



# EXPLORING THE FLAVOURS OF SICHUAN

News brief from Hela Spice Canada



# EXPLORING THE FLAVOURS OF SICHUAN

## News brief from Hela Spice Canada

### **“China is the place for food, but Sichuan is the place for flavour”**

Sichuan is a province in central China that has a global reputation for fiery foods. And while some of that is true, it's only part of the story. Sichuan is and has long been known as the center of gastronomy in China. There is a saying in China that goes, “China is the place for food, but Sichuan is the place for flavour”. A major contributor to this, the Chile Pepper, wouldn't make it to China until the late 16th century. It was likely introduced to China in one of two ways, either by way of sea faring Portuguese traders who brought with them this plant from the New World or by an overland route through India, by way of the Silk Road.

Sichuan food, as it is known today, didn't really begin to take shape until the late 19th century and into the early 20th century. During the Japanese occupation of China, there was a massive influx of displaced people from the northern and coastal areas of China to the Sichuan Region. Chongqing became the capital of the Nationalist Government and with that, government officials from all over China took up residence. US servicemen had also arrived to support the war effort. Soon, new restaurants started popping up to serve all of the new residents. This growth included 30 Western-style restaurants and coffee shops. With this influx of displaced people came their food and styles of cooking. Sichuan cuisine changed and adapted to these flavours by blending the new cooking styles including roasting with smoking, and deep frying.

### **The 5 Flavours of Sichuan**

Sichuan cuisine, like Western cuisine and traditional Chinese cuisine has a number of tastes. Unlike Western cuisine which has identified four tastes : sweet, salty, bitter and sour, and traditional Chinese cuisine that has identified five tastes : salty, sweet, sour, hot or pungent, and bitter, Sichuan cuisine has five tastes: salty, sweet, sour, hot or pungent, and numbing.

Sichuan chefs can combine ingredients in a multitude of ways to balance these five flavours. To balance these complex flavours, chefs use common Chinese ingredients like soy sauce (both light and dark), sesame oil, Shaoxing wine, garlic and ginger. Chefs also use ingredients unique to Sichuan like Sichuan pepper, chiles in all forms (dry, fresh, preserved), chile oil, fermented black beans and Sichuan chile bean paste (a paste made from fermented broad beans and chiles that offers a complex and spicy umami flavour as well as a deep red colour). In addition to these staple ingredients that build the base flavours of Sichuan cuisine, there are many different preserved vegetables like mustard tuber and mustard greens that help provide balance.

There are many dishes in the Sichuanese culinary cannon, but most Western consumers would know the most popular items. These popular dishes like dan dan noodles, gong bao chicken, mapo tofu and mouth-watering chicken are well known. While many of these dishes rely on a blend of fresh, dry and preserved ingredients, all of these dishes use a healthy dose of the famous Sichuan peppercorn. This Peppercorn, when used in combination with different chiles, provides the ma'la flavour or the hot and numbing flavour that Sichuan is famous for.

### **What can Sichuan do for you?**

While many of the dishes listed in this article are what can be termed “traditional” Sichuan dishes, the food of Sichuan, like many other cuisines, is ever changing to meet the needs of new consumers. You too can look to the classics for inspiration but apply the flavours in new and exciting ways. Try a hong shao rou (red cooked) beef jerky, mouth-watering chicken pepperette, Sichuan hot pot cook-in-bag chicken dinner, or a non-traditional snack seasoning.



Contact the Hela Spice Canada Sales Team for further information:

Tel: (905) 852-5100  
Fax: (905) 852-1113  
[www.helaspice.com](http://www.helaspice.com)  
[customerservice.ca@helaspice.com](mailto:customerservice.ca@helaspice.com)