

Simple, healthful and vegetarian, *shojin ryori* originated from Japanese Zen temples and is beloved today for its exquisite flavours, creativity and regard for ingredient, provenance and beauty.

Following the success of his previous book, *Shojin Ryori: The Art of Japanese Vegetarian Cuisine*, chef Danny Chu of Enso Kitchen demonstrates once again the versatility and sophistication of the cuisine.

With clearly written step-by-step instructions and insightful cooking tips, he brings the bounties of each season to the home kitchen and shows how satisfying, everyday meals can be made with ease, elegance and pleasure.

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Danny Chu

Living Shojin Ryori

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Everyday Zen Cuisine to Nourish and Delight



Review Only Danny Chu

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For Review Only Introduction

Shojin ryori is a traditional vegetarian cuisine that originated from Buddhist temples in Japan. The monks in the temples incorporate the philosophies and the processes of *shojin* cooking in their daily practices to achieve a mental state of peace and tranquility. As such, *shojin ryori* is sometimes translated as 'food of devotion'.

This aspect of Zen training requires one to observe abstinence from meat, fish, egg and dairy products, which makes *shojin ryori* a vegan-friendly diet. Its simple recipes and careful cooking processes allow cooking at home to be a mindful practice and life's simplicity and goodness to be enjoyed. In *shojin ryori*, less is indeed more.

The main essence of *shojin* cooking is to use ingredients by the seasons, to extract the best flavours and optimum nutrition. All ingredients used are pure, whole vegetables or obtained from plant sources. Typical ingredients used include seasonal vegetables, dried foodstuffs such as seaweed, mushrooms and tofu products, and the main seasonings include salt, soy sauce, mirin and miso.

Much attention is placed on the presentation of a *shojin* meal setting where a variety of dishes are prepared, as much as possible, to offer different flavours (sweet, sour, bitter, salty and savoury) and multiple colours (red, yellow, green, white and black) and cooking styles. Artificial colourings and flavourings, as well as onions, garlic, scallions, chives and leeks, are avoided.

Shojin ryori cooks also make sure not to waste any of the ingredients; Zen practitioners try to eat all of the food prepared during the day, and throw nothing edible away. It is also customary in Zen temples to chant five reflections before eating:

The effort that brought me this meal

This is an appreciation of the effort made to put the meal together, from harvesting the crops to preparing the ingredients and even those who made the tableware and cutlery. The meal is possible only through the kindness of others.

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My imperfections as I receive this meal

This is the recognition that nobody is perfect, so the individual is kept humble and the heart open, thankful and appreciative of the goodness of life.

Mindfulness to be free from imperfections

This is to keep free from negativity through rightful actions, speech and thinking. Only when one is fully aware of his shortcomings, would he seek to change for the better.

Taking this food to sustain good health

The essence of this reflection is to be mindful of what one eats as food has an impact on health.

The fulfillment of our obligations

The essence of living is to achieve one's goals. With this in mind, the individual is able to uplift his spirits and reach his goals.

Like in traditional Chinese medicine, the way a *shojin* meal is prepared – focused on colours, tastes, cooking styles and the seasons – is associated with the five main elements in nature. The five elements are wood (spring), fire (summer), earth (late summer), metal (autumn) and water (winter). Through the process of cooking and eating a *shojin* meal, one will be able to achieve a balance within oneself and also attain harmony with nature.

Shojin ryori is more than just food that we consume to satisfy our appetite. Another aspect of cooking by seasons is to instill mindfulness that brings our focus to the present moment. It helps us appreciate certain characteristics of the seasons and its associated elements, and relate it to our daily life. This nourishes us physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

For instance, spring is represented by the element of wood, and is when leaves start to sprout. Trees grow in the direction of the sun and its branches snap easily if they are too brittle. This metaphor reinforces the importance of being decisive yet maintaining a sense of flexibility when reaching after goals.

Summer, being the hottest season, is associated with fire. Days are brightened by many colourful flowers and vegetables.

This encourages us to follow our passion and reminds us that whatever we do should always give us a sense of joy.

With late summer, nature returns the fruits it has made, which are ripe and ready to be picked. We associate late summer with the element, earth. Fruits are harvested and conserved so that we can survive autumn and winter without scarcity. This reminds us to adopt a down-to-earth approach in life.

Autumn is known to be the most picturesque season with falling leaves. It is as if someone is using metal knives to prune the trees and thus explains the association with the element of metal. The sight of falling leaves in autumn suggests we should always remember to let go and lighten our burdens.

Winter, being the coldest season, is inevitably associated with the water element. Animals and plants go into hibernation, reminding us to find time to relax and rejuvenate ourselves by going for a retreat or on a vacation.

