

# CHINESE CUISINE

## INTRODUCTION

The cuisine of China is marked by the precise skills of shaping, heating, color way and flavoring. Chinese cuisine is also known for its width of cooking methods and ingredients as well as food therapy influenced by traditional Chinese medicine.

### History:

The diet of the common people in pre-modern times was largely grain and simple vegetables, with meat reserved for special occasions. China emerged as one of the world's earliest civilizations in the fertile basin of the Yellow River in the North China Plain. It has been ruled subsequently by the following dynasties

- Southern and Northern dynasties
- Tang Dynasty
- Song dynasty
- Mongol Yuan Dynasty
- Ming dynasty
- Qing dynasty
- Republic of China and then the Peoples Republic of China

Four key developments contributing towards the Growth of cuisine historically are as follows:

- The expansion of Han culture from the upland stretches of the Yellow River across a huge and expanding geographical area with climate zones ranging from the tropical to the subarctic, each providing new ingredients and indigenous cooking traditions;
- An elaborate but continually developing traditional medicine which saw food as the basis of good health ("Food was medicine and medicine, food");
- Constantly shifting demands from elites – beginning with the imperial courts and provincial governors but eventually expanding to include rich landowners, "scholar-gourmands", and itinerant merchants – for specialised cuisines, however far away from home.
- Continuous absorption of diverse foreign influences, including the ingredients, cooking methods, and recipes from invading steppe nomads, European missionaries, and Japanese traders.

### Geographic Location:

China is the world's second largest state by land and the most populous country in the world. The capital of China is Beijing. China's landscape is vast and diverse, ranging from forest steppes and the Gobi and Taklamakan Deserts in the arid north to subtropical forests in the wetter south. The Himalaya, Karakoram, Pamir and Tian Shan mountain ranges separate China from much of South and Central Asia. The Yangtze and Yellow Rivers, the third and sixth longest in the world, respectively, run from the Tibetan Plateau to the densely populated eastern seaboard. China's coastline along the Pacific Ocean is bounded by the Bohai, Yellow, East China, and South China seas.

### Adjoining Countries:

China extends across much of East Asia, bordering Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar (Burma) in Southeast Asia; India, Bhutan, Nepal, Afghanistan, and Pakistan in South Asia; Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in Central Asia; and Russia, Mongolia, and North Korea in Inner Asia and Northeast Asia. Additionally, China shares maritime boundaries with South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines.

### Climatic Conditions

The climates of central and south China are humid, which make it difficult for perspiration to evaporate. A perceived reason for people eating spicy food is that, according to traditional Chinese medicine, chilies help move internal dampness and cold, increasing health and comfort.

Colder climate areas in the north tend to eat heartier foods with higher calories, as the body needs these to keep warm there.

### **Cuisine :**

The ingredients used in China's foods are traditionally based on the agriculture and wildlife of a region. The preference for seasoning and cooking techniques of Chinese provinces depend on differences in historical background and ethnic groups. Geographic features including mountains, rivers, forests and deserts also have a strong effect on the local available ingredients, considering climate of China varies from tropical in the south to subarctic in the northeast. Imperial, royal and noble preference also plays a role in the change of Chinese cuisines. Because of imperial expansion and trading, ingredients and cooking techniques from other cultures are integrated into Chinese cuisines over time.

The color, smell and taste are the three traditional aspects to describe Chinese food, also the meaning, shape and nutrition. While, cooking should be appraised from ingredients, cuttings, cooking time and seasoning. It is considered inappropriate to use knives on dining table. Chopsticks are the main eating utensils for Chinese food, which can be used to cut and pick up food.

### **Staple Diet**

China's staple food is rice in the south, wheat based breads and noodles in the north. Pork is the most popular meat in China. Southern part of china, due to the area's proximity to the ocean and milder climate, has a wide variety of seafood and vegetables; it differs in many respects from the wheat-based diets across dry northern China.

