

The Chinese Alphabet & Calligraphy

The written language in nearly every country on the planet consists of a small series of letters or symbols (20-50) which represent sound values in spoken language.

By using the letters of an alphabet, one can write down the words of a spoken language so that others may read it.

In Chinese writing, however, there is no alphabet or letters. The Chinese writing system consists of a large number of symbols used to directly represent words. This writing is often referred to as calligraphy. Worldwide, the Chinese language as written is considered a beautiful art form.

Special ink, made from charcoal and rice, is mixed fresh each time one writes. Special brushes are used to write characters, which are a series of brush strokes that form the actual word.

One fascinating difference is that Chinese writing flows up and down (vertically) on a page, as opposed to our writing that flows from side to side (horizontally). Here's an example of three words, written in Chinese above each word, and the verbal sound or pronunciation below.

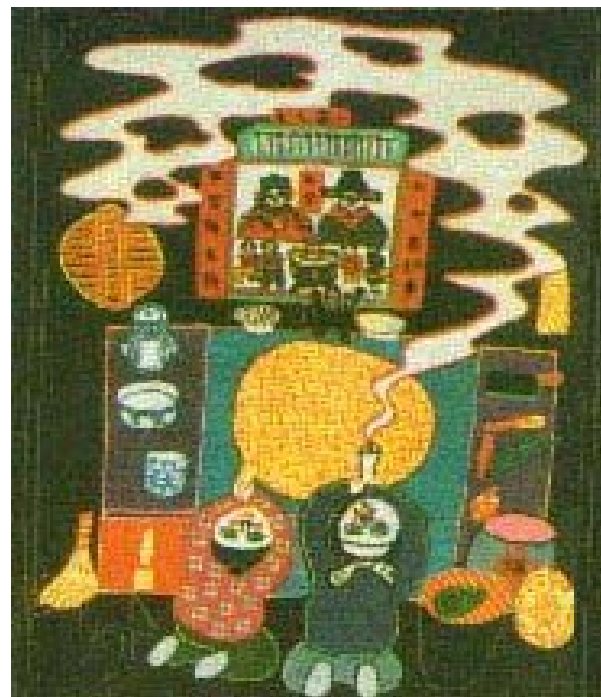


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The Chinese Kitchen god

During the last lunar month of the Chinese year, the Kitchen god returns to heaven to report to the Jade Emperor (ruler of heaven) about the family's activities over the past year.

On this day, Chinese families try to appease the Kitchen god so he will give the Jade Emperor a favorable report. Traditional images of the Kitchen god are burned to symbolize his act of departure. Often, gold or silver money will also be burned for traveling expenses. In some households, the Kitchen god's lips are brushed with honey or a sugar solution just before being burned. This increases the likelihood that only sweet things will be said by the Kitchen god.

The Kitchen god departs on the 24th and during his absence, the shrine in the kitchen is cleaned in preparation of his return on New Year's Eve.

猴年 2004

The Chinese New Year lasts seven days and is a special holiday for children. On the first day, everyone stays home. Over the next six days, children visit their relatives and are given red envelopes with money inside. Candy, also handed out during New Year, has wishes of happiness, prosperity and health written on the wrappers. The Chinese New Year for 2004 began on January 22nd. It is celebrated during the second new moon after the winter solstice.



The Cultural Cuisine Courier

A Newsletter for Children and their Parents

CHINA

The geographical size of China is about 9,596,960 square kilometers. By comparison, it is slightly smaller than the 9,631,418 square kilometers that make up the United States.

However, the mostly mountainous country is home to almost 1.3 billion people, while America's population totals about 290 million.

Throughout history, China has faced starvation problems because the large population needed to be fed, but their land was not suitable for agriculture. Because of this, the Chinese people became rather creative about what they would eat, turning to all sorts of exotic things we might never consider eating. Some of these exotic foods might include shark fins, bear paws, bird's nest soup, bamboo and water lily roots.

Because the Chinese had to be open to a variety of potential foods in order to survive, their cuisine has developed into one of the best and most varied in the world.



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Chinese Ingredients

One of the main ingredients used to flavor Chinese cooking is soy sauce. Soy sauce is made by fermenting boiled soybeans in a wooden barrel with water, salt and a roasted grain, such as wheat or barley. There are many different versions of soy sauce to choose from.

Soy products provide Chinese food with vegetable protein as well as flavor. While the oil extracted from soybeans is used for culinary purposes, soy milk is used as a beverage. Tofu is a bean curd, made from coagulated soybean milk. Look up *coagulated* in the dictionary to find out what it means.