As *shojin ryori* is an art, it allows us flexibility to be creative and discover new recipes, lessons and philosophies. I find it fruitful to keep an open mind and learn from nature. The rules and philosophies should not be a constraint or burden.

I have written the recipes inspired by the seasons – Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter and All Seasons – and also included individual sections showing Soups, Pickles and Desserts. It is perfectly fine to cook them individually without serving them as a set. If you like to cook *shojin ryori* meals by preparing different dishes and serving them together based on the seasons, you can take a look at some of the suggestions in my first cookbook, *Shojin Ryori: The Art of Japanese Vegetarian Cuisine*. The dishes found there can be substituted with those featured in this cookbook.

The next time when you prepare *shojin ryori*, use seasonal ingredients as much as possible and develop your awareness of the season and the gifts it brings. I hope you enjoy this cookbook and the recipes. *Itadakimasu* with folded hands.

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Spring



With the arrival of spring, associated with the element of wood, nature resumes its vitality. Leaves sprout, flowers blossom and trees lean towards the sun. Yet branches snap easily if they are brittle, so the season of spring is the season of possibilities and growth, strength and suppleness.

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SPINACH with PEANUT DRESSING

Serves 4

200 g (7 oz) spinach
1/2 tsp sea salt
1 tsp raw sugar

PEANUT DRESSING

4 Tbsp chopped roasted peanuts
4 Tbsp Japanese soy sauce
4 tsp sake
4 tsp raw sugar

Using a *surikogi* (pestle), finely grind the peanuts in the *suribachi* (mortar). Add soy sauce, sake and sugar and mix well.

Rinse spinach and trim off the roots. Boil a pot of water and add salt and sugar. Blanch spinach for about 1 minute, then remove and rinse in cold water. Drain and squeeze gently to remove water. Cut lengthwise into equal portions.

Place boiled spinach on 4 individual serving plates and serve with the peanut dressing.

.....
Substitute spinach with any leafy vegetable.

Salt and sugar are added to boiling water when blanching leafy greens to obtain a bright green colour.

Instead of the more typically used sesame seeds, this recipe uses aromatic roasted peanuts. Other nuts such as walnuts and almonds, or a combination of different nuts, can also be used to make the dressing.



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Summer



The season of bright sunshine and colourful produce is associated with fire, creativity and basking in the warmth. Late summer, associated with the element of earth, presents the ripe fruits of nature, ready to be harvested and conserved. This reminds us of our reliance on the earth and inspires gratitude.

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SWEET POTATO and SHUNGIKU with SESAME DRESSING

Serves 4

40 g (1½ oz) *shungiku* (chrysanthemum) leaves

150 g (5⅓ oz) Japanese sweet potatoes

Vegetable oil for deep frying

SESAME DRESSING

1 tsp sesame paste

1 Tbsp sake

1 tsp mirin

1 tsp Japanese soy sauce

Remove *shungiku* leaves from stems. Wash and drain well.

Boil a pot of water. Parboil *shungiku* stems briefly for about 1 minute, then remove and rinse in cold water. Drain and squeeze out excess water. Chop finely.

Grind *shungiku* stems with a *suribachi* or mortar and pestle. Add sesame paste, sake, mirin and soy sauce and mix well.

Wash and scrub sweet potatoes. Cut into bite-sized pieces.

Heat oil and deep fry sweet potatoes until golden brown. Remove and drain well on absorbent paper.

Gently mix *shungiku* leaves and fried sweet potatoes with the sesame dressing.

Divide into 4 equal portions on individual plates and serve.

.....
Substitute *shungiku* with any leafy salad vegetable. You can also parboil the *shungiku* leaves instead of leaving it raw.

Substitute sweet potato with yam or pumpkin.

Crispy sweet potato is paired with raw *shungiku* leaves to create a salad-like dish using sesame dressing. The fresh, herby character of the *shungiku* leaves cuts through the richness of the savoury fried sweet potatoes.



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Autumn



Pretty falling leaves bring to mind knives pruning trees, so the season is associated with metal. The downward drift of cinnamon-hued leaves suggests we should let go, lighten our burdens and liberate ourselves for a fresh start.

