

### Lesson Nine Style of Cooking

#### 1. Style of Cooking

There is an old Chinese saying goes: “food is the first necessity of the people”. As China has a long history, the food culture here is of extensive knowledge and profound scholarship after a long term of considerable development.

In Xia, Shang , and Zhou Periods, people began to eat cooked food instead of raw food. In Spring and Autumn Periods, four major cuisines as Chuan Cai, Lu Cai, Huai Yang, Yue Cai emerged. Later in Han and Tang Dynasties, food raw materials are more abundant, and people began to sit around table to eat. The ancient Chinese often steamed and boiled food. As a distinguished feature of Chinese cuisine, sautéing, also known as stir frying, is common nowadays, but it turns up later than other ways of cooking. According to the record, sautéing remarkably began to appear in the Wei, Jin and Southern and Northern dynasties(220-589). The reason why sautéing turns up later than other cooking techniques is connected with the prevalence of the metal cooker. To sauté, the cook needs hot oil heated by big fire. Proper cooking equipment is necessary for this way of cooking. Due to the high price of bronze, it was only when cheaper iron cookers were widely spread that sautéing became possible. And compared to other cooking methods, sautéing requires more oil. Ancient Chinese mainly used animal fat and oil to cook and a small quantity of animal oil is not enough to let sauté cooking to become popular. Thus stir-fried food was still exclusive to many restaurants in the Song Dynasty (960-1279). In Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties, the Chinese food culture gradually went mature and formed system.

Nowadays, people all around the China pay more attention to three aspects of dishes: color, fragrance, and taste. Color refers not only to the beautiful color of the food, but also to the layout and design. Fragrance refers to the fragrant and appetizing smell of the dishes served on the table before eating. Taste is not only associated with tasting the food itself, but also with the appreciation of seasonings and texture.

If somebody wants to cook a good Chinese dish with good color, fragrance and taste, he (or she) has to learn some Chinese cooking skills. Firstly, he has to pay more attention to time and temperature. There are numerous methods of cooking, which includes boiling, stewing, braising, frying, stir-frying, quick-frying, deep-frying, frying and simmering, sautéing, simmering, smoking, roasting or barbecuing, baking, steaming and scalding. Secondly, he has to learn to use various seasonings because taste mainly depends on the seasonings. There are many tastes—salty (salt, soy sauce), sweet (sugar, honey), sour (vinegar), pungent (chili, ginger, scallion), fragrant (sesame oil, coriander, wine), prickled (prickly ash) and tangy (monosodium glutamate or MSG) and bitter (dried tangerine, bitter apricot kernel).

In addition, the Chinese philosophy of Yin and Yang is also reflected in cooking. Each food has its own characteristics of yin or yang. Yin foods are thin, cooling and low in calories. Yang foods are rich, spicy, warming and high in calories. Boiling food makes them yin and frying them makes them yang. Taking the philosophy of Yin and Yang into consideration, the Chinese began to pay more attention to the Medicinal Function of food. People contend that a food tonic is much better than a medicine in fortifying one's health. Therefore, based on traditional Chinese herbal medicine practice, medicinal cuisine combines strictly processed traditional Chinese medicine with traditional culinary materials to produce delicious food with health-restoring qualities. The Ingredient add into the medicinal cuisine includes Dang Sheng, Gastrodia Elata, Chinese angelica, lotus Seed, Medlar, Chinese Date and some other Chinese medicine with high nutritional value. Numerous Chinese believe that the medicinal cuisine is helpful for preventing and curing diseases. Some typical medicated diet as Shashen and Hawthorn porridge, Shudihuang bone soup, Ginger and brown sugar soup are believed that they are good for spleen and stomach.



## 2. Eight Regional Cuisines.

Due to China's vast geography and diverse nationalities, Chinese cuisine includes a variety of different flavors nowadays. Foods vary from north to south. Tastes also differ regionally because of the climatic differences. One popular summary of Chinese food is “sweet in the south, salty in the north, sour in the west and spicy in the east”. The local dishes with their own distinctiveness can be roughly divided into eight regional cuisines in China.



