

Title:

Chinese Cuisine What's In A Name?

Word Count:

479

Summary:

There's more to Chinese cuisine than meets the taste buds. There is also what meets the eye, the ear and the imagination. Chinese culture demands attention to the entire presentation of a meal, and that includes the blend of flavors, the subtlety of the spicing, how appealing the colors and arrangement of the food is and how well it plays on the imagination of the diner. This is a concept that is as foreign to most Westerners as an appreciation for the nuance of a single brush...

Keywords:

Chinese ,Chinese cuisine ,

Article Body:

There's more to Chinese cuisine than meets the taste buds. There is also what meets the eye, the ear and the imagination. Chinese culture demands attention to the entire presentation of a meal, and that includes the blend of flavors, the subtlety of the spicing, how appealing the colors and arrangement of the food is and how well it plays on the imagination of the diner. This is a concept that is as foreign to most Westerners as an appreciation for the nuance of a single brushstroke in an ideograph. To the Chinese, though, the name of a dish plays its own part in the presentation when they serve a meal to guests.

The subtlety is lost on most Americans, who'd rather know what's going to be on their plate than enjoy a bit of imagery with their meal. Some of the most common names survive - Seven Happiness, a dish that includes shrimp, lobster, scallop, fish, pork, beef and chicken in a delicate sauce with vegetables, for instance. Seven happiness indeed - what mouth wouldn't be happy with that?

In China, however, many honored and respected restaurants still cling to the old traditions. At the Confucius House, for instance, one can dine on Two Phoenix from One Egg, An Oriole Welcoming Spring and As Luck As One Wishes. The Fangshan Restaurant in Beihai Park serves Phoenix in Its Nest and "Frog and Abalone". The Fangshan Restaurant has also revived an ancient tradition - the complete Manchu-Han Banquet. Created during the Qing Dynasty as a celebration of important events, the Manchu-Han Banquet consists of 234 hot dishes, 28 cold dishes, cakes

and fruit. Such a lavish spread is it that it often is held over the course of several days.

It was during the Northern and Southern Dynasties that the practice of giving poetic names to dishes truly flourished. While many dishes were named simply for their appearance, many others included a play on words in their names - subtle references to the ingredients wrapped in a beautiful title. Thus, a dish of shredded fish with orange might be called 'powdered gold and minced jade'. Shrimp with green peas and scallions might bear the name 'Coral, Pearl and Jade'. Some were far more fanciful - and in some cases descriptive of the elaborate preparation that turned a plate of food into a landscape or a scene from history. One such dish is chicken and soft-shelled turtle, served in its shell and named "the Conqueror says goodbye to his concubine".

It's only fitting that Hunan cuisine, generally considered to be the most visually appealing of the Chinese regional cuisines, should also feature the most fanciful and delightful names. Who cares what the ingredients are when your host serves you 'Footsteps of the Phoenix' and "Pearls in the Snow"? They are truly names fit for the dishes that graced the tables of emperors.