**Rice** : Rice is a major staple food for people. Steamed rice, usually white rice, is the most commonly eaten form. Rice is also used to produce beers, wines and vinegars. Rice is one of the most popular foods in China and is used in many dishes. Glutinous rice ("sticky rice") is a variety of rice used in many specialty Chinese dishes.

**Wheat** : In wheat-farming areas in Northern China, people largely rely on flour-based food, such as noodles, breads, jiaozi (a kind of Chinese dumplings), and mantou (a type of steamed buns).

**Noodles**: Chinese noodles come dry or fresh in a variety of sizes, shapes and textures and are often served in soups or fried as toppings. Noodles can be served hot or cold with different toppings, with broth, and occasionally dry. Noodles are commonly made with rice flour or wheat flour, but other flours such as soybean are also used.

**Soybean products**: Several kinds of soybean products are sold in a farmer's market in Haikou, China. Tofu is made of soybeans and is another popular food product that supplies protein. The production process of tofu varies from regions to regions, resulted in different kinds of tofu with a wide range of texture and taste. Other products such as soy milk, soy paste, soy oil, and fermented soy sauce are also important in Chinese cooking.

### **Vegetables**

Some unique vegetables used in Chinese cuisine include Chinese leaves, bok choy, dao-mieu (pea seedling), choy sum, on choy, yu choy, bitter melon, Chinese broccoli, carrot, cabbage, capsicum, Baby corn, Spring onion, French beans and so on. Other vegetables including bean sprouts, pea vine tips, watercress, lotus roots and bamboo shoots are also used in different cuisines of China.

Because of different climate and soil conditions, cultivars of green beans, peas, and mushrooms can be found in a rich variety.

### **Herbs and seasonings**

Seasonings such as fresh ginger root, garlic, scallion, white pepper, and sesame oil are widely used in many regional cuisines. Sichuan peppercorns, star anise, cinnamon, fennel, cilantro, parsley, and cloves, dried Chinese mushrooms, dried baby shrimps, dried tangerine peel, and dried Sichuan chilies are also used.

**Sauces:** China is home to soy sauce, which is made from fermented soy beans and wheat. Oyster sauce, clear rice vinegar, chili, Chinkiang black rice vinegar, fish sauce are also widely used. A number of sauces are also based on fermented soybeans, including Hoisin sauce, ground bean sauce and yellow bean sauce.

**Regional Cooking Styles:**

The most praised "Four Major Cuisines" are Chuan, Lu, Yue and Huaiyang, representing West, North, South and East China cuisine correspondingly. Modern "Eight Cuisines" of China are Anhui, Cantonese, Fujian, Hunan, Jiangsu, Shandong, Sichuan, and Zhejiang cuisines.

The color, smell and taste are the three traditional aspects to describe Chinese food.

**Northern China food** — salty, simple, less vegetables with wheat as the staple food

**Western China food** — hearty halal food with lamb the main meat

**Central China food** — spicy with a lot of seasonings

**Eastern China food** — sweet and light

**Southern minority food** — sour

**Northern Cuisine** — salty and simple with less vegetables

**Regions:** Beijing, Xi'an, Inner Mongolia, and Northeast China

Lu (Shandong)	Yang (Su)	Yue (Guangdong/Cantonese)	Chuan (Sichuan)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Beijing cuisine               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Imperial</li> <li>. Aristocrat</li> <li>. Tianjin (Jin)</li> </ul> </li> <li>. Northeastern               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Liao</li> </ul> </li> <li>. Shanxi (Jin)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Huaiyang</li> <li>. Anhui (Hui)</li> <li>. Shanghai (Hu)</li> <li>. Zhejiang (Zhe)</li> <li>. Henan (Yu)</li> <li>. Hubei (E)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Chiuchow (Chaozhou)</li> <li>. Hakka (Kejia)</li> <li>. Fujian (Min)</li> <li>. Hainan (Qiong)</li> <li>. Hong Kong</li> <li>. Macanese</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. Guizhou (Qian)</li> <li>. Hunan (Xiang)</li> <li>. Jiangxi (Gan)</li> <li>. Shaanxi (Qin)</li> <li>. Yunnan (Dian)</li> </ul>

