



DONG BEI CAI | STRAIGHT FORWARD ISN'T IT

Dongbei cuisine is sort of the red-headed stepchild of Chinese food. Many consider it to be “unrefined,” a term some use to describe food that hasn’t yet caught the attention of UNESCO and isn’t served by hipsters out of a truck. In reality, Dongbei food is a wonderful testament to the area’s people and history—a mixture of Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Russian influences that combine to form China’s heartiest cuisine. Given its emphasis on meat, potatoes and heavier vegetables, it’s also very western-friendly—meaning you might be able to convince even the pickiest amongst your friends to give it a shot.

Look, there are dozens of Dongbei spots across the city, and everyone has their favorite based on different criteria. Truthfully, there’s probably not a whole lot of difference between them. But that’s beside the point.

Xx Dongbei Restaurant, which sits at the corner of Houmiao Lu and Jiangshan Zhong Lu, is the spot we would choose for a Ningbo Chinese food issue. We’ll get to why in a bit. But first, let’s tick the

boxes to make sure we’ve got the degree of authenticity needed to make this place deserving of a mention.

Beer boxes stacked everywhere? Check. Ever-present aroma of meat and soy sauce? Check. Gruff and to-the-point service? Check. A waitress who knows her baijiu backwards and forwards? Check.

So the atmosphere is right. The drinks are right. And thankfully, the food stacks up too.

老虎菜 (lao hu cai), which translates to “tiger food,” is a simple salad made from cilantro, Chinese leeks, green peppers and peanuts, and features a dressing made from sesame oil, vinegar and chili peppers. It can often be overly salty, but here it’s just right. Beware that the flavor of raw leek will definitely stay with you after this one, so maybe bring some gum or mouthwash if you’re on a date.

Perhaps the most popular dish of the region is 锅包肉 (guo bao rou), which can either be bright, citrusy and crispy



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or heavy, soggy and a weird mish-mash of flavors depending on where you get it from. Thankfully, at this joint, it's the former. The breading on the sliced pork is light and crispy, almost like a tempura batter, and the sauce is just sweet enough without sending shivers through your teeth.

If you hail from anywhere in the western world and you haven't tried 土豆泥 (tudou ni), change that immediately. It's not basically mashed potatoes and gravy, it is 100% mashed potatoes and gravy and may even be an improvement on its western counterpart. The main reason we chose xx as our Dongbei spot is because their tudou ni has the most gravy. Just check out the photos. "Swimming in gravy" was just a euphemism before. It is the salty, meaty comfort food you need in your life—a surefire way to eat your feelings and enjoy it.

As a last thought, Dongbei food is much better enjoyed with friends and (un)healthy amounts of booze. Not only does the boss lady know her baijiu, she'll recommend several different local bottles from back home. All of them are great and terrible at the same time. Take one or two up to one of the nice private round-table rooms upstairs, call a few friends and enjoy.