



A Part-time Job as a Student Led to a Path to Japanese Cuisine

Getting Motivated to Study in Japan

Tsai Ming Gu (Taiwan)

While studying cooking at the National Kaohsiung Hospitality Management Academy (the current National Kaohsiung University of Hospitality and Tourism) in Kaohsiung, Taiwan's second largest city, Tsai Ming Gu started working part-time at a Japanese izakaya run by a Taiwanese manager. This was Tsai's introduction to Japanese cuisine. Japanese TV dramas and music were popular in Taiwan, exposing Tsai to Japanese culture from a young age. So working at an izakaya seemed like a natural extension. "The reason I started working at an izakaya was because I wanted to learn work skills other than those that I learned at school" says Tsai. He was concerned about his employment opportunities after graduation.



After starting to work at the izakaya, the strong impression he got was that Japanese cuisine placed emphasis on a sense of seasons, used a lot of vegetables, and was rich in colors. "The dishes were sophisticated and the sensibility of using flowers for decoration was refreshing" he said.

After graduating from school, finishing his military service, and starting work again, Tsai chose once again the path to becoming a chef in Japanese cuisine. Gaining experience at a yakitori restaurant and a Japanese restaurant in Taipei operated by the Mitsui Food & Beverage Enterprise Group, Tsai learned the basics from Japanese chefs while studying by reading books and using the internet. "Japanese cooking is not simply about the dishes themselves. Careful attention is paid to each step. Whether it is about how to cook fish or the time spent on each step of making dashi, each minute and each second is important and it is a very delicate cuisine." Although it is said that Japanese cuisine reflects the seasons, the foods "in season" also change in accordance with the local ingredients. He sensed the richness and depth of Japanese cuisine in its reflection of each region and the lives of people there.

In this way, Tsai added to his knowledge of traditional Japanese cuisine, while on the other hand, his three years of experience working at Chen Cuisine, a members-only original Japanese restaurant in Taipei, greatly expanded his range of cooking. He experienced the joy of creating modern dishes, combining cooking styles of various countries such as China and Thailand. "It was the restaurant that taught me how to make my dishes shine," he reflects. Seeking experience outside of Taiwan, Tsai currently works at the Japanese restaurant Senwa Cuisine, which newly opened in Shanghai in 2016.

Tsai's dish for the WWC is Japanese mini-eggplant and turban shell in spicy yuzu kosho cream. Bringing together the chewy texture of turban shells with tenderly simmered eggplant, Tsai came up with a refreshing combination. Garnished with purple shiso (Japanese basil) leaves and powdered egg yolk, it is a festive dish.

Having never studied authentic Japanese cooking in Japan, Tsai hopes that "the WWC will be a major turning point for me," indicating his motivation to use this opportunity to connect with many outstanding Japanese chefs and master Japanese cooking.



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