



Chance Opportunity Turns into Career in Japanese Food

Connecting with Customers through Appealing Dishes

Songkran Comnew (Thailand)

Songkran Comnew was born in Isan in the northeastern region of Thailand. Through a family introduction, Comnew got a job at a sushi restaurant in Bangkok, which was his first introduction to washoku. After three years there, Comnew sought to expand his knowledge of washoku beyond sushi, and through connections landed a job at the respected Japanese restaurant Nanohana, which opened in Bangkok in 1998. That was some 11 years ago.

Comnew was drawn to Japanese food for a number of reasons including the extensive use of seasonal ingredients to make dishes that reflect the seasons, its foods for specific seasonal events and customs, and the appealing presentation and healthy qualities of the cuisine. Comnew was also drawn to the care and attention that goes into preparing Japanese food.

When he first started working at Nanohana, Comnew was solely responsible for preparing sushi and sashimi at the sushi bar, but he now also prepares nimono and yakimono in the kitchen. Nanohana owner and chef Hiroshi Izaki thinks highly of him and says, “Thai people tend to be laid back and typically are not as focused on preparations. However, Comnew can take one look at the fridge contents and know what kind of prep work needs to be done that day.” Comnew has become a valuable member of Izaki’s team and helps supervise inexperienced Thai kitchen staff.

Chef Izaki instructs his local staff to prepare food “as if it were your art work,” encouraging them take ownership and not cut corners. He believes this will inspire his staff to make food as deliciously and attractively as possible, an approach that has been thoroughly instilled in Comnew. On the enjoyment he gets from making washoku, Comnew says, “Washoku—with its emphasis on appealing food and tableware—is ideal for making a connection with the customer through food.”

Comnew’s entry for the World Washoku Challenge 2016 is a preparation of lotus root chrysanthemum flower bun in thick seaweed sauce, made using a lotus root and yamaimo paste with salami, giving a pleasantly springy texture. The paste is formed into a bun and rolled in chrysanthemum flowers for deep-frying. The bun is served in a seaweed sauce thickened with yoshino kudzu starch, creating an eye-pleasing contrast between the golden brown bun and dark seaweed. Comnew developed the dish with input from chef Izaki, and it is currently featured on the Nanohana menu and has been well-received by Japanese customers.

In reaching the final competition of the World Washoku Challenge 2016, Comnew is visiting Japan for the first time. Upon hearing the news that he had become a finalist, a delighted Comnew went to apply for his passport the very next day. “One day I would like to open my own Japanese restaurant in Thailand.”



"Lotus root chrysanthemum flower bun" (in thick seaweed sauce)