

Joy of Soy

Tofu as a Category of Food Philosophy

„Getting used to meals without a central piece of animal flesh may take time, but once it has happened you will have so many interesting new dishes to choose from that you will wonder why you ever thought it would be difficult to do without flesh foods.“ Peter Singer, in *The Ethics of Food* (2002)

Intercultural philosophy aims at the “dialogue between West and East” for mutual understanding of foreign cultures. A central topic of this philosophical endeavor is most famously connected with the German philosopher Martin Heidegger and, one generation younger, with French philosopher Michel Foucault. Facing the “crisis of Western thinking” (Foucault) and of “Western civilization and its planetary fate” (Heidegger), both of them raised the question whether “the world could be saved through the wisdom of the East?” While in the later *Denkweg* of Heidegger - and its early reception by Japanese philosophers - we find much evidence that he himself tried to change the Western way of thinking by learning from Eastern traditions, especially from ancient Chinese Daoism and Japanese Zen masters¹, most scholars would certainly hesitate to associate Foucault with intercultural philosophy and questions of Eastern wisdom altogether. Yet, during his visit of Japan in 1978 Foucault went to a Zen temple to learn more about Eastern wisdom and practices of cultivating an ethical self. We see him on a photo depicting him in front of a primitive rice pot among Buddhist monks. Eventually, in a short discussion about his philosophical interests he turns to Omori Sogen, head of the Seionji temple in Uenohara: “I like to ask you only one question. It has to do with the universality of Zen. Is it possible to separate Zen praxis from the whole of religion and Buddhism?”²

I want to take up Foucault’s and Heidegger’s philosophical question concerning the supposed “wisdom of the Far East” in their honest search for solutions and ways to

¹ Japan und Heidegger, Gedenkschrift der Stadt Meßkirch zum 100. Geburtstag Martin Heideggers, Sigmaringen 1989

² Michel Foucault and Zen, In: Michel Foucault, Religion and Culture, 1999, p. 110-14.

overcome the global crisis that the Western way of life brought over the world. But instead of discussing Heidegger and Foucault once more the intention of my talk is to apply this important topic to the global food crisis. Facing the crisis of “Western diet,” we might ask, could the world of food be saved by the “food wisdom of the East?” This leads to the rather neglected matter of global food ethics regarding the future survival and wellbeing of humanity: What would be the best diet for our small planet?

In order to answer these food philosophical questions we need at first to understand what “food ethics” is. Then the term “Western diet” needs explanation and also what we could call the “traditional Eastern food wisdom.” By extending the scope of intercultural philosophy beyond thinking in bulk oppositions like “West” versus “East” I will talk about contemporary “tofu cuisines” all over the world as ethically good foodways.

Food Ethics

Food ethics or gastrosophy is a new discourse in moral philosophy. What does it mean to think about food philosophically, or gastrosophically? Here are two brief answers: Firstly we think about our culinary or dietary life - about “food” or “eating” - from a philosophical point of view if we start to understand that eating is not only the one-sided intake of nutrition. Eating means not simply to fuel one’s empty stomach. What happens every day when we eat is - and has always been - a little bit more complex. For when we eat we are not only *consuming “food,”* we are also *feeding and creating “world”* - the global world of food.

Secondly, to think about food in this way or philosophically means to understand that *food matters*: Food matters because, what billions of human beings eat, shapes largely how the world looks like. Their daily food determines fundamentally their relation to nature and to human environments. Food matters on a global scale: There is nothing trivial about it.

In the last 150 years, thinking about food has been the domain of modern “food science”. Food scientists are mainly biologists or chemists who focus on nutrition, calorie, and metabolism. Their understanding of food dominates currently the average dietary or culinary knowledge of the population in contemporary society. Although it is important to know about these details, the traditional food scientific

approach ignores many other components and realities that are important if we think about food philosophically. What we need to consider in order for understanding the global *food chain*, as well, are the cultural, political, economical, and medical implications of the way we eat. To reflect the food world philosophically or gastrosophically - to give it a name - we want also to analyze the positive and negative effects of our diet. There exists no way (“out”) for us as creatures of mother Earth not to ask what is ethically good or bad about this important part of our every day life regarding our environment, our health, our sense of political justice, and our eating as a significant practice of everyday culture.

Western diet

The globalization of the “Western diet” is a predominant trend in our contemporary world.³ Sometimes the popularization of Western culinary life style is referred to as McDonaldization. But even if catchy phrases like “McDonaldization,” or “Fast Food Nations” have the advantage to be easily understood by everybody, these terms are misleading. For what constitutes the core of Western diet is not so much the consumption of McDonald’s Hamburger or other popular products of the fast food industry. What dominate the spirit of Western culinary life style is certainly *meat* and the *insatiable joy* of tasting beef, pork, fish, chicken, eggs, and other animal products. Of course, the majority of consumers in the West do not exclusively eat meat. They also like a lot of white bread, convenience food and all sorts of things that are highly processed and calorie-laden with sugar and fat. And they are happy to eat numerous nutrients made out of healthy soy, although they currently do not know anything about soybean products like tofu as a possible meat analogue and delicious ingredients of a tofu cuisine. But facing the present dispositif of Western diet „it must not be forgotten that in industrialized countries soy appears in myriad foods as an additive, albeit often in tiny quantities. Just a little soy protein or lecithin can inexpensively change the texture, consistency, moisture retention, or shelf life of a food. For this reason, soy is constantly used in the manufacture of America’s processed groceries. Sometimes it is also used as an

³ More details regarding the term and description of „Western diet” see: Michel Pollan, In Defense of Food. An Eater’s Manifesto, 2006, p. 83-136.

economical extender of more expensive ingredients (e.g., meat) or as one of several sources of protein within a processed food. Soy appears in these ways in hospital meals, vegetarian foods, sport drinks and snacks, pizza toppings, seafood, diet products, frozen desserts, dietary supplements, and myriad other ordinary grocery items.⁴ Of course, this additional way of eating soyfoods only amount to minor quantities. Even by considering the direct consumption, the average American eats a scant 5 grams of soy, and that mostly in the form of oils (often hydrogenated) hidden in high-fat foods. Compared to the average Japanese person who eats 50 to 80 grams of soy food daily in various forms, such as miso, tofu, and soymilk. Any yet, the Western diet with its meat preferring taste does not exclusively refer to dietary habits in the West like the U.S. or Europe.

This popular way of eating is not - no longer - “the other” to food cultures of the East that marks a simple opposition in cultural difference. Increasing numbers of affluent consumers in Eastern countries and in any other part of the globe decide to eat in the Western style. Worldwide people enjoy more meat. Hundreds of millions of individuals in all cultures westernize themselves freely in their food choices. We have to keep in mind: No one is forced to do so; every adult and affluent person decides by him- or herself individually what to eat and what to refuse. But what counts equally for all is the following: If the present globalization of Western diet continues it seems not unlikely that this culinary life style will become the global food philosophy and global food reality - to its good and to its bad.

