

Yasuma Fujiwara,
founder of Tokyo Panya

A Freshly Baked Taste of Japan in Korea

Sushi restaurants are not the only Japanese restaurants being run by Japanese people overseas. In Seoul, South Korea, a Japanese-run bakery has become popular. We introduce Tokyo Panya, which has achieved success by offering Japanese taste and service.

Seoul's Garosugil is an area lined with fashionable restaurants and boutiques and is popular with young South Koreans. Tokyo Panya, run by baker Yasuma Fujiwara, is situated here. ("Pan-ya" is the Japanese word for "bakery.") Some 200–300 people come to the store on weekdays, and 300–400 people on weekends. Tokyo Panya's catchphrase is, "The Japanese taste you don't have to go to Japan for."

The bread-eating culture spread in Japan with the influx of western civilization from the Meiji period (1868–1912) onward. Since that time, various people have created bread that is unique to Japan. One famous Japanese-style bread is *anpan* (bread stuffed with red bean paste), which was first produced by the Kimuraya bakery in Tokyo in 1874, based on a similar, 700-year-old confection called *manju*.

"One of the features of Japanese-style bread is

that it often combines a range of ingredients, such as curry, *yakisoba* (pan-fried noodles), or custard," says Fujiwara. "The most popular bread I sell is *karepan* (bread stuffed with curry)."

It was not in South Korea but while he was studying in New York from 2000 to 2004 that Fujiwara



The main branch of Tokyo Panya, in Hakdong, Seoul. Yasuma Fujiwara opened his shop here in 2008.

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first recognized the potential of Japanese bread. New York had few appealing bakeries for him, and believing that the wide variety of Japanese breads would be well received by Americans, he decided to set up a bakery overseas. He returned to Japan, and began training to become a baker at a Tokyo bakery famous for its *kare-pan* and *miso-pan* (bread baked with miso). Around three years after he began his training, he heard about someone who had planned to open a café that served Japanese-style bread in Seoul and was looking for a Japanese baker, so he decided to try his hand in South Korea.

The store closed after a year, but in 2008 Fujiwara opened Tokyo Panya by himself. Word soon spread that a Japanese person was making Japanese style bread, and today he runs four stores, including the Garosugil store.

"Firstly, I focus on improving the staff's customer service. I drum it into the staff that they must greet customers when they enter the store and thank



Kare-pan (curry-stuffed bread) (front) on sale at Tokyo Panya. As in Japan, customers take the bread from the trays themselves.

them when they have made a purchase, as well as ensuring that they fully understand the products and are able to explain them properly to the customers," says Fujiwara. "Also, in South Korean



The Garosugil, Seoul branch of Tokyo Panya serves breads, cake rolls and drinks.

cooking many types of food are served on numerous small plates. The more small plates there are, the better South Koreans deem the service of a store to be, so we offer free samples or one or two complimentary breads to customers who have made large purchases."

Of course, the key thing is the flavor.

"The most important service we provide for the customer is the consistency of our products' taste and quality," says Fujiwara. "To achieve this, I believe that the training of bakers in South Korea is extremely important."

"The work of a baker is the constant repetition of a process that involves kneading the dough, dividing it, shaping it, baking it, displaying it and selling it. I would like to train bakers who are able to carry out this process with just that bit more speed and precision yet consistently make bread that satisfies our customers," says Fujiwara.

"My dream is for people all over the world to know the taste of Tokyo Panya. I want to work hard so that one day Japanese bread will be synonymous with Tokyo Panya."

