



University of Gastronomic Sciences
**Università degli Studi
di Scienze Gastronomiche**

**Japanese food culture of “Shojin Ryori” and the
cross connection within the context of Buddhism,
Shintoism and inside the “Dewa Sanzan”**

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Acknowledgement:

I would first of all like to thank everyone at Genuine Education Network for making it possible for me to be able to come to Japan and learn about this unique and great culture with so much culinary history and tradition. Yukako Saito, Yoko Miyoshi, Kenichi Ito and Zsanett Lasio have all worked hard in promoting Tusruoka, a UNESCO Creative Gastronomic City and sharing their knowledge about the ingredients and local products within this region. Our group of researchers for the Gastronomic Creative Summer 2017 consisted of UNISG students Tiffany Bassford, Reina Talukder, Marianna Longo, Eleanora Badellino, Konstatntin Stheimeyer, Martina Barbero and Tomo Flatt. While we also had two students from University of Parma, Iacopo Florio and Francesca Gualerzi and Italian-Japanese translators Pierre Girasole, Luca Cirrone and Thora Keita. Our team also included Austrian food writer Andras Jokuti and Austrian photographer Gabor Teveli that made the entire group a very distinct international set of gastronomers with various backgrounds within the food sector. This was a truly remarkable experience shared with this special group of individuals that made this experience a cherished memory.



***Photo 1 on Index**

Introduction:

In Japanese food culture cuisine can be considered as part of a religious ceremony...

What is “Shojin Ryori”? Are Buddhist temples the only religious sect that serves this type of vegetarian cuisine?

“Shojin” means energy or vigor and “Ryori” means cuisine and “Shojin Ryori” is a way of presenting food that is in balance and harmony with nature.

Buddhist temples do serve their own version of “Shojin Ryori” which is part of their daily ritual as a monk but Shintoism also has their own version of “Shojin Ryori” that is served at various “Shokubu” which are inns that allow the “Yamabushi” or mountain warriors to stay and rest while they recharge their mind, body and soul for their journey ahead of them or their return back home from doing their duty of protecting the three sacred mountains from dwelling evil spirits.

Aside from Buddhist temples and “Shokubu”, some restaurants also specialize in serving “Shojin Ryori” as a way of celebrating vegetarian cuisine and highlighting the flavor of each season to maximize the fullness of vegetables. There are traditional ways of preparing this marvelous cuisine, which is the most common practice and there is also a modern approach, which some new young chefs are slowly doing to bring this cuisine the necessary recognition it deserves.

Footnotes:

- **“Shojin means vigor or energy, and ryori means cuisine” – excerpt taken from Chu, Danny, Shojin Ryori (The Art of Japanese Vegetarian Cuisine) Introduction page 13, Marshall Cavendish Cuisine, 2014**

Cross Connection:

From a Western perspective, the state and church are normally separate and both are independent entities that sometimes intertwine and mingle within each other's affairs. At one point in Japan's history one of these entities took over the other one and because of this cross connection has occurred. One of these cross connection is the food culture of "Shojin Ryori" which was once originally part of a Zen-Buddhist meal has also been intersected into Shintoism and deeply rooted within the "Dewa Sanzan".

Before our research trip to Japan started, my perception of what "Shojin Ryori" was, that it is a type of vegetarian cuisine served only at Buddhist temples. I began to explore the question that if it is a type of Buddhist temple cuisine then why is it allowed to be served at restaurants and other places? Furthermore, I asked is this cuisine served in other religions and sacred places within Japan?

The search for "Shojin Ryori" has officially begun...

Arrival in Tokyo, Japan

July 31, 2017 at around 2:00 in the morning is when I arrived in Tokyo, Japan and this was the first time I have stepped foot in this country. As a Chef, I have always wanted to come here and experience for myself the glorious Japanese cuisine with all its various flavors and different techniques in preparation and serving. I was jet lag and exhausted from the travel but was starving and it being very late already all restaurants were closed so I had to go to the local convenience store which is called a “Family Mart” and proceed to order a Pork “Tonkatsu” which is a deep fried breaded cutlet and some chicken “Yakitori” which are barbecued skewers of either meat, poultry or vegetables.

Growing up in the Philippines which is not too far from this region I am accustomed to convenience store dinners and I have to admit after paying for the meal and walking home I was very excited to try the quality of the food and I had high expectations as well. It did not disappoint I can assure you that in fact I was very surprised of how good it was considering this was from a convenience store and was heated up in the microwave which coming from a French fine dining background is considered an improper way to cook. This being my first meal in Japan inside my hotel room at 3:00 in the morning with a can of Sapporo in my hand I felt so happy that I have finally been able to go to Japan and try the cuisine, which was exceptional based on this primary meal I had just consumed. The hype lived up to its reputation and this was a good start to begin my five week journey on a food

research project for Genuine Education Network in the Yamagata prefecture which I was set to depart for after spending one full day in Tokyo first.

To set out and explore Tokyo as a newcomer is no simple feat as the subway system is vast and complex with different lines intersecting one from each other and be it requiring different ticket types as well. My first stop was to visit “Shibuya” crossing which is known as the Times Square of Asia. This was a breath taking sight to see and it can really compare to New York City with the massive amounts of people passing by each minute. I started my journey walking east and taking in the culture, sights and sounds of busy Tokyo. The Japanese people are fascinating with their sense of fashion being very distinct and in a way it seems modernistic but also very traditional in their embedded culture.