Here are some numbers to illustrate what it means if the Western meat-based diet would become everybody’s custom in the world over. On average every American consumes 125 kilograms of meat each year, in Germany the average consumer eats 80 kilograms of meat. By now Asian societies still eat considerably less meat. Chinese eat 50 kilograms and Japanese around 40 kilograms. But this change of the traditional Eastern diet is even more striking compared to Western cultures. Under

⁴ Christine du Bois, Chee-Beng Tan, Sidney Mintz (eds.), *The world of Soy*, 2008, p. 6.

Thus, on a random day in the kitchen of one of the authors the following foods contained soy oil, soy lecithin, or soy protein: grain products (hot dog rolls, whole wheat bread, breakfast cereals, crackers, animal cookies, brownie mix, and fig bars); canned good, including soups, tuna, and cat food; peanut butter; powdered drinks (breakfast drinks, hot cocoa mix, and nondairy creamer); sauces and condiments, including whipped dessert topping, margarine, salad dressing, mayonnaise, barbecue sauce, teriyaki sauce, cilantro sauce, Worcestershire Sauce, and beef bouillon cubes; and frozen foods, including waffles, chicken nuggets, ravioli, pierogies, and eggplant parmigiana.

Western influence the once famous tofu culture of Japan started to constantly increase its appetite for animal products.⁵ Whereas in the United States or in Germany there are a growing number of people who choose to eat less meat, the opposite is true for China or Japan.

Those trends in the globalization of Western diet explain why the global meat consumption has increased from 44 millions tons annually in 1950 to now over 260 million tons, more than doubling the annual consumption per person. Given the ongoing global demand for meat, meat consumption needs again to double in the next decades.

But this is not likely to happen. In the strong aftertaste that the Western diet has regarding, for instance, its medical and environmental effects, we savor the global food crisis. Focusing shortly on a medical point of view, those who live on such diet eat too much animal proteins, too much sweets and too fatty ingredients, and not enough fresh vegetables and fruits. This malnutrition has caused obesity for a growing number of people. Two thirds of Americans - or of Germans a bit less - are overweight or obese. Virtually all of the obesity and type 2 diabetes, 80 percent of the cardiovascular disease, and more than a third of all cancers can be linked to their eating habits. Four of the top ten killers in America are chronic diseases linked to them. Facing the nutritional ill-health, it is obvious that this diet is not good for anyone.

And there are heavy environmental effects. Meanwhile most of them are well known by many people. The grains and soybeans fed to animals to produce the amount of meat consumed by the average American in one year could feed him and six additional persons for the same period, if he or she would eat the soybeans *directly*, for instance as tofu. (But note: I don't want anyone to eat *those* soyfoods directly - nor even indirectly - as long as they are products of the current global industrial agriculture and world trade system.) Ninety-eight percent of the US soybean crop is directed to feed livestock. In 2008, the world's farmers produced 213 million tons of soybeans. Of this, only 20 million tons were consumed directly as tofu or meat substitutes. The bulk of the remaining 193 million tons was crushed

⁵ At present, the Japanese consume 25 grams per day, is rather little compared to the 200 grams Americans eat every day. However, including fish as meat the average Japanese eats about 190 grams of fish per day, or approximately another 70 kg of fish meat per year on top of 40 kilograms animal flesh.

in order to extract soybean oil and high-protein soybean meal. This protein-rich soybean meal is fed to meat animals.

In short: Most of the world's fast-growing soybean harvest is consumed *indirectly* in the beef, pork, poultry, milk, eggs, and farmed fish that we eat. The basic logic of converting grain to animal protein is well known. To recall some truths of feed-animal inefficiency in producing edible calorie: It takes 28 calories of fossil fuel to produce 1 calorie of protein in edible beef. Compare this to the 2 calories of fossil fuel that are needed to produce 1 calorie of protein in soybeans. Soybeans can produce up to 15 times more protein per acre than land set aside for meat production.

There exist much evidence for the alarming unsustainability of industrial agriculture and its factory farming, the energy inefficiency of animal feeding and a meat-based diet. There is little disagreement among experts that the way, how the industrial agriculture produces food, consumes inefficiently limited natural resources based on fossil fuels, water, and topsoil at unsustainable rates. Meat production contributes disproportionately to numerous forms of environmental destructions. Huge areas of rain forest and bio-diversity in Brazil, for example, get destroyed every single day for industrial agriculture and animal-feed production.

Global meat production not only accounts for massive land cleaning and crop monoculture in many parts of the world. It is also a major climate killer because animals produce and emit toxic greenhouse gas. Methane emissions causing nearly half of the planet's human-induced warming and the number one source of methane worldwide is animal agriculture. Consider this: One kilogram of beef is responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions and other pollution than driving for 3 hours while leaving all the lights on back home.

Confronted with growing evidence and growing catastrophe caused by the climate change, most government and politicians are trying to come up with different ways to reduce the carbon footprints of our life styles. But there is one indispensable thing everyone can - and ought to - do right away, something that is comparably easy to achieve on an every day level: detach yourself from Western diet, eat less meat and start to favor alternatively a climate friendly diet. So the recipe of a vegetarian every day politic is rather simple to apply: The best and most efficient way to reduce global warming is to reduce our individual consumption of animal products.

Apart from political vegetarianism and the obvious environmental impact of a meat-based diet - and including ethical vegetarianism and animal rights - this foodways causes pain and misery to factory-farmed animals. They suffer badly and exclusively for the joy of meat-eaters - but, more than that, for the profit of those few companies which force the whole world, ruminants and omnivorous humans alike, to love their cheap grain. Five companies control 75 percent of corn; four have a lock on 80 percent of global soybean processing. This tiny handful of grain traders have driven prices down below production costs and kept them there. They have gotten the national governments - us, the taxpayers - to make up the difference. Western countries support the giant food producers with subsidies totaling 360 billion US-dollars. Grassing-eating ruminants are being stuffed with grain just because it is impossibly cheap (price dumped). So this is what commodity grain can do to a peaceful cow: “industrialize the miracle of nature that is a ruminant, taking the sunlight- and prairie grass-powered organism and turning it into the last thing we need: another fossil fuel machine. This one, however, is able to suffer.”⁶

Philosophical problems in search for a vegetarian yet joyful diet

It seems undeniable that the Western diet and its meat-centered way of thinking about food are animal ethically incorrect, environmentally unsustainable, and ultimately unhealthy. Facing this morally wrong situation we have to raise the philosophical question: How do we “eat better” in the future? What is the best diet for this small planet to save the natural world and our humanity?

