

# The Wok of Harmony

## --China Through the Art of Cooking--

**Goals:** To provide the general knowledge of the art of Chinese cooking and enable students to understand the philosophy behind it. Through hands-on activities, help students truly appreciate Chinese food.

**Materials:** Excerpts from Eat Drink Man Woman  
(Produced by Li-Kong Hsu, directed by  
Ang Lee, Ang Lee Film Products, 1994)  
Colored transparencies of ingredients, herbs,  
and spices  
Transparencies of the background knowledge  
Transparencies on the philosophy of Chinese  
cooking  
Menus from various Chinese Restaurants  
Recipe for Northern boiled dumplings  
Transparencies of Chinese dining vocabulary

### **Day 1**

- (1) Brainstorm with students on their knowledge or questions regarding Chinese cuisine. Chart the questions.
- (2) Show excerpt from Eat Drink Man Woman (beginning 5 minutes.)  
Allow students more time to add questions or comments.
- (3) Present transparencies 1, 2, and 3 of the background knowledge and colored transparencies on the art of Chinese cuisine and refer to students' questions.
- (4) Make a chart to compare three meals between Chinese and American food.

### **Day 2**

- (1) Show transparencies 4 and 5 on the philosophy of Chinese cooking.
- (2) Show colored transparencies to illustrate ingredients, herbs and spices used in Chinese cooking as they relate to the yin-yang philosophy.
- (3) Divide students into small groups. Pass out menus from various Chinese restaurants. Let students pick certain dish to show the yin-yang philosophy.
- (4) Have students learn and practice pronouncing food vocabulary in Chinese.

### **Day 3**

- (1) Make dumplings (follow the recipe).

Let's try a little mind-reading game. Close your eyes for a moment and think about eating a great Chinese meal. The appetizing aromas, the intense flavors, the bright colors and contrasting textures. Okay, you can open your eyes now. In the picture you imagined, you were sitting at a round table in your favorite Chinese restaurant.

The great Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu once said:

**"Governing a great nation is much like cooking a fish."**

What he meant is that in governing a country, just the right "seasonings" and adjustments need to be made for successful results. This metaphor clearly points up the important position that food occupies in the Chinese mind!

Repeat after me: Chi le fan mei you? That's one of the most common Chinese greetings. And what do you suppose it means? Hello? How are you? Nice to meet you? No. It means, "Have you eaten yet?" This greeting says a lot about the role of food plays in Chinese culture. Chinese people spent an average 40% of their income on food. Every region has its own delicacies--from chicken feet to fresh-water crab to snake meat. Whatever they are, people are passionate about them, and they'll go to any length and expense to enjoy them on special occasions.

Food must be shared! The importance of sharing is instilled in Chinese children from an early age. It would be unthinkable to order a dish all to yourself in a restaurant in China--or to serve a dish to a single person at home. Everything is intended to be experienced and discussed by all the guests. That's why many Chinese tables are round--so you can see and talk to everyone, and everyone has equal access to the food at the center of the table. It's all about togetherness. In China, family units stay together with many generations living under one roof. After thousands of years, that's still the way it's done. Cooking and eating are a huge part of the thread that holds the Chinese social fabric together.

---Martin Yan

Soup, Tapioca soup or fresh fruits. Drinks may be tea, Mao-tai, Rice Wine or beer. Rice is rarely served at a banquet.

### **Special Holidays Require Special Meals:**

Jan.-Feb.: Chinese New Year-- Shui-jiao (boiled dumplings), and the best dishes you can afford.

Lantern Festival-- Yuan-xiao (sweet rice balls boiled in water)

June: Dragon Boat Festival--zong-zi (rice foot: sweet rice wrapped in water-plant leaves in the shape of a foot).

September: Mid-Autumn Festival- moon cakes.

Birthdays: Boiled Noodles. These imply longevity.

China is a vast country and as such is exposed to extremes of both geography and climate. This naturally results in the growth of different agricultural products, so it is little wonder that cuisines vary from province to province. Making the Yangtze River as the dividing line, Chinese food can be roughly categorized into Northern and Southern styles of cooking.

**Northern Style Cooking:**

Ingredients: Wheat products: pasta, noodles, dumplings, steamed dumplings(Baozi).

Flavors: Flavors tend to be oily, heavy on the use of vinegar, garlic, and scallion.

Cooking: Ways of cooking include steaming , pan-frying, boiling, and hot pot.

Typical food: Peking duck, Beef Noodle, Lamb Hot Pot, etc.

**Southern Style Cooking:**

Ingredients: Rice products are heavily used: regular rice, rice noodle, rice wine, sweet rice, etc.

Flavors: Flavors tend to be sweet, sour, spicy, etc.

Freshness and tenderness of the dish are emphasized. Southerners eat more fresh-water fish, shrimp, and crab more often.

Cooking: Ways of cooking include stir-frying, flash-frying, steaming, and stewing.

Typical food: Flash-fried Shrimp, Chicken Baked in Salt, Sichuan Style Bean Curd, etc.

**Breakfast:** xi-fan (rice gruel)  
you-tiao (fried breadstick)  
bao-zi (steamed dumplings)  
man-tou (steamed bread)  
mian-tiao (noodle)  
Shao-bin (unleavened bread)  
huen-duen (wonton)

**Lunch:** Lunch is similar to dinner except in smaller portions or fewer dishes.

It may include:

Rice/ mian-tiao (noodle)/ fan (steamed rice)  
Cai (dishes)--may include vegetables, chicken, pork, etc.

