

# Sichuan hotpot, life's hot spot essay



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Having been away from China for nearly 5 months, am I homesick? Having been fed on beef burgers, French fries, chicken wings and pizzas for the whole semester, am I missing a certain kind of food in China? What makes my mouth water now and then? What delicate flavor haunts me day and night? The memory mixed with a spicy, pungent and aromatic smell is welling up several times from my innermost heart, which gives the sole answer-Sichuan Hotpot.

I was born and have lived in Chengdu, Sichuan, which is the one of the most prosperous and thriving cities in the western part of China. Sichuan cuisine is known internationally. Sichuan (commonly spelled “ Szechuan” in the U. S.), also known as the “ heavenly country”, is a province abundant in natural resources. From ancient writing, it is said people of Sichuan uphold good flavor and are fond of hot and spicy taste (Fu 9). Chengdu abounds in red chili pepper, so chili pepper oil gives a distinct flavor to many Sichuan dishes, and garlic, ginger and spices feature prominently in Sichuan cuisine (Marshall 126). However, when talking about Sichuan cuisine, many locals naturally associate it with one type of food, which represents Chengdu and Sichuan most-that is Sichuan Hotpot.

As mentioned, Chengdu is known as “ heavenly country”, because of Chengdu's mellow climate and plentiful produce that makes life easier and happier here than other parts of China (Yee 19). Chengdu is also called a city that “ Once you come, you will never want to leave.” This is the city that is known for its slow pace, leisurely spirit and comfortable lifestyle. Chengdu people are notorious for their calm and relaxed demeanor, never happier than when they are gathering playing mahjong in a teahouse or having

delicious food with family and friends. This is where a cup of tea can last a whole afternoon and a Sichuan Hotpot can last from dusk to midnight.

Wandering around my hometown Chengdu, you'll easily find the streets filled with dinners sitting at tables gathering around bubbling hot pots, in which dozens of dried chilies bob up and down in an oily broth. Meals last hours long, as locals chat, sip beer and drink a toast to each other. As one of the most popular dishes in Sichuan, this delicacy is eaten by both the rich and the poor alike, whether in a fancy restaurant or along the side of a street.

In the eyes of Chengdu people, having Sichuan Hotpot with family and friends is the moment of immersing oneself in the mood of being carefree and relaxing and is the moment of reunion and sharing. Sichuan Hotpot meals are a long-standing tradition in Chengdu. However, Sichuan Hotpot is just one branch of Chinese hotpot. Hot pot cooking in China seems to have gained popularity during the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644 AD). During the Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1911) the hot pot was adopted by the imperial court and appeared on the emperor's menu (" The Culture of Hotpot" 2). In the 1930's, hotpot was adapted from its earlier versions to a more modern restaurant setting. On the streets, an inexpensive version of hot pot is immensely popular. Here locals dip food on bamboo skewers into the numbingly spicy liquids made famous in the Sichuan region (" The Culture of Hotpot" 4).