

Inside this
issue

Shojin Ryori: "I find Buddha in vegetables", Lunch with Chef Toshio Tanahashi 1 + 2 + 3

Ceremony of the Enthronement of his Majesty Emperor Naruto 3

Medical Japan: Innovative solutions for aging societies 4

会見

INTERVIEW

Shojin Ryori: "I find Buddha in vegetables"

Lunch with Toshio Tanahashi: An introduction to the Japanese traditional Buddhist cuisine

Toshio Tanahashi is a man with a mission: promoting Shojin Ryori, the Japanese traditional Buddhist way of cooking. These days, he says, people eat bad food, which affects their health. One of the possible translations for "shojin ryori" could be "spiritual food". Mr. Tanahashi believes that this type of cuisine can help people feel better and enjoy a healthier life. In November, he visited Switzerland for a couple of weeks and attended several events all around the country. We had the pleasure to meet the Chef and were lucky to have him prepare delicious and nutritious food for us in the beautiful framework of ["The Hamlet"](#), in the city center of Geneva. We are not sure that we will find Buddha in vegetables, as he poetically says, but definitely provided us with food for thought.

Origins of Shojin Ryori

Shojin ryori dates back to the 6th or 7th century, when Buddhism was introduced to Japan. However, it is during the 13th century, when Buddhism had eventually spread all over the country, that Shojin ryori really developed to become the way we know it today. Shojin ryori was particularly popular in the Kansai region, around Kyoto, and



Toshio Tanahashi: A colourful and healthy cuisine

this is where Mr. Tanahashi started his apprenticeship at the age of 27. He trained in the Geshinji Temple, a nunnery famous for its cooking. He told us it was a meaningful experience.

Traditionally, Shojin cooking uses the donations (mostly food) that people make to the temple. The essence of shojin ryori is to bring out the best of what has been kindly given.

A healthy, seasonal and local cuisine

Since it can only use the donations coming from the surrounding community, shojin ryori is a local and seasonal cuisine based on vegetables and fruits; the use of fat is limited. It is undoubtedly

ly a very healthy cuisine. As Mr. Tanahashi explained, people feel light and full of energy after a shojin ryori meal (we agree). When we asked him if shojin ryori is vegan, Mr. Tanahashi did not give a straight answer. When he cooks, however, it is vegan indeed. He uses no meat, fish, eggs or any other animal or animal-derived products.

Nevertheless, Mr. Tanahashi is not vegan himself. As part of their religious beliefs, Buddhists must not kill animals and therefore do not use them in their cooking. But, if he's offered meat, Mr. Tanahashi will eat it.

(continued on page 2)

会見

INTERVIEW

Shojin Ryori: "I find Buddha in vegetables"



Grinding sesame: a daily routine

(continued from page 2)

Taking time is part of the process

"People often say that they have no time to prepare their meals, but why is that?" Mr. Tanahashi asked us. He says that "In the past, people had to walk much more than they do nowadays; they had to hand-clean their clothes. Today, we have cars and washing machines that help us save time."

"Every morning, I grind sesame for one hour. It's my way of meditating. Usually, monks meditate by doing nothing, but if I try it myself, too many thoughts will cross my mind. Doing something with my hands, enables me to reach the appropriate state of mind." Oftentimes, when something seems quick to make, it actually isn't. For our lunch he prepared a simple soup with nori (alga) and mushrooms.

It only takes 15 minutes to prepare the soup, he said, but the nori had taken a year to dry.

A Chef that teaches to the best

In shojin ryori, it is important to honor the ingredients used, by bringing out the best of them.

However, as always when it comes to cooking, the chef has a great influence on the final result. Toshio Tanahashi clearly transcends shojin ryori - his is gastronomy, more than cooking. The simplest products are combined, prepared and cooked in a perfect way. It is no surprise that so many famous chefs are willing to learn from him. The French chef Alain Ducasse was so impressed that he convinced Mr. Tanahashi to go to Paris and to train the new Plaza Athénée team for three months. When we asked Mr. Tanahashi what he taught to this highly qualified team he nonchalantly answered that he had nothing to teach. He simply helped them to reconnect with the products they were using, by showing them how he works. "They had three microwaves in their kitchen, what do you need three microwaves for?" he asked us laughing. "We started by grinding sesame every morning".

The man who listens to vegetables

Every morning, Mr. Tanahashi goes to the local market and "talks to the vegetables first, then to the seller". It is important to treat the vegetables in a gentle manner, he said. This is why he avoids processing the products too much (no grinding is involved, for instance). It is important to see what you are eating. When we asked him where he finds inspiration from and he simply answered: "From the products themselves". He says that vegetables whisper, and we need to pay attention and listen to them to understand what is the best way to prepare them.

The capacity to understand the products and to use them in a simple way that will allow them to develop the best taste is certainly a great merit for every cook, but also one of the strengths of Japanese gastronomy that has inspired so many chefs from all around the world.