There are at least two ways to think and talk about a better diet and an ethically good way of eating. One of them is to communicate the *moral obligation* to feel personally responsible for a “vegetarian diet.” Many moral philosophers argue for a vegetarian diet as a general counterpart to the Western diet. For a vegetarian diet is healthy, animal-friendly, good for our environment and the best to feed all humans in the future. It has a certain philosophical advantage, namely it is simply and beautiful to think of. Especially sensible souls and minds that like easy rules are attracted to the simple idea that we can create justice for animals, for impoverished humans, and for the earth just by eating grains and beans. That

⁶ Michel Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma. A Natural History of Four Meals*, 2006, p. 84.

simplicity speaks to our desire for beauty, that with one act so much that's wrong can be set right. The theoretical disadvantage of a vegetarian ethics, however, is that its food philosophy focuses mainly on *strict moral* arguments. Without referring to culinary pleasure and hedonist arguments this ethical recipe sounds like: "Meat is prohibited and bad; thus, you should not eat meat! You as everyone else ought, is morally obliged, to become a vegetarian or even a vegan by detaching yourself from culinary pleasure like the joy of tasting meat."

Talking in this way vegetarianism becomes associated with ascetism that teaches *unpleasant* abstinence. This strict and, for sure, morally correct diet has been taught already hundreds of years in the East and in the West. Apparently, the problem with the teaching and ethics of ascetic vegetarianism is simply: Most people don't listen to it because they dislike it - its joyless sound. People neither like to get it taught nor like to eat it. Consequently, as the renowned moral philosopher Peter Singer has realized, going vegetarian "is still too big a step for most of the hundreds of millions of people in industrialized countries who now eat animals." As a result, most of the hundreds of millions of people in industrialized countries who now eat animals, stick to their meat-based diet. Certainly, nobody should *feel* obliged to change his or her diet because it is their "bitter duty" (Kant) to become a vegetarian or even to become a vegan.

I prefer to choose a different (and more complex or "aesthetically refined" way) to think about eating ethically good. When I suggest talking about the "joy of tofu cuisine" I think of better arguments, which may motivate us to change our Western diet - with joy. A new food philosophy should prepare rather inviting or inspiring, and in the full sense of the term, more appetizing arguments. To be sure, there is growing evidence that millions of consumers in the West and in any other part of the world do wish to change their current way of eating. This wish - or this willingness - to start practicing an ethical way of good eating, I think, should be nurtured philosophically, or gastrosophically.

I agree with the philosophical intention of Peter Singer's food ethics when he explains: „My aim is to make the transition from an omnivorous diet to a vegetarian one much easier and more attractive, so that instead of seeing the change of diet as an unpleasant duty the reader looks forward to a new and interesting cuisine, full of fresh foods as well as unusual meatless dishes from Europe, China, and the

Middle East, dishes so varied as to make the habitual meat, meat, and more meat of most Western diets stale and repetitive by comparison.⁷

We might turn Singer's argument around by saying: In case the only reason why people in the West or anywhere else do not make the transition from an omnivorous diet to an ethic of eating, were their lack of culinary imagination and everyday practice then for them, I think, it would be wise to learn from traditional tofu cuisine of the East. However, it would be wise for them to learn from traditional tofu cuisine of the East certainly not to become a Buddha. But to become "one who eats ethically good." To make themselves morally responsible beings who happily enjoy a dietary life, which nurtures the wellbeing of all beings that nourish them.

To my mind, a worthwhile aim for a new food philosophy is to offer gastrosophical ingredients and appetizing recipes for an interesting and joyful cuisine that is full of fresh foods as well as unusual meatless dishes. And I consent with Peter Singer that it might help to learn especially from the Eastern food traditions to overcome the Western diet. The food wisdom of the Far East manifests itself in the traditional tofu cuisine of China and Japan.

Traditional Eastern tofu cuisine

There would be a lot of explanation needed to discuss the historical origin of tofu and of the traditional tofu cuisine in the East, especially because there exist various theories about the historical invention of making tofu and the philosophical meaning of eating tofu. I cannot go into in details here.⁸ But a few words regarding this historical genealogy are indispensable.

The historical origin of soybean curd or tofu lies in China. It took hundreds of years of experimentation with soybeans that soybean curd finally got invented. The earliest known mention of the Chinese word "doufu" was in about AD 950, at the beginning of the Sung dynasty. However the soybean itself had already been domesticated by around 1000 BC. Archaeologists detect the region in northeastern

⁷ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation and Vegetarianism*, In: Gregory E. Pence (ed.), *The Ethics of Food. A Reader for the 21st Century*, 2002, p. 26-50, 44.

⁸ Profound information regarding further historical details are put together by the authors of the best selling *Book of Tofu* William Shurtleff and Akiko Aoyagi and their online soy information center: www.soyinfocenter.com

China to be the plant's origin. Soybeans were considered one of the Five Sacred Grains (*wu ku*) in ancient China. Their existence is documented in the *Analects of Confucius (Lunyu)*, also in the *Rites of the Zhou (Zhouli)* or in the *The Record of Rites (Liji)*.

What the ordinary people consume were mostly *dou fan* - cooked soybean granules - and *ho geng* - soybean leaf soup. As historians point out, „The result of preparing soybeans in this way was not entirely satisfactory.“⁹ Consequently, for a long time soybean as human meal was considered a coarse and inferior food. Not only the taste remained unsatisfactory, fad and unpalatable; another reason beyond culinary inferiority was that the prolonged consumption of it as a cooked grain could be hazardous to one's health. It made people feel permanently bloated. The *Discourse on Nurturing Life (Yangshen lun)* of Xi Kang, circa AD 260, says, that „ingestion of soybean makes one feel heavy.“ (ibid.)

Despite of these culinary and dietary disadvantages that explain why soybean was held in low esteem by the ancient Chinese they nonetheless kept eating cooked soybean granules and appreciated soy as one of five staple grains of the realm. For lacking the availability of animal protein this food was important inexpensive protein-rich nutrition for the average population. In the *Book of Han (Han Shu)*, written by Ban Gu in the first century AD, it was noted that the poor had only soybeans to chew and water to drink. Apart from becoming an indispensable food for the poor population, another virtue of the soybean was that it produced good crops even on poor land. It does not deplete the soil, and it guarantees good yields in poor years, so that it made a useful famine crop. Leguminous plants like soy are so useful and healthy for the earth's topsoil because it breaks down and fix nitrogen in the soil to a form that plants can assimilate. This is where all the fixed nitrogen on the earth starts. And this is why the soy plant could be exceptionally important for sustainable agriculture and the future of food if grows environmentally correct.¹⁰

The rich elite of ancient China excluded soybeans from their culinary template for the sake of cultural and social distinction. Their haute cuisine was build around an

⁹ H. T. Huang, Early Uses of Soybean in Chinese History, In: Christine du Bois, Chee-Beng Tan, Sidney Mintz (eds.), *The World of Soy*, 2008, 45-55, 46.