**CANTONESE CUISINE**

It comes from Guangdong province and is one of the Eight Culinary Traditions of Chinese cuisines. Its prominence outside China is due to the large number of emigrants from Guangdong. Guangzhou, has long been a trading port and many imported foods and ingredients are used in Cantonese cuisine. Besides pork, beef and chicken, Cantonese cuisine incorporates almost all edible meats, including offal, chicken feet, duck's tongue, snakes, and snails. However, lamb and goat are rarely eaten, unlike in the cuisines of northern or western China. Many cooking methods are used, with steaming and stir frying being the most favoured due to their convenience and rapidity. Other techniques include shallow frying, double steaming, braising, and deep frying.

For many traditional Cantonese cooks, the flavours of a finished dish should be well balanced and not greasy. Apart from that, spices should be used in modest amounts to avoid overwhelming the flavours of the primary ingredients, and these ingredients in turn should be at the peak of their freshness and quality. There is no widespread use of fresh herbs in Cantonese cooking, in contrast with their liberal use in other cuisines. Garlic chives and coriander leaves are notable exceptions, although the latter are usually used as mere garnish in most dishes.

In Cantonese cuisine, a number of ingredients such as spring onion, sugar, salt, soy sauce, rice wine, cornstarch, vinegar, scallion oil, and sesame oil, suffice to enhance flavour, although garlic is heavily used in some dishes, especially those in which internal organs, such as entrails, may emit unpleasant odours. Ginger, chili peppers, five-spice powder, powdered black pepper, star anise and a few other spices are also used, but often sparingly.

## SHANDONG CUISINE

The cuisine as it is known today was created during the Yuan Dynasty. It gradually spread to northern and northeastern China, Beijing, Tianjin, and the emperor's palace, where it influenced imperial food. Shandong cuisine is primarily made up of eastern Shandong and Jinan dishes.

Commonly known in Chinese as Lu cuisine is one of the Eight Culinary Traditions of Chinese cuisine and one of the Four Great Traditions. It is derived from the native cooking style of Shandong, a northern coastal province of China. Shandong cuisine is famous for its wide selection of material and use of different cooking methods. The raw materials are mainly domestic animals and birds, seafood and vegetables. Popular cooking techniques include Bao (quick frying), Liu (quick frying with corn flour), Pa (stewing), roasting, boiling, using sugar to make fruit, crystallizing with honey.

Shandong cuisine features seafood ingredients and a variety of cooking techniques. It is known for its fresh, salty, crisp, and tender flavors.

### Staple Foods:

- It is noted for its variety of seafood, including scallops, prawns, clams, sea cucumbers, and squid.
- Shandong is unique for its use of maize, Shandong maize is chewy, starchy and often has a grassy aroma. It is served as steamed (or boiled) cobs, or the kernels are removed from the cob and lightly fried.
- Shandong is noted for its peanuts, which are fragrant and naturally sweet. Large dishes of peanuts (roasted in the shell or shelled and stir-fried with salt) are common at meals, and they are served raw in a number of cold dishes from the region.
- Shandong uses a variety of small grains. Millet, wheat, oats and barley can be found in the local diet, often eaten as congee or milled and cooked into a variety of steamed and fried breads. People in Shandong tend to prefer steamed breads rather than rice as a staple food.
- Potatoes, tomatoes, cabbages, mushrooms, onions, garlic and eggplant are staple vegetables, with grassy greens, sea grasses and bell peppers also common. The large, sweet cabbages grown in central Shandong are popular.
- Shandong's greatest contribution to Chinese cuisine is arguably its vinegar. Hundreds of years of experience and unique local methods have led to the region's prominence in Chinese vinegar production

Styles: Shandong cuisine is divided into, Jinan, Jiaodong, Luxinan and Kongfu Cuisine.

