



Massimiliano Sgai

An Italian Promotes the Appeal of Japanese Food

A street in Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture

Massimiliano Sgai arrived in Japan in 2007. He has been active as a Japanese-Italian interpreter and entrepreneur engaged in coordinating business relations between Japanese and Italian companies. He is also popular for his social network posts and blog that promote the appeal of Japanese food culture in all its diversity: from traditional *washoku* cuisine to convenience store sweets.

Murakami Kayo

Massimiliano Sgai's popular social media posts feature ways to arrange the menu of a chain of Italian restaurants in Japan in an authentic Italian way. His nickname is "Massi." On his social media, Massimiliano talks about the appeal of fine food served at family-oriented casual restaurants and cafés that are familiar to Japanese people, while pointing out differences between Italy and Japan.

One of the features that Massimiliano finds most interesting about Japan is the ability of the Japanese to arrange and re-make existing things, for instance by modifying and improving foreign food to achieve something uniquely Japanese, or by adding seasonal touches to standard food to create a variety of limited-edition flavors.

"Take for instance the maritozzo,¹ which became very popular in Japan some time ago. Originally, it was a type of pastry found in Rome, Italy. Most maritozzi in Rome are simple, old-fashioned sweet buns filled with whipped cream, but the maritozzi I encountered in Japan were different. Various shops have added their own unique arrangements and developed novel and exciting maritozzi tailored to the Japanese taste, so in Japan people can enjoy a rich variety of this popular pastry. Moreover, they are all delicious. I think it is wonderful that Japanese people have the imagination to create new products by modifying the original maritozzo in ways that would not occur even to native Italians."

Massimiliano says that when he first came to Japan, he was amazed by kak-

igori² (shaved ice), a traditional Japanese summer treat.

"I was impressed by how delicious ice can be when it is simply shaved and drizzled with syrup. I was really amazed when I saw Japanese-style *kakigori* topped with red bean paste and *shiratama* (Japanese rice-flour dumplings)."

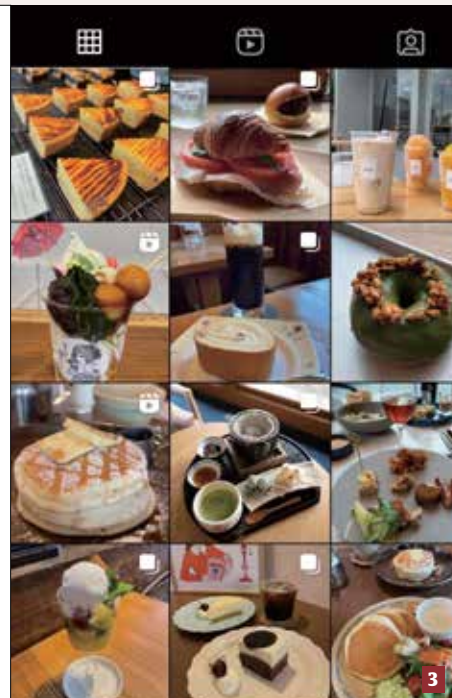
Massimiliano decided to specialize in Japanese language in university because he wanted to read Japanese literature in the original language. The company for which he worked transferred him to Japan in 2007. Later, he left the company and continued to work in Japan as an independent interpreter, supporting communication between Japanese and Italian companies. As interpretation work dwindled during the COVID-19 pandemic, he

1 A traditional Italian pastry with plenty of whipped cream sandwiched between bread. "Maritozzi" is its plural form.

2 A cold dessert made by shaving a block of ice with a special machinery and topping it with flavored syrup

3 <https://twitter.com/massi3112>

4 https://www.instagram.com/massimiliano_fashion/



- 1 In 2022, he published a book about the appeal of Japanese gourmet cuisine.
- 2 Massimiliano on Twitter³
- 3 Massimiliano on Instagram⁴
- 4 Maritzo, a traditional Italian pastry that has been given a unique remake in Japan with the addition of fruit and other fun ingredients.
- 5 Ujikintoki, a Japanese dessert made with shaved ice drizzled with sweet matcha syrup and topped with red bean paste

similiano is also engaged in efforts to promote these alluring aspects of Kanazawa together with the food and culture of Ishikawa Prefecture in general.

In 2022, he published *Italia-jin Massi ga Buttonda, Nihon no Kami-gurume* (“Japan’s Divine Culinary Treats That Astonished the Italian, Massi”), a book about the appeal of Japanese food. “I love writing as well as eating, so going forward I would like to continue to spread information that will help people rediscover the appeal of Japan,” he says, and, true to this words, his writing and ideas will surely continue to delight many people in the future.

a second thought, such as sweets and snacks sold in convenience stores.

Ever since he was a child, Massimiliano has loved to eat. “Food is very essential part of enriching our lives,” he says. He continues to share information about food from his unique viewpoint, inspired by a desire to share with as many Japanese people as possible about his exciting experiences of encountering favorite foods in his favorite country, Japan.

Today, Massimiliano lives in Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture. Historically, Kanazawa flourished as a castle town ruled by the powerful feudal lords of the Maeda clan. Nowadays, it is a large city with a population of 460,000 people (as of June 2023). The lords of the Maeda clan were patrons of arts and culture, and their impact is still felt today in the thriving traditional culture, the variety of delicious Japanese food, and the leisure flow of time despite the fact that Kanazawa has a vibrant urban atmosphere. Mas-

began posting on social media about his favorite foods in Japanese, which led to his current success. For instance, egg sandwiches, which are quite common in Japan, are a remarkable food for Massimiliano. He says that other countries, too, have sandwiches made using eggs, but sandwiches with eggs as the only filling are quite rare. “Egg sandwiches contain only eggs, yet they are so creamy and delightful! I hope Japanese people will rediscover their deliciousness.”

Massimiliano has a unique perspective from which he conveys his wonder and excitement about the delicious taste of foods that are so familiar to Japanese people that they do not give them



Massimiliano (left) interpreting at a talk show with Italian guests