

COOKERY

Chinese Cookery

Pantry and cleaver skills, fast aromatics, velveting, stir-frying and wok hei, steaming, red braising, deep-frying, and dumpling making — closing with a capstone planning and cooking a genuine family-style meal, several shared dishes served together rather than in sequence.

10 Chapters

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CHAPTER 1: FOUNDATIONS & THE CHINESE PANTRY

Chinese Cookery

Chapter 1 · Foundations & the Chinese Pantry

Chinese home cooking leans on a compact set of real, distinct sauces and a small handful of tools used with real precision — a wok, a cleaver, a steamer. This chapter is the no-cooking foundation: the pantry, and the equipment later chapters actually lean on.

Soy Sauce: Two Genuinely Different Bottles

TYPE	WHAT IT IS	BEST USED FOR
Light soy sauce	Thinner, saltier, the everyday seasoning soy sauce	Seasoning during cooking, dipping sauces — the one to reach for most often
Dark soy sauce	Thicker, less salty, aged longer, with a mild sweetness and much deeper colour	Colour and depth in a braise, especially Chapter 7's own red braising — a small amount goes a long way

THESE AREN'T INTERCHANGEABLE

Using dark soy where a recipe wants light will make a dish taste flat and oddly sweet without enough real salt; using light where a recipe wants dark leaves a braise pale and underwhelming, no matter how long it cooks. Keep both on hand rather than treating one as a substitute for the other.

Shaoxing Wine

A fermented rice wine, essential in marinades, stir-fries, and braises alike — it adds real depth and cuts through richness in a way water or stock alone can't. If you genuinely can't find it, a dry sherry is the closest reasonable substitute, though the flavour isn't identical.

Sesame Oil: A Finishing Oil, Not a Cooking Oil

Toasted sesame oil is deeply aromatic and nutty — and it burns and loses that aroma fast at real stir-fry heat. It's added at the very end of cooking, off the heat, as a finishing touch, not used as the oil a dish is actually cooked in.

THE SAME FINISHING-OIL LOGIC AS ITALIAN COOKERY'S EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL

Reserve your good sesame oil for the very end, exactly the way Italian Cookery's own Chapter 1 reserves a good extra virgin olive oil for drizzling rather than frying. A neutral oil (vegetable, peanut, or a similar high-smoke-point oil) does the actual cooking; sesame oil finishes it.

Rice Vinegar & Oyster Sauce

- **White rice vinegar** — mild and clean, used in dipping sauces and lighter dishes.
- **Black (Chinkiang) vinegar** — deeper, slightly smoky and malty, closer in character to a balsamic vinegar, used in richer dressings and dipping sauces, particularly for dumplings (Chapter 9).
- **Oyster sauce** — a real, savoury depth-builder for stir-fries, despite the name it isn't fishy or sharp — genuinely umami-rich rather than seafood-flavoured on its own.

Cornstarch: A Different Thickener Again

Cornstarch does two real jobs in this course: it's the key ingredient in velveting meat (Chapter 4), and mixed with a little cold water into a slurry, it thickens a stir-fry's own sauce almost instantly at the very end of cooking.

A THIRD WAY TO THICKEN A SAUCE

French Cookery thickens with a cooked roux; Italian Cookery thickens with starchy pasta water. A cornstarch slurry is a genuinely different, third approach — added raw, straight into a hot, already-cooking liquid, thickening within seconds rather than needing minutes of simmering.

Essential Equipment

GENUINELY ESSENTIAL

- A carbon steel wok (Chapter 5's own wok hei depends on it)
- A Chinese cleaver (Chapter 2)
- A steamer, bamboo or metal (Chapter 6)
- A wooden spatula or ladle sized for the wok

NICE TO HAVE, NOT URGENT

- A spider strainer, for lifting food out of hot oil or water cleanly
- A wok ring, if your stovetop doesn't hold a round-bottomed wok steady

SKIP FOR NOW

- A non-stick wok — a well-seasoned carbon steel one genuinely performs better for this course's own techniques
- Specialty dumpling-pleating tools — your own fingers do this fine (Chapter 9)

Kitchen Practice

No cooking yet — this chapter's practice is about stocking and tasting, not a dish.