¹⁰ Christine Du Bois, Sidney Mintz, Soy's Dominance and Destiny, In: Christine du Bois, Chee-Beng Tan, Sidney Mintz (eds.), *The World of Soy*, 2008, 299-314.

aesthetic philosophy of refinement and elaboration of tastes, colors, textures, symbols, using exceptional and expensive ingredients like animal foods. Delicious, “good food” could not be without artistic sophistication. The Chinese culture is the first that developed a culinary hedonism and high culture of food. The aristocrats’ life style of culinary aesthetics and eating pleasure contrasted extremely with the ordinary diet of the people who were forced to eat joyless and tasteless “simple everyday food” like cooked soybean granules and soybean leaf soup. Yet even the poor Chinese tried to make the best out of their available foodstuff. Turning misery into creativity they worked hard to create various techniques of making appetizing soy-based food from an early time long before some of them - finally - invented the making of delicious and subtle bean curd around AD 900.

There exist various speculations about the prior invention of making tofu from soybeans. One of them attracted most attention and I also prefer to mention this one here, because it implies some - vague - links to Asian philosophy. For a long time historians thought that the art of making tofu was invented by the legendary Liu An (179-122 BC), grandson of the first Han emperor Liu Bang. Known as the „Lord of Huainan,“ Liu An was not only a politician but also a famous scholar. Liu An is especially well known because of the *Huai-nan Tzu* (Tzu means “prince”), a 21-chapter work compiled under his patronage at his court by scholars he had summoned. Predominately Daoist, this work on philosophy, morals, and statecraft, is also full of omen lore, cosmological speculation, and concepts from diverse other philosophical sources. In our context it is of interest to note that despite of its Daoist philosophy the *Huai-nan Tzu* contains no reference to tofu. It does mention *shu* (beans or soybeans) in several places, giving instructions for planting them by the constellations, noting their season of growth, and adding that they grow well when fertilized by mud from the river bottoms. It was the great Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi (1130-1200) who stated that the Lord of Huainan invented the making of bean curd. Perhaps because of Zhu Xi’s authority, subsequent scholars did not question his claim until the version hardened into history.

Already at the beginning of the Later Han a legend appeared, which said that Liu An, rather than committing suicide, had been ushered up to heaven by the eight immortals of Daoist mythology. In fact, Sun Ta-ya of the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) wrote that Liu An ate tofu, grew younger, eventually sprouted wings, and ascended

to heaven, thus clearly linking the eating of tofu with immortality.¹¹ Another legend in this line of thought suggests that Daoist alchemist created tofu in their quest of an elixir of immortality.¹²

As a matter of fact, a series of almost magical or alchemical transformations seem to take place in the processes of converting yellow or green soybeans into white soymilk, then the milk into cloudlike curds and pale yellow whey, and finally the delicate curds into firm cakes of tofu. Today natural scientists confirm tofu being a nutrient-dense “perfect food.” Few foods contain as much nutritional bang for the buck as the bountiful soybean. Ounce for ounce, calorie for calorie, the soybean gets top-billing as a rich source of protein, unsaturated fats, fiber, B-vitamins, folic acid, potassium, calcium, zinc, and iron-and it's cholesterol-free. There is no other single food that supplies so much nutrition in such a tiny package. Not surprising, as it were, that even today people like to celebrate the “Tao of Tofu” and tend to exoticize the powers and potentials of “Taoist wisdom.”¹³

The authors of *The Book of Tofu*, Shurtleff and Aoyagi, however, point out the fallacy of tracing the historical origin of tofu to the famous politician and scholar Liu An and ultimately to Chinese Daoism altogether. What is verified up-to-date seems to be that by the time of the Song dynasty (960-1279) the Chinese, from Emperors to peasants, learned to know and to enjoy tofu. If we are unable to give a historical explanation we might think about cultural and philosophical reasons for this remarkable change in their diet.

Most scholars agree that a crucial reason that helps explaining the popularization of tofu during the Tang and Song dynasty in China was the emerging Buddhism for India and its vegetarian philosophy. Sydney Mintz and Christine du Bois, two anthropologists who did extensive research on this topic, confirm: „Certainly Buddhism and the emphasis on vegetarianism contributed to both the popularity and diffusion of tofu and soybean products throughout soy-using Asia.“¹⁴ Linking Buddhist philosophy to tofu seems to be a good reason that might explain the cultural spread of this particular food. For the Buddhist ethics rejects the eating meat as being morally false. Buddhism teaches an ascetic abstinence for eating

¹¹ William Shurtleff and Akiko Aoyagi, *The History of Tofu* (<http://www.soyinfocenter.com>)

¹² Ramesh Kumar Biswas, *Das Tao des Essens*, In: *Götterspeisen*, herausgegeben vom Historischen Museum der Stadt Wien 1997.

¹³ Robert Church, *The Tao of Tofu*, 2009.

¹⁴ Christine du Bois, Chee-Beng Tan, Sidney Mintz (eds.), *The World of Soy*, 2008, p. 15.

animals to reduce the suffering in the world, i.e. the unnecessary suffering of beings that are killed just for fun, namely to please the palate of man. The food wisdom of Buddhist practice is essentially based on its search for detaching oneself from this wrong way. The reason why recently more and more people in the West convert to Buddhism as a way of thinking ethically about ourselves in relation to nature and other life (and not so much as a monastic life form) is partly because it expresses responsibility for preferring a meatless diet out of moral, i.e. animal ethical, motifs.

It seems reasonable for those who are not allowed to eat animal protein to choose instead vegetable protein from soy-based food. However, in order to follow a strict vegetarian diet there is no necessity for Buddhists and any other vegetarian or ethical self to eat soybeans at all or tofu in particular. To eat animal ethically correct like a Buddhist you do not have to opt for a tofu cuisine as a joyful alternative. To supply oneself with protein-rich soy food it would be enough to live on cooked soybean granules and soybean leaf soup like the poor in ancient China used to do. Some even say to live a true vegetarianism or Buddhism alike you should not eat soy products like tofu or similar food if you eat them primarily to substitute meat. Because eating it as meat substitute or alternative meat means ultimately that you are still a meat eater in mind and that you have not really reached the point to detach yourself from the desire of tasting "meat."

To be clear about this point: We have to think about the term „meat“, at least, in three ways: In a nutritional sense as animal source for protein (essential amino acids); in a metaphorical sense as the joy of good food; and in a formal sense as the edible part of any given foodstuff. In this latter respect there is not only meat from animals, but also fruit meat or wheat meat, etc. Even grass is meat. Actually all we eat is meat and nothing but meat, if we think of meat as the edible flesh of the sun and the soil, of our earth. Therefore we have to substitute meat in any case to sustain ourselves. If we restrain from eating animal meat, we need to eat other meat. There is no way for us to become real vegetarians because we are forced to eat meat of some sort. We need to kill other's life to stay alive. Yet to become a vegetarian by restraining from eating animals is certainly one good option to minimize the suffering in the world which human sustenance cause. Of course, to practice a vegetarian ethic and diet you do not need to rely on any (joyful) animal meat substitutes.

