

The Flavors and Culture of China, Connected by One Hot Pot

Hello, everyone. My name is Shen Chunyan, and I have been working as an International Exchange Coordinator at the Mie Prefectural Government Office since April this year. I am from Henan Province, China. It's a pleasure to meet you! The theme I would like to introduce for this month's article is hot pot, one of China's most iconic dishes. Hot pot is a style of cooking in which a variety of ingredients are simmered together in a single pot and enjoyed communally. In China, hot pot is more than just a meal, it is also a place for people to connect and communicate. Family members and friends gather around a shared pot, enjoying conversation over a meal and spending quality time together. China is a vast country, and its climate and natural environment vary greatly from region to region. As a result, hot pot differs from place to place in terms of its broth, ingredients, and the way it is eaten. Today, I would like to introduce the landscapes, local traditions, and cultures of different parts of China through several representative styles of hot pot.

■ Beijing Copper Pot Shuanrou — A Taste of Tradition

When people think of hot pot in Beijing, many picture the traditional Copper Pot Shuanrou. At the center of the copper pot is a chimney, and the pot is heated from underneath with charcoal. The broth is very simple, consisting only of water simmered with green onions and ginger. Thinly sliced lamb is briefly swished through the hot broth, then dipped into a sauce based on sesame paste, often mixed with fermented tofu and cilantro. Beijing winters are cold, and temperatures can sometimes drop below freezing. For this reason, lamb, which is believed to help warm the body, has long been popular among local people. Beijing has also been influenced by imperial cuisine, which places great importance on appreciating the natural flavors of the ingredients themselves. Although this hot pot may appear simple at first glance, it reflects an important aspect of Beijing's culinary culture of bringing out the natural flavors of the ingredients.



■ Sichuan Mala Hot Pot — Depth Behind the Spice

When people hear "Sichuan hot pot", the first thing many people probably think of is its spiciness. However, its appeal goes far beyond simply being spicy. In addition to chili peppers, a variety of spices, including Sichuan peppercorns and star anise, create a rich aroma and distinctive flavor. The numbing sensation, spiciness, umami, and fragrance all come together, allowing you to experience a variety of flavors with every bite.

Sichuan is located in a basin and has a humid climate. The region has long had a culinary culture that makes extensive use of various spices, which eventually developed into today's mala hot pot. In Sichuan, it is a familiar sight to see family and friends gathered around a circular table, enjoying a steaming hot pot filled with a bright red, spicy broth.



An illustration of a traditional Chaoshan building with a tiled roof and a courtyard. In the foreground, a blue and white ceramic teapot sits on a wooden tray with four small cups of tea.

Chaoshan Beef Hot Pot

— A Commitment to Freshness

In the Chaoshan region of southern China, freshness is considered more important than anything else when it comes to ingredients.

The beef used for beef hot pot is freshly butchered that day, with different cuts separated and arranged for diners to choose from. Each cut requires a different cooking time, and some become ready to eat after only a few seconds in the broth.

In Chaoshan, there is a saying that "every part of a cow has its own best way of being enjoyed". Appreciating the differences in texture and flavor between the various cuts is one of the highlights of this style of hot pot. The idea of respecting ingredients and bringing out their flavors to the fullest is at the heart of Chaoshan beef hot pot.



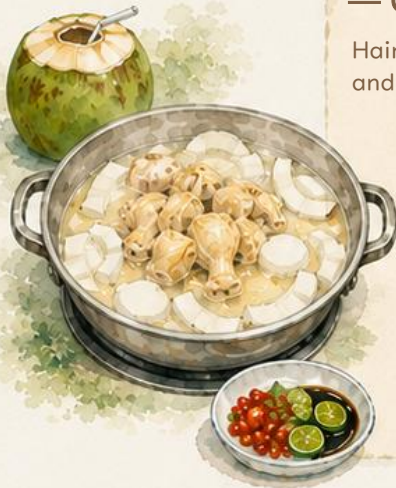
Hainan Coconut Chicken Hot Pot

— Gifts of the Tropics

Hainan Island enjoys a warm climate throughout the year and is well known as a major coconut-producing region.

