

ACHIEVING BALANCE: TONIC SOUPS

BY IMOGENE LIM

A soup can begin as well as end a meal. In a restaurant when soup is the last item presented, it is typically sweet and serves as a dessert. At home it is often a slow simmering soup to refresh and balance foods just eaten. Home soups distinguish themselves by a cornucopia of dried ingredients (vegetables, herbs, seeds, and/or fruits) added to a pork and/or chicken soup stock. Rare is the one ingredient soup. The taste of this type of soup is not the sweetness of sugar but of a pleasant melange of flavor, or sometimes even of a slight bitterness. Three examples of soups typically made at home will be presented in this discussion. All of them are made with dried ingredients. They are: Ching Po Leung, Cane and Arrowroot Stock, and Dried Cole.

Food as Medicine: There is nothing as wonderful as fragrance from a simmering pot of soup to whet one's appetite or remind of family cooking. The soups I recall and make for myself are those not commonly found on restaurant menus. They are slow simmering soups that are as much tonics as they are food. They nourish the body, not with protein and minerals in the western sense of nutrition, but with *qi* energy (pronounced "chee").

Qi is a fundamental concept in Traditional Chinese Medicine; it is an invisible vital force that circulates throughout the body along prescribed pathways (known as meridians). If it does not flow smoothly or is stuck, illness is the result. For this reason, stimulation of *qi* can be in the form of acupuncture or acupressure. *Qi* is also stimulated by food. As readers of *Flavor & Fortune* know, "food is medicine." There is a truism in Chinese: "One cannot draw a line between foods and herbs," that is, there are many plants that are equally foods and herbs.

In western food ideology, foods are categorized according to proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, and minerals. In contrast, in eastern ideology they are classified according to their taste, organic action, movement, and energy as they affect *qi*.

The table below illustrates associations between tastes and their influences on major organs. Only in regard to diabetes does western medicine associate taste, sweet, with illness. However, in Chinese thinking, these associations need to be considered when using food as medicine because their balance produces harmony, or health.

Taste	<i>Yin</i> Organ	<i>Yang</i> Organ
Sour	Liver	Gall Bladder
Bitter	Heart	Small intestine
Sweet	Spleen	Stomach
Pungent	Lungs	Large intestine
Salty	Kidney	Bladder

Maintaining one's balance is also between the opposing forces of *yin* and *yang*; this is the other fundamental concept in Traditional Chinese Medicine. Any imbalance in these forces also results in sickness and poor health.

The concept of *yin-yang* is basic to the Chinese world view and is analogous to moon/sun, earth/heaven, water/fire, cold/hot, and female/male, respectively. Movement is also associated with them and for *yin*, there is a tendency to contract and flow downwards, while for *yang*, there is a tendency to expand and flow upwards and outwards. Important to understanding the *yin-yang* concept is the recognition that each is a part of the whole. One is not isolated from the other. So, when considering food combinations, *yang* accompanies *yin* and vice versa.

Yin-yang creates movement, but so do certain parts of plants in their effects. This explains the use of a plant's leaves rather than its roots for certain illnesses. Leaves and flowers produce a tendency of upward movement while roots, seeds, and fruits produce a tendency of downward movement. Movement can also be inward as well as outward. All of these affect *qi*.

Yin-yang helps to explain the dynamic of food in relation to *qi*, that is, the energy. Foods can be cold, cool, neutral, warm, or hot. These terms do not describe the temperature of the item, but the effect on the body upon ingestion--the sensation created in the body.

Foods typically recognized as hot are: Rich in fats, such as mutton, eel, or peanuts, also Spices, such as chili peppers or ginger; and Strong alcoholic drinks. Those identified as cold generally are fruits, as well as bland vegetables including those grown in water, such as seaweed and watercress. Water has a cooling effect. Some foods are neutral, the most common is rice. The above are generalizations rather than an itemized list of ingredients. Also, be aware that there is limited unanimity regarding food energies. For example, in one book mango is identified as cool, yet it is known to me as a hot food.

Although a food itself carries energy, that hotness or coldness can be manipulated by the addition of other contrasting ingredients. Chili is the obvious example to increase hotness in all senses. The manner of food preparation has an effect as well. Deep-frying, grilling, or long baking impart more heat to the food. In the case of a slow simmering soup, the gradual application of heat reduces its energy unlike the suddenness of heat in deep-frying, the hottest of food preparations.