Shandong Cuisine, also known as Lu Cai, is the most extensive spreading local flavor branches throughout the three provinces in Northeast China. Shandong cuisine is one of the oldest cuisines in China, with a history of 2500 years. It was originated in the Qi and Lu areas in Spring-Autumn and Warring States Period from Confucius' family banquet, and then adopted by imperial kitchen. It is formed in the Qin and Han dynasties. After the Song dynasty, Shandong cuisine has become the representative of North China cuisine. Lu Cai has three factions: Jinan style, Jiaodong style, and Confucius style dishes. All of the three factions are famous for their qualities of freshness, clear colors, dedication to fragrance and pure tastes. The Shandong cuisine specializes in seafood like prawns, sea cucumber, and flounder. The cooking methods always applied includes quick-frying, stew, deep-fry and

stir-fry. Typical dishes of Shandong cuisine include braised prawns, braised intestines in brown sauce, sweat and sour carp, braised sea cucumber with scallion, braised pork balls in gravy sauce, Dezhou braised chicken, steamed tofu stuffed with vegetables, pork pieces simmered in earthenware jar, braised whelk with brown sauce etc.

Sichuan Cuisine, also known as Chuan Cai, is famous for its various flavors, especially for its hot and pungent flavoring. Sichuan cuisine is famous for its spicy and hot food, however, just being hot and spicy can not distinguish it from Hunan or Guizhou cuisines, for the latter are also hot and spicy. What really special about Sichuan cuisine is the application of Chinese prickly ash seeds, which could leave a taste of numbness feeling on one's tongue and mouth. Besides of this unique spicy, Sichuan dishes are also usually prepared with other spices such as chili pepper, ginger, garlic, chili oil and fermented soybean, and that add many flavors to Sichuan cuisine as ma (numbing), fragrant, spicy, spicy prominent, refreshing and denseness. There are a lot of famous dishes in Sichuan Cuisine, steamed fish head with diced hot red peppers, Yu-Shiang shredded pork, Mapo tofu, boiled fish in spicy water, sauced chicken dices with chili peppers, Kung Pao chicken and pork lungs in chili sauce are representative dishes.



Guangdong Cuisine is known as Yue Cai or Cantonese Cuisine. Guangdong Cuisine originated in Han dynasty, and its cooking skill went to matured in Song dynasty and Tang dynasty as Canton has been a trading port. Due to the Ming and Qing thriving economies, the Guangdong Cuisine had a great promotion. Guangdong has an advantage in diet for its subtropical climate and long coast line which provide abundant ingredients. With its own climate characteristics and customs, Cantonese has formed a complete system of cooking skills and unique cooking characteristics. It is composed of three local flavors: Guangzhou

cuisine, Chaozhou cuisine and Dongjiang cuisine, and each one of them has its own characteristics. Yue Cai has some distinguishing taste as clean, light, crisp and fresh. It usually has fowl and other meats to produce its unique dishes. The cooking skills often used in Yue Cai include roasting, stir-frying, deep-frying, braising, stewing and steaming. Cantonese cuisine features light and fresh with a clear and fragrant smell. Light foods are served in summer and autumn, and strong foods in winter and spring. Typical dishes of Guangdong cuisine such as steamed mandarin fish, Cantonese roast suckling pig, Cantonese sausage, Cantonese sausage, braised goose in Cantonese style, salt Baked chicken, sliced boiled chicken are all pretty delicious.