The most distinctive feature of coconut chicken hot pot is that fresh coconut water, rather than ordinary water, is used as the base of the broth. When locally raised chicken is simmered in it, the savory flavor of the chicken gradually blends with the natural sweetness of the coconut, creating a light yet deeply flavorful broth.

Without relying on complicated seasonings, this hot pot allows you to enjoy the abundant gifts of Hainan's natural environment just as they are.



Yunnan Mushroom Hot Pot

— Flavors of the Mountains

Yunnan Province is located in southwestern China and is so rich in nature that it is sometimes called the "Kingdom of Plants". During mushroom season, markets are filled with a wide variety of wild mushrooms.

The people of Yunnan have lived alongside the mountains for generations and have always valued the gifts provided by nature. Mushroom hot pot is one of the dishes that best represents the region. Various kinds of mushrooms are simmered together in a pot, allowing their aromas and umami to infuse the broth and create a rich, flavorful taste.

In this single pot, we can see both Yunnan's abundant natural environment and the way its people have lived in harmony with nature.

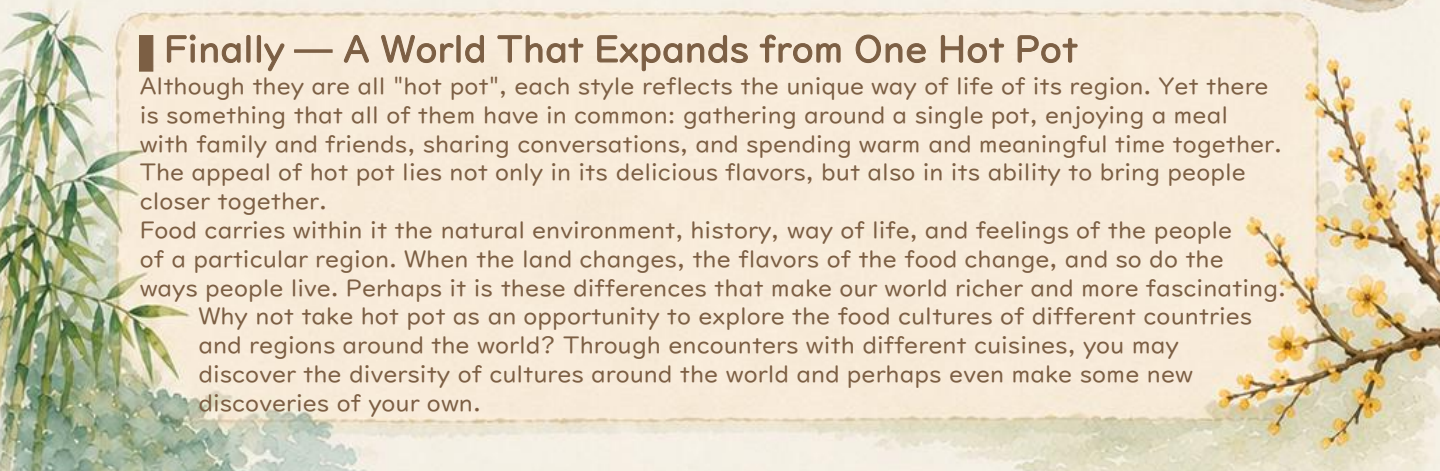


Finally — A World That Expands from One Hot Pot

Although they are all "hot pot", each style reflects the unique way of life of its region. Yet there is something that all of them have in common: gathering around a single pot, enjoying a meal with family and friends, sharing conversations, and spending warm and meaningful time together. The appeal of hot pot lies not only in its delicious flavors, but also in its ability to bring people closer together.

Food carries within it the natural environment, history, way of life, and feelings of the people of a particular region. When the land changes, the flavors of the food change, and so do the ways people live. Perhaps it is these differences that make our world richer and more fascinating.

Why not take hot pot as an opportunity to explore the food cultures of different countries and regions around the world? Through encounters with different cuisines, you may discover the diversity of cultures around the world and perhaps even make some new discoveries of your own.





Coordinators for International Relations
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cultures each month through various themes.
We hope you enjoy reading and discovering
more about the world's diverse cultures.



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