

# pure & simple

When a little goes a long way. Chef Danny Chu shows us the art of Zen temple cooking, Shojin Ryori

RECIPES DANNY CHU, PALATE SENSATIONS

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**Danny Chu** graduated from the National University of Singapore with an Engineering degree and began his career in banking as a foreign exchange dealer. He then moved on to sales and marketing, business development and product management within various industries. Life took a turn when he settled down with a place of his own. He enjoyed entertaining his friends at his little bachelor pad and he would whip up dishes according to cookbook recipes or design his own special concoctions. Friends suggested he start his own food business, but Danny decided to wait until he discovered a unique offering he could make to Singapore's food paradise.

About this time, he discovered Buddhism. Though born into a Buddhist family, he has been a Christian since he was in primary school. In January 2003, he went to India and attended a teaching by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. So inspired was Danny that he took his first step in his spiritual path by becoming a vegetarian.

Through a friend, he was introduced to Shojin Ryori, an art of cooking originating from the Zen temples in Japan. What

appeared as alluring pictures in a book quickly made him hungry and it was that hunger that propelled him to learn more about the cuisine and the mysteries behind its preparation. In 2005, Danny said goodbye to corporate life and headed for Japan in search of the wonders of Shojin Ryori.

Danny now runs Enso Kitchen and every Sunday, he is at Wacha, where he'll whip up a Shojin lunch/dinner for you. Reservations are required at Wacha – the first bonsai tea salon and tea-shot bar in Asia. It serves selected Japanese tea and sake from various regions of Japan and a variety of unique sake cocktails. All cuisines and desserts are served in precious Japanese tableware such as lacquer ware from Yamada Heiando and porcelain ware of Fukagawa, purveyors of the Japanese Imperial Family. Wacha also retails these lacquer and porcelain ware, and it is also the first select store of authentic Japanese arts and crafts brands in Asia. Visit [www.ensokitchen.com](http://www.ensokitchen.com).

You can also learn to prepare Shojin cuisine at Palate Sensations with Chef Danny Chu. Visit [www.palatesensations.com](http://www.palatesensations.com).



## rice with new tea leaves

serves 4

2 cups rice [short grain]

2 cups water

1 pc dried *konbu*

1 tsp new tea

1. Wash the rice and soak in 2 cups of water for 30 minutes with dried *konbu*. Cook the rice using a rice cooker.
2. Chop the new tea till very fine and mix it into the cooked rice just before serving.

New tea, or young tea leaves, are picked once they first sprout, usually during summer. Using new tea in cooking not only symbolises a new beginning, it also adds a touch of elegance and flavour to the rice.