The search for “Ramen” now has officially begun and being an avid aficionado of Ramen for years now this was one of the main driving factors why I wanted to come to Japan in the first place. First let me give a brief description of what Ramen is all about as it is one of the most popular dishes around Japan and also one of the more popular types of Japanese cuisine that has been exported all over the world. Ramen did not originate from Japan as it was initially brought in by settlers from China and served as Chinese styled noodles as oppose to the salty, rich and tasty broth that we are accustomed today. The major types of broth are either made from “Tonkotsu” which is a pork bone broth, “Shoyu” which is a soy sauce based broth or “Miso” which is a fermented rice and sake by product paste. “Chasu” is the roasted pork topping that is commonly the protein served in “Ramen” bowls which is similar to an Italian “Porchetta”.

As my search for this bowl of “Ramen” continues while navigating the busy streets of Shibuya I found one small corner shop that was full of business people on their lunch break and ventured in. The place was packed and loud but the food coming out of the kitchen was so fragrant and inviting that it made me hungry right away. I ordered the lunch combination, which consisted of chicken topping rice and a basic bowl of “Tonkotsu” broth ramen. This was simply a magical experience to taste the flavors that before today I was only reading in books or watching on Netflix. The simplicity of the dishes were very extravagant yet the complexity of the broth and freshness of the vegetables were a whole new level of art form that I have never experienced before. The level of craftsmanship in cuisine that they show in Japan was something that I found to be truly remarkable.

After indulging in this classic lunch combination I was almost moved to tears on how good and hearty a meal can be even if it was not prepared by my own mother and also experienced in a foreign land where I do not know anyone nor do I speak the language. This sole experience has opened my eyes to what the capabilities of ingredients are when used during the height of their flavor and served as the benchmark for what will be a very interesting time in my life as a Pollenzo student as I was about to embark to Tsuruoka, Yamagata to be part of the food research team for Genuine Education Network Gastronomic Creative Summer 2017.

Footnotes:

- **In order to present my topic clearly Ramen has been introduced and defined, as the vegetables are an essential part of the dish. All information, definitions and classifications are taken from the Museum of Ramen in Yokohama, Japan**



***Photo 2 on Index**

Searching for “Shojin Ryori” through the discovery of “Sansai”

As my full day in Tokyo was ending and so was my time as a tourist, which meant one thing, the time for fun and learning was about to begin. I was given a ticket by Yoko Miyoshi to take the over night bus from Tokyo Station to S-Mall in Tsuruoka which was a nine hour bus ride. The departure time was 9:00 pm and the weather could not have been harsher as the rain was pouring hard all day and the wind was gushing at high speeds. I was real glad to see the bus arrive and it was a full trip up north as all seats were taken but this being my first time to also get on a bus here in Japan, I was surprised on how spacious the seats were and that each chair fully reclined and had their own curtain which turned into almost like a cubicle. Of course a free can of green tea was provided along with a bag of peanuts. As the trip started to progress and you could hear a Japanese soap opera on the television in the middle of the bus, I started to doze off and silently anticipating what was going to happen next as I did not know yet who would be meeting me when I arrive or who I would be working with in Tsuruoka.

Alas... fast forward to nine hours and we have finally arrived at S-Mall and Shota Hayashi was the one to meet me at the station. He is the husband of Yukako Saito, who is the co-founder of Genuine Education Network. It was a quiet thirty-minute drive to the hotel that was being rented to us for the summer and as we arrived

home everyone was still asleep but the day and month's activities were just about to begin.

As people started waking up I began to slowly meet a few of them all with an awkward smile and exhausted eyes that signaled our gastronomic journey was about to begin.

On our first day of research the group went directly to "FOODEVER" which is a high-end farmers market selling top quality produce and ingredients both from Japan and Europe. This was my first encounter meeting the entire group from Italy and also the Japanese contingency, which slowly shared their culture with us and I did not know yet at that time that I was about to make a spiritual connection with this great country and its people.

My first introduction to "Sansai" happened here and I was amazed of the quality of the foraged vegetables. I myself was never a big vegetable person both, as a consumer or as a Chef but this session started my transformation to becoming a more-well balanced individual.

"Sansai" is the center of Japanese cuisine and the main staple diet of the people. These are wild vegetables that are foraged and naturally preserved by drying, salting, curing or fermenting and then re-hydrated and served often as the main dish of the meal accompanied by rice and miso soup.

This is a common form of living for many Japanese people based here in the rural areas of Yamagata prefecture. Chefs from both restaurants and hotels call the foragers and ask for specific types of weeds, vegetables and grains that they would

need for their daily menu and in turn this system becomes like a revolving economy that supports each other.



* Photo 3 on Index

Chapter 1 – Shintoism

Shintoism was the original religion of Japan and is the Japanese interpretation of the Chinese words “Shen” and “Dao” meaning Spirit and Way. It is “life’s religion concerned with the here and now”. Shinto focuses on matters relating to the world, on procreation, the protection of fertility, on spiritual purity and physical wellbeing. The “Kami” meaning spirits or deities is the main focus of worship and “Kami No Michi” or Way of The Gods is the common belief. Although, Shinto has no known founder and it is believed to have emerged during the late prehistoric “Yaoyi” culture between 300 BCE–300 CE. “Amaterasu” is the Sun Goddess and the most important “Wigami” or tutelary deities associated with the most ancient recorded Japanese “Uji” (Clans) and spirits of place.

