

food forum

Kikkoman's quarterly intercultural forum for the exchange of ideas on food

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Shojin Ryori

Home Cooking

As our series about shojin ryori concludes, we look at how this Buddhist culinary tradition has been incorporated into daily home cooking.

—
by Shoshi Takanashi

Vegetable tempura

One of the virtues to which Buddhist priests adhere is the practice of *sharing*. Money, food and other resources are shared freely with others, rather than hoarded. This principle applies not only to material things, but also to teachings and knowledge. Whatever is deemed to be good is to be distributed or disseminated openly and proactively, not concealed or hidden away. Priests use various ways of extending what they have learned to society: the serenity attained through their practice, for example, or teachings found in sutras.

Shared experience

In the same way, knowledge of *shojin ryori*, although originally created and refined by priests in Zen temples for their own training and spiritual cultivation, was shared

beyond temple walls with ordinary people. When people visited temples to hold ceremonies for the deceased or offer prayers to the principal deity, *shojin ryori* was sometimes served to them, providing a rare opportunity to experience dishes that were unfamiliar to the masses. Furthermore, from the Muromachi period (1336-1573), temples in the Soto school of Zen Buddhism around Japan actively promoted lay participation in monastic practice, wherein laypeople would stay at a temple for several days to join priests in zazen meditation and the chanting of sutras. Temples made efforts to transmit the fundamentals of the monastic way of life to them so they could follow these practices upon their return home.

Historically, these temple training experiences have also included instruction in the manners and practices of the temple kitchen and its methods of food preparation.

If such experiences had been related to a business enterprise, these kitchen secrets would surely have been hidden. But in their adherence to the precept that what is good should be shared with all, temples allowed *shojin ryori* to spread to all people—and into their kitchens.

Shared tastes

It is difficult to describe with certainty how some modern cooking methods and dishes might be traced directly to *shojin ryori*. It is said that techniques such as deep-frying and stir-frying were acquired by Japanese priests studying in China who brought this knowledge back to temple kitchens in Japan, where it adapted to Japanese cooking styles. Indeed, many dishes typically associated with today's Japanese home cooking share similarities with the classic *shojin ryori* repertoire: popular deep-fried vegetable tempura, for instance,

is said to have originated from *shojin ryori*.

Connections between temple food and household cooking might be suggested by the names of some dishes. One example is *kimpira gobo*, a side dish usually made with sautéed root vegetables that is often found both on Japanese tables and routinely prepared in temples. Burdock root (*gobo*) and carrot are sliced into thin strips, stir-fried in oil and seasoned with soy sauce and mirin, with chili pepper added for a touch of heat. There are several theories regarding the origin of the name *kimpira gobo*. One intriguing explanation suggests it is a play on words: *Kompira-sama* is a guardian deity worshipped at temples, while *gobo* refers not only to burdock root, it can also mean a temple building or priest. Another dish possibly referencing *shojin ryori* is the commonly served *aemono*, which involves assorted vegetables combined and dressed with ground sesame seeds or tofu. The written *kanji* characters for *aemono* carry the idea of “bringing things together,” which reflects Buddhist teachings of unity and harmony.

Shojin ryori is considered the likely inspiration behind *kenchin-jiru*, a hearty soup of tofu and root vegetables that is a favorite in home kitchens. One well-known anecdote about the origin of the soup involves a priest in training who accidentally drops a block of precious tofu, reducing it to crumbles.* *Kenchin-jiru* is prepared by crumbling and dry-roasting tofu, then simmering it with kombu and vegetables that often consist of trimmings, peels or leftovers from the preparation of other dishes. The texture of dry-roasted tofu resembles meat, which is prohibited in temples. In former times, meat was a rare and inaccessible ingredient for ordinary households, and this meatless substitute became popular beyond temple walls among the wider

populace. This thrifty use of broken pieces of tofu and kitchen scraps embodies the spirit of *shojin ryori*.

Shared gratitude

At the heart of *shojin ryori*, one is taught to approach ingredients with care and reverence in a manner that honors the life-giving spirit of precious food. In Zen temples, before and after meals, priests chant sutras of gratitude; these are directed both toward the food itself



Kimpira gobo



Kenchin-jiru

and to those who prepared it. As they partook of temple meals, both visitors and laypeople in temple training absorbed this spirit of gratitude, and over the course of centuries, priests propagated this underlying meaning. One could say that the commonly used Japanese expressions *itadakimasu* (“I humbly receive”) and *gochisosama* (“thank you for the meal”) are simplified forms of this tradition of expressing gratitude.