Fujian Cuisine, also known as Min Cai, is noted for its light taste and sweet and sour flavor. Based on Fuzhou Cuisine, the Fujian cuisine was originated from Fuzhou, and then it combined with the other five flavor dishes from East Fujian, South Fujian, West Fujian, North Fujian and Puxian. The Fujian cuisine puts great emphasis on choosing the choicest ingredients, and is thus particularly apt in preparing seafood dishes. There is a very famous dish in Fujian Cuisine called Buddha jumps over the wall or fo tiao qiang. Since its creation during the Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1912), the dish has been regarded as a Chinese delicacy known for its rich taste, usage of various high-quality ingredients and special manner of cooking. The dish's name is an allusion to the dish's ability to entice the vegetarian monks from their temples to partake in the meat-based dish. There are many stories on the origin of the dish. Among them, a common story is about a scholar traveling by foot during the Qing Dynasty. While he traveled with his friends, the scholar preserved all his food for the journey in a clay jar used for holding wine. Whenever he had a meal, he warmed up the jar with the ingredients over an open fire. Once they arrived in Fuzhou, the capital of Fujian

Province, the scholar started cooking the dish. The smells spread over to a nearby Buddhist monastery where monks were meditating. Although monks are not allowed to eat meat, one of the monks who were tempted by the smell jumped over the wall to where the scholar gathered for cooking. A poet among the travelers said that even Buddha would jump the wall to eat the delicious dish.

Jiangsu Cuisine, also known as Su Cai or Huai yang cuisine, has characteristically sweet taste. It preserves the food's original flavor, while emphasizing strictly choice ingredients, exquisite workmanship, and elegant shapes. Boiled shredded dry bean curd; braised shredded chicken with ham and dried tofu are popular in Jiangsu cuisine. Among them, wensi tofu is a time-honored dish in Huaiyang cuisine. This dish is made of finely shredded tofu and other ingredients. It is also a perfect combination of color, aroma, taste and appearance and to make it successful the chef must pay special attention to their knives. Beggar's Chicken is another famous dish for its delicious taste in Huai yang cuisine. The Beggar's Chicken is called "jiaohuaji" or "fuguiji" there. The chicken is stuffed, wrapped, and roasted following a traditional eastern Chinese recipe. Many Chinese dishes have names adapted from folklore, legend, or story, so as to "jiaohuaji". It is believed that once upon a time, a beggar led a wandering life in poverty. One day, he lucked into a chicken, but had neither tools nor condiments. He came to the foot of the mountain and roasted it without plucking it. However, when the roasted chicken was ready, the smell of it spread over a long distance.

Zhejiang Cuisine, also known as Zhe Cai, has won a reputation for freshness, tenderness, softness, and smoothness in its dishes with mellow fragrance. The Zhejiang Cuisine is comprised with local cuisines of Hangzhou, Ningbo, and Shaoxing. Hangzhou cuisine is characterized by its elaborate preparation and varying techniques of cooking, such as sauteing, stewing, and deep-frying. Hangzhou food tastes fresh and crisp, varying with the change of season. Ningbo food is a bit salty but delicious. Specializing in steamed, roasted and braised seafood, Ningbo cuisine is particular in retaining the original freshness, tenderness and softness. Shaoxing cuisine offers fresh aquatic food and poultry that has a special rural flavor, sweet in smell, soft and glutinous in

taste, thick in gravy and strong in season. Each of the three sub-cuisine traditions is noted for its special flavor and taste, but they are all characterized by the careful selection of ingredients, emphasizing minute preparation, and unique, fresh and tender tastes. Zhejiang cuisine specializes in quick-frying, stir-frying, deep-frying, simmering and steaming, obtaining the natural flavor and taste. Special care is taken in the cooking process to make the food fresh, crispy and tender. Thanks to exquisite preparation, the dishes are not only delicious in taste but also extremely elegant in appearance. Zhejiang cuisine is best represented by Hangzhou dishes, including Hangzhou roast chicken, Dongpo pork, fried shrimps with Longjing tea and steamed grass carp in vinegar gravy (commonly known as West Lake fish), Songsao shredded fish soup, etc. Among them, the West Lake fish is the most famous one. This dish was named after the most beautiful and famous lake in China, West Lake. But what makes this dish famous is not just because of its name. Before the fish is cooked, it has to stay hungry in clean water for one or two days, so that the smell of mud in the fish can be got rid of. Cooking of the fish is simply putting it in boiling water for about 3 minutes. Then all that needs to be done is to pour the sauce onto the fish. The sauce was made up of the water used to cook the fish, vinegar, sugar, rice wine, soy sauce, etc. The simple cooking method pretty much shows the essence of Zhejiang cuisine - maintaining the freshness as much as possible.