The “Kojiki” and “Nihonshoki” are both ancient Shinto texts that states there are eight million “Kami” within this spiritual universe. In 712 CE Ono Yasumaro, who was a religious advisor compiled the record for ancient matters, which is now called the “Kojiki”. The court then after commissioned the chronicles of Japan, which is now called the “Nihonshoki” during 720 CE. Both these texts are still currently considered the official reference for Shintoism, in context similar to what the Bible is for Christianity or the Koran for Muslims.

Jimmu Tenno who is the first emperor of Japan is believed to be the earthly descendant of “Amaterasu”, the Sun Goddess. In Shintoism, one’s soul is believed to become a “Kami” after the death of its mortal host. The “Torii” symbolizes sacred

gateways leading to the “Jinja” which is the Shinto shrine which in turn leads to the “Naiku” which is Shinto’s holiest place, the inner shrine dedicated to “Amaterasu”. When the Meiji restoration returned power to the emperor in 1867, Shintoism also took a different form as part of Japanese culture. State Shinto was established in 1871 and was declared by the emperor as the sole official religion of Japan and during this period is said to be the official birthplace of the word “Shinto” as we still use it today. For about seventy-four years “State Shinto” was in power up until the end of the Second World War in 1945 where Japan and the Communist forces were defeated. In 1947 the emperor renounced all claims to divinity and prohibited the state from interfering all religious affairs, which symbolized the end of State Shinto. Shintoism then reverted back to being a loosely organized collection of local “Jinja” shrines throughout Japan. Due to the implementation of State Shinto all Buddhist temples were converted to Shinto shrines for worship. This interaction of the 2 religions have allowed many Buddhist deities to be worshipped as Shinto “Kami”

Footnotes:

- In order to present my topic clearly Shintoism as a religion must be explained so all information, excerpts and definitions from this chapter are taken from the book by Littleton, Scott C., SHINTO, Oxford University Press 2002



* Photo 4 on Index

Chapter 2 – Buddhism

Buddhism is a religion from Eastern Asia that offers a spiritual path of transcending the suffering caused by human desires through “Samsara” an endless cycle of births and deaths. This is the result of each individual’s “Karma” which is the consequences of our actions, both good and bad distributed over many lives. Release from this endless cycle of suffering can only be achieved when one becomes enlightened, which is what Buddhists aims to achieve. “Nirvana” is then reached when an enlightened one or “Buddha” has escaped all hate and greed is never subject to rebirth again.

Mahayana Buddhism was first introduced in Japan from Korea around 552 A.D.; but the mission accomplished little. An age old established barter in East Asia between China, Korea and Japan has included the teachings of Buddhism into Japan. On this route along with the exchange of gifts, from a diplomatic mission an image of “Shakyamuni” Buddha and several volumes of text were given.

Myoson Eisai was the first Japanese monk to receive the “Inka” which is the highest-level seal of certification one can have and officially recognizing him as a “Rinzai” teacher. In 1111 he returned back to Japan from Mount Tiantai in China and brought back with him “Rinzai” zen teachings but also the practice of tea drinking which is said to aid monks in meditation. He founded the first Zen temple in Japan called the “Shofuku-ji” in the area of Kyushu. Eisai is believed to have spent the rest of his life spreading the word and teaching about Japanese Zen Buddhism.

Dogen Kigen or commonly known as “Dogen Zenji” would later on become to be Japan’s greatest Zen master. In 1217 like Eisai before him he would take the dangerous voyage to China to seek out the meaning of enlightenment. After years of training in meditation in the here and now philosophy of Buddhism, he returned back to Japan and founded the “Eihei-ji” which is the main temple of the Soto sect of Zen Buddhism located in Echizen. His masterpiece “Shobogenzo” is still widely taught and practiced to this day.

Zen practitioners often refer to a chance of enlightenment and close connection to the environment through meditation. “Chan” and “Zen” which both mean meditation encourage individual meditative practices that lead to self-purification of the mind and self-realization of nature. What greatly differs the “Zen” practice of Buddhism from the other sects is that rather than relying on a divine being, the practice of having a strong heart and mind connection between the master and his student is given importance.

Footnotes:

- In order to present my topic clearly Buddhism as a religion must be explained so all information, excerpts and definitions from this Chapter are taken from the book by Hearn, Lafcaido, Japan’s Religions Shinto and Buddhism, Houghton Mifflin Company 1922 and History of Zen from zen-buddhism.net**



* Photo 5 on Index

Chapter 3 - “Shojin Ryori” in Buddhism

“Shojin” means energy or vigor and “Ryori” means cuisine and “Shojin Ryori” is a way of presenting food that is in balance and harmony with nature. This type of cuisine originated from the Buddhist temples in Japan around the 6th century but did not gain popularity until Zen Buddhism was introduced during the 13th century. Preparing “Shojin Ryori” was initially a form of Zen training for the Buddhist monks as part of their daily meditation rituals.

This form of cooking involves not only the chef’s skills but his whole personality and spiritual being. “Shojin Ryori” is a very delicate process that the cook has to be mindful of why the ingredients are chosen, when they are prepared and most importantly how the dish as a whole is presented and served.

Respectful of the most basic Buddhist pretext, which is to not take life, “Shojin Ryori” is completely vegetarian. One key practice in preparing this type of meal is to reduce wastage of every single ingredient as much as possible while utilizing it’s maximum potential for flavor and freshness.

