

# 和食ワールドチャレンジ2015 決勝戦出場者

## Perceiving artistic quality in a feel of the seasons depicted in Japanese cooking A 27-year veteran at a hotel washoku restaurant



Pyo Gil-Taek Pyo (46, South Korea)

It all began when he dined at a restaurant with his family. Each one of the dishes he ate at this upscale Japanese restaurant was packed with a feel of the seasons. "I want to cook something like this myself, too, one day." Pyo Gil-Taek, who has been interested in food and cooking ever since he was in high school, took his first step as chef in 1989 at Lotte Hotel, Seoul's leading 5-star hotel. "If I were to study cooking at all, I wanted to study it at the finest place" was the reason he chose to work at a Japanese restaurant inside a hotel twenty-seven years ago.

Pyo studied the basics as a cook, focusing on *kaiseki-ryori* and sushi, then, in 1996, he switched to Hanazono, a Japanese restaurant housed inside The Ritz Carlton Seoul, another of the city's luxury hotels where he still works today. Here, besides undergoing training at the affiliated hotels The Ritz Carlton Tokyo and The Ritz Carlton Osaka, he also had the chance to study Japanese cooking in 2003 at Musashino Cooking College in Tokyo. His experiences while in Tokyo left a strong impression on him. He was deeply moved by how a single cooked vegetable dish could express such profound aroma and fragrance.

By 2004, Pyo was promoted head chef of Japanese food at The Ritz Carlton Seoul. At present, he vigorously carries out wide-ranging activities, in addition to working inside the kitchen: he teaches Japanese cuisine at the hotel's Cooking Club, and even appears on TV cooking programs to display his culinary skills. He continues to study and improve his craft day and night, hoping to be recognized by many people for his culinary talent and skills, and one day become a chef whom everyone instantly calls to mind when hearing the word "Japanese cuisine."

He feels that the appeals of Japanese dishes lie in the fact that it emphasizes not only taste, but also elements of enjoying them with the eyes. He perceives artistic quality in the clever way of using food ingredients and a sense of color to express the emotions associated with the four seasons. When he himself cooks Japanese food, he makes sure to arrange the five colors or green, red, yellow, white and black, which also happen to be the basis of Korean cooking. This concept is based on the theory of Ying-Yang and the five elements that had been passed down from China since the ancient times. It claims that uniformly ingesting the elements of wood, fire, earth, metal and water which each of the five colors of green, red, yellow, white and black symbolize, helps a person maintain his or her mental and physical balance. The dish that Pyo has created for this Washoku World Challenge is "Crab dumplings steamed in the shell." This dish, too, incorporates all the five colors: spinach for green, crab for red, yuzu for yellow, dumplings for white, and burdock for black.

In addition, he sites *surimi* as the key factor featured in the dish he has created on this occasion. This is one of the ingredients that Pyo has always loved to use. He describes its characteristic as "having a distinct flavor of fish and a soft texture; the whiteness of its color enhances other ingredients." For this particular dish, he emphasized the redness of crabmeat with *surimi*. "Instead of simply boiling crabmeat and eating it, by turning it into *surimi*, I was able to elevate the quality as a dish. In other words, *surimi* added a sense of dignity to the overall dish," sparing no words to praise the ingredients.

Regarding his own future, Pyo says, "I have worked at a hotel for 27 years. If I were to quit the restaurant and go on my own, I would love to open a sushi shop." Since sushi has become popular in South Korea, like in other countries, he wants to contrive tastes that suit the Korean palate, and serve a set menu featuring *nimono* and soup that reflects his unique tastes. He hopes to perform well at the Washoku World Challenge, and move closer to his future, and show, to the people of South Korea, an even more upgraded version of his Japanese cooking. These are his lofty dreams, and he is committed to making them come true.



Crab dumplings steamed in the shell