

My Kungfu Journey

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I've been learning martial arts called Kungfu since I was 6 years old. It's been 7 years since I started learning it. Unlike the other martial arts like Karate and Judo, you don't actually fight with another person in competitions. Kungfu is a performance of many fighting styles and poses combined. I started learning Kungfu because my mother likes Kungfu action movies and wanted me to learn and be able to move like the actors. I was just learning with no motivation and feelings about Kungfu, but as time passed, I wanted to stand on the top of the podium and get the gold medal. I really hated to lose, and I wanted to win. I even started going to the best dojo in Kansai to train with the best athletes and coaches. Eventually, with lots of practice, I caught up with the people who used to be more skilled than I was. I would go 6 times a week to the class and sometimes practiced for hours at home, too.

There was a trip to China as a team in 2016. The purpose was to learn with the local team and to learn about Kungfu in China as it is a Chinese sport. When I heard about this, I was half excited because this was my chance to get better at Kungfu and win my next competition. Since my rival wasn't going, I also thought that it would be my opportunity to get better than she was. However, I was also half scared and anxious because my image of China was negative. I imagined Chinese people being mad, unkind, and not so friendly and the training would be physically and mentally challenging. We started to prepare for our trip as soon as it was decided. Our coaches spoke and knew Chinese so they sent us documents with some Chinese words and phrases as well as the rules and manners in China that we could use there. Also, the daily practices got even harder so that we can get used to the training in China. It was the first time for us to go there, so we didn't know how hard it would be but we thought we'd practiced enough.

Oh my gosh! We were wrong, and we totally underestimated the training

in China. I understood why they are all so good at Kungfu. They practiced all day long with coaches who were really strict. When I first went into the dojo, I was about to barf because it was so smelly. It smelled like rotten food and people's sweat. The dojo had no air conditioner, so it was so hot, and my clothes were wet with sweat, but I put in 100 percent of my power and did the same thing as everyone else who was older than me. I didn't want to waste the opportunity and the time I received to learn and didn't want to fall behind just because I was the youngest in the group. I also didn't want my coach and the other team members to think that I was not motivated enough and that I was too weak. During my last practice, I started to have a bad stomachache, and I wasn't able to concentrate. But I had to, so I tried my best following everyone and finished the class. The mates in China were all really kind and friendly. They all helped me and cheered me on. When we had to say goodbye to them, we exchanged our phone numbers so that we could text often.

When we came back to Japan, I entered the Kinki regional competition and won 5th place and qualified for the nationals for the first time. I knew I won, because of the training I had in China. At the nationals, I got the silver medal, which was a surprise. Suddenly, my eyes and nose started to hurt and tears came out from my eyes. I was trying to hold it in, but I couldn't. It was my first time in this competition, and I won second place. We had to give a little speech to our team afterward, but I couldn't talk because I was crying too much. After that, we took a photo, and my coach sent it to the coaches in China to inform them of our results. I was thankful to the team in China because it was definitely their exhausting training in China that helped me win the competition. However, I was proud of my achievements and results too. I am going to continue my journey to win first place in the nationals and in the world championship someday.