The 5 chants that Zen Buddhist monks would chant before eating were traditionally a part of “Shojin Ryori”. These 5 chant reflections are:

- 1) “The effort that brings me this meal” – this symbolizes appreciating the effort put into the meal and to celebrate kindness.**
- 2) “My imperfections as I receive this meal” – a reminder to be humble and open hearted. No one is perfect but we must learn to accept every individual’s unique beauty.**

- 3) **“Mindfulness to be free from imperfections” – knowing oneself is vital in order to allow growth to become a better person and showing a brighter version through right actions.**
- 4) **“Taking this food to sustain good health” – every individual is encouraged to be knowledgeable of the food that we consume as ingredients have an impact on the human body and soul.**
- 5) **“The fulfillment of our obligations” – the essence of life is to achieve our dreams and the spirit will guide us to reach our goals.**

The “Shojin Ryori” style of cooking uses seasonal ingredients at the height of their flavor. This practice allows the produce to give the maximum health benefit to nourish the body. It is often served as a variety of small dishes presented in different trays and then arrange together to form a complete meal. With a great deal of care for the ingredients and a generous amount of detail given to the presentation, a “Shojin Ryori” meal is suppose to engage our five senses using vegetables as a tool. The essence of “Shojin” cooking is about mindfulness of the ingredients being used and enjoyment in preparing each dish. The emphasis is placed on balance with nature and harmony in presentation with the other ingredients.

Footnotes:

- **“Shojin means vigor or energy, and ryori means cuisine” – excerpt taken from Chu, Danny, Shojin Ryori (The Art of Japanese Vegetarian Cuisine) Introduction page 13, Marshall Cavendish Cuisine, 2014**

- **5 chant reflections of Shojin Ryori Buddhism – excerpt taken from Chu, Danny, Shojin Ryori (The Art of Japanese Vegetarian Cuisine) Introduction page 13, Marshall Cavendish Cuisine, 2014**
- **In order to present my topic clearly “Shojin Ryori” as a type of cuisine must be explained so all information, excerpts and definitions from this chapter are taken from Chu, Danny, Shojin Ryori (The Art of Japanese Vegetarian Cuisine), Marshall Cavendish Cuisine, 2014**



* Photo 6 on Index



* Photo 7 on Index

Chapter 4 – “Shojin Ryori” in Shintoism

“Shojin Ryori” within the context of Shintoism is not too different from Buddhism in terms of respect for the quality of the ingredients and seasonality of the products. Similar to Buddhist principles, the sacredness of life and the integrity of the ingredients are highly emphasized in their kitchens as well. Foraging for wild and fresh ingredients is a more predominant feature in Shintoism because they are not restricted to live in temples and are allowed to explore their surroundings.

“Sansai” is the highlight of Shinto cuisine and is celebrated in every single course of their version of “Shojin Ryori”. It also showcases various techniques of preservation through salting, drying, smoking and fermentation. These methods show the evolution of the produce from one state to another and this cycle is considered to be part of the natural evolution of the ingredient as everything that is used for the transformation comes from nature.

The meal preparation is also a bit more extravagant in the Shinto aspect as a “Shojin Ryori” meal is considered to be a feast and it is considered to celebrate the life and beauty of what nature has to offer. Different dishes are set on the table that are designed to complement one another and function as different sets of ingredients that showcase the current climate of the “Terroir” and carries the flavors of nature. Vegetables are cooked lightly to introduce their personalities and garnishes are often light sauces that are designed to enhance the versatility of freshness while complementing each other.

The most important aspect of “Shojin Ryori” whether it be in Shintoism or Buddhism is to learn to possess the trait of being grateful for the meal that is about to be shared. One must always learn to be thankful of where the food came from, how it was prepared, who prepared it and most importantly to be thankful to your hosts for serving the food and inviting you as their guests. A meal offered in a restaurant, home or “Shokubu” in most cases are always similar in context as the western approach to fine dining and caste systems in cuisine as we Chefs like to call them are fortunately not existent in this part of Japanese culture.

Another distinct difference from the Shinto practice of “Shojin Ryori” to the Buddhist counterpart is that the meal is considered more to be a celebration of life that is to be shared with your group. Staple inclusions like rice and “miso”, are often placed in a large communal container than is distributed “family style” to encourage interaction and dialogue between guests.

The change of seasons also allow for creativity and the introduction of new flavors and ingredients in each cycle. As the weather turns the soil follows suit and this just might be the greatest asset of “Shojin Ryori” because it is always evolving with nature. The farmers, foragers and chefs that prepare the vegetables in turn act as an extension of nature as they are the reflection of what the land has given to us.

With the differences of “Shojin Ryori” between these two types of religions enumerated we must now have a more clearer picture that even though we may believe in different gods and rituals there will be always one common uniting factor in all of us, cuisine. Nature’s greatest gift to us is the food that grows from the soil, which in turn is allowed to give nutrients to the body. Nourishment of the mind,

body and soul is what makes “Shojin Ryori” special and unique from every other cuisine that is being served today. “Shojin Ryori” is so deeply embedded into Japan’s food culture that sometimes you will tend to forget that it is derived from two different religious perspectives because of its inclusion in their everyday life. I consider myself lucky enough to have experienced and studied both types of “Shojin Ryori” preparation and I can honestly say that they are equal in flavor and beauty. Their differences may sometimes seem vast but if you pause for a bit to observe clearly, you will learn to reflect through cuisine that instead of comparing what separates them from each other maybe it’s better to learn to celebrate what brings them together and their individual distinct uniqueness.