## pan-fried cucumber

serves 4

2 cucumbers

4 tbsp sesame oil

2 tbsp soy sauce

1 tbsp sake

1 tsp vinegar

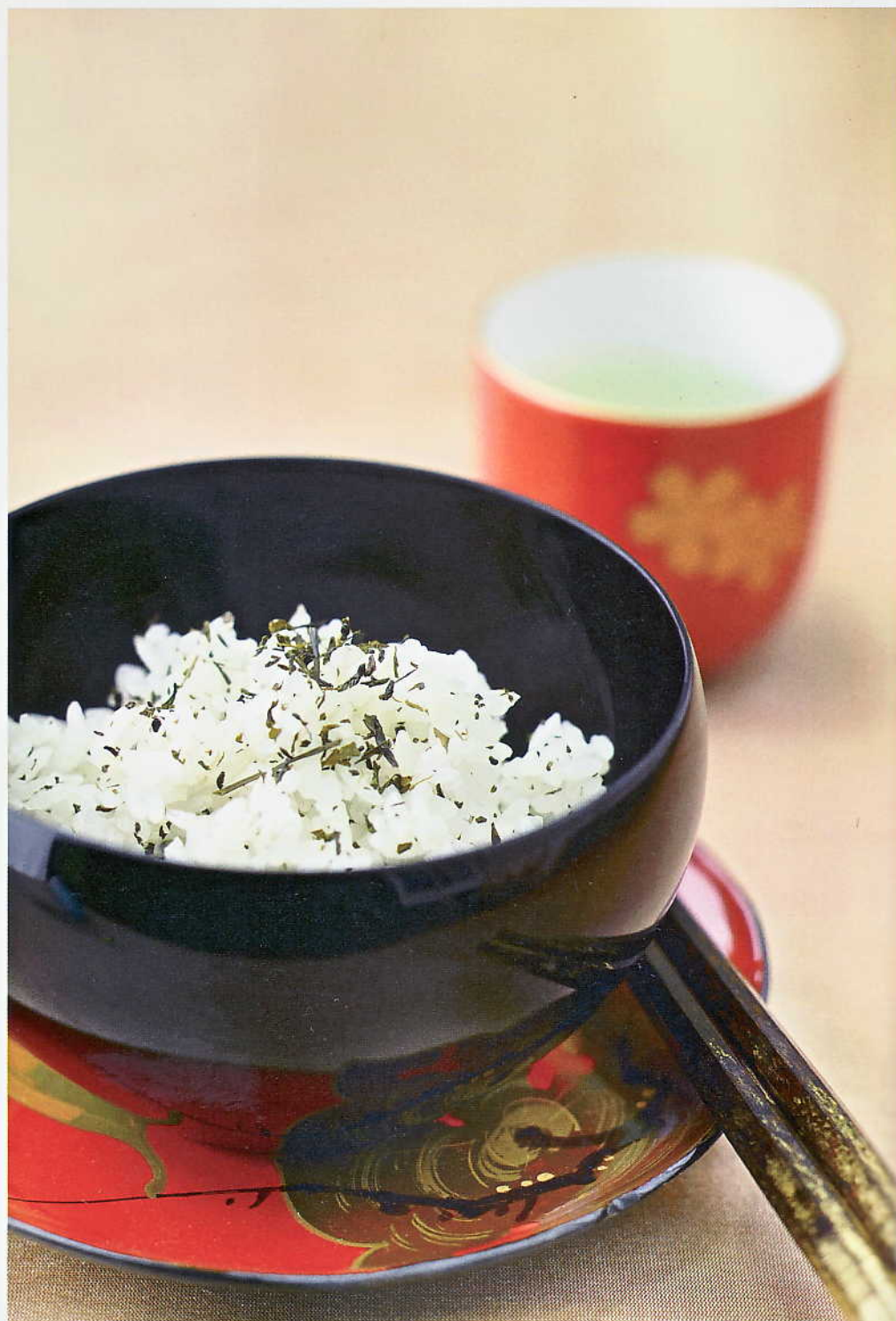
1 red chilli, cut

pepper & salt to taste

1. Rub cucumber with salt, then cut it diagonally.
2. Heat up the saucepan and add sesame oil. Add the cut red chilli, soy sauce, sake, vinegar, then dashes of pepper.
3. Add the cucumber and cook for 1 to 2 minutes.

This is specific to Shojin cooking – slice the cucumber diagonally at a 45° angle, on one side. Make sure not to cut through though. Roll over to the other side and slice the same way. Tear the cucumber into chunks and cook as suggested above.

“With Shojin Ryori, I am able to embrace three aspects of my life – spiritually, because of the philosophies behind this cooking; commercially, because I have always wanted to set up something of my own; and physically, because I have been a vegetarian for at least 4 years now.”







Shojin means vigour  
while Ryori means cuisine.



A photograph of a Shojin Ryori dish. In the foreground, a white ceramic bowl with a delicate pink and purple floral pattern holds a serving of bright green, cooked green beans. A single, elongated, golden-brown fried vegetable strip, possibly a tempura-style eggplant or carrot, is placed diagonally across the beans. Two small, halved cherry tomatoes are tucked behind the beans. The bowl sits on a textured, brownish-gold fabric surface. In the background, two more similar bowls are visible but out of focus, one showing blue floral patterns and the other pink. The lighting is soft and even, highlighting the textures of the food and the bowl.

Shojin Ryori is completely vegetarian.



“The art of Shojin Ryori begins from a spiritual learning on the entire philosophy of this cuisine. It is about translating spiritual practice, combined with fine skills, to draw out the natural flavour of the ingredients when each dish is served. This cuisine is meticulously prepared in the belief that it has the power to heal the mind and body. To complete the experience, the meal is also partaken with its 5 reflections.”



### green beans with ginger

serves 4

**100 g of green beans, ends removed**

**1 tbsp young ginger, finely grated**

**1 tbsp soy sauce**

**1 tsp vinegar**

**pinch of salt**

1. Bring sufficient water to a boil and place the green beans in water. Boil for about 5 minutes. Plunge into cold water, then cut the beans into 3 cm lengths.
2. Mix the ginger, soy sauce, vinegar and salt well. Arrange the beans and top with the ginger mixture.

Yet another simple dish – ginger, a ‘warm’ ingredient, improves blood circulation and is particularly good during winter to keep warm.

### miso soup with tofu

serves 4

**4 cups water**

**1 pc dried *konbu***

**1 block silken tofu**

**4 tbsp white miso**

**roasted sesame seeds**

1. Use a damp cloth to wipe the white powder on the surface of the dried *konbu*. Place the *konbu* and water in a pot over medium heat. Simmer until the volume is about 4 cups to make the dashi stock.
2. Stir in the white miso until it dissolves.
3. Crush the silken tofu and add to the soup.
4. To serve, sprinkle the sesame seeds over the soup.

A unique aspect of Shojin cooking is to crush the tofu – this is to emphasise the practice of equanimity.



"The philosophies behind Shojin Ryori are: to minimise wastage, to use seasonal ingredients to capture the natural flow of energy and to abstain from eggs, dairy products, garlic and onion."

### daikon with sweet miso

serves 4

1 daikon, cut 12-16 cm lengthwise

4 tsp sweet miso

2 tsp sake

1 tsp of sugar

1. Cut daikon to 4 equal rounds and place daikon in a pot of ample water. Bring it to a boil and reduce heat. Simmer for about 15 to 20 minutes.
2. To make the sauce: mix the sweet miso, sake and sugar well.
3. To serve, spread the miso on each daikon round.

One philosophy of Shojin cooking is to minimise wastage. Thus when preparing Shojin cuisine, it is encouraged to save the water that is used for washing the rice. This water can be reused to boil the daikon.

### sake braised shiitake mushrooms

serves 4

16 dried shiitake mushrooms,  
reconstitute in water

1 tbsp vegetable oil

1 tbsp soy sauce

1 tbsp sake

1. Heat oil in frying pan over medium heat. Add mushrooms and sauté for a few minutes.
2. Add soy sauce and sake. Stir fry for about 20 seconds, then serve.

A simple yet delicious dish that goes very well with rice.







Shojin Ryori originated from the  
Zen temples in Japan and the  
cuisine was popularised  
in the 13th century.