As a matter of fact, vegetarian Buddhists lived in India and in China for centuries without eating tofu and without developing and enjoying tofu cuisine. The food philosophy of most Buddhist Schools does not teach to cherish culinary joy as a way of practicing wisdom in every day life. Instead they follow the example of Shakyamuni Buddha himself. His practice of the “middle way” was to seek alms rather than cooking himself to create delicious dishes of joyful ethical food. We should not forget that the original understanding of being a Buddhist “monk” means “one who seeks alms.” Begging food necessitates becoming indifferent to food: Everything edible you get “tastes good.”

The traditional Buddhist diet and its animal ethical, yet joyless and ascetic spirit changed precisely at that moment when it became influenced by Chinese culture, especially Chinese love for good food. Only when the Buddhist philosophy gradually began to establish itself in China, some Buddhist began to fusion its vegetarian food ethics with Chinese culinary habits. Before (or in spite of) the cultural influence of Chinese aesthetic cultivation of a culinary self, traditional Buddhist dietary habits and food ethic remained ascetic by ignoring the pleasures of eating and the appreciation of fine cuisine.

But to become successfully integrated into Chinese high society and the demanding eating culture of the ancient aristocracy, the Buddhist diet had to improved aesthetically. Customized to meat dishes as crucial elements of Chinese cuisine there was no way for the royal families and the ruling class just to abandon this centre of culinary joy - without any compensation. Consequently, „when the spread of Buddhism led to abstention from meat during religious festivals, the Emperor’s chefs devised ways of making gluten and tofu resemble various forms of meat and seafood, so that the Emperor could continue to dine on the classic dishes of Chinese cuisine.“¹⁵

Those Chinese and culinary hedonists who to decided to become Buddhist monks, to live in monasteries and to eat meatless diet, yet unwilling to give up the flavors, textures, and delightful diversity of Chinese cuisine, searched for possibilities to create themselves what I like to call a delicious tofu cuisine for everyday life. Differing from the meat-based and in this respect ethically bad taste of the aristocrats the Chinese Buddhists and temple chefs started to make use of soy

¹⁵ Peter Singer and Tom Mason, *Eating. What we eat and why it matters*, 2006, p. 259.

products and eventually soy bean curd and similar plant-based food as delightful alternative for animals. By experimenting with all sorts of fresh ingredients their temple kitchens not only invented interesting and unusual meatless dishes, which creatively substituted the morally questionable centerpieces of the haute cuisine of the rich Chinese. Those Buddhist monks and masters, being a privileged social group that was better off than their fellows outside the monasteries, practically detached the traditional linkage of soyfood to poor people's food. While - before the invention of tofu - China's poor majority ate soy protein and basic soybean gruel out of misery, those of them who decided to become vegetarian Buddhist started - using the invented fermented soybean curd - to prepare and to enjoy tofu or other plant-based meat alternatives as "good food" and as the "Way" to practice "true wisdom."

This way of combining a vegetarian diet with culinary creativity started to attract more attention from its social environment. It is fairly documented that during the Sung dynasty tofu and the dedicated temple cuisine became an appealing practice not only in numerous monasteries and not exclusively among monks but also throughout the general public. Around that time eating tofu and enjoying tofu cuisine started to spread out and to become a popular and culturally esteemed foodways that gradually everyone in China learned to appreciate.

There are good reasons for appreciating such a tofu cuisine: 1) This foodways presented a culinary life that appropriated the culinary joy and the aesthetic achievements of Chinese high food culture. 2) In substituting meat by using plant-based food like tofu this way of eating relayed on morally superior cuisine than Chinese traditional haute cuisine that supplied culinary pleasures only on the base of using meat (i.e. killing animals). 3) This tofu cuisine attractive for ordinary people because it used easy available soybeans that were less expensive than meat and also good for the soil and sustainable agriculture. 4) As a way of practicing true wisdom this ethically good food disconnected a soy-based diet, including soybean curd, to culturally symbolize inferior food that only poor people would have to eat. After preparing - or inventing - tofu as a joyful alternative to meat, some monks and masters continued trying to develop something with a firmer texture and a more satisfying chew. Many parts of China grew wheat, so they began by making a simple dough from wheat flour and water. While kneading the dough in a tub full of cold water, they noticed the starch extracted into the water; as they kneaded,

more and more starch clouded the water. What finally remained was a chewy substance that was 70%-80% pure protein or gluten, “wheat meat” or “seitan” as it is now known in the West. Contemporary Chinese call this grain meat “Mien Ching,” or “Buddha’s Food” after the vegetarian Buddhist monks that created the recipe. After simmering the protein-rich wheat dough in a flavored broth for a number of hours, they had grain meat that had a firm texture. It could be ground and flavored like traditional Chinese sausage. It could also be shaped and flavored like chicken, beef, ham, or shrimp, or sliced and stir-fried or grilled. Chinese cuisine thus learned to use gluten to create vegetarian editions of traditional meat-based Chinese dishes, including sausages, shrimps, ham, beef, etc. Temple chefs have become extremely creative in imitating meat using tofu or prepared fu and other plant products. Some of their inventions are the oldest and most-refined meat analogues in the world. Tofu and fu are very versatile materials, because they can be manufactured into various shapes and textures, and they absorb flavorings (including, but not limited to, meat-like flavorings), whilst having very little flavor of their own. With the proper seasonings, they can mimic various kinds of meat quite closely.

To sum up: What gave birth to the traditional tofu cuisine was the contingent fusion of two separate elements. On the one hand side the Chinese culture and its love for good food (in aesthetic terms of culinary elaboration and the joy of good tasting food); and on the other hand side the Buddhist philosophy and its food ethics of a meatless diet. Only when a vegetarian ethic fuses happily with cultural practices of joyful eating to create a plant-based (ethical) and yet good tasting (joyful) diet, the first tofu cuisine became alive. For cultivating tofu cuisine as an everyday activity neither traditional Buddhism nor the Chinese classic cuisine was sufficient. Someone had to bring them together.

Those were the wise master of Ch’an or Zen Buddhism in China and Japan. Their way of eating and food wisdom might teach those contemporary individuals who want to change their Western diet by eating less meat and by creating delicious meals out of plants. Getting to know about these things is what Peter Singer, one of the few philosophers who tries to make people more familiar with food ethics, has in mind. „When I speak in public about [ethical food], I am often asked about what one can eat instead of meat, and it is clear from the way the question is phrased that the questioner has mentally subtracted the chop or hamburger from

his or her plate, leaving the mashed potatoes and boiled cabbage, and is wondering what to put in place of the meat. A heap of soybeans, perhaps? There may be those,” Singer goes on, “who would enjoy such a meal, but for most tastes the answer is to rethink the entire idea of the main course, so that it consists of a combination of ingredients, perhaps with a salad on the side, instead of detaches items. Good Chinese dishes, for instance, are superb combinations of one or more high-protein ingredients - in vegetarian Chinese cooking, they may include tofu, nuts, bean sprouts, mushrooms, or wheat gluten, with fresh, lightly cooked vegetables and rice.” Singer tries to update the Eastern tofu cuisine for our contemporary world; an exemplary recipe of his food ethics teaches: “You can even make ‘tofu meatballs’ to put on top of your spaghetti.”¹⁶ Something similar happened in China and Japan eight hundred years ago.