Footnotes:

- In order to present my topic clearly “Shojin Ryori” as a type of cuisine must be explained so all information, excerpts and definitions from this chapter are taken from Chu, Danny Shojin Ryori (The Art of Japanese Vegetarian Cuisine), Marshall Cavendish Cuisine, 2014



* Photo 8 on Index



* Photo 9 on Index

Chapter 5 – “Dewa Sanzan”

The 3 sacred mountains of “Dewa Sanzan” can be found in the northern part of Japan inside the Yamagata prefecture. Each mountain symbolizes a cycle of one’s journey through life and it represents a specific connection of your spiritual being with nature. Mount Haguro, which is the first holy mountain of Shintoism in Tsuruoka, symbolizes the celebration of life and every individual’s journey after birth. This mountain is the most modern amongst the other two and has the busiest tourist attraction sites for the public. Mount Gassan is the second sacred mountain of “Dewa Sanzan” which represents death, both in body and spirit. This mountain has a very tedious path, which requires a rough four-hour trek to the top and is not open to the public. The final mountain of divinity is called Mount Yudono, which symbolizes rebirth and the purification of one’s soul. This place possesses the strongest spiritual connection one can feel through nature. The aura here is just overwhelming and it is surely impossible not too feel the presence of a “divine higher power” over you.

Mount Haguro was the first place we visited after we completed our two-day “Yamabushi” training at the foot of mountain. We were introduced to the concept of becoming a mountain warrior capable of protecting the scared “Dewa Sanzan” mountains. This form of spiritual and mental training here in the Yamagata prefecture is considered to be somewhat similar to a Buddhist monk that is vying for acceptance in his own sect temple. We learned the Shinto style of meditation and their own methods of clearing ones self completely by becoming balance with nature

and embracing your surroundings. As the moment our trek began from entering the temple of Mount Haguro, I was able to feel the sudden shift in my spiritual being as I understood that my journey into learning about cuisine has just started here and I was about to be spiritually born.



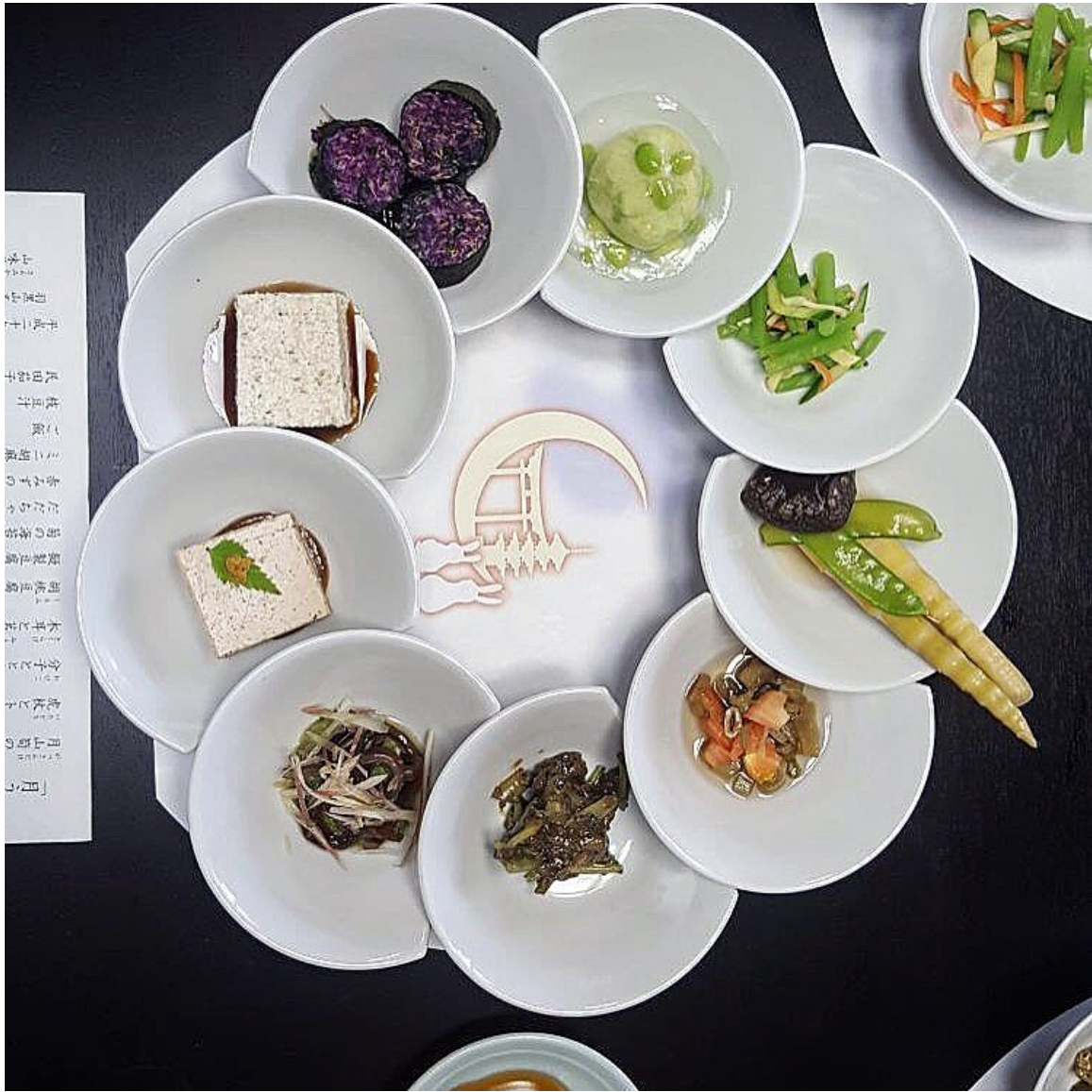
* Photo 10 on Index

At the summit there is a sacred temple and also a place that offers the chance to participate in a “Shojin Ryori” meal using vegetables that are harvested from the gardens around the mountain and also from what grows wild naturally around the area. This was to serve as my introduction to “Shojin Ryori”, and the beauty of this type of vegetable cuisine. Chef Masayuki Okuda briefly explained to us what “Shojin Ryori” is and what his perception of this cuisine is currently in Japan and what it should be in the future. I have had few moments in my life where something has made such a huge impact on both my spiritual being, and this was one of them. I was completely levitated to the presentation of the dishes and the strength of the flavor of the ingredients.