For the serious practitioner of Traditional Chinese Medicine, foods are not simply identified as healthy or unhealthy. The state of the individual is a variable. For example, a person suffering from a hot

continued on page 10

almond, bitter	苦杏仁
almond, sweet	甜杏仁
arrowroot	粉葛
barley, pearl	薏米
bok choy	白菜
date, honey	蜜枣
dioscorea	淮山
fox nuts	茯苓(實)
imperatae	茅根
lily bulb, dried	百合
longan, dried	元肉
lotus seed	莲子
luo han kuo (momordica or arhat fruit)	罗汉果
polygonatum	玉竹
sugar cane	甘蔗

ACHIEVING BALANCE: TONIC SOUPS

continued from page 9

illness will not want to ingest hot or warming foods. That person needs cooling foods to balance his or her system. The manner of preparation has an effect as well as when the food is consumed, that is, the season. Certain foods may be more desirable in summer rather than autumn for their movement of *qi*; for example, the preference is outward and downward, respectively, during those times.

Rather than spend inordinate amounts of time determining which foods are best for you at any given moment, consider preparing a tonic soup to achieve that balance. This is particularly true as the seasons change: spring to summer, then autumn to winter.

Tonics: As with many Chinese food preparations, manufacturers have made cookery tasks easier. Either the tonic has been processed so that the addition of only hot water is necessary, or standard measures are pre-packaged ready to be added to soup stock. Examples of the former include: Lo-Han-Kuo Beverage, and Cane and Imperatae Beverage. In my youth, this mass marketing did not exist. If one wanted to make a particular soup, one needed to consult an herbalist or a knowledgeable person about the specific ingredients.

With a multitude of filled bins gracing the storefronts and the shelves of Chinese markets these days, the casual shopper might be at a loss as to choice, or even the knowledge of the necessary items to get. They can benefit from tonic soups without acquiring the expertise of an herbalist. As noted in an insert accompanying Lo-Han-Kuo Beverage:

"Long time drinking of this beverage will improve liver and strengthen spleen, stimulate spirit and promote the flow of saliva. It is reputed as the choice of the cooling beverage. Besides, it can also be used as subsidiary material for making tonic soup. It is convenient to take and easy to carry."

Foods that generally have tonic action on the body are said to be *pu*, that is, strengthening, supplementing, and/or restoring. Although *pu* foods are hot, by slow simmering they are reduced to gentle warming. Basically they help to correct bodily imbalance. The following soups are all-purpose tonics. Nutrient analysis has not been given, as most of the pre-packaged items differ; and they provide their own. Read them carefully as some make a single serving while others make enough for several diners.

BASIC PORK SOUP STOCK

Ingredients:

- 2 pounds meaty pork neck bones
- ½ Tablespoon salt
- 12 to 14 cups water
- 2 Tablespoons yellow rock sugar

Preparation:

- 1 Place ingredients into a large stock pot. Bring to a boil then skim the surface.
- 2 Add packaged ingredients and simmer as directed.

CHING PO LEUNG SOUP

Ingredients:

- 1 package Ching Po Leung
- 10 honey dates
- ½ a Lo-Han-Kuo (see photograph, whole and cut)
- 1 recipe prepared soup stock (see above)

Preparation:

- 1 Rinse packaged ingredients and drain.
- 2 Add to soup stock with remaining ingredients. Dried figs can be substituted for the honey dates, but use only five or six as they are sweeter and larger.
- 3 Simmer for at least two hours, the longer the better.



Notes:

- 1) Breaking Lo-Han-Kuo, also known as momordica, requires a degree of force because the rind is rather hard. Keep in mind that neither the rind nor its seeds are edible. All the other ingredients can be consumed when cooked, but care should be taken with the honey date because the pit is sharp.
- 2) The packaged ingredients for Ching Po Leung are sometimes identified as such in English, but more often are simply labeled Dried Assorted Vegetables (see photograph). Identification is not a problem for those who can read Chinese.
- 3) To assist those less familiar with these ingredients, note the photograph with seven dried ingredients, it illustrates the contents of a typical package. The top row, left to right are: dioscorea, lotus seeds, fox nuts, and dried longan. The bottom row, left to right: are: dried lily bulb, pearl barley, and polygonatum.
- 4) Honey dates are also illustrated
- 5) Pre-packed ingredients can be bought individually and I regularly add more of each to my soup pot as I enjoy eating them. To help you do so, consult the list of individual ingredients in English and in Chinese.

continued on page 26

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RICE: A MOST IMPORTANT GRAIN

continued from page 18

36 raisons

- 6 pieces preserved or canned red cherries
- 6 candied lotus nuts
- 1 cup walnuts, blanched
- 12 dried watermelon seeds
- 12 dragon longans, seeded

Preparation:

- 1 Wash rice, then put into a pot with six cups of cold water. Boil until soft, about 60 minutes, then mix in the sugar.
- 2 Rub a bowl (that can go into the steamer) with butter or oil. Arrange the fruit in an attractive pattern and cover with the cooked rice in such a way as not to disturb the pattern.
- 3 Steam for 90 minutes, then remove bowl from the steamer and immediately invert it on to a platter.
 - Optional, add a sauce before or after inverting the pudding. To make one: Bring 1/2 cup sugar, 1 teaspoon of cornstarch, and 1 cup of water to the boil. Boil it for one minute then pour over the rice before or after inverting it on to a platter.