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Audit your own pantry against this chapter's own list. Check off what you already have, and note which missing items are needed soonest — light soy sauce and Shaoxing wine for the earliest chapters.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Taste light and dark soy sauce side by side, plain, off a spoon. Note the real differences in saltiness, thickness, and sweetness between the two.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Taste a small amount of toasted sesame oil plain, then heat a little of it in a pan until it just starts to smoke, and smell the difference. Note how much aroma is lost once it's been properly heated.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — THE CHINESE PANTRY

- Light soy for everyday seasoning; dark soy for colour and depth in a braise — not interchangeable
- Shaoxing wine in marinades, stir-fries, and braises alike
- Toasted sesame oil is a finishing oil, added off the heat at the very end
- White rice vinegar for lighter dishes; black (Chinkiang) vinegar for richer dipping sauces
- Cornstarch: velveting meat (Ch.4), and a raw slurry that thickens a sauce almost instantly
- Equipment: a carbon steel wok, a cleaver, a steamer, and a wok-sized spatula

Next — Chapter 2: The Cleaver & Chinese Knife Skills

One all-purpose cleaver, rock-chop mincing, slicing on the bias, and smashing garlic with the flat of the blade.

CHAPTER 2: THE CLEAVER & CHINESE KNIFE SKILLS

Chinese Cookery

Chapter 2 · The Cleaver & Chinese Knife Skills

A Western kitchen often splits knife work across a chef's knife, a paring knife, and a separate cleaver for heavy jobs. A Chinese kitchen frequently does all of it with one broad, rectangular cleaver — slicing, mincing, crushing, and even scooping ingredients off the board.

One Cleaver, Several Jobs

A mid-weight, all-purpose Chinese cleaver (*cai dao*) handles the overwhelming majority of home prep — slicing, mincing, and julienning vegetables and meat. A separate, much heavier bone cleaver exists for breaking down bone-in cuts, but it isn't needed for anything in this course — skip it for now.

1 Pinch grip, claw guiding hand

Grip the cleaver with a pinch grip on the blade near the handle, and curl your guiding hand into a claw shape on the food — the same core safety principle behind every knife technique in this Cookery Subject, just applied to a broader blade.

2 Let the blade's own weight do real work

A cleaver is heavier than a typical chef's knife — let its own weight fall through the cut rather than forcing it down with your arm.

Rock-Chop Mincing

Mincing garlic, ginger, or scallion with a cleaver uses the same rocking motion as mincing with any chef's knife — the tip stays roughly in contact with the board while the heel rises and falls, walking across the pile of food with each rock.

Slicing on the Bias

Many Chinese recipes call for meat or vegetables sliced at an angle — "on the bias" — rather than straight down. This isn't a stylistic flourish; it's a real, functional choice.

MORE SURFACE AREA, FASTER AND MORE EVEN COOKING

An angled slice exposes more surface area per piece than a straight, thick cut of the same width would. That matters enormously once Chapter 5's stir-frying is genuinely over in under a minute — a bias-cut piece cooks through faster and more evenly in that short window, where a thicker, straight-cut piece risks staying raw in the centre.

Smashing Garlic with the Flat of the Blade

1 Lay the cleaver flat over the clove

Rest the broad, flat side of the cleaver directly on top of a garlic clove.

2 Strike firmly with the heel of your hand

Give the flat of the blade a firm, controlled strike — enough to crush the clove, not shatter it across the counter.

3 Peel, then chop if needed

The crushed clove's skin comes away almost by itself. From there, you can mince it further with the same rock-chop motion, or leave it roughly crushed depending on the dish.

CRUSHING RELEASES MORE FLAVOUR THAN A CLEAN SLICE

Smashing ruptures far more of the garlic's own cell walls than a clean knife cut does, releasing more of the compounds responsible for its real, pungent flavour and aroma — a genuinely different result from simply slicing the same clove thinly, not just a faster way to peel it.

Using the Flat of the Blade to Transfer Ingredients

Once something is prepped, use the cleaver's own broad, flat side as a scoop — slide it under the pile on the board and lift the whole thing directly into a bowl or straight into the wok. This small habit matters more than it looks: Chapter 5's stir-frying moves fast enough that fumbling ingredients from a cutting board into the pan by hand can cost real, meaningful seconds.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Rock-chop mince a clove of garlic and a small piece of ginger with the cleaver, then use the flat of the blade to scoop and transfer both into a small bowl.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Cut one portion of a vegetable (carrot or a similar firm vegetable) on the bias, and a second, equal portion straight down. Stir-fry both for the exact same short amount of time and compare how evenly each portion cooked through.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Smash one clove of garlic with the flat of the blade, and mince a second clove with just the tip of the blade, no smashing. Compare how much aroma each releases, and how easily each clove peeled.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — THE CLEAVER & CHINESE KNIFE SKILLS