This was a whole new experience of joy and peace through a meal that is shared with my new friends in a sacred place that serves the freshest ingredients at the height of their seasonal flavors. Having been introduced to this concept and form of spiritual cooking my eyes are now fully open and aware of the power of food and how it can nourish one’s mind, body and soul through “Shojin Ryori”.



* Photo 11 on Index



* Photo 12 on Index

Mount Gassan was a completely different experience all together from the first mountain as this reflected our journey through life and how spiritually we were about to die. I recall that as we were about to start our journey, rain was pouring down hard on us which made it more symbolic because not only were we climbing the second sacred mountain of “Dewa Sanzan” but we were also invited to attend the festival of the dead or as the Japanese call it “Obon”.

The hike was extremely difficult as there was no path laid out for the “Yamabushi” and most of the passable routes were quite narrow so both sides have to stop every now and then to let the people going to the opposite direction pass through. The sites were breath taking though as you slowly elevate towards the summit, which in total is 1,987 meters above sea level. Various patches of “Sansai” could be seen along the way and there are two resting stops available for elder people and children to regain their energy back but most importantly these sectors serve as a supply point that is able to recharge the summit for basic necessities like food and water.

Once at the top the view of the Yamagata landscape from this height is outstanding and the other two sacred mountains are dwarfed by the height and physique of Mount Gassan. The “Obon” festival is one of the most anticipated rituals practiced in Japan, with the Buddhist having their own version with the releasing of lanterns. Here in the “Dewa Sanzan” mountain the celebration of the “Obon” ritual is completely different from the popular counterpart. First let me explain what the “Obon” festival symbolizes, this ritual is performed to release the dead spirits that have been trapped in the mountain and the fire acts as a symbol that burns their shackles and gives them the freedom to return to their land in peace to be able to

continue to protect their loved ones. There are specific chants that the priest will recite during the ritual that is considered to give a tribute and to put honor to the name of the soul that has departed in order for their family to be able to let their souls rest in peace.



* Photo 13 on Index



* Photo 14 on Index

Mount Yudono is the last sacred mountain of “Dewa Sanzan” and this place symbolizes the rebirth of your soul. Although this mountain is open to the public it has very strict policies on technology that no mobile phones or photography is allowed and even talking at a certain point is already prohibited. This place is considered the most spiritual among the other mountains and the energy present here is completely different from the others. After visiting the previous two mountains your heart and soul is meant to be reborn here and this signifies a purification of the new you.

There is a natural hot spring here that allows the rejuvenation of your feet after your climb to the summit of Mount Yudono, which is a scared hill that is said to grant your desire as long as you offer a prayer to the mountain. This hill which was quite steep but short gave a calm feeling when you start climbing the steps. What separates the experience here from the other two mountains is the closeness that you feel within your heart and nature telling you about your desires whether it be good or bad and also having the opportunity to purify yourself before you are returned back to the natural world.

Footnotes:

- **In order to present my topic clearly “Dewa Sanzan” as part of Shintoism culture in Yamagata must be explained so all information, definitions and excerpts on this chapter are based solely on my experience as part of our research trip with Genuine Education Network Gastronomic Creative Summer 2017**



*Photo 15 on Index

Chapter 6 – Sake

We have been focused on cuisine for the most part of this paper but I have not forgotten about one important aspect in Japanese culture that is an accompaniment to most meals and included as part of “Shojin Ryori” in a Shinto setting, which is Sake. This is a beverage that is synonymous with Japan in the western atmosphere. Sake is often part of every meal that has many functions in the dining room, it serves as a beverage that can aid digestion, it also serves as an icebreaker to let people start conversing together and most importantly it is a symbol of camaraderie that unites local and foreigners alike in the celebration of food. Many of us have enjoyed this beverage but know very little about it so in this chapter I will elaborate further to share the knowledge I have gathered from my research while in Japan.

Sake is a type of alcohol made from rice and water then produced by a unique fermentation process called, multiple parallel fermentation that utilizes microorganism such as yeast and “Koji” mold. “Koji” mold is the magic ingredient in Sake brewing and is a type of fungus that is also used in producing many other products like “Miso” and “Shoyu”. Among fermented beverages, Sake has the highest alcohol content. Making sake takes at least 3 months to produce.

Sake has been consumed since ancient times and this history goes back to 2,000 years. The organization called “Miki-no-tsukasa” (sake brewery office) was established by the Imperial Court and started brewing sake for most important ceremonies during the Heian period (8th-12th century). During the Muromachi period (15th century), hundreds of small-scale shops were born in Kyoto and Sake

came to be brewed throughout the year. At the same time, the brewers of “Soboshu” (sake brewed in temples) in Nara and other places lead the development of new brewing techniques. Since then, the technical development with consistent quality has progressed and from the middle of the EDO period (18th century) when, the brewing technique that was established is quite similar to the current methods that is applied today. During this period, it also became popular to concentrate brewing Sake in the best season to maximize flavor, which is during winter. This technical development gave rise to the special professional group of Sake brewing hierarchy consisting of “Toji” (chief sake brewer) and “Kurabito” (worker at a sake brewery). It was also discovered that the quality of water used in brewing had a vast effect on the brewing of sake. It was the development of the breeding of rice varieties, brewery sciences and manufacturing facilities after the Meiji era (19th to 20th century), which marked the beginning of modern Japan, which also established the current brewing process that has been left significantly unchanged to this day.