Even today, many Japanese place their hands together in the Buddhist gesture of reverence, reciting these phrases before and after a meal.

The origin of many Japanese dishes that are routinely prepared in households can be traced to *shojin ryori* and, as it attracts renewed attention as exemplifying a healthy and balanced diet, contemporary adaptations continue to emerge. Even when *shojin ryori* was first created in Zen temple kitchens,

a similarly experimental approach was taken in devising new dishes, and so modern innovations are entirely in keeping with the spirit of this cuisine. Japanese cuisine evolved around the skillful use of vegetables and the ability to bring out their subtle flavors using delicate seasonings such as dashi and soy sauce; such attributes are deeply rooted in the teachings and techniques of *shojin ryori*.

I believe *shojin ryori* has played a part in enriching Japanese cuisine. Placing one’s hands together and humbly expressing gratitude toward the food, toward those who prepare it, and to our very own life that allows us to partake of the meal itself—these all embody a spirit that I sincerely hope will be passed on through future generations as an essential part of Japan’s food culture. ●

** This anecdote, passed down in Zen temples, is one of several theories regarding the origin of kenchin-jiru.*

On the cover *Yuzu*, featured in *Spirit of the Seasons*, page 5; and *goma-ae*, an *aemono* dish of *komatsuna* Japanese mustard spinach, carrot and sesame.

Author’s profile

Shoshi Takanashi was born in 1972. Currently head priest at Soto Zen temple Eifukuji in Gunma Prefecture, he is also a specialist in *shojin ryori* and studies the spirit and techniques of this cuisine. From 2001-2005, he served at Daihonzan Eiheiji Tokyo Betsuin Chokokuji Temple, where he was *tenzo* (head of kitchen). His publications include *Hajimete no Shojin Ryori: Kiso kara Manabu Yasai no Ryori* (Beginner’s guide to *shojin ryori*: basics of vegetable cooking; 2013).

Shochu

Shochu is a distilled spirit indigenous to Japan. While there are modern distillation methods used to mass-produce *shochu*, the focus here is on traditional *honkaku* “authentic” *shochu*, deeply rooted in the Kyushu area.

Honkaku shochu involves the single-distillation of specific regional agricultural products to make distinctive types of *shochu*, each of which reflects its origins. A single base ingredient—barley or potatoes, for example—is fermented with *koji* mold then single-distilled. With a relatively low alcohol content, the flavor, aroma and character of *shochu* thus vary significantly, depending on base ingredient, and each type has its enthusiasts.

Most *honkaku shochu* is region-based, the best-known of which is the rich, aromatic *imo shochu* made from sweet potatoes. Kagoshima Prefecture, a leading sweet potato producer, is home to the greatest number of *shochu* distilleries in the country. Smooth and fragrant *mugi shochu* made from barley is famously produced in Oita Prefecture. Kumamoto Prefecture is known for its slightly sweet *kome shochu*,

made from rice. While these three *honkaku shochu* types predominate the market, there are others made from various local products from different regions. They include *kokuto shochu*, made from unrefined cane sugar, produced only in the Amami Islands of Kagoshima Prefecture, as well as “niche” *shochu* varieties made using buckwheat, chestnuts, *shiso* (perilla) or sesame seeds.

Regardless of its base ingredient, however, *shochu* is always clear and colorless, and drinkers are able to appreciate its essential taste. *Shochu* can be served neat, “on the rocks,” with water or soda, or mixed with hot water to bring out its aroma. *Shochu*-based cocktails are ever more trendy, as its mild taste accommodates an array of mixers and flavors. Most common is the *chuhai*, which is *shochu* mixed with soda and fruit juice or



Shochu served on the rocks

sweet liqueur, while more stylish cocktails may feature offbeat ingredients, like green tea and herbs. Its versatility pairs well not only with Japanese foods, but with all types of cuisines.

Emerging artisanal distillers are exploring this versatility by creating novel, small-batch craft *shochu*. Barrel-aged *shochu* is among these innovations, a process that lends it a gentle amber tinge while developing a rich aroma and flavor reminiscent of whiskey. Meanwhile, aromatic varieties of *shochu* that carry a hint of fruit are now marketed, sparking interest among younger demographics. As contemporary distillers honor and improvise on the traditions of *shochu*, they elicit a fresh appreciation of its original spirit. ◆

Exploring the versatility of shochu



Chuhai with fresh grapefruit and lemon juice



Diverse types of regional *shochu*

Quick Tsukemono

Our Japanese tsukemono pickle overview concludes with delicious short-prep options.

