

# Meet American Chinese Cuisine In a New Trend

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## Is American Chinese Cuisine “real” Chinese food?

For Americans, what comes first when mentioning Chinese food? Orange Chicken? Tso’s Chicken? Or Fortune Cookies?

Native Chinese may never know those dishes. Generally speaking, American Chinese cuisine is a style of Chinese cuisine developed by Americans of Chinese descent. The dishes served in many North American Chinese restaurants are adapted to American tastes and often differ significantly from those found in China.



## Explore American Chinese restaurants

Songbirds coo contentedly. Leaves of trees are whirling with gentle breezes and warm sunshine. The air tastes delicious. A nice day to enjoy a good meal.

“Would you like to eat some Chinese food? I haven’t had any good Chinese food for months. It’s a nice day to explore some highly recommended restaurants.” I suggested. After searching on the Yelp app, a four-star Chinese restaurant called Dragon Inn located in Durham appeared on my screen. The girls nodded at once. It took us nearly forty minutes to arrive, but when the moment I stepped into the restaurant, I knew it was worth coming here.

Dim lights, brick-red wallpaper, and shimmering candles make Dragon Inn an ideally peaceful place for a non-social dinner with friends or family. There is a brown and old checkout counter close to the entrance, the owner is standing here and giving a smile to every customer. Across checkout counter is a small blackboard and specialists in bright color. Everyone sitting there takes sips of drink and chats softly. Pictures of traditional Chinese food – Hot-spicy Pot, Dry Fried Cabbage, Braised Pork– indicate this restaurant is not a typical Americanized Chinese food restaurant. It is a balance of American Chinese restaurant and authentic Chinese restaurant. It not only serves American Chinese cuisine, which treats vegetables as a side dish or garnish and puts meat and rice in a same plate, but also offers secret menu that lists traditional Chinese food.

Half a year ago, I heard Dragon Inn for the first time. Yet afterwards I remembered someone recommended this restaurant to me on my first day here. “Please try it,” my friend who is a junior said, “and you will love it. I have been there a lot of times even though it is far away. Try some traditional Chinese food, it is home-

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town's taste." Away from home for too long, I was overwhelmed with nostalgia when I stepped in the restaurant. Red lanterns gilded with character Fu (meaning fortune) and a string of red chilies hung over the door reminded me of the childhood memories during Spring Festival. All is like home. Sounds of chopsticks and spoons occasionally hit my ears. People chatting, kids laughing, everyone seemed to enjoy themselves, fully relaxed as if they were eating at their own dining tables. However, for American Chinese restaurants, they exist as a kind of fast food. People eating here are busy working or studying and they hardly ever chat with each other. Furthermore, they may go to restaurant alone.

The food on each table is colorful. In real Chinese cuisine, cooked ingredients still look as they did before cooked. Spices are used in moderation to preserve the authentic taste of the food. Dragon Inn does pretty well in this way. Nevertheless, an arbitrary mixture of meat and brown sauce is mostly presented in typical Americanized Chinese restaurants. Adding white sauce is also an ordinary

way of American Chinese cuisine. Just like the old man sitting at my back table, he ordered Sesame Chicken without second thought and poured white sauce to meat adroitly.

Dishes are "simple." Unlike any fancy and complex dishes that jam various materials into one dish, almost all dishes have less than three ingredients, yet they seem to be diligently prepared. That is also a point that differs traditional Chinese food and American Chinese cuisine. Take a common dish, Take Bok Choy as an example. A thin layer of oil lacquers the Bok Choy, making its surface gleam in the candle light. The natural green color of Bok Choy is well-preserved. A bite from the stem squeezes the slightly sweet juice out of the green, yet accompanying the salty drippings from the greens, an indescribable but delicious flavor bursts in the mouth. This dish, a home cooking staple, is one of the easiest dishes to make among all traditional homely cuisine. Just by eating it, a picture emerges of you coming home from school and seeing your mother picking out fresh material remaining in the fridge, asking you to wait for a





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(A Chinese document)

a little while, and later bringing out this dish with a bowl of steaming hot rice. The authentic taste of Bok Choy even reminds you of the fresh smell of soil in spring. As I refer to fresh, yet vegetables in the American Chinese cuisine are using a fresher way. They are basically boiled in the hot water. Think of Sushinara in Lenoir, the way of cooking broccoli is a generally way of treating vegetables. Though kept the original taste, vegetables in American Chinese cuisine are easily flavorless if raw material is stale. Without doubt, the flavorless of vegetables can neutralize the oiliness of meat and the saltiness of soy sauce rice, while authentic Chinese eat sticky white rice without taste.

The meat brings unexpected pleasant for me. I ordered Braised Pork, one of my mother's specialties. Braised meat is covered with the sticky syrup-colored soy sauce. The fatty meat is so fully elastic, while the lean meat is a little tough, but overall pleasant to chew. Of course, the dishes here cannot compare to the taste within memory, but it truly evokes something that doesn't usually come to my mind. I was kind of surprised to taste unexpected traditional Chinese cuisine in an American Chinese restaurant. Certainly, it is not an original American Chinese restaurant any more.

#### **Several Recommend Restaurants in the Triangle Area**

##### *1.Asian Café*

118 E Franklin St, Chapel Hill, NC 27516

919-929-0168

original American Chinese cuisine in pleasant price

##### *2.Gourmet Kingdom*

301 E Main St, Carrboro, NC 27510

919-932-7222

If you want to try spicy food, it is a good choice

##### *3.Dragon Inn*

3823 Guess RD, Durham, NC 27705

919-477-6310

a great balance of traditional Chinese and American Chinese

## How can we define nowadays' American Chinese restaurant?

I personally tend to conclude that it is still American Chinese restaurant but in a new trend. In the recent years, due to the increasing amount of Chinese international students, American Chinese restaurants reformed its menu and are willing to provide different menus to different customers. On the one hand, for Americans, they serve original American Chinese cuisine which are mostly made of chicken. On the other hand, when a group of Chinese enter the restaurant, they automatically provide the secret menu listing traditional Chinese food. Consistent with my personal research in several restaurants in the Triangle Area, big group of customers are more likely to order dishes in the secret menu. Nevertheless, none of customer refuses fortune cookies, which are a representative of American Chinese Cuisine. And we have to admit that the amazing balance of American Chinese food and traditional Chinese food is also a part of American Chinese food culture. American Chinese cuisine is a culture that emerges from immigration, and the change of Chinese population will undoubtedly bring changes for American Chinese cuisine.

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