Sake brewing is a complex and unique process that is simple and fascinating at the same time. First the rice starch needs to be converted into sugar then sugar is then converted by “Kobo” (yeast) into alcohol. This method of converting the starches into sugar through “Koji-kin” (aspergillus mold) has been the same process since the 4th century. Before this technique was used, sake was brewed by a method called “Kuchikami-Sake” that is made from rice or other cereals that is chewed in the mouth by workers to promote fermentation from their saliva. First “Koji-kin” is carefully grown over the steamed rice to make “Komekoji” (malted rice). Then, from “Komekoji”, another batch of steamed rice and water is added to make the

fermentation starter called, “Shubo” (yeast mash). After this step, the fermentation is once again promoted by the method called “Danjikomi” (3 step fermentation process) by adding steamed rice, “Komekoji” and water three times. After this final fermentation process, Sake can now finally be filtered, then pasteurized at a low temperature before being carefully stored for the desired maturation period. The current Sake production method requires very complex technique, detailed organization and advanced skill set from the chief brewer and their workers which fortunately for the consumers most modern breweries have already perfected and allows us to enjoy this beverage served in the desired temperatures.

Here are the types of Sake classified by their brewing method:

- “Genshu” – Sake made without any additional water, 20% alcohol content with a deep and more firm flavor
- “Muroka” – Clear sake that has not been filtered with activated carbon
- “Namazake” – Unpasteurized Sake
- “Seimai-buai” – It is the degree to which the rice for brewing Sake has been polished
- “Koshu” – Sake aged for 5 years or upwards with flavor profile of spices and nuts
- “Taruzake” – Sake that is aged in casks that takes the fragrance of wood
- “Nigorizake” – Sake that is milky white, since the mash is only lightly filtered using a coarse textured cloth
- “Sparkling” – Carbonated Sake with a mouth-feel reminiscent of Champagne

While here are the types of Sake classified by the government, which appears on their labels and is more familiar to the public:

- **“Ginjoshu” – polished that 60% of the grain remains, contains rice, “koji” and water plus brewing alcohol**
- **“Dai-ginjoshu” – polished that 50% or less of the grain remains**
- **“Junmaishu” – made only from white rice, “koji” and water**
- **“Honjoshu” – polished that 70% of the grain remains**

Remember these simple rules when enjoying sake, always pour for your companions, smile constantly and never forget to say **“KAMPAI”**.

Footnotes:

- **In order to present my topic clearly Sake as a beverage must be defined and all information, history, classifications and definitions on this chapter are taken from lectures at Museum of Sake in Sakata, Japan and explained by Justin Potts of Kidoizumi Shuzo Brewery in Japan, Keith Nostrum of Masumi Brewing Company in Japan and Takashi Goto of takashigoto.com (International Sake expert and lecturer) from Japan**



* Photo 16 on Index



* Photo 17 on Index

Reflection:

The summer I spent in Japan made a major impact on me spiritually both as a Chef and as a student of UNISG. I was in a bit of a crossroad when I arrived in Pollenzo as my previous restaurant where I was the Executive Sous Chef had closed down and I did not have a clue of what to do with my life anymore. The first three months that I spent in Italy was a bit of soul searching as I was learning a different culture, getting to know a new set of people and also trying to understand a different language all at the same time was a bit exhausting. I applied at the career day with other companies and was accepted by Helen Browning Organic Farm from the UK while interviewing and did not expect Genuine Education Network to consider me for their summer program.

Sometime around the end of June I received an email from Yukako Saito stating that I was accepted as a Food Researcher for the whole month of August and that I will be part of a team to be based in Tsuruoka. This immediately gave me a strange feeling, as it was always a dream of mine to be part of a project in Japan and at that time after being lost for quite some time it seemed like my path has now been found. I immediately purchased my ticket and eagerly told everyone that I was going to Japan to work for GEN.