Many *tsukemono* pickles require multiple steps and lengthy preparation, but others can be enjoyed after very brief pickling times. These *tsukemono* include lightly pickled *asa-zuke*, *shiokoji-zuke* pickled in salted rice malt, and *gari* sweet pickled ginger, usually served with sushi. ◆

Asa-zuke

Crunchy vegetables like cabbage, cucumber and carrot are cut into bite-sized pieces, placed in a container and massaged with a seasoning liquid. After refrigerating for 15-30 minutes, *asa-zuke* are ready to eat and have the crispness of fresh vegetables. Typical seasoning liquids are soy sauce-based, salt-based, or dashi-based, with one's preferred spices and ingredients added. While it's easy to create a favorite seasoning liquid based on personal taste, a wide range of convenient ready-made *asa-zuke* seasoning mixes are sold in stores.



Asa-zuke

Shiokoji-zuke

Shiokoji is a traditional Japanese fermented seasoning made with rice *koji* that has been fermented and matured with salt and water; preparation of these pickles usually involves using a pre-made *shiokoji*. Cut-up vegetables are mixed with *shiokoji* and refrigerated. Pickled for just one or two hours, the *tsukemono* have a light, refreshing texture, similar to *asa-zuke*. If pickled overnight, the result is a softer texture. Enzymes in the *koji* elicit the natural umami, sweetness and aroma of vegetables.



Shiokoji-zuke

Gari sweet pickled ginger

Popular sweet pickled ginger, called *gari* at sushi restaurants, is made using tender young ginger, which has a mild spiciness. The ginger is thinly sliced along its fibers, blanched in boiling water, then drained. The ginger slices are placed in a container together with a mixture of vinegar, sugar and salt, then pickled in the refrigerator for half a day. This results in a refreshing sharp taste that makes *gari* the perfect palate cleanser between servings of sushi.



Gari sweet pickled ginger

Yuzu

柚子



Yuzu-gama with grated daikon and salmon roe

On our cover is *yuzu*, a fragrant citrus fruit introduced from China centuries ago. Records indicate that by the sixteenth century, *yuzu* was already being enjoyed at home in the form of *yuzu-miso* paste. Today it is widely used and has become integral to Japanese cuisine. Nowadays, Kochi Prefecture accounts for roughly half the country's *yuzu* harvest.

Yuzu peel, juice and zest add a complex and intense citrusy fragrance. Sliced peel is sprinkled over udon or soba noodles as a condiment. The juice is the base for *yuzu-ponzu* citrus-flavored soy sauce, a seasoning or dipping sauce for hot pot. Hollowed-out *yuzu* fruit becomes an aromatic serving vessel called *yuzu-gama* ("yuzu-pot"), inviting diners to enjoy its flavor and scent. *Yuzu kosho* is a paste of *yuzu* peel, chili pepper and salt that adds a citrusy, spicy kick to foods. *Yuzu* is also popular in sorbets, cakes and jams that highlight its tangy taste and refreshing aroma.

Yuzu carries strong seasonal associations, including the body-warming tradition of *yuzu* baths. On the winter solstice, whole *yuzu* citrus are floated in a hot bath where the heat releases fragrant, natural oils from the fruit, a custom believed to warm the body and ward off illness through the cold months. ◆

Steamed Chicken with Grated Apple-Daikon *Oroshi*

Serves 2

806 kcal
Protein 58.3 g
Fat 48.8 g
(per serving)

- 2 boneless chicken thighs with skin on, each about 340 g / 12 oz.
- Salt and pepper
- 1½ T lemon juice
- 250 g / 9 oz. apple, cored and peeled
- 250 g / 9 oz. daikon, peeled
- 2 T sake

Sauce

- 4 T apple juice (*from grated apple, Step 2*)
- 3 T grain or apple vinegar
- 4 T Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 3-4 T honey
- Daikon sprouts for garnish



Oroshi-mushi is a classic Japanese steamed dish of fish or meat topped with daikon oroshi grated daikon. Daikon oroshi acts as a natural steamer, resulting in a tender, moist texture. Here, grated apple is mixed with daikon oroshi to add mildness and a hint of fruity aroma. This recipe achieves a steaming effect using just a frying pan.

