapes. From 1910 onwards, two new shapes appeared in advertisements: Kona-oshiroi 粉白粉 (powdered) and Uchi-oshiroi 打白粉. Then, from 1912 onwards, Tama-Oshiroi 玉白粉 (ball powder). A lead- and zinc-free version, selling for between 20 and 45 sen, was listed in the cosmetics directory of Tokyo haberdashers in 1913. (10)

A pioneering oshiroi in many fields

Shades appear early. Until the Taisho era, make-up remained essentially immaculate white. In 1906, Shiseido, a company of pharmaceutical origin, broke new ground by offering two shades to suit Japanese women's skin color: oshiroi Kahede かへで白粉 is yellow, and is supposed to produce a healthy skin color, while oshiroi Hana はな白粉 is a flesh-colored (red) powder that emphasizes skin whiteness. (11) By November 1908, Sumire oshiroi was already available in 7 shades: Pink rose, Cherry Rose, Indian Rose, Crimson Lake, Rose Madder, Pfach Pink, and Vermillion. All shades revolve around the color pink. (12) The German term Pfach (pretty) is used alongside the English terms in the names. The aim of these shades is to play on color contrasts to bring out the skin's natural white complexion.

In 1917, Shiseido, one year after opening its first boutique dedicated exclusively to cosmetics, launched its own 7-color box. For most authors, this date marks a breakthrough in the history of Japanese cosmetics.

標商録登

西洋白色多洗耐

壽美禮堂

製本禮製

東京東兩國元町

THE BEST MADE
SUMIRE
VIOLET PASTE

製煉トツレオイワウ
入器子油白乳附蓋錫
いろしお禮美壽

◎ 壽美禮白粉

肉色發賣

◎ ピンクローズ (PINK ROSE) 肉色

◎ チェリーローズ (CHERRY ROSE) 肉色

◎ ピーチピンク (PEACH PINK) 桃肉色

◎ インディアンローズ (INDIAN ROSE) 肉色

◎ クラリム (CRIMSON LAKE) 肉色

◎ ソンレーキ

◎ ヴェニアミリオン (VERMILION) 黄肉色

◎ ロースマメー (ROSE Madder) 肉色

◎ 其他肉色各種

◎ 煉製水製共調製

東京東兩國元町

壽美禮堂

Advertisement published in Tokyo Komamono Keshōhin Shōhō (1908) © 日本化粧品工業会

Oshiroi are usually scented with musk. The more delicate violet essence is extracted naturally from the fragrant violet that grows in Europe. The flower is highly prized, but difficult to work with. It's an expensive raw material reserved for luxury perfumes. When ionone, a synthetic violet-scented molecule, was discovered in 1893, synthetic violet perfume spread throughout Europe and Japan. The use of synthetic molecules ensures greater stability. Here again, Oshiroi Sumire seems to be breaking new ground. In 1901, the Wakita Seishindō 脇田盛真堂 store launched a new violet-scented version of its popular Kaō 花王白粉 oshiroi. But most violet perfumes remain imported from Europe.

A multi award-winning oshiroi: a marketing argument

As in Europe after international exhibitions, the manufacturer conspicuously displays prize medals from national and international fairs.

The blush won a total of five awards between 1899 and 1910. First, a bronze medal in 1899 at one of the Gonikai 五二會品評 fairs organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Trade from 1894 onwards. The name Gonikai (go meaning 5, and ni meaning 2) comes from the fact that Masana Maeda 前田正名, then Vice-Minister of Agriculture, planned a fair to encourage the manufacture and sale of five categories of products (textiles, pottery, lacquerware, porcelain and paper objects) to which sculpture and tapestry were added. Gonikai fairs brought together objects from all over the country. (13)

Tetsutarō went on to win an honorable mention for the Sumire oshiroi and a perfume presented at the 5th National Industrial Exhibition 第五回内国勸業博覧会 held in Osaka in 1903. Based on the model of European World Fairs, the government began organizing national exhibitions in 1877, with the aim of "introducing Western technologies and encouraging competition between local industries". 5 exhibitions were held between 1877 and 1903. For 153 days, from March 01 to July 31, 4.3 million people visited the Osaka exhibition (14).

The Sumire oshiroi went on to win an award at the Tokyo Industrial Fair in 1907.

Rewarded with Medals and Certificates of Merit in the 5th Domestic Industrial Exhibition, Tokyo Industrial Exhibition, and the Gonikai Competitive Exhibition.



"SUMIRE"
WASHING POWDER.

"SUMIRE"
TOOTH POWDER.

"SUMIRE"
VIOLET PASTE.



MANUFACTURER
OF
DENTIFRICE, VIOLET
POWDER
AND
EVERY DESCRIPTION OF
TOILET ARTICLES
SAITO-SUMIREDO,
HIGASHI RYOGOKU, TOKYO.
TEL. NO. 2765 NANIWA.

