

Dumplings Galore

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Chinese rice dumpling, or zong zi in Mandarin, is a traditional Chinese food made of glutinous rice stuffed with fillings usually consisting of braised meat, dried mushroom, mung beans and Chinese chestnut. Wrapped in bamboo reed or other large flat leaves, these little pyramid-shaped bundles are then steamed or boiled for hours. Originating from China, the tradition of eating rice dumplings, particularly in celebration of the Dragon Boat Festival, has since spread around the world wherever Chinese communities reside.

THE STORY

During the Warring States period, there was a kingdom called Chu. Qu Yuan was an important minister who was well-known for his loyalty to his country and the emperor of Chu. Legend has it that the other ministers got jealous of Qu Yuan and convinced the emperor that Qu Yuan was a traitor who gave seditious advice. The emperor got angry and banished Qu Yuan from the state of Chu.

In 278 BC, when Qu Yuan heard that the state's capital was captured by its enemies, he tied himself to a big rock and then threw himself into the river of Puo Luo. The people of Chu rushed to rescue their patriotic minister but it was too late. They then threw rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves into the river as a sacrifice to his spirit as well as to stop the fishes from eating Qu Yuan's body. Some people even rowed downstream in a boat, shouting out loud and beating drums to scare all the fishes away. This was how the tradition of eating rice dumplings and dragon boat racing was believed to have come about.

DUMPLING VARIETIES

Teochew

The Teochews relish a combination of sweet and salty, so to recreate this taste, they combine sweet ingredients like red bean paste and winter melon with a savoury meat filling.

Nyonya

The Peranakan community makes dumplings which have a rather sweet taste and refers to them in Hokkien as "pua kiam tee chang" or "salty sweet dumplings". The filling consists of finely diced meat spiced with ground

coriander seeds, cekur ginger and candied winter melon. A small piece of pandan leaf is used to line the bamboo leaves to add fragrance.

Hokkien

One of the most popular dumplings is the Hokkien dumpling known as "kiam bak chang" or "salty pork dumpling". The filling has chunks of pork belly, shiitake mushroom, chestnuts, salted egg yolk and dried shrimps. The glutinous rice is flavoured with soy sauce which makes it savoury.

Hainanese

The Hainanese wrap their dumplings in banana leaves in rectangular parcels and call them "chim kau tarng" or pillow dumplings. The tradition of using banana leaves instead of bamboo leaves can be traced back to the tropical vegetation on Hainan island in southern China where banana plants grow in abundance.

Hakka

Hakka dough dumplings are a traditional festive food of the Hakka Chinese wrapped in bamboo leaves and steamed. This kind of dumpling

uses glutinous rice flour instead of glutinous rice and contains a filling of minced meat, preserved radish, five-spice powder and mushroom.

Cantonese

Cantonese dumplings are highly popular and contain similar ingredients to their Hokkien counterpart, but with the addition of mung beans. They are lightly flavoured with soy sauce so the taste is more subtle, scented by the fragrance of the bamboo leaves used to wrap the dumplings.

The skill of wrapping dumplings is often passed down through generations, much like a family recipe. In more traditional families, making dumplings is an occasion for the whole family to get together and chip in. It is a tedious process that can take up several days. To reduce the hassle of dumpling-making while preserving traditions, Raffles Town Club offers a range of delectable Cantonese dumplings for you and your family to enjoy together. For orders, please contact **The Chinese Restaurant** at **6357 3338 / 339**.