- One mid-weight cleaver handles slicing, mincing, and crushing — no separate bone cleaver needed here
- Pinch grip on the blade, claw grip on the guiding hand, let the blade's weight do the work
- Slicing on the bias increases surface area — faster, more even cooking in a fast stir-fry
- Smash garlic with the flat of the blade — releases more flavour than a clean slice, and peels easily
- Use the flat of the blade to scoop prepped ingredients straight into a bowl or the wok

Next — Chapter 3: The Holy Trinity & Building Flavour Fast

Ginger, garlic, and scallion — how and when they're added, and building aromatics in seconds rather than the slow bases of Italian and French cooking.

CHAPTER 3: THE HOLY TRINITY & BUILDING FLAVOUR FAST

Chinese Cookery

Chapter 3 · The Holy Trinity & Building Flavour Fast

*Ginger, garlic, and scallion make up Chinese cooking's own "holy trinity" — but where Italian Cookery's soffritto sweats for 10–15 minutes and French Cookery's mirepoix simmers for hours, this trinity is cooked in **seconds**. A genuinely different aromatic philosophy, built for a genuinely different style of cooking.*

The Three Aromatics

AROMATIC	CHARACTER	NOTES
Ginger	Warm, slightly spicy, fresh	Sliced or minced (Chapter 2's techniques) — used generously in both stir-fries and braises
Garlic	Pungent, the most commonly used of the three	Burns fast at wok heat — genuinely faster than in a gentler sauté
Scallion (spring onion)	Whites are pungent, closer to a mild onion; greens are delicate	Whites and greens are used at genuinely different points — see below

Cooked in Seconds, Not Minutes

1 Heat the oil until genuinely hot

Have your oil properly hot before the aromatics ever go in — this whole step happens too fast to wait around for heat to build once they're in the pan.

2 Add ginger, garlic, and scallion whites together

Add all three together, stirring constantly.

3 Stop the moment it smells fragrant

A few seconds — genuinely just a few — is usually enough. The moment the aroma hits you, move on to the next ingredient. Don't wait for colour or softness the way Italian Cookery's soffritto or French Cookery's mirepoix both do.

GARLIC GOES FROM FRAGRANT TO BURNT IN SECONDS, NOT MINUTES

At real wok heat, garlic can turn from perfectly fragrant to bitter and scorched in the time it takes to turn away and reach for the next ingredient. This is a genuinely faster window than Italian Cookery's own "burnt garlic can't be saved" warning for a gentler sauté — the margin for error here is smaller still.

Scallion Whites vs. Greens

Scallion is really two different ingredients wearing one name. The white, more pungent base holds up to real heat and is added early, alongside the ginger and garlic. The green tops are delicate — they wilt, lose colour, and lose flavour if cooked too long, so they're stirred in right at the very end, or scattered on top as a fresh, raw garnish.

THE SAME "ADD IT OFF THE HEAT" INSTINCT AS FRESH BASIL

This mirrors Italian Cookery's own instinct to stir fresh basil into a sugo only at the very end, off the heat — a genuinely delicate ingredient added early loses exactly what makes it worth using in the first place.

Infusing Oil: An Alternative Technique

Some dishes bloom ginger, garlic, and scallion in oil briefly, then strain the aromatics back out entirely — leaving behind a fragrant, infused oil with none of the visual bits. This suits dishes headed for deep frying (Chapter 8) or a clean, smooth-looking sauce, where the flavour is wanted without the texture.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Bloom ginger, garlic, and scallion whites in hot oil for just a few seconds, until fragrant, and taste the result. Then make a second batch, deliberately leaving it in well past that point until it browns and turns bitter, for comparison.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Cook one portion of scallion greens for the full stir-fry time, and add a second portion only in the final few seconds. Compare their colour, texture, and flavour side by side.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Bloom ginger and garlic in oil, then strain the solids out entirely, and taste the infused oil directly against a plain, unblomed oil of the same type.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — THE HOLY TRINITY

- Ginger, garlic, and scallion whites — bloomed in hot oil for just a few seconds, never sweated slowly
- Stop the moment it smells fragrant — garlic burns fast at wok heat
- Scallion whites go in early with the other aromatics; scallion greens go in at the very end or as a garnish
- Infusing oil (bloom, then strain out the solids) suits deep-frying or a clean, smooth sauce

Next — Chapter 4: Velveting: Tenderizing Meat Before It Ever Hits the Wok

Marinating in egg white, cornstarch, and a little wine or oil, and a brief blanch or oil-pass before the final stir-fry.

