

Hidden Messages in Chinese Food

Chinese food is set up in a combination of soup, eggroll, stir fry and rice. What is the order behind the Chinese menu? If you wince at seeing whole fish or shrimp served with heads on, rest assured that the heads aren't attached to upset your appetite. Whether the fortune cookie is authentic, the Chinese food industry is a worldwide phenomenon. After Yvonne Wolf's introductory conversation on Chinese food, you will gain a new perspective on the Chinese dining experience, whether it is sit-down or take-out.

Warning: Watching this presentation may make you very hungry for Chinese food. In the given time, four questions will be addressed:

- What features make it Chinese?
 - What is the order of appearance?
 - How do the Chinese see our food?
 - What do some Chinese food mean?
1. What features make it Chinese?
 - a) Soup: Hot and Sour Soup and Egg Drop Soup are both based on clear broths. No creamy soups based on a non-dairy diet.
 - b) Eggroll: crunchy shell and soft center filling. Golden wrapper and vegetable cut in matchstick sizes.
 - c) Stir Fry: vegetables and the other half protein: typically, chicken, pork, beef, shrimp, and/or tofu.
 - d) Fried Rice: peas, cubed carrots, and the rice breaks apart. There might be meat, such as shrimp, egg, or chasiu (barbequed pork), but the meat does not dominate the fried rice. Since the meat or protein is used for flavoring purposes, it is used as less than half the main ingredient, rice.
 2. What is the order of appearance?
 - a) Soup, Eggroll, Stir Fry and Fried Rice is set up via a Victorian order and Victorian style of individual servings.
 - b) To read more about Victorian dining cultural history, check out *Forgotten Elegance: the art, artifacts, and peculiar history of Victorian and Edwardian entertaining in America* by Schollander, Wendell.
 - c) In Chinese dining etiquette, the soup comes last. Family style dining is predominantly practiced.
 3. What does Chinese food mean to Chinese people?
 - a) Yin and Yang in Chinese food consumption, the balance of yin (vegetables) and yang (meat) is weighed by caloric energy, not by absolute biological distinction between plant and animal.
--In this sense, burgers are yang heavy.

- b) Balance of 5 colors: white, red/ brown, black, green, and yellow/ brown.
 - c) Whole vs. Parts is a Yin Yang combination.
 - Seafood served with its head on shows its freshness
 - For practical and food safety reasons
 - d) Yin Yang balance of starch vs. protein.
 - e) Yin Yang balance of flavors in sweet and sour pork, hot and sour soup, sweet and spicy. Yin Yang can also explain texture differences in a crispy and soft spring roll.
4. What do some Chinese food mean in English?
- a) There are numerous of online jokes on poor Google translations of Chinese dishes.
 - b) One aspect of the yin and yang of Chinese food is the naming of Chinese dishes. Just as there's no meat in minced meat pie, Chinese dishes are filled with euphonisms to enhance the dining experience.
 - c) Artifice vs. Reality is a yin yang pair.
 - d) Wontons floating in a clear broth represent clouds floating in a sky.
Wonton= a spoonful of a cloud
 - e) Kung Pao chicken is named after an honorific title, *Kung Bao*, such as naming a dish after *Judge Judy's* favorite.
5. In conclusion, I welcome you to enjoy Chinese food with more cultural enrichment.

If you are interested to read more, please look up:

Chop Suey: a Cultural History of Chinese Food in the United States
by Andrew Coe

Regarding the regions of Chinese cuisine, check out:

<https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/chinese-food/eight-cuisine.htm>



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Disclaimer:

This presentation is intended to enrich the typical Chinese food experience. It is not meant to cover the immensity of Chinese dishes and regional cuisine. This is the beginning of a conversation to develop interest and distinguish terms for a further understanding of Chinese culture. If you have experienced Chinese food outside of the examples given, I encourage you to invite me to further discussion and to expand additional curriculum. This presentation is a conversation opener for many more conversations on what you may not know about the immensity of the topic of Chinese cuisine and related dining etiquette. This presentation is not a critique of other philosophies, religions, nor faiths.

About Yvonne:

Intercultural consultant and educator, Yvonne Wolf, delivers presentations that clarify the elements of Chinese culture in an accessible, relatable context. She has given talks at libraries, museums, and community centers. Yvonne's thoughtful consideration serves to enrich her entertaining presentations.

Yvonne generously shares the knowledge and skills she has gained from her experiences living in four different countries where she became fluent in three languages (Chinese (Mandarin), English, and Danish). She worked as a bilingual analyst in a Japanese global corporation in Denmark and served as a global language trainer in Japan. She has also visited half the states in the USA. She has ten years' experience working as an organizational consultant in Los Angeles mediating cross cultural misunderstandings. She continues her work in the Greater Chicago area.

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