Teaching of traditional Eastern tofu cuisine

In the Eastern history we find a well-known teaching of traditional tofu cuisine in the Japanese Zen Master Dogen Kigen, the founder of Buddhist „Zen“ philosophy. In his writings he talks extensively about cooking and „good food“ as an ethical way of eating or „Joyful Way“ in practicing a plant-based diet. After he returned from traveling to China in 1223 to search for the right way of life, Zen master Dogen tells us, that he obtained “enlightenment” during his first visit of a Chinese Ch’an or Zen monastery while he was observing the devoted cooking and gardening of Zen masters. Thus, he suddenly realized that cooking and enjoying good food by combining vegetarian ethics and culinary creativity is the best, most delightful and most rewarding way to practice a well-lived life - instead of filling one’s stomach with everything given, as he got taught from the dominant Buddhist schools back home (especially the Tendai or “Pure Land” Buddhism). As a matter of fact, most Buddhist schools in Japan were - and still are - not very strict about the moral obligation to choose a vegetarian diet. They also do not manage to improve their teaching and practicing of an ascetic diet by refining the Buddhist way of eating in terms of tofu cuisine. Let us listen to Zen master Dogen: “Although the Buddha’s Teachings have been heard for a long time in Japan, I have never heard of any one

¹⁶ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation and Vegetarianism*, in: Gregory E. Pence (ed.), *The Ethics of Food. A Reader for the 21st Century*, 2002, p. 26-50, 44.

speaking or writing about how food should be prepared within the monastic community as an expression of the Teachings [...]. As a consequence, we Japanese have taken no more consideration of how food should be prepared in a monastic context than have birds or animals. This is cause for regret, especially since there is no reason for this to be so.¹⁷

To offer a teaching that would eventually change the diet of the people, Dogen argued for an entirely different way of life. He introduced a new philosophy of food that treasures kitchen work and self-made food. What is needed to practice “true Buddhism” in the “right way” and to show “great wisdom in everyday life”, Dogen suggests, one should learn to regard cooking and eating plant-based, yet culinary good, food as an ethically good activity or as an “awakening activity” to use his Buddhist terminology.

This shows that especially the Zen Buddhism - opposed to every other school of Buddhism - played a decisive role in cultivating the Eastern tofu cuisine. To “justify” his Zen gastrosophy, Dogen could have cited a famous story about the monk Bodhidharma, the legendary founder of Zen (Ch’an) Buddhism who came from India - “from the West” - to bring the Buddhist wisdom to “the East” (between 520 and 528 AD). This story offers another speculation regarding the true origin of tofu, namely the theory that it is imported from India (and, as it were, this story offers simultaneously a suggestion regarding the true origin of Buddhism, namely the philosophical, yet irrational and mythic, wish that it is Zen Buddhism). What we get out of this - certainly fictitious - story is the food philosophical, yet irrational and mythic, wish of the ancient Zen masters to be regarded as the true inventor of tofu and tofu cuisine.

The story is been told from Yang Wan-li (Jap. Yomanri) in his book called the *Tou-lu Tzu-jou Chuan* (Jap. *Toroshi ju-den*) and it goes that someone, called Fu, heard about Bodhidharma coming to China. Fu went to this Buddhist from the West and asked to become his disciple. Bodhidharma asked him, „Do you wish to become the heart-and-mind of the God of heaven, earth, and nature, rinse off all superficial knowledge, and follow me?” The story then tells that Fu went home, washed his body, changed his clothes, and vowed to speak only the truth wholeheartedly to Bodhidharma. However this *same* sentence can also be interpreted to mean: “Wash

¹⁷ More details about Dogen’s Zen gastrosophy see: Harald Lemke, *Die Weisheit des Essens*, 2009.

soybeans well and make them into tofu.” Bodhidharma then engaged Fu in Dharma combat, probing the depths of his heart-and-mind and his understanding of tofu as another name for the Buddha’s Way. He was very impressed with Fu’s simple, honest, straightforward, and humble nature. The Zen master Bodhidharma then told Fu that his own teacher had told him that there is a subtle and wonderful essence of flavor that remains in the curds when milk is curded, and that the flavor of Fu’s being is this most delicious of all flavors, called *daigomi*. The term means “Five Great Flavors” in Chinese; the *same* term was used to describe the curds the Buddha ate just before his enlightenment. Certainly the story is fictional like the rivaling one of Liu An and the alleged Daoist invention of the marvelous tofu. But the story of Bodhidharma of course suggests that Chinese Zen (Ch’an) monks did not mind to found their unique wisdom in the joy of tofu and similar delicacies of a tofu cuisine. So why shouldn’t we believe that Bodhidharma praised tofu for its simplicity, its honest, straightforward nature, and its ‘lovely white robes’.¹⁸

Even without fantasizing or telling those things, Dogen transmitted the teaching of Zen tofu cuisine he learned from Chinese masters and chefs to the Japanese, after he came back to Japan. Although no one knows exactly when tofu first came to Japan, it is not likely that Dogen personally introduced the making of tofu to the Japanese.¹⁹ But, historically, it is almost certain that the art of tofu making was introduced to Japan from China at that time. The word “tofu” first appeared in a Japanese document in 1183 and it again appeared in a letter from the famous Buddhist monk Nichiren Shonin, written in 1280.²⁰

But, what is more important, it was Zen master Dogen who introduced the teaching of a new food ethics or of tofu cuisine, to give it a name. And by doing so he prepared the philosophical recipe for appreciating food like tofu. Dogen settled in Kyoto in 1227 where he founded his own school and temple. This explains why the ancient capital of Kyoto is said to be the place where the finest tofu originated.

¹⁸ William Shurtleff and Akiko Aoyagi, *The Book of Tofu*, 1992, p. 93.

¹⁹ Although Dogen talked about many details regarding kitchen work, culinary skills, and food making, he did not mention the making of tofu. This does not necessarily show that he himself was unfamiliar with this rather new dish or even ignored about it, as it were. But if he knew about it, he would have had profound reasons to include this outstanding food in his teaching of a joy meatless diet. What one gets out of this void amidst the fullness is that no one needs to eat tofu to enjoy tofu cuisine or the ethical way of good eating.

²⁰ Chee-Beng Tan, *Tofu and Related Products in Chinese Foodways*, In: Christine du Bois, Chee-Beng Tan, Sidney Mintz (eds.), *The World of Soy*, 2008, p. 99-120.