Anhui Cuisine, also known as Hui Cai, is highly distinctive not only for its elaborate choices of cooking ingredients but also for its strict control of the cooking process. It comprises the specialties of South Anhui, Yanjiang and Huai Bei. Anhui cuisine chefs are good at braising and stewing, and they often pay more attention to the temperature in cooking. They are experts especially in cooking foods from mountains and sea. Most ingredients in Anhui cuisine, such as pangolin, stone frog, mushroom, bayberry, tea leaves, bamboo shoot etc. are all from mountain area. Hams and sugar are always

added to improve the flavor in Hui Cai. Anhui dishes preserve most of the original taste of the food but a little bit spicy and salty. Typical dishes of Anhui Cuisine includes stewed soft shell turtle with ham, steamed stone frog, bamboo shoots cooked with sausage and dried mushroom, and Li Hongzhang Hotchpotch. Li Hongzhang hotchpotch is a popular dish named after Li Hongzhang, and who was a top official of the late Qing Dynasty. One day, Li Hongzhang hosted a banquet for some of his American friends. As all the specially prepared dishes have been eaten by all the guests, the chef, with limited resources, began to fret. Under Li Hongzhang's order, the chef put the remaining raw materials, such as sea cucumber, squid, tofu, ham, mushroom, chicken meat and other less identifiable food into a pot. In this way, a delicious new dish was created.

Hunan Cuisine, also known as Xiang Cai, is akin to that of the chili-rich Sichuan dishes. Hunan cuisine has a long history of more than 2000 years. Hunan cuisine has assimilated a variety of local forms, eventually evolving into its own style. It contains 4,000 dishes now, among which over 300 dishes are very notable, such as Dong'an chicken and smoked pork with dried long green beans. As Hunan is located in the south-west of China, the cuisine gives priority to abundance, fatness, smoothness and moistness, mostly take Chili, pepper and shallot as the main course. It not only has the saltiness of the North and the sweetness of the South, but also the hotness and sourness of local characteristics. There are two reasons that could accounts for why Hunan cuisine is so spicy. Firstly, there are many rivers and lakes in Hunan. People there must suffer from the wet environment. Pepper yield and quality are very impressive and very suitable for consumption in Hunan. Secondly, In ancient times, Hunan is an economically and traffic underdeveloped regions. Some areas were especially poverty. Salt has always been expensive here. Peppers stimulate taste and with disinfection function, just as a substitute for salt. Hunan cuisine consists of three styles: Xiang River, Dongting Lake and western Hunan style. Hunan cuisine is well known for its hot spicy flavor, fresh aroma and deep color. Common cooking techniques include stewing, frying, pot-roasting, and braising. Due to the high agricultural output of the region, ingredients for Hunan dishes are many and varied. Typical dishes of Hunan cuisine include steamed fish head with chopped pepper, Mao's braised pork with soy sauce, Dong'an chicken, spicy salted duck, Changsha preserved smelly tofu, smoky flavors steamed



together, etc. Among these, the Mao's braised pork with soy sauce is a representative dish for it is inseparably bound up with the memory of Chairman Mao. It is said that Mao Zedong loved it very much, ate it frequently.

**Questions:**

1. Nowadays, people pay more attention to three aspects of dishes. Do you know these three aspects?
2. Do you know when did the Chinese food culture gradually went mature and formed system ?
3. Naming the eight regional cuisines existed in China at present.
4. Among the eight regional cuisines, which cuisine is your favorite? Why?
5. If you were given the chance of learning one regional cuisine, which one would you choose? Why?