We asked Mr Tanahashi how he manages to find the proper ingredients when he travels out of Japan. He answered that he is always happy to try with local ingredients. Shojin ryori is about doing your best with what you have. For our lunch he went to a local supermarket and was impressed by the quantity of fresh fruits and vegetables available. Plus, many Japanese typical ingredients such as soy sauce, sesame or tofu are easy to find on nowadays. Almost all the ingredients came from there except the nori alga he brought from Japan. What if one day he travels somewhere where he can find neither soy sauce nor sesame?

It would be stimulating he answered laughing.

(continued on page 3)



Tofu salad with broccolis, kaki, apple and grapes; rice with chestnut and mushrooms; beetroot

Shojin Ryori: “I find Buddha in vegetables”

(continued from page 2)

A man with a mission

As said in the introduction, Mr. Tanahashi has a mission. He believes that shojin ryori is not only good for human health, but also for the planet. The Japanese chef's mission is to share this traditional cuisine in the most effective way. He started by opening a restaurant in Tokyo that soon become famous. He kept it for 15 years, but during

that time he realized he was looking for something different. He told us he is no business man, and has no interest in being rich. Therefore, he closed the restaurant in 2007 and since then he has been traveling around the world to reach more people. In 2008 he opened the Zecoow Culinary Institute, where he teaches the shojin way of cooking and further develops the philosophy behind it. Mr. Tanahashi hopes to find the right partners to

open a similar center in Europe. “Why not in Switzerland?”, he asked.



A delicious and colourful soup

会見

INTERVIEW

Ceremony of the Enthronement of his Majesty Emperor Naruto

The Enthronement ceremony of his Majesty Emperor Naruto took place on October 22.

The enthronement process is a highly codified ritual. The official schedule reports 24 ceremonies and rituals to take place from the abdication of Emperor Emeritus Akihito on April 30, 2019 until December 2019.

Right after the abdication, the accession ceremony took place, inaugurating the new Reiwa era in the Japanese Shinto calendar.

The enthronement itself (Sokuirei-Seiden-no-gi) is the second part of the process, and it happens in the State Hall. It is certainly one of the highlights of the whole ritual. The ceremony was attended by around 3,000 guests, including 55 heads of state and government and 32 royalties.

Initially scheduled on the same day, the parade was postponed to

November 11 because of Typhon Hagibis, which hit Japan in October.

Current successors to Emperor Naruhito are Prince Akishino (1) - his brother, Prince Hisahito (2) - Prince Akishino's son and the Em-

peror's nephew, and Prince Hitachi (3) - the Emperor's Uncle.

Emperor Naruhito's only child, Princess Aiko, cannot succeed her father without a modification of the Imperial Household Law.



His Majesty Emperor Naruhito in the Takamikura throne. The Emperor wears the “Kourozen-no-Gohou”. Its color represents the sun.

動向

TREND

Medical Japan: Innovative solutions for aging societies

革新

INNOVATION

Aging societies are a challenge for most developed countries, but this is especially true for Japan, which has the highest number of elderly people in the world. In 2018, 28.4% of Japan's population was aged 65 or older. According to the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, the percentage of seniors should increase to 35.3% by 2040.

In order to tackle this problem, Japanese companies will have to be highly innovative because the working force will not be enough in the future.

Therefore, a new fair dedicated to this issue is growing in popularity. For three days, the second edition of [Medical Japan](#): Medical and El-

derly Care Expo & Conference" took place from October 23 to 25, 2019 in Tokyo.

The fair is bi-annual: it is held in Tokyo in October and in Osaka in February.

Medical Japan addresses several aspects of elderly care such as medical devices, community care and pharmaceutical solutions.

The interest for this fair is obvious, with an increased scale of 30% for the second edition. During three days, 23,101 visitors attended and 610 exhibitors showcase their latest products.

This fair is a great opportunity for foreign companies to discover the most cutting-edge technologies: IoT wearable devices, exoskeleton

robots, AI-powered glasses, smart shoes and much more.

Foreign companies active in this industry also have a great opportunity to showcase their own products in a highly demanding market.

Next events:

Osaka Feb. 26-28, 2020

Tokyo Oct. 14-16, 2020

Info for [exhibitors](#)

Info for [visitors](#)



✓ Agenda

日程

AGENDA

Save the date:

The next JETRO seminar will take place on February 20 at the CCIG in Geneva.

More details to follow

JETRO is a government-related organization that works to promote mutual trade and investment between Japan and the rest of the world. Originally established in 1958 to promote Japanese exports abroad, JETRO's core focus in the 21st century has shifted toward promoting foreign direct investment into Japan and helping small to medium size Japanese firms maximize their global export potential.

The JETRO Switzerland Newsletter can also be viewed and/or downloaded online:
<http://www.jetro.go.jp/switzerland/newsletter>

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