Dogen's Zen Buddhist Way of Eating became retrospectively known as *shojin ryori*, which in the meantime is considered to be the quintessence of the Japanese tofu cuisine. After being transmitted to the monks of the popular Zen Buddhist sects, the subsequent spread of *shojin ryori* made tofu more available to the ruling upper class and the aristocrats, but also to the general public. To promote their religion many Zen temples, especially in Kyoto and Kamakura, opened *shojin ryori* restaurants in and around the temple compounds. Some scholars believe that all of Japan's (and China's) earliest tofu shops were located within large temples or monasteries and were run by Buddhists and temple cooks. Laymen, having tasted tofu temple cuisine for the first time, learned from the monks how to prepare it, then accustomed to enjoying it or then they opened their own shops in the capital cities of Kamakura and Kyoto. It was only later that tofu-eating and tofu-making spread from the cities to the countryside. Despite being invented in China it is *shojin ryori* or the traditional tofu cuisine of the Zen Buddhist temples in Kyoto that made tofu famous for being good food and that made tofu cuisine a symbol of the wisdom to eat ethically without meat, but with joy.

By the end of the 14th century, most Japanese followed Buddhist ethics and refrained from eating meat. It was during this time that the Japanese created several new varieties of tofu that did not exist in China. Those new varieties include *koya-dofu* (dried-frozen tofu), *hiryoze* or *ganmodoki* as it is sometimes called (deep-fried tofu dumplings), *abura-age* (deep-fried tofu pouches), *yaki-dofu* (grilled tofu) and *kinukoshi-dofu* (soft silken tofu).

It is still possible up to day to experience the marvelous tofu cuisine in long-established restaurants in Kyoto. One of the oldest is Daitokuji Ikkyu, a Zen monastery in Kyoto, which has been preparing *shojin-ryori* since its foundation in 1326. Many of the great tea masters of the period, like Sen no Rikyu who is also link to the Zen monastery Daitokuji in Kyoto, used tofu extensively in their Tea Ceremony Cookery, *cha kaiseki*, which helped to bring Zen's tofu cuisine into the world of Japanese haute cuisine and to introduce it to famous chefs and restaurateurs.²¹

The stylish *kaiseki ryori* in its contemporary presentation, however, has lost the vegetarian ethic that originally was the philosophical heart of its predecessor,

²¹ William Shurtleff and Akiko Aoyagi, *The Book of Tofu*, 1992, p. 94.

shojin ryori. At present the Japanese haute cuisine, like the diet of the average Japanese, relies heavily on fish and animal flesh and consists only partly of tofu dishes any more. Of course when people from the West travel to Japan for tasting its greatly celebrated haute cuisine they enjoy a way of eating and a culinary aesthetics which differ strongly from their customs. But foreigners love *kaiseki ryori* - now considered to be the epitome of Japanese food wisdom - for being “good food” because it is based on the extensive use of mainly fish meat and not, as it mere, because it is a work of art to enjoying a meatless cuisine.

Therefore those tourists and food adventurer or other whole-hearted way-seekers who eventually wish to learn about the traditional Japanese tofu cuisine have to dine in a temple or in special tofu restaurants. Most foreigners from the West, however, visit Kyoto for its renowned *kaiseki* cuisine, not for its old tofu cuisine. Likewise, instead of tofu, it is another Japanese food - sushi - which is recently becoming popular in the West and which is partly changing the Western diet (i.e. substituting animal flesh through fish).²² In reverse, a growing number of the average Japanese population westernize their diet by substituting tofu through the increasing consumption of poultry, pigs, beef and other animal products. Remembering the traditional tofu cuisine of Japan (to stick to this exemplary country of “the East”), we might say with Zen master Dogen, “this is cause for regret, especially since there is no reason for this to be so.”

Teaching of new local tofu cuisine all over the world

The weird teaching of some ancient philosophers of the East and the traditional tofu cuisine in Japan - like any traditional tofu cuisine in other Asian countries - prove that tofu and other plant-based food can be used to help making cuisines more palatable, diverse, and creative even without relying on tasty animal ingredients. But nobody of us has to choose and to like the traditional tofu cuisine. Neither is it necessary to become a Zen Buddhist or to visit a temple in Kyoto nor to prepare *shojin ryori* in order to eat ethically well. For that matter, you not even have to eat tofu. (And in the present global food system, as I said before, only very few tofu and soyfoods are produced ethically good.)

²² Nicola Liscutin und René Haak, Zwischen Burger und Sushi - Essen und Ernährung im modernen Japan, In: Essen und Ernährung im modernen Japan. Japanstudien, Bd.12, 2000: 23-44.

When I speak out for a new tofu cuisine the word “tofu” has not primarily literal meaning as to name a special foodstuff. Talking philosophically about tofu in teaching tofu cuisine does not mean we only should eat more soybean curd or various tofu versions. Actually, as I mentioned already, a gastrosophical ethics does not even teach a strict meatless vegetarian diet. To be sure, there is nothing wrong with eating tofu and with eating more of it and less animal meat (as long as we know that it is being produced in a sustainable way). Yet I speak of tofu in a metonymic sense. Tofu cuisine stands for the philosophical or - to name it - for the gastrosophical ideal of an ethical foodways that runs through the whole global food chains. Once again, this Way of good eating combines a mostly plant-based diet with the daily joy of aesthetically prepared and culinarily good tasting self-made home food. Consequently “tofu” as a complex culinary creation, which combines vegetarian ingredients with the hedonism of aesthetically prepared and good tasting everyday cuisine, is a perfect *manifestation* of and a beautiful *symbol* for gastrosophical ethics. What the world - the affluent we, the starving poor, the factory farmed animals, and the suffering environment - needs and heels, are the gastrosophical curiosity and hedonistic ethic to learn more about tofu - this ancient food creation worth trying.

When we talk about tofu in such a way, we talk about it as a whole new food philosophy and as an ethical praxis of eating healthy in a broad sense, of improving world eating from an human or environmental health perspective. We are not speaking of anything trivial and not about some “strange Asian foodstuff.” We do exactly the opposite. We think through heavy matters of global justice and the future of the world and ourselves. Like the Japanese Zen master Dogen did centuries ago, when he experienced awakening by preparing a delicious meal made of plants, nuts, fruits and various other ingredients, tastes, textures, colors he got out of his garden. But today it is no longer necessary to call his gastrosophical wisdom a “Way of Buddhas” nor do we need confining the food ethics to monks, masters, chefs or other Zen spirits. To enjoy a tofu cuisine, to eat ethically good incorporates a universal practice that every one of us could and should or, why not, likes to live every day. To emphasize the joyfulness of ethically good foodways as the everyday experience of practicing a good life seems to be important in order to philosophically motivate millions of people to change (eagerly and with joy) their culinary life and their Western or otherwise wrong diet.

