



A meal that represents the different regions of mainland China includes (clockwise) Mongolian beef from the north, ocean bass from Shanghai, meat pastry from the north, shrimp chips which are Cantonese style cooking, and squab, a Mandarin dish from 5-week-old pigeon.

Tasting Chinese food

Every region has its own flavor

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

Kam Yeung Shum has been preparing the wide spectrum of dishes from his native China for half of his 32 years. For the last three he has been practicing his craft at Sui Dong's Restaurant, 3349 West Eight Mile near Farmington Road, Livonia.

Trained as a cook in China, Shum, who doesn't speak English, worked for five years as an apprentice before becoming a cook.

It takes them five years to become a cook. Some people never learn, said Henry Dong, Farmington, one of the restaurant's owners.

They have to work for three years as an apprentice, one year as a helper and a year as a cook before they are considered a cook.

When you apply to be an apprentice in a restaurant in China, they give you a year to try out. The apprentices aren't paid for the first year, but you're lucky if you're chosen. There are many people who would like a job in a restaurant, Dong said.

SHUM CAME from communist China to Hong Kong, where he became head cook in a banquet hall, supervising 100 cooks.

You don't have anything like it here, Dong explained. But in Hong Kong there are many of them. A Chinese banquet has about 1,000 people. A Chinese wedding isn't a matter of money. If you don't invite your friends, they say, "What's 1 good

enough to be invited to your wedding?"

At the time Shum came to the United States, the Dong family was looking for a cook to work in the restaurant they had transplanted from downtown Detroit to the Livonia Farmington, Farmington Hills border.

If I didn't hire him, I'm sure that someone else would have, said Dong, who helped bring him to the U.S. He was what we were looking for.

Shum prepares the less well known Chinese dishes that originated in northern and southwestern China.

Most of the food that is served in Chinese restaurants is Cantonese food, Dong said. When Kam came to us, he didn't know how to make Cantonese food like almond chicken. We had to show him. But he taught me a lot.

The wide expanse of land and the accompanying variety of climates helped to nurture different types of Chinese cuisine, according to Dong.

Mandarin style cuisine originated in the north and features more meat and fowl dishes than the Cantonese style, which depends on vegetables.

The northern people have more fowl and meat available to them than in the south. There aren't any grocery stores in China, said Dong.

MANDARIN STYLE cooks don't cut up their food before preparing it, as in done in Cantonese cooking. The northern cooks had ovens. Before the Communists came

into power, they were among the first in the country to have electrical power and central heating, Dong said.

Mandarin cooking takes more time, more preparation, more people to cook it. They can do that because the people from the northern section are richer. In the south, the people are farmers.

When the Chinese gave Nixon Peking Duck, it was uncut and it took days to prepare. Peking Duck has to marinate for three days before it is served, he said.

Peking Duck must be ordered three days in advance at Sui Dong's.

Mandarin dishes include Mongolian beef dishes.

The Mongols left their mark on China. There are some Chinese in the north who are six feet tall. The Mongolians would carry around their own spices and cover the native food of the area with them, said Dong.

Unlike their northern neighbors, who cook with an emphasis on roasting and steaming, the southern Chinese fry most of their foods.

The wok started out shaped like a frying pan, Dong said. Then, it was noted that a curved shape kept the heat longer and heated a larger portion of the meal at the same time.

Soy bean stalks were used as fuel for the fire, Dong continued. They were used in the meal and for the fire. The Chinese found many uses for them. Like George Washington Carver did for the peanut.

Bill Look prepares the Cantonese dishes for the restaurant.

Kam cooked the exotic dishes, so he was standing around a lot of the time, Dong said. I showed him how to cook the American food we serve. We serve steaks and pork chops.

He was shocked that Americans would eat all that meat without any spices, he said.

Shum uses a right-hand kitchen. Dirty dishes are stacked to the right of the door. The waitress turns to find a new tray on her right side. Three refrigerator drawers near the stove are on the cook's right side.

All our cooks are right-handed, Dong said. If we get a left-handed cook, he'll have problems.

Our customers are welcome to come in and look at the kitchen and see their food being prepared.

The menu we have is for people who want the more common dishes. Our customers can ask for dishes that are not on the menu. Our menu changes every month, Dong said.

Staff photos

by

Harry Mauthe



A northern Chinese lunch dish is prepared by Kam Yeung Shum. The pork rolled in steamed dough resembles a meat pie.

Bill Look's deft motions make frying a wok-full of fried rice a fast moving art.



Kam Yeung Shum fries rice in the restaurant's right-handed kitchen.

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