

5 rarely ordered items to try at a Chinese restaurant

Chinese food is pretty much American food. Most of what is served at Chinese restaurants in America bears little to no resemblance to what you would find in China. Regardless, Chinese cuisine feels American – we order take out regularly, order it on Holidays when we don't feel like cooking, and love sitting at the bar ordering cocktails with umbrellas in them, especially Borpion Scowls – which I believe sober people call Scorpion Bowls.

There is something so very American about sitting up late night with a special someone, cuddling and watching movies while having Chinese takeout. It's delicious, affordable, and with an astounding array of choices, there's surely something to appeal to anyone and everyone.

While you might have had one of these dishes, they rarely, if ever, pop up during a discussion of favorite Chinese dishes. Almost always, you hear General Gao/Tso/Tsao's Chicken, Pu Pu Platter, boneless spareribs, Egg Foo Young, Chow Mein sandwiches or something similar. However, I'm willing to bet that most people would actually love the dishes on this list and even turn some into their new favorite, they just never hear about them.

We all know those friends who are terrified of leaving their food comfort zone. You know that one who has only ever order Luncheon Combo #5 and never tried anything else? I have friends who will not stray from the same 4-5 dishes no matter what. They just aren't interested. We all have that strange friend who even orders a burger or French Fries when he goes to a Chinese Restaurant. I joke with my friends that I am pretty sure that if you order the burger enough times at you favorite Chinese restaurant, it will summon Jerry Seinfeld.

Anyhow, you may have never heard of these dishes (though the true foodies will scoff) but they are or were some of my favorite dishes to order. I intentionally only chose the ones that garnered a positive response from those who ventured out. So, nothing hardcore. You're in good hands.

Mu Shi Pork



Mu Shi is, in essence, the Chinese version of a burrito or a wrap. Alternate spellings are Mu Shu, Moo Shu, or Mu Xu. This dish is an interactive one and in my opinion, a good gimmick to get your child to try it – getting some vegetables into his or her body without realizing it.

The dish is primarily shredded green cabbage, pork, thinly sliced carrots, scallions, bean sprouts, wood ear mushrooms, and a small amount of scrambled egg. Though there are quite a few variations circulating. It is accompanied by a small dish of sweet, salty Hoisin sauce and a bunch of warm, steamed tortilla-like pancakes.

The interactive part is making the taco or burrito since, in my entire life, I have never had a restaurant explain the

proper way to do it. I guess, it's like a famous cookie, whereby there is more than one way. What I do is smear a little Hoisin sauce on the pancake, spoon in the deliciousness, roll it into a cylinder, fold the bottom flap up and then proceed to fail and embarrass myself. But at least everyone else gets to have a laugh.

All that aside, it is absolutely delicious and I have enjoyed every version of it from any restaurant I've eaten it.

Yu Hsiang (Tofu)



The version with tofu is one of my most favorite dishes of all time – it's so good that when my daughter was growing up she always asked for it. You know something is delicious if you don't have to twist a child's arm to eat it. *Yu hsiang* is a sort of spicy garlic sauce but it also refers to a type of Sichuan cuisine – so you will find many variations of it, and utilizing a variety of meats instead of tofu.

Using a base of garlic, the sauce includes soy sauce, vinegar, sugar, vinegar, ginger, pickled chili peppers and *doubanjiang*

– a fermented paste of broad beans and soybeans. I am pretty sure you could put this sauce on a section of old tire and it would be delicious. The typical vegetable medley consists of sweet red pepper, bamboo shoots, broccoli, scallions, snow peas, wood ears (a type of tree fungus – think tree mushroom) and comes with white rice.

Even though I had some yesterday and have leftovers in the fridge, I'm thinking about getting some tomorrow for lunch.

Shiitake Mushrooms w/ Black Bean Sauce and Tofu



I think I say this all the time: this is one of my favorite dishes of all time. I must be a foodie. Let me go further – this is perhaps my most favorite dish of all time – as in indubitably top three. This is one of the heartiest dishes ever created and has an abundance of what the Japanese call *umami*. *Umami* is what the Japanese consider the 5th flavor along with sweet, salty, sour, and bitter. If you blindfolded

a typical meat-eater and gave him a few bites the savoriness, richness, and texture could fool him or her.

It has a few simple ingredients: shiitake mushrooms, soft tofu, and covered in black bean sauce. Of course, accompanied by white rice. So incredibly mouth-watering and satisfying. If you are a vegetarian or vegan this will fill any cravings you may have had for meat or if you are ever in some dark point in the early stages of becoming one, this will help you stay on course.

Out of these dishes, this is the only dish I have found in only one restaurant and that is at Gumbo's in Dartmouth.

Shumai



While America has a love affair with Chinese dumplings, the “other” Chinese dumpling gets over-shadowed and neglected. Like dumplings, Shumai are little bundles of mouth-watering joy: a filling of either pork and/or shrimp, with green scallion, garlic, soy, ginger, a pinch of sesame wrapped in a wonton wrapper and steamed.

However, unlike traditional dumplings, Shumai are bite-sized which translates into trouble. You can't just eat one. Variations of the meat may include scallop or crab, even vegetarian. Shumai are one of the cross-over foods from Dum Sum style restaurants. Dim Sum for those who have never been to a Chinese restaurant that serves this style of cuisine is the Chinese version of Spain's Tapas. Considering the age of Chinese culture, it might be more accurate to say that Tapas is the Spanish version of Dim Sum.

Chicken w/ Curry Sauce



Chinese style chicken with curry sauce is a simple dish: sliced chicken, sweet green peppers, and onions in a savory sauce of yellow curry, turmeric, and garlic. Occasionally you may come across places that put a little coconut milk in the sauce. Don't be fooled though since these few ingredients are

all one needs.

Anyone who is a fan of Asian cuisine in general knows that curries are found across the cuisine and with an astounding variety. The Thais, Vietnamese, Laotians, Indians and everyone else has a love affair with curries. They are so popular that if you go to the UK, every pub serves a curry due to the cultural exchange between England and India.

As far as I know, this dish and the yellow curry is a standard and there isn't any variation beyond what is paired with the chicken. I have seen it with potatoes, but not on the SouthCoast.