Taste this: What only becomes crucial for cultivating contemporary tofu cuisines is the daily practice of eating a plant-based diet powered by the culinary joy to cook creatively and by the pleasure we get out of those self-made creations. Accordingly those of us who are willing to change their own meat-based diet might learn from the traditional food wisdom of the East. But this does not mean we have to copy these traditions and eat their recipes again and again. By experimenting and diversifying new tofu cuisines and dishes, good eating cultures are already growing, as we can see, everywhere throughout the world.

Ethical tofu self

Let's finish up with tofu: If using tofu as ingredients and if tofu dishes are to be accepted as interesting features of another culture's or person's cuisine, it is going to become an art work: the multi-facet fruit of creativity. If tofu is to become a part of South India foodways, for example, it has to be cooked in ways acceptable to the average Indians, such as in curries. The French may enjoy eating tofu in Chinese restaurants, but if it is not creatively appropriate by the French cuisine, it cannot become a feast of the usual culinary habits. Many chefs in the West begin to experiment with tofu. By adding European flavors such as wine, mustard, garlic and herbs, as well as fresh vegetables, nuts, and herbs, contemporary kitchen masters developed new variations, like the old Zen kitchen masters did. For example, while attempting to create a vegetarian teriyaki wrap, Seattle chef, David Lee searched for a protein food that is entirely based on plants and yet would have a firm resistance to the tooth, would "char" well, and take on the flavor of the flame. Grain meats from Asia known as fu or wheat meat (Mien Ching, Buddha's food or Seitan) had the firmness he was looking for and they charred well under the flame, but they were plain in flavor and very rubbery. David began to experiment with different recipes and finally developed the prototype for "Field Roast", now commercially available as one product of grain meat among other tasty food.²³ Shopping in organic food stores in Germany, for example, you will find tofu versions with added herbs or nuts, with smoky flavor and funny seitan sausages, which are as delicious as traditional Frankfurter Würstchen or what else you like.

²³ Ellen's Kitchen, From Temple Food to Tasty Alternative (<http://www.ellenskitchen.com>)

The consumers in all parts of the world have become fully accustomed to experimentation in the sphere of food. In the previous years grocery store refrigerator cases and freezers began filling with all sorts of meat alternatives ranging from mediocre to mighty good. World wide the assortment of available tofu products is diversifying and expanding because this food like organic food in general becomes popular for millions of ethical consumers. Thanks to the culinary adoptability of tofu, the popularity and indigenization of meatless cuisine is quite possible to become mainstream. As the author of *Tasting Food Tasting Freedom*, the anthropologist Sidney Mintz, predicts: „It is at least possible that Americans,“ - and of course not only Americans, I would like to add - “will become big eaters of vegetable protein in place of meat during the next half century.”²⁴ The average American or German comes already somewhat close to tofu cuisine when we take into account his or her love for margarine, for example, being a creatively refined and altogether vegetarian substitute for butter, i.e. fat taken from animals. Or to name another example that is even closer to the idea of a tofu cuisine: the popular “Veggie Burger” which is since 2010 available in any McDonald’s Shop in Germany and the “Tofu Burger” you may savor in Japanese McDonald’s Shop. Of course it’s true, “buying a soy burger is an emotional quick fix that does not address the tenacious and terrible roots of power and inequality.”²⁵ Thus, to go for vegetables once in a while is certainly an option to calm one’s moral consciousness, but it will not change the food world of Western diet. And it does not fully activate the ethical joy of good eating.

Luckily there are better options to choose. For instance, taking part in the global gastrosophical movement to free your self from the Western diet to save the world and our future. And why not learning from gastrosophical wisdom of the East by letting its indigestible or unpalatable functional food - ascetic vegetarianism or Buddhism - on the plate, so to pick just the most delicious creations of it: its tofu cuisine? To help nurturing the growing global movement of ethical eating, philosophy can teach us that those new tofu cuisines realize the “gastrosophical good.” For living our culinary life that way is good for our health, good for animals,

²⁴ Sydney Mintz, *Fermented Beans and Western taste*, In: Christine du Bois, Chee-Beng Tan, Sidney Mintz (eds.), *The World of Soy*, 2008, p. 65.

²⁵ Lierre Keith, *The Vegetarian Myth. Food, Justice, and Sustainability*, 2009, p.118.

good for environment, good for a just world society, good for making and enjoying delicious food, and good for living a good life every day.

Certainly skeptics will find that such a shaky recipe to found a gastrosophical ethics on tofu turns out to be itself nothing more than a “tofu project”? In Chinese, “tofu projects” (*doufu gongcheng*) refer to construction or building projects that have no solid foundation. But the opposed meaning is also possible. Then we might call the gastrosophical ethics a philosophical tofu project in a positive sense of being a soft and delicate concept that crumbles easily *only* if handled carelessly, mindlessly and unpracticedly. Similarly, in Chinese the “tofu way of life” might refer to a tough life of a person who depends on making and selling tofu for a poor living.²⁶ Yet we can easily imagine a “tofu self” to be someone who knows that the way one eats incorporates the way one lives and what person or self one is. Thus, choosing to become a tofu person means to become an ethically good person, living day by day a tofu self means living fully a good eating life.

Long ago, in 1661, the Chinese Zen (Ch’an) monk Ingen Ryuki composed a short proverb in praise of Japanese tofu, which is still used today.²⁷ It describes both the character of the Japanese word for tofu and that of a good person. The proverb goes *mame de shikaku de yawaraka de*.

mame de = either *made of soybeans*, or *being diligent*

shikaku de = either *square, cleanly cut*, or *being upright and honest*

yawaraka de = either *soft*, or *being kind-hearted*

Each line has a double meaning, allowing the poem to be read either as soybeans square cleanly cut and soft, or as practicing fully, being upright and kind-hearted. Either way we talk about admirable qualities in bean curds and human beings - we learn about the ethical tofu self. It is quite easy to nurture this gastrosophical self individually and globally - by practicing a new “tofu cuisine” which in turn changes the “Western diet.” To change the Western diet means to improve world eating and to make its destructive impact onto the health of our body, our environment, our sense of justice, and our common future - history. Understand: To act ethically good might prompt great risks and personal sacrifices depending on the given

²⁶ Chee-Beng Tan, Tofu and Related Products in Chinese Foodways, In: Christine du Bois, Chee-Beng Tan, Sidney Mintz (eds.), *The World of Soy*, 2008.

²⁷ I want to thank Eguchi Takeru to explain this proverb to me. And special thanks I like to express to Ogawa Tadashi who kindly supported my work once again.

situation; in extreme situations this may include sacrificing even one's self. To eat ethically well is much less risky and heroic. And its politically and morally correct practice includes and culminates in joy. I want to be clear. It would be wrong to think: Eating ethically well or - to say the same but with pathos - choosing a diet which saves the world is just a matter of individual enjoyment (of "good food"). The global food crisis confronts humanity with realities that are no fun at all. But the good thing about food matters is that we eventually learn both to enjoy tasting ethics for its goodness and to know the joy of becoming an ethical self.



Tofu-Kozo