**Dinner:** Fan (steamed rice)/ Cai (dishes--may include fish, shrimp, pork, chicken, or beef)/ tang (soup, such as Bean Curd Soup, Tomato-Egg Soup, or Winter-melon Soup, etc.), Vegetables, including spinach, bok choy, beans, potato, cabbage, wintermelon, Chinese squash, etc.

## **Banquet**

**Food:** Appetizers are usually a cold dish, such as Five-flavored Beef, Smoked Chicken, Jellyfish, etc. Main dishes may include Seafood Soup or Shark-fin Soup, Roasted Duck, Steamed Whole Fish, Shrimp, Lobster, Spare Ribs, etc. Desserts may be Red Bean.

## IT'S ALL IN THE BALANCE

The ancient Chinese philosophy of yin- the dark, feminine, and yielding, and yang- the bright, masculine, and hard- underlies the whole of Chinese culture. The faith is that harmony arises from the proper blending of opposites, i.e., complementary pairs. Yin and yang are not unrelated, but interrelated, as the ancient symbol shows.

In food, yin might be cooler, softer, and moister, like melon, asparagus, or crab. Yang may take the form of chilies, ginger, fried foods, or red meat. Yin and yang are important in combining colors and textures as well: bright colors with pale; chewy food with soft.

As for seasonings, yin and yang reveal themselves in classic partnerships like sweet and sour, soy sauce and rice wine, ginger and scallion, salt and Sichuan peppercorns.

In the composition of a dish, yin and yang mean the union of opposites: chicken with green vegetables, red tomatoes and eggs, crispy duck skin with soft mandarin pancakes.

The yin and yang principle extends still further to menu planning. Cook cooler foods in the hot months, and warmer food in the winter months. Plan a simple meal when you are harried, and a more complex meal when you are calm.

However, this is not a hard and fast law. It is an unconscious mode for most Chinese. A Chinese cook puts poultry and greens together because it feels right, or it's traditional and automatic. If you keep yin and yang in mind, you will never plan a meal that will overtax the cook, bore the guests, or put them into an early grave from the effects of too much salt, sugar, chili, or oil. It's all in the balance.



A dish may be savory, sweet, tart or piquant. The main colors of a dish may include red, yellow, green, white, and caramel. In Chinese cooking color, aroma, flavor, and composition share equal importance in the preparation of each dish. All these elements contribute to making Chinese food a true feast for the eyes and nostrils as well as the taste buds.

(insert graphic)

## **Boiled Northern Dumplings** **(simplified version)**

### **Ingredients:**

Don't bother to make the dough for the wrappers. You can buy the wrappers in packages of 50 in every Asian and American market such as Lucky. Be sure to buy the circular ones and not the square ones--those are for making Wontons.

1/2 lb. napa cabbage or Chinese chives, finely chopped

1 tsp. salt

1/2 lb. ground pork

1 tsp. sesame oil

1/2 tsp. white peppers tbs. cooking oil

2 tsp. minced ginger

1 tbs. finely chopped green onions

### **METHOD:**

1. In a bowl, mix all the ingredients well.
2. To fill each dumpling, place a heaping teaspoon of the filling in the center of a wrapper. fold the wrapper in half to form a semicircle. Dip your finger into a bowl of water and wet the edges of the wrapper. Pinch to seal.
3. To cook the dumplings, fill a medium to large sized pot with water and bring to a boil. Gently drop the dumplings in the pot, and stir in one direction to keep the dumplings from sticking to the bottom of the pot. Cover and cook until it boils again. Pour a small amount of water into the pot to cease the boiling and then cover and cook until it boils again. Repeat 3 or 4 times and stop cooking. Drain the dumplings and serve hot with soy sauce, rice wine, vinegar, or hot chili oil.

**Handy Vocabulary and Phrase Li**  
**For Food and Drink**

**Name> Pinying (phonetic pronunciation guide)**

1. Hot and sour soup > Sauna la tang (so-an la tong)
2. Menu > Cain Dan (tsai-dan)
3. Chopsticks > kuai zi (kwai-zuh)
4. Spoon > tiao geng (tee-ow gun)
5. Bowl > wan (waun)
6. Vegetarian dishes > su cai (soo tsai)
7. Shrimp > xia (shiah)
8. Fish > yu
9. Chicken > ji (gee)
10. Duck > ya (yah)
11. Beef > niu rou (neoo roh)
12. Delicious! > Hao chi (how-che)
13. I am full. > wo chi bao le (whoa-che bow la)
14. Apple > ping guo (ping gwoh)
15. Banana > xiang jiao (shong jeeow)
16. Grape > pu tao (poo taow)
17. Orange > ju zi (ju dzuh)
18. Peach > tao zi (tao dzuh)
19. Pear > li zi (lee dzuh)
20. Pineapple > bo luo (boa loa)
21. Watermelon > xi gua (shee gwah)
22. Milk > niu nai (neoo nai)
23. Tea > cha (chah)
24. Breakfast > zao can (dzao tsan)
25. Lunch > wu can (woo tsan)
26. Dinner > wan fan (wan tsan)
27. Steamed rice > mi fan (mee-fan)

**Handy Vocabulary and Phrase List  
For Greeting and Parting**

1. How are you? > Ni hao ma? (nee how maaa)
2. Good morning > Zao chen hao (zow chun how)
3. Good evening > Wan shang hao (wan shang how)
4. Glad to meet you > Jian dao ni hen gao xing (jeein dao nee hun gaoh shing)
5. Goodbye (See you again) > Zai jian (tzai jien)
6. Good night > Wan an
7. Happy birthday > Sheng re kuai le (shun err kuai leh)