Three years later, Tetsutarō wins fourth prize at the tenth Kansai Competitive Exhibition 關西府縣聯合共進會 held in Tsuruma Park in Nagoya from March to June 1910. The first was held in 1883. 2.6 million Japanese visited the 10th edition. Nearly 73,000 objects (from 27 prefectures) are on display. Industrial products are divided into 5 groups. In the central aisle of the main south building is group 4, which includes cosmetics. Visitors stroll along, admiring display cases classified by geographical origin.



Photo of the Group 4 at the Kansai Competitive Exhibition (1910) © Japan National Diet Library

In the cosmetics section, there's a large showcase prepared by Tokyo haberdashers; another by the Osaka Regional Soap Industry Association. Items are neatly arranged on tables wrapped in tablecloths and dotted with flowers. In category 61 (corresponding to cosmetics), 69 products won awards, including 12 oshiroi. Alongside the Sumire oshiroi are the popular Daigaku, Tatsuta, Shin-Miyako no Hana, Suishō and Misono oshiroi. (15)

The same year Tetsutarō was awarded a silver medal for a perfume, the Sumire oshiroi and a powdered toothpaste at the Anglo-Japanese Exhibition 日英博覧会 (March 14 to October 29, 1910) held in London. One of the exhibition's many aims was to introduce Japanese civilization to the Western world, showing the past, the recent present and the projected future. The intention was to show that Japan was not a country that had suddenly jumped to a state of high civilization in the mid-nineteenth century, but had always been in a state of natural progression.

The disappearance of the two companies

From 1913 onwards, advertisements were rare. The two factories are still mentioned in a 1922 Tokyo city telephone directory. (16) Kichijirō published one last advertisement in The Japan_Year Book in 1923.

On September 1, 1923, a magnitude 7.9 earthquake struck the Kanto region. The city of Tokyo was partly devastated. Numerous fires broke out in the Ryōgoku district. The population takes refuge in Yokoami Park. They bring with them whatever they can salvage from their homes. Blown by the strong winds, the flames from the surrounding fires reach the park. Futons and household objects burst into flames, creating a gigantic whirlpool of fire. That day, some 38,000 people were burned to death. (17) Today, the Kanto earthquake memorial museum and a memorial to this terrible incident are located in the Yokoami district. The offices of Kichijirō and Tetsutarō do not seem to have escaped destruction. They no longer appear in a directory of Tokyo businesses and industries published the following year. Nature took its toll on a three-hundred-year-old family business.

References

1 F Tiemann, P Krüger ,Ueber Veilchenaroma. Ber Dt Chem Ges, 1893, 26,2675-2708

2 Yang D, Fu M, Zhao Q, Wang Y, Li T, Feng B, Li E, Nishijima Y, Sun Z, Hu Z. α -ionone promotes keratinocyte functions and accelerates epidermal barrier recovery. Ann Transl Med. 2023 Apr 28;11(8):297. doi: 10.21037/atm-23-1239. Epub 2023 Apr 30.

3 Tong T, Park J, Moon Y, Kang W, Park T. α -Ionone Protects Against UVB-Induced Photoaging in Human Dermal Fibroblasts. Molecules. 2019 May 9;24(9):1804. doi: 10.3390/molecules24091804. Erratum in: Molecules. 2020 Jul 31;25 (15)

4 The Japan Year Book, 1911

5 東京模範商工品録 , p118, 1907
Tōkyō mohan shōkō-hin-roku, p118, 1907
Tokyo Commercial and Industrial Directory

6 History of toothpastes in the Edo period, Tooth Museum website (Yokohama)
<https://www.dent-kng.or.jp/museum/ja/hanohaku12/>

7 Japan Trademark –Patent office, n°402

8 大正人名辞典, p1511, 1914
Taishō jinmei jiten, p1511, 1914
Biographical dictionary of the Taisho era

9 Japan Trademark, n°12926

10 東京小間物化粧品名鑑, 1913, p400-401
Tokyo Komamono Keshōin Meikan, 1913, p400-401
Cosmetic directory of Tokyo haberdashers

11 Shiseido official website
<https://www.shiseido.co.jp/foundation100/answer/q51.html>

12 東京小間物化粧品商報, November 1908
Tōkyō Komamono Keshōhin Shōhō, November 1908
Tokyo haberdashery cosmetics bulletin

13 Cultural site of Mie prefecture
<https://www.bunka.pref.mie.lg.jp/rekishi/kenshi/asp/meiji/detail.asp?record=431>

14 National Diet Library website
<https://www.ndl.go.jp/exposition/e/s1/naikoku5.html>

15 関西府県聯合共進会事務報告, March 1911
Kansai fuken rengō Kyōshin-kai jimu hōkoku
Kansai Competitive Exhibition Administrative Report
<https://dl.ndl.go.jp/pid/845348>

16 東京特選電話名簿 上巻, 1922, p31
Tōkyō tokusen denwa meibo Volume 1, 1922, p31
Special Tokyo telephone directory
<https://dl.ndl.go.jp/pid/958749/1/1>

17 Official website of Yokoami Park (Tokyo)
<https://tokyoireikyoukai.or.jp/park/history.html>

key words: oshiroi-Sumire-whitening-powder-cosmetics-make-up

mots clé: fard blanchissant-Sumire-poudre-cosmétique-maquillage