



Orange chicken and General Tso's chicken are available at Chick Rice in the Pudong New Area. — Sun Minjie

# The in-between cuisine: Western-style Chinese food



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## Alexander Bushroe

As we all are surely aware, Chinese cuisine is among the most, if not the most, diverse and bountiful in the world. With both surf and turf, combined with a vast array of vegetables, cooked up with varied spices and amalgamations, ingredients and preparation methods vary greatly from region to region.

From the hearty, meat-heavy fare up north to the fiery, tongue-numbing spice in the central and southern regions, to the more delicate but intricate tastes here in the east, the country is a veritable paradise for those with curious palates.

However, there exists a category of food that is known and referred to by many as Chinese, but is, in fact, foreign to those who live here. The cuisine viewed by the vast majority of people in the United States and many other Western countries as "Chinese food" is, despite being

Chinese in origin, much different from what can be seen on menus in China itself.

Many of the ingredients and cooking methods have been changed. In some instances, vegetables and spices native to China that were, in the past, scarcely available abroad were replaced with more easily obtained substitutions.

In other cases, the taste and appearance of certain dishes were altered to cater to locals' preferences.

Regardless of the origin, entrepreneurial Chinese in the 19th and 20th centuries brought the culinary traditions of their homeland abroad and flourished.

There is quite a long and storied history involved that dates back to the mid-19th century and travels a winding path up to the fortune cookies, sweet-and-sour dishes and the familiar foldable paper boxes known as "oyster pails" that are ubiquitous in Chinese restaurants in Western countries today.

Chinese cuisine first appeared in Europe and the US in the mid- to late 19th century. Its arrival to the latter was spurred by the California Gold Rush of the late 1840s that brought people from many corners of the world to the area in search of the precious yellow metal that, rumor had it, lined the riverbeds of the region.

Many migrants from China were among them, and in subsequent decades comprised

a significant percentage of the residents of the burgeoning area. They brought with them, of course, cultural traditions ranging from dress and style to food.

Despite rampant xenophobia in that era, the cuisine eventually began to gain a foothold with local residents. Enterprising restaurateurs from China decided to alter their traditional methods of cooking and seasoning to better fit the tastes of locals.



Chop suey