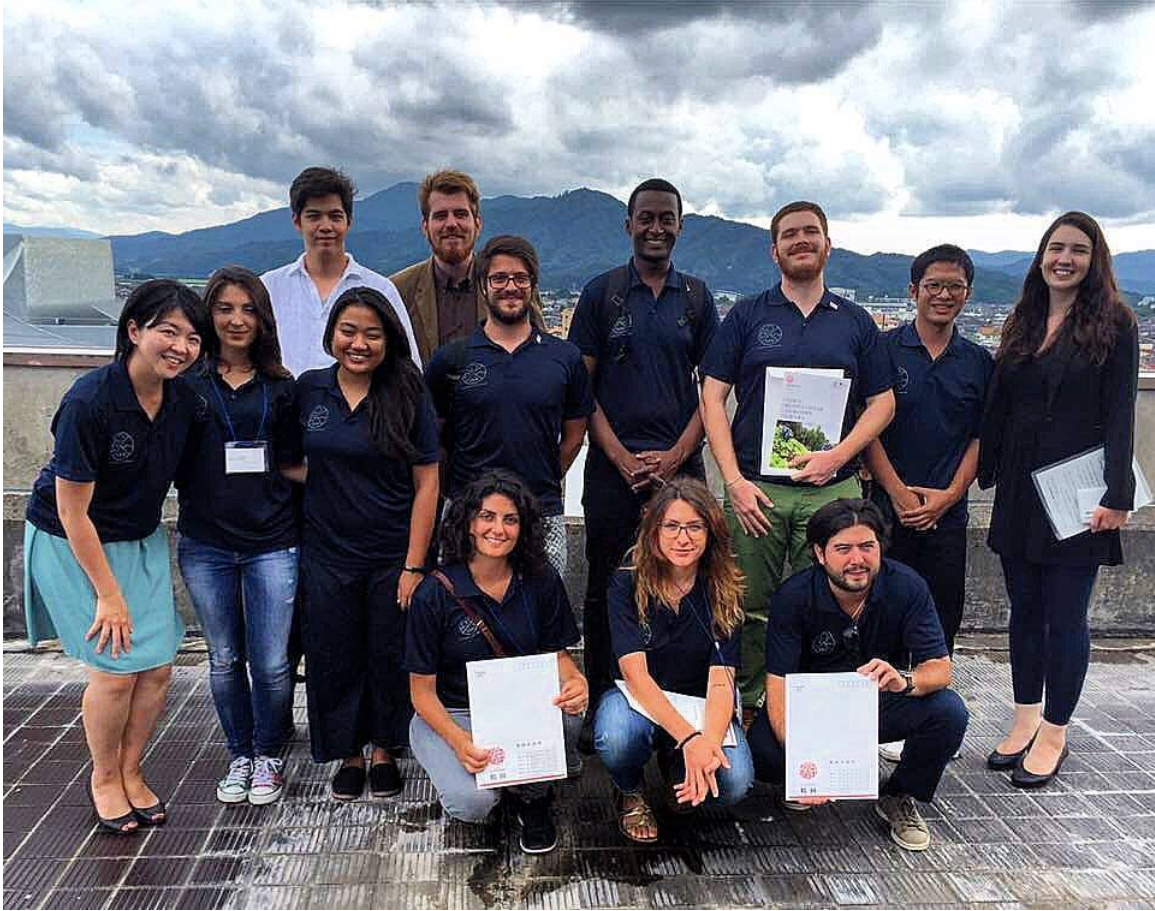
I have learned so much during my stay in Japan researching various kinds of ingredients and products. It was unbelievable that some of the things I had seen during this time I had no knowledge of even though I have been working as a Chef for about 6 years already. The attention to detail and pride that they carry for their

work no matter what task is given to them is most admirable about the Japanese. The cuisine that they offer is just outstanding and heart warming aside from being extremely delicious.

This was definitely a life changing moment for me coming to Japan and learning about “Shojin Ryori” as it opened my eyes to something that has exquisite beauty yet seems so simple and basic at the same time. The connection I felt here was so strong and the purity of the cuisine was what I had needed to be reminded that in life we are always faced with constant struggles but our passion should always drive us to persevere and chant “**UKETAMO**” which is a Shinto saying that means we must always remain humble and be thankful for everything.



* Photo 20 on Index



* Photo 21 on Index

Conclusion:

Now that we have distinguished what the different perceptions of “Shojin Ryori” are within the context of Buddhism and Shintoism, and have a clearer picture of how this meal is celebrated around Japan. Although our religious beliefs may vary between different sects, the one constant variable is and will always be food. We all need to eat in order to survive and our body must receive this nourishment in order to continue to function properly.

“Sansai” is definitely the centerpiece of a “Shojin Ryori” meal in both religions and the beauty of this ingredient is its simplicity. The elegance of the vegetable is represented in both the Buddhist and Shinto approach whether it being foraged, preserved or freshly harvested. If we look closely enough within these two religious perspectives, life is celebrated in different forms and methods but the vegetable is considered the centerpiece that gives us strength and wisdom to fulfill our daily tasks.

Before I left for Japan my research plan was to understand the differences of how “Shojin Ryori” is presented within these two religions and as I continued to progress with my work everything began to slowly shift towards the concept that instead of highlighting about what separates them apart, I instead started to focus more on the similarities that bring them together. Vegetables, was not even part of the structure for my paper because I was focused on looking at cuisine as a whole but it has now been the centerpiece of both my internship and thesis paper. I can

now confidently say that “Sansai” is the most fascinating ingredient that I have ever had the privilege of learning about.

I would like to conclude my thesis paper with this closing statement:

Vegetables is life’s greatest gift to us and “Shojin Ryori” is a style of cuisine that celebrates the use of vegetables even though it is presented between two distinct religions it shares one meaning which is to celebrate life through the beauty and simplicity of the ingredients, using cuisine as a showcase presentation that promotes eating healthy and nutritious while being mindful of our environment and constantly focusing on Sustainability for the future.

Along this phrase:

“To know the food culture is to know the people’s lives. To know the people’s lives is to know the way the people feel and think” taken from the Dewa Sanzan Shojin Ryori project.

Footnotes:

- “To know the food culture is to know the people’s lives. To know the people’s lives is to know the way the people feel and think” – excerpt taken from the Dewa Sanzan Shojin Ryori project

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Bibliography:

*** Due to no text/material ever being written about this topic my research aside from a few books/text/sites/lectures, is based entirely upon the time I spent in Japan as a food researcher for Genuine Education Network and our UNISG study trip.**

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- **Zsanett Laszlo from City of Tsuruoka**
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* At the Akagawa Hanabi 2017 festival