**Jinan Cuisine :** The cooking methods of Jinan Cuisine are focused on quick frying, roasting and boiling. Jinan-style food is generally sweet, aromatic, fresh, and tender.

**Jiaodong Cuisine :** Jiaodong Cuisine is more focused on cooking and cutting skills. The Jiaodong area is located close to the sea, so most raw materials are seafood. Sea cucumber, abalone, and scallop are common in this area.

**Kongfu Cuisine :** The family of Kong is the descendant of Confucius. It was the largest family in Chinese history, lasting about 2000 years. Being close to the royal courts they had high standards for the quality of every dish.

**Luxinan Cuisine :** Luxinan is the area southwest of Shandong province. People living in this area like to eat health food with Chinese medicines and raw materials.

## Huyang / JIANGSU CUISINE

Also known as Su cuisine Jiangsu cuisine consists of Yangzhou, Nanjing, and Suzhou dishes. It is famous for its fresh taste, with moderate saltiness and sweetness. Ingredients of Jiangsu Cuisine mainly come from rivers, lakes, and the sea. It features precise and delicate carving techniques and various cooking techniques including braising, stewing, and quick-frying.

It is derived from the native cooking styles of Jiangsu province. In general, Jiangsu cuisine's texture is characterized as soft, but not to the point of mushy or falling apart. For example, the meat tastes quite soft but would not separate from the bone when picked up. As the style of Jiangsu cuisine is typically practiced near the sea, fish is a very common ingredient in cooking. Other characteristics include the strict selection of ingredients according to the seasons, with emphasis on the matching colour and shape of each dish and using soup to improve flavour.

Styles Jiangsu cuisine consists of several other styles, including:

**Huaiyang cuisine:** Although Huaiyang cuisine is one of several sub-regional styles within Jiangsu cuisine, it is widely seen in Chinese culinary circles as the most popular and prestigious style of the Jiangsu.

**Nanjing :** Its dishes emphasize an even taste and matching colour, with dishes incorporating river fish/shrimp and duck.

**Suzhou :** It emphasizes on the selection of material, stronger taste than Nanjing cuisine, and with a tendency to be sweeter than the other varieties of the cuisine.

**Wuxi:** Its proximity to Lake Tai means it is notable for wide variety of freshwater produce, such as the "Three Whites" – white bait, white fish and white shrimp

## SICHUAN CUISINE

Szechwan cuisine is a style of Chinese cuisine originating from Sichuan province in southwestern China. It has bold flavours, particularly the pungency and spiciness. Sichuan is colloquially known as the "heavenly country" due to its abundance of food and natural resources. One ancient Chinese account declared that the "people of Sichuan uphold good flavor, and they are fond of hot and spicy taste." Most Sichuan dishes are spicy, although a typical meal includes non-spicy dishes to cool the palate. Sichuan cuisine is composed of seven basic flavours: sour, pungent, hot, sweet, bitter, aromatic, and salty. Sichuan food is divided into five different types: sumptuous banquet, ordinary banquet, popularized food, household-style food, and food snacks.

Sichuan cuisine is the origin of several prominent sauces/flavors widely used in modern Chinese cuisine, including the garlic sauce/yuxiang , mala ,and guaiwei Common preparation techniques in Sichuan cuisine include stir frying, steaming and braising.

Styles: Four sub-styles of Sichuan cuisine include Chongqing, Chengdu, Zigong, and also Buddhist vegetarian style.

### Staple Diet

The complex topography of Sichuan including mountains, hills, plains, plateaus, and basin has shaped food customs in Sichuan with versatile and distinct ingredients.

