

和食ワールドチャレンジ2015 決勝戦出場者

Choosing to live a “second life” with Japanese cooking Acknowledging the power of washoku that is spreading in various countries



Ko Jee-Eeun (46, South Korea)

Ko Jee-Eeun is a cook with an unusual career history: She has worked as a designer of golf wear for nearly twenty years. At present, she studies at Hattori Nutrition College in Tokyo.

As a designer, Ko had opportunities to dine at high-end restaurants. She first fell in love with Japanese cooking in her 20s when she visited London and Paris. She became intrigued with *kaiseki-ryori* at a Japanese restaurant, serving individual dishes to each guest. “I felt that this was a type of cooking that made it easy for people, even if they are not very close, to dine together,” she says. As she continued to travel to various countries for work, she discovered that the same Japanese cooking changes its taste as different local ingredients are used. While living in Manila, Philippines, she became impressed with the fact that Japanese restaurants were crowded with Philippine customers despite their high prices. When she was compelled to give up her work as a designer because of stress and illness, she recalled these experiences. She made up her mind that she would open her own restaurant one day. To begin her new life, she decided to study Japanese cooking. She chose Hattori Nutrition College because she loved to watch “Iron Chef,” a popular cooking TV show from Japan that was aired overseas as well, and remembered college president Yukio Hattori who had appeared as a judge.

Ko feels that Japanese cooking and clothes design have lots of things in common. “Golf wear must be nicely designed, and also functional at the same time: it must be comfortable and easy to move in. Japanese dishes must be beautiful, and also functional at the same time: you must consider if they are easy to eat, and how their textures are, etc. I think that Japanese cooking is the only cuisine that considers fine points that far,” she says.

“Harmony: Western-style *nikujaga*” was a dish she had contrived for the contest. To enter a culinary school, she first studied Japanese language for two years. Alongside her studies, she asked her friend to translate several Japanese cookbooks into Korean, and studied Japanese cooking. It was then that she realized that all the cookbooks featured *nikujaga*, a dish of beef cooked with potatoes popularly served in Japanese households. She wanted to arrange it to make a dish that goes well with wine, and eaten at a fancy restaurant. These thoughts were put into her dish for contest.

To make it so that people could enjoy two types of *nikujaga* with a single dish, she placed, on a plate, *nikujaga* having robust sweetness, covered it with mashed potatoes, then arranged a *wagyu* diced steak. Since the contest is held in winter, moreover, she came up with the idea of keeping *nikujaga* nice and warm: placing a thin metal plate, boasting outstanding thermal conductivity, over small heated stones. She arranged a small purple flower as an accent, to complete the dish. Ko is confident of her arrangements and presentations that reflect her tastes in design which she has cultivated over the years.

Ko says that she wants to open a washoku restaurant overseas and spread Japanese cuisine. To make her dream a reality, she is planning to advance to the Japanese cooking course offered by the school, beginning in April, and make the traditional tastes her own.



Harmony: Western-style *nikujaga*