



Devotion to Making Good Food for Customers

Receiving the Highest Compliment from a Japanese Customer

Cheong Cherng Long (Malaysia)

Japanese restaurants began to spring up in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur about 20 years ago, as young Malaysians came to embrace this food from a completely different culture. That was the case for Cheong Cherng Long, who after graduating from high school, spent six months studying hotel management during the day while working at a Japanese restaurant at night. Long says that the first washoku he tasted was shoyu ramen, and he particularly remembers the delicious taste of the braised egg. Long, who is of Chinese descent, was impressed by the subtleties of Japanese ramen compared with Chinese noodle dishes, and it stirred his interest in making Japanese food.



Long presently works at Sushi Oribe, a restaurant that opened in Kuala Lumpur in 2014. Prior to that, he worked at a number of Japanese restaurants including an establishment in the luxury Starhill Gallery mall, learning to prepare teppanyaki, sushi, tempura, and kaiseki. “The appeal of washoku is that it makes the most from fresh ingredients,” says Long, who is particularly drawn to kaiseki ryori. He also feels that the attention to appearance use of attractive tableware is unique to washoku.

From Sushi Oribe owner and chef Hideaki Oritsuki, Long has developed a passion for Japanese cuisine while also honing his technique and ability to choose ingredients for the ultimate hospitality. “What I learned from Oritsuki-san is that the most important thing—even more so than cooking technique—is a devotion to making good food for the customer,” says Long. Under Chef Oritsuki’s watchful eye, Long has honed his ability to prepare food desired by the customer. He still proudly remembers the day when he served a sushi omakase course to one of the restaurant’s regular Japanese customers, and was complimented with the words “You know exactly what I like.”

Long’s entry for the World Washoku Challenge 2016 is a preparation of Akamutsu no kenchin yaki, using a technique that involves stuffing white-fleshed fish (in this case rosy seabass) with tofu and vegetables for grilling. Long chose this dish in order to highlight a different preparation from dishes such as tempura, sukiyaki, and donburi that are already well-known outside of Japan. He also chose kenchin yaki because, although it is a traditional washoku preparation, it is not as common as ordinary nimono. To garnish and add other textures to the dish, Long also serves edamame tempura and tenderly braised gobo stuffed with kabocha with the kenchin yaki. “I created this dish to show Malaysians an aspect of washoku that they don’t know about,” says Long.

For Long, the most important part of reaching the final competition of the World Washoku Challenge is not winning or losing, but to witness and acquire techniques from high-level chefs from other countries, so that he can grow as a chef. His dream is to one day open a Japanese restaurant in Kuala Lumpur, in the image of the traditional machiya houses in Kyoto. “One day, I dream of visiting Kyoto in spring with my wife, when the beautiful cherry blossoms are blooming. I would like to visit various buildings and restaurants that are housed in machiya, to gather inspiration.”



Akamutsu no kenchin yaki