



## **It's all because of love**

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Chinese people are often compared with Italian people; both like to travel, talk, care about the family, and most importantly, both nations love food.

I spend about 200 days per year on the road, and usually go to Italy at least 3 times per year. From Tuscany to Beijing, the love put into home cooking makes results that are equally delicious. There are a lot of commonalities between the two cuisines; sauces, rice, noodles, sausage and other ingredients are important for both, but the underlying attitude to food is what really links the two. If for French and Japanese gourmards the finest ingredients and rarest flavors are necessary, and for Indian cuisine, the right mix of spice takes precedence, Italian and Chinese cuisine revolves around love, sharing, and family. During my childhood, my mother would cook the meal in a way that involved the whole family; Italians are the same way. Perhaps it is this intrinsic similarity that explains the newfound popularity of Italian cuisine in China.

French food was the first foreign cuisine to take root in China. During the 1990s, a large number of high-end French restaurants opened in Hong Kong, Beijing, and Shanghai; you'd spend 500 RMB and get an amazing experience of cuisine. At that time, French cuisine symbolized Western cuisine more generally. However, during and after the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, as more and more international luxury hotel brands opened in China, education about Italian cuisine started to take place, as excellent chefs started opening restaurants here. The warmth of Italian cuisine and the strong stimulation of taste buds made it easy to appreciate; the informal and casual ambience of Italian restaurants felt comfortable for Asian diners, often put off by the excessive formality of other cuisines. Hotel chefs saw their opportunities, and the first batch of Italian restaurants opened in Hong Kong, quickly followed by Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, Macau, and other cities. After a few years of experimentation, the best of the group were still left standing, differentiated by region. Northerners love pasta and breads, so they best pizzas in China are to be found in Beijing; Shanghai people are detail oriented, and so colorful and lovely Italian cuisine takes the fore here; Guangzhou people love umami flavors, and so seafood and

ham are popular. In Hong Kong, restaurants need to have all-around quality, including good environment, taste, and cost-effectiveness. It's in Hong Kong where Italian food has reached greatest popularity.

Food security in China is a huge issue, and one in the forefront of many chefs minds- how can pasta served in China be of the same quality as that in Italy? "In China, to cook well is not enough- you also need to maintain good relationships with suppliers to ensure that you get the finest ingredients," Beijing-based chef Paolo said. Some chefs import certain key ingredients, such as truffles, to go along with carefully selected local meats and vegetables, ensuring both quality and freshness.

Famous New York restaurant critic Ruth Reichl wrote that "food is a way to understand the world," which raises the question: in a prosperous age like ours, is food for nourishment or pleasure? German Romantic poet Hölderlin raised the question centuries ago. Food is so important to us, but we are living in one of the first eras where we have so much choice as to what to eat. Even as cuisine is subjected to technology and economics, preparing authentic food which preserves the traditions and flavors of our forefathers isn't easy. A love of ingredients, a love of food, and a love of sharing with family means that in this quest, Chinese and Italians will always be united.