- 1 Lightly season both sides of chicken thighs with salt and pepper. Set aside in refrigerator for 30 minutes. (1)
- 2 Put lemon juice in a bowl and grate the apple into it. Mix well, then use a strainer to separate the juice and pulp, gently pressing out excess liquid. (2) Set aside the grated apple and its juice separately. Grate the daikon, strain, lightly squeeze out moisture and discard its juice. Combine the grated apple and daikon.
- 3 Add the sake to a frying pan just large enough for the chicken thighs. Place the chicken in the pan skin side up. Spread the apple-daikon mix evenly on top of the chicken. (3)
- 4 Heat over medium heat until liquid in pan starts to bubble. Reduce heat to low, maintaining a constant stream of tiny bubbles, then cover and cook for 15 to 17 minutes. When a skewer pierces through easily, thighs are cooked. Turn off heat, cover, and let it stand for 2 minutes. Remove thighs from the pan and spoon off the grated topping to set aside. (4) Keep the liquid in the pan. Cut chicken into bite-sized pieces, place on a serving plate and top with the set-aside apple-daikon mix.
- 5 In a small pan, combine the apple juice from Step 2, vinegar, soy sauce and honey,* then bring to a boil. Add 100 ml / 3.5 oz. of the pan juice** from previous step. Bring to a boil (5) and spoon over the chicken. Garnish with daikon sprouts and serve with extra sauce on the side.

* May adjust amounts accordingly, as taste varies depending on type of apple, vinegar and honey.

** If amount is insufficient, use leftover apple juice and/or water to total 100 ml.

Recipe by Michiko Yamamoto

1 C (U.S. cup) = approx. 240 ml; 1 T = 15 ml; 1 t = 5 ml



Japanese apples

There are many apple varieties in Japan, including the Tsugaru and the Jonagold. This recipe uses the popular Japanese Fuji apple, which has a good balance of sweetness and acidity.





Discover Kikkoman #2



"Discover Kikkoman" with Kikona, Kikkoman's official brand mascot, on a visit to Manns Wine Katsunuma Winery in Yamanashi Prefecture.

MANNS WINE Katsunuma Winery



Kikkoman Group's Manns Wines has been recognized in international competitions since being founded in 1962. Its Katsunuma Winery is the pioneering winery in Yamanashi Prefecture, a region that boasts the largest grape production and number of wineries in Japan. The winery makes wines primarily from Japanese grape varieties: the Koshu and Muscat Bailey A, both registered with the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (O.I.V.).



New commercial facility at Katsunuma Winery

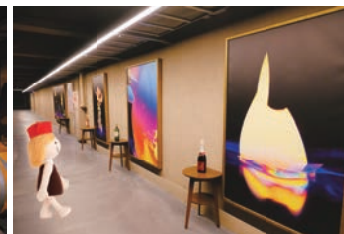
In 2020, Katsunuma Winery opened a new facility comprising wine cellars, exhibition space and tasting rooms. Here, visitors from

around the world are invited to learn about its wines through guided tours including English-subtitled videos about the cellars and winemaking.

Near rows of wood barrels in the cellar is an exhibition space with vibrant wall imagery that looks like large paintings, each with a corresponding wine bottle next to it ... but look again! These are not paintings, they are



Barrels in cellar



Exhibition space

macro photographs of crystals found in those wine bottles, taken through an electron microscope. Discover the mysterious world of wine in this eye-opening gallery.

The tour includes tastings of different Manns Wines, including our highly rated premium Solaris wine. First we sampled the Solaris Chikuma River Shinano Riesling 2024, made with the Shinano Riesling grape variety uniquely



Wine tasting

bred by Manns Wine. Its elegant aroma and slightly dry palate are perfect for novice wine lovers. Next, a taste of the Solaris Yamanashi Muscat Bailey A 2023, made from Muscat Bailey A grapes grown in Manns Wine vineyards. Grapes are hand-picked, selected and cooled, then fermented before aging in barrels for twelve months. This wine has a rich berry aroma and complex, concentrated flavor.

Winery visitors can not only purchase their favorite wines, they also have exclusive access to rare back-vintage Solaris wines.

Katsunuma Winery offers a unique opportunity to experience and taste wines that are unavailable anywhere else. When in Japan, consider spending time here to immerse yourself in the world of Manns Wine.



Solaris Room at the wine shop

MANNS WINE Katsunuma Winery

Operating Hours

April through November: 9:30 to 16:30

December through March: 10:00 to 16:00

* Wine cellar tour available by reservation only

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By train: approx. 5 min by taxi from Shioyama Station, JR Chuo Line

For more information and reservations

mannswines.com



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