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SHISO MAKI

Serves 4

- 8 shiso leaves
- 320 g (11¹/₃ oz) *momen* tofu
- 1 medium eringi mushroom, finely chopped (about 50 g / 1³/₄ oz)
- 10-cm (4-in) length burdock
- 10 g (1/3 oz) grated ginger
- 2 pieces *kuruma fu*
- 2 Tbsp cornflour
- 5 Tbsp soymilk (unsweetened)
- 1/2 tsp sea salt
- 1 Tbsp Japanese soy sauce
- Vegetable oil for sautéing
- 4 lemon wedges

SIMMERING STOCK

- 250 ml (8 fl oz) konbu dashi (page 16)
- 1 tsp Japanese soy sauce
- 1 Tbsp sake

SAUCE

- 1 Tbsp Japanese soy sauce
- 1 Tbsp miri

Remove excess water from *momen* tofu by wrapping it with paper towels on a shallow bowl. Weight it down evenly with a plate and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.

Peel burdock and soak in water immediately to prevent discolouration. Discard water and drain well before using.

Prepare konbu dashi. Add soy sauce and sake. Bring to the boil and add burdock. Lower heat and simmer for 20 minutes. Remove burdock and finely chop when it is cooled.

Using a food processor, grind the *kuruma fu* into crumbs.

Remove tofu from the refrigerator and peel off the paper towels. Mash tofu and add burdock, eringi mushroom, grated ginger, *kuruma fu* crumbs, cornflour, soymilk, sea salt and soy sauce. Mix well and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

Divide mixture into 8 portions and shape into balls. Place one ball on each shiso leaf and flatten into patties.

Heat vegetable oil in a pan. Sauté shiso patties on medium heat for 3-4 minutes on each side. Mix soy sauce and mirin. Drizzle the sauce on the shiso patties and sauté briefly.

Arrange on 4 individual serving plates with a wedge of lemon each and serve.

.....
Alternative method for making *kuruma fu* crumbs is to place *kuruma fu* in a plastic bag and smash.

You can substitute *kuruma fu* with bread crumbs.

If the shiso patty mixture is too dry, add more soymilk.
.....

The flavour of this tasty dish is enhanced by the distinctive fragrance of shiso leaf (also known as perilla).

The use of burdock and eringi mushroom adds a nice depth to its taste and texture. A healthy alternative to burger patties!



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Soups



In a traditional Japanese meal, rice and soup are always served. In the past, the left side of the tray was reserved for the more important items.

The Japanese have regarded rice as an important staple for generations, and so the rice is always placed on the left side with the soup on the right. With my guests,

I normally recommend starting with some soup. This helps warm up the stomach before proceeding with the rest of the meal.



SPICY MISO SOUP

Serves 4

- 1.25 litres (40 fl oz) mushroom dashi (page 16)
- 2 medium dried shiitake mushrooms
- 100 g (3 1/2 oz) daikon
- 80 g (2 4/5 oz) carrot
- 5-cm (2-in) length lotus root
- 1 Japanese eggplant
- 4 Tbsp white miso
- 3-cm (1 1/2-in) slice red chilli
- 1 Tbsp sesame oil

Prepare mushroom dashi. Reserve 2 mushrooms and cut into quarters. Set aside.

Peel carrot, daikon and lotus root. Cut each root vegetable into bite-sized pieces. Cut the eggplant into 1-cm thick slices.

Slice chilli lengthwise into half and remove the seeds. Heat sesame oil in a pot. Add chilli and stir fry for 30 seconds. Remove chilli and then add the rest of the vegetables (carrot, daikon, lotus root and eggplant). Cook for another 2-3 minutes.

Add mushroom dashi and bring to a boil. Lower heat and simmer for 15-20 minutes, skimming off and discarding any foam that surfaces from time to time.

Press white miso through a fine sieve into the stock and stir until dissolved.

Spoon soup and vegetables into 4 serving bowls and serve.

.....

Once the miso has been added, do not boil the soup as it will destroy the beneficial properties of the miso. Substitute or add any other vegetable that you like.



CARROT SOUP

Serves 4

- 100 g (3 1/2 oz) carrot
- 400 ml (13 1/2 fl oz) soymilk (unsweetened)
- 400 ml (13 1/2 fl oz) konbu dashi
- Sea salt, as needed

Peel and cut carrot into chunks. Boil a pot of water and add in carrot. Simmer for about 15 minutes or until the carrot is soft. Remove carrot and leave to cool.

Add carrot and soymilk in a food processor. Blend until smooth. Transfer to a pot and add konbu dashi. Simmer for 10 minutes under medium heat and stir gently. Add salt to taste.

Spoon soup into 4 serving bowls and serve.

.....

Avoid over boiling as it might burn the soymilk. Low medium heat will be sufficient.

Sautéed mushrooms can also be added. Julienne 2 fresh shiitake mushrooms and stir fry with sesame oil for a minute before adding sake and soy sauce. Cook for a further 30 seconds, then spoon into carrot soup.



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