- Abundant rice and vegetables are produced from the fertile Sichuan Basin,
- A wide variety of herbs, mushrooms and other fungi prosper in the highland regions.
- Pork is overwhelmingly the major meat. Beef is somewhat more common in Sichuan cuisine than it is in other Chinese cuisines, perhaps due to the prevalence of oxen in the region.
- Sichuan cuisine also utilizes various bovine and porcine organs as ingredients, such as intestine, arteries, head, tongue, skin, and liver, in addition to other commonly utilized portions of the meat.
- Rabbit meat is also much more popular in Sichuan than elsewhere in China.
- Yoghurt, which probably spread from India through Tibet in medieval times, is consumed among the Han Chinese. This is an unusual custom in other parts of the country.
- Sichuan cuisine often contains food preserved through pickling, salting, and drying. Preserved dishes are generally served as spicy dishes with heavy application of chili oil.
- The most unique and important spice in Sichuan cuisine is the Sichuan pepper which has an intense fragrant, citrus-like flavour which produces a "tingly-numbing" sensation in the mouth.
- Other commonly used spices in Sichuan cuisine are garlic, chili peppers, ginger, and star anise, etc.
- Broad bean chili paste is one of the most important seasonings. It is an essential component to famous dishes such as Mapo tofu and double-cooked pork slices

## HUNAN CUISINE

Hunan cuisine is similar to Sichuan cuisine, but generally even spicier. It has a great variety of ingredients due to the high agricultural output of the region. Is known for sourness, as many pickles are very popular in Hunan. Common cooking techniques include pickling, smoking, stewing, stir-frying, and braising, and pot-roasting.

## FUJIAN CUISINE

Fujian cuisine is famous for its abundant ingredients from the sea and mountains. It is characterized by its fine slicing techniques, various soups and broths, and exquisite culinary art. Fujian dishes are slightly sweet and sour, and less salty. Common cooking techniques include braising, stewing, steaming and boiling.

### **ZHEJIANG CUISINE**

Zhejiang cuisine comprises the styles of Hangzhou, Ningbo, Shaoxing, and Shanghai. It is famous for freshness, softness, and smoothness, with a mellow fragrance. It is characterized by its elaborate preparation and varying techniques of cooking, such as sautéing, stewing, steaming, and deep-frying.

### **ANHUI CUISINE**

Famous for the native cooking styles of the Yellow Mountains (Huangshan) region of China, Anhui cuisine features an elaborate choice of wild ingredients and the strict control of heat and cooking time. Most of its ingredients are from local mountain areas, leading to greater freshness and tenderness.

### **XINJIANG CUISINE**

Xinjiang is inhabited by many ethnic groups, and about half of the population belongs to the Uyghur minority, so Xinjiang Cuisine mostly refers to Uyghur cuisine. The food is predominantly halal food due to most Xinjiang people being Muslims.

### **BEIJING CUISINE**

Beijing cuisine is influenced by a variety of China's cooking styles, due to being the capital, but mostly nearby Shandong and Inner Mongolia. It is famous for its imperial court cuisine, which originated from the imperial kitchens, where food was cooked for royalty and officials.

### **TAIWAN CUISINE**

It is most like Fujian cuisine, as the geography is similar, and there has been most interaction between these two areas of China. There is also notable Japanese influence in Taiwan food.

### **INNER MONGOLIA CUISINE**

Inner Mongolian cuisine comes from the traditions of ethnic Mongols, and features dairy products, and all kinds of red meat (captive herds and game): mutton, beef, venison, etc. Typical dishes include roasted whole sheep, roast leg of lamb, and 'hand-grabbed' mutton.

### **TIBETAN CUISINE**

Tibetan cuisine is a blend of flavors of Nepalese, Indian, and Sichuan cuisines due to Tibet's position neighboring India, Nepal and Sichuan Province. It also has its own original dishes, influenced by its harsh climate where they farm yaks, e.g. yak fat tea.