Soybeans contain the best source of high quality plant protein.

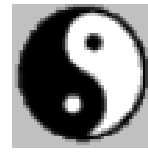
But did you know that soybeans are also used in China for industrial purposes, too? They are used in manufacturing paints, soaps, plastics and even ink.

Another commonly used bean in Chinese cuisine is the mung bean. This bean, when planted, will sprout. Bean sprouts are a common stir-fry ingredient. They are also made into flour and noodles, called bean thread noodles.

Ginger is another popular flavoring ingredient in many Chinese meals. Ginger comes from the ginger root and is sometimes ground into fine powder. It is the flavoring in gingerale and ginger bread - Yes, gingerbread men are flavored by this Chinese favorite! Many times, ginger is used fresh and raw, which adds the distinctive, tangy flavor to spicy Chinese dishes.

Did you know that garlic does more than ward off evil spirits? In China, garlic is a staple herb that is prized not only for its fiery flavor, but for medicinal purposes as well. It has been used in traditional Chinese medicine for thousands of years.

And finally, the mainstay of the Chinese diet is rice. Rice comes in all sorts of colors and shapes and there are over 7,000 different varieties! Rice is a grain, like wheat, and is very nutritious when eaten as a whole grain. Brown rice or whole rice is more nutritious than white rice. While white rice is preferred because it has a longer shelf-life and is quicker to cook, during the refining process, much of the protein, minerals and vitamins are lost.



Yin and Yang

Yin and Yang. Hot and Cold. Male and Female. The philosophy of yin and yang lies at the heart of Chinese culture. Interpreted literally, yin and yang mean the dark side and sunny side of a hill. Today, the symbol is more commonly thought of as opposing forces. However, it might be more appropriate to refer to them as complimentary partners.

The most important concept of yin and yang is balance. There is always a balance in life. Nature's wrath of floods, storms or earthquakes is balanced by dry, desert lands, clear sunny days, and the peaceful calm of silence.

Yin and yang are incorporated into Chinese cooking because of their opposing elements. Certain foods are thought to have yin, or cooling properties, while others offer yang, or warming properties. The challenge is to consume a diet that is a healthy balance.

For illnesses, an oriental physician might prescribe an herbal tea to restore yin (cooling) to someone who is suffering from heartburn because they ate a yang (hot or spicy) food, rather than giving them an antacid.

Interesting enough, Chinese cooking methods also have yin and yang properties:

Yin

Boiling
Poaching
Steaming

Yang

Deep-frying
Roasting
Stir-frying

Some examples of foods representing yin and yang are stir-fried beef with broccoli and sweet and sour pork. The key is to have a balance of color, flavor and texture.



Recipe of The Day

Tofu & Vegetable Stir-Fry

1 cup tofu, diced
2 cups mung bean sprouts
2 cups snow peas
2 cups chopped bok choy
2 cups mixed frozen vegetables
1 tablespoon oil
3 tablespoons soy sauce
1 tablespoon chopped ginger
1 onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, diced

Cook the brown rice in boiling water until rice is soft and set aside in a covered pot. Chop the bok choy and onion. Dice (chop into very small pieces) the tofu and garlic. Pour the oil and soy sauce into a wok or frying pan. When the oil mixture is hot, pour all of the remaining ingredients into the pan and stir as you fry the stir-fry.

Source: Food is Elementary© 2001
Antonia Demas, Ph.D.

Brown Rice

2 cups brown rice
2 cups water

Directions:



Chinese Brown Rice Stir-Fry

4 cups pre-cooked brown rice
1 cup edible pea pods (snow peas)
2 tablespoons soy sauce
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1/4 cup vegetable oil
1 tablespoon fresh ginger, finely chopped

In a wok or frying pan, heat soy sauce, ginger and garlic until the mixture is boiling. Add snow peas and stir-fry. Add rice, mix well and stir-fry another minute.

A Chinese Buddhist Temple



The Chinese Kitchen

One of the most important items in the Chinese kitchen is the wok. A wok is a thin, metal bowl-shaped frying pan. Its curved shape helps spread heat around the whole surface so that all the food in the pan gets cooked evenly. Two other essential items are a large lid, for steaming, and a wok stand, which makes a base for the wok over a gas flame or electric ring on the stove.

The Chinese wok is never cleaned with detergent, but with plain water. After it is cleaned, a small amount of oil is rubbed into it.



Long-handled spatulas, bamboo steamers, a sieve and wooden chopsticks are also essential utensils that every Chinese kitchen contains.