

Hironobu Tsujiiguchi

Bringing to the World the “Sweets”
that Evolved to Be Part of Japanese Culture

Hironobu Tsujiiguchi has been a holder of top titles in the world of confectionery as a pâtissier and chocolatier. His overflowing creativity has allowed him to launch 13 confectionery brands, and is now evolving beyond the boundaries of sweets-making with his visions for empowering communities and nurturing children.

Going beyond presenting Japan's gastronomic culture to the world

2017 marked a year of great achievement for Tsujiiguchi. He was awarded the Tablette d'Or (Gold Tablet) prize of the Club des Croqueurs de Chocolat (C.C.C.) for the fifth consecutive year, and also won the same competition's Award de l'Excellence (Award of Excellence) for foreign chocolatier. Ever since he became the youngest winner of the Coupe du Monde de la Pâtisserie (the “World Cup” of pastry chefs) 20 years ago in 1997, at age 29, various recognitions have come his way. Having been dubbed an “award sweeper,” Tsujiiguchi continues to impress us by exhibiting an exuberant creativity that goes far beyond culinary competitions.

Speaking of his career, he comments, “Encountering people from different countries through the winning of many awards convinced me that what I was aspiring to achieve was not merely to become a winner of different awards, but to be a presenter of Japan's unique culture and distinguishing characteristics, rather than merely mimicking France's culinary culture.”

Tsujiiguchi's endeavor to highlight Japanese cuisine, however, had an additional effect: it challenged the conventional culinary approaches of Japanese chefs. His “*Hakko No Mariage* (“Marriage of Fermentations”)” is a fusion of various fermented foods from Japan and other countries; “*DNA Chocolate*” contains glutamic acid, which is extracted from *kombu* seaweed but is also a component of mother's milk; and he utilizes rice powder so finely-ground that its particles can fit between two lines of a fingerprint—just to name a few.

Tsujiiguchi's ingenuity has given birth to completely new ingredients, rather than merely new applications for what already existed in Japan. In addition to his use of local ingredients, he invented “Caferine”—edible and palatable coffee beans, which immensely impressed René Redzepi, chef of

“Noma” in Copenhagen, one of the most highly-acclaimed restaurants in the world, who was quoted as saying, “THIS is a SPICE!” Today, Tsujiiguchi is more than a presenter of Japanese cuisine or a world-renowned pâtissier/chocolatier; he is becoming an explorer of food's new frontier and potential.

Tsujiiguchi comments, “San Sebastián in Spain is a city with a population of only 180,000, and yet it is home to restaurants which boast a combined total of 17 Michelin stars. This achievement is attributable to 11 local chefs who were willing to share their recipes with each other, learn from each other, and spread the recipes around, which resulted in San Sebastián's current stature as a gastronomic city. The number of inbound tourists to Japan is said to have reached 20 million recently, and is expected to increase to 60 million in the future. My vision is that local communities would communicate Japanese food culture clearly and in an accessible manner to these visitors, and that the whole country would become a San Sebastián.”

The art of sweets-making is the epitome of life

Today, Tsujiiguchi is a successful owner of 13 brands, including Mont St. Clair with its flagship store in Tokyo. His initial years, however, were unpromising.

“My family went bankrupt when I was 18, and my father disappeared,” recalls Tsujiiguchi. “Because I didn't have money, I couldn't go to a vocational school, and my apprenticeship years are full of sour memories. When I needed guidance, there was no father to turn to, but these circumstances compelled me to become an 18-year-old who thought hard about how a breakthrough could be brought about in his life.”

Because he underwent hard times himself, he pours out his love on his apprentices. Tsujiiguchi connects those who want to start their own businesses with people who can support them, and he allows his staff to study in France to improve their culinary skills. They work only five days a week, and



their jobs come with social and health insurance, benefits that are not commonly found in the confectionery sector.

“I was helped by people who gave me opportunities to grow, and without them, I would have failed to become what I am today, considering the fact that, back then, I didn't even have a home to go back to. So, in my opinion, it is better to take apprentices as someone you share your success with, rather than as rivals. Because life is too short.”

His philosophy and personality have culminated in what Tsujiiguchi calls “*Sweets-Iku*” (personnel development through sweets-making). It is an educational method for parents and children that Tsujiiguchi has been advocating.

“The art of sweets-making is the epitome of life. Sweets-making requires the setting of priorities, and unless the proper procedures are followed, nothing tasty comes out. I want to tell children that life is full of circumstances where setting right priorities and using the right procedures can make a big difference. You have to prepare something well, complete it efficiently, present it to somebody, and make that person happy. Children can experience a sense of achievement after taking the right steps. When they face a difficult situation, such memories can uphold them. Sweets should be viewed as part of Japanese culture, and my vision is that by introducing *Sweets-Iku* into elementary school education, children's minds would be richly developed.”

Hironobu Tsujiiguchi

Born in 1967 in Ishikawa Prefecture into the second generation of a family of Japanese sweets-makers. As a pâtissier and chocolatier, he incorporated Japanese ingredients and traditional culture in his creations, resulting in the launch of 13 brands, each founded on a different concept. As representative director of the Japan Sweets Association, he devised the “Sweets Concierge” certificate system, and is involved in many different activities to promote sweets as part of Japan's cultural heritage. He also serves as a visiting professor at SANNO Institute of Management, is a part-time instructor at Kanazawa University, and is the director of SuperSweets Academy. He is a tourism ambassador for Ishikawa Prefecture and Mie Prefecture.

Official website:
<https://www.super-sweets.co.jp/>