Approximate nutrient analysis:

per person when serving 12 people.

Calories	423 Kc
Carbohydrate	52 g
Protein	9 g
Sodium	12 mg
Total fat	22 g
Saturated fat	2 g
Cholesterol	None

CRISPY RICE PAPER TOFU ROLLS

Ingredients:

- 1 pound firm tofu, drained well, then mashed
- 1/4 pound shrimp, minced
- 1/4 pound roast pork, minced
- 5 shiitake mushrooms, soaked then minced fine
- 1 scallion, minced fine
- 1/4 cup cornstarch
- 1/2 teaspoon powdered chicken or beef broth
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon ground white pepper
- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- 10 pieces round thin rice paper
- 4 Tablespoons cornstarch
- 2 to 3 cups corn or vegetable oil

Preparation:

- 1 Mix first ten ingredients (tofu through white pepper). Grease a plate that can go into the steamer and place this mixture thinly, in a square or rectangular shape, on the plate.
- 2 Steam for eight minutes, remove from the steamer, cut into ten equal size strips, and coat strips with 2 Tablespoons of the cornstarch.
- 3 Roll each strip into a piece of rice paper, very lightly wet to seal. When all are rolled, dust both sides with the remaining cornstarch.
- 4 Heat oil and deep fry until crispy, drain and serve.

Approximate nutrient analysis:

Assuming 3 Tablespoons of oil absorbed making the entire batch, per tofu roll.

Calories	197 Kc
Carbohydrate	11 g
Protein	13 g
Sodium	143 mg
Total fat	12 g
Saturated fat	2 g
Cholesterol	24 mg

This article was written by the editor.

ACHIEVING BALANCE: TONIC SOUPS

continued from page 10



CANE AND ARROWROOT SOUP

Ingredients:

- 1 package Cane and Arrowroot Stock
- 1 recipe prepared soup stock (see above)

Preparation:

- 1 Rinse and soak the packaged ingredients overnight.
- 2 Add them to the prepared soup stock then simmer for at least two hours.

continued on page 28

SHANGHAI CUISINE

continued from page 20

DRUNKEN CHICKEN

Ingredients:

- 1 broiler of frying chicken, about 3 pounds
- 1 Tablespoon coarse salt or 1 teaspoon table salt
- 2 scallions, tied in a knot
- 2 slices fresh ginger
- 1 cup dry rice wine or dry sherry

Preparation:

- 1 Rinse chicken and dry with paper towels.. Rub with salt, put scallions and ginger in the cavity; then put it in a steamer, cover and steam it for twenty minute. Remove and cool for half an hour.
- 2 Put chicken in a bowl, cover with wine and put in to the refrigerator. Turn it twice every day. It is best left marinating two to five days, the longer the better.
- 3 Remove from the refrigerator, chop it into bite-sized pieces, plate and serve.

Approximate nutrient analysis:

per person when serving 6 people.

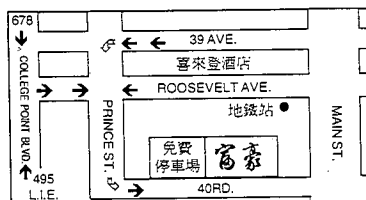
Calories	350 Kc
Carbohydrate	1 g
Protein	5.0 g
Sodium	644 mg
Total fat	14 g
Saturated fat	5 g
Cholesterol	198 mg

This article was written by the editor.

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ACHIEVING BALANCE: TONIC SOUPS

continued from page 26



DRIED COLE SOUP

Ingredients:

- 1 package dried cole
- 2 Tablespoons bitter almond
- 12 honey dates
- 2 Tablespoons sweet almond
- 1 dried orange peel, about 2 by 2 inches
- 1 recipe prepared soup stock (see above)

Preparation:

- 1 Rinse and soak the dried cole overnight.
- 2 Drain and reserve the liquid. Cut the cole into four-inch pieces.
- 3 Add cole and reserved liquid to prepared soup stock with the other ingredients and simmer for at least two hours.

Notes:

- 1) Depending on the package, the ends of the bok choy may be somewhat tough so should not be eaten but used merely to provide flavor.
- 2) The word cole is a misnomer--perhaps a poor translation because "dried cole" is bok choy (see illustration of the package and its contents). And should you want to, the soup can be made with fresh bok choy.

Imogene Lim, Ph.D., teaches anthropology at Malaspina University-College in Nanaimo, BC, Canada and took all the accompanying photographs. The Chinese food list is the hand of Qun Chen, a graduate anthropology student at the University of Victoria. Lim is a long time foodie whose research interests and professional efforts include food and ethnicity; an example can be seen when as a visiting professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, she taught a course titled: Consuming Identities: At the Table of Asian America.