CHAPTER 4: VELVETING: TENDERIZING MEAT BEFORE IT EVER HITS THE WOK

Chinese Cookery

Chapter 4 · Velveting: Tenderizing Meat Before It Ever Hits the Wok

Velveting has no real equivalent anywhere else in this Cookery Subject — a two-stage prep, done entirely before the meat ever meets the wok's own extreme final heat (Chapter 5). Where searing builds a crust and braising breaks down collagen, velveting is about protecting a thin, fast-cooked slice of meat from drying out in the first place.

Why Velveting Exists

Chapter 2's own bias-sliced meat, cooked at genuinely extreme wok heat for well under a minute, is at real risk of turning tough and dry with nothing protecting it. Velveting coats each piece in a thin layer that seals moisture in, so the final stir-fry finishes it tender and silky instead.

The Marinade

1 Slice the meat thinly

Slice the meat thinly, on the bias (Chapter 2), before marinating — velveting works on individual thin pieces, not a whole cut.

2 Mix egg white, cornstarch, and a little wine

Combine egg white, a spoonful of cornstarch, and a small splash of Shaoxing wine or light soy sauce.

3 Massage the marinade into the meat

Massage the mixture into the meat with your hands, working it into every piece rather than just stirring it through.

4 Rest for 15–30 minutes

Let it rest, refrigerated, for at least 15 minutes. This isn't optional — the coating needs real time to adhere properly to the meat's own surface.

THE REAL CHEMISTRY BEHIND THE COATING

Egg white and cornstarch together form a thin protective layer around each piece of meat. When that coating hits hot oil or water in the next step, it sets almost immediately — creating a physical barrier that locks moisture inside while the meat itself finishes cooking.

Setting the Coating: Oil-Passing or Blanching

METHOD	HOW	NOTES
Oil-passing	Submerge briefly in warm-to-medium oil, roughly 130–150°C (265–300°F)	The classic restaurant method — needs a real quantity of oil
Blanching	Drop briefly into gently simmering water	The genuinely practical home version — no large quantity of oil needed

Either way, the goal is the same: cook the velvety meat just until the outside turns opaque and the coating visibly sets, then remove it immediately. This is a real, deliberate **par-cook** — the meat finishes properly once it's added to the hot wok in Chapter 5, not here.

DON'T SKIP THE REST, AND DON'T OVERCOOK THE PAR-COOK

Rushing the marinade's own rest time means the coating hasn't properly adhered, and it can slip right off in the oil or water. Overcooking the blanch or oil-pass stage defeats the whole point too — if the meat is already fully cooked before it ever reaches the wok, the final stir-fry has nothing left to finish, and the meat risks toughening from being cooked through twice.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Velvet a portion of thinly sliced chicken or beef — marinate, rest for at least 15 minutes, then blanch briefly in simmering water before a quick final stir-fry to finish it. Taste for tenderness.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Cook two equal portions of the same thinly sliced meat in a hot wok for the exact same time — one velveted, one plain, with no marinade at all. Compare tenderness and moisture directly.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Marinate a portion of meat and blanch it almost immediately, skipping the rest time. Compare how well the coating holds together against a properly rested batch.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — VELVETING

- Marinate thin, bias-sliced meat in egg white, cornstarch, and a little wine — massage it in, don't just stir
- Rest at least 15–30 minutes so the coating properly adheres
- Set the coating with a brief oil-pass (~130–150°C) or a gentler home blanch in simmering water
- Stop the moment the outside turns opaque — this is a par-cook, finished later in the wok
- Skipping the rest, or overcooking the par-cook, both undermine the whole technique

Next — Chapter 5: Stir-Frying & Wok Hei

High heat, constant motion, and the mise en place discipline for a cook that's over in under a

minute.

CHAPTER 5: STIR-FRYING & WOK HEI

Chinese Cookery

Chapter 5 · Stir-Frying & Wok Hei

This is the chapter everything so far has been building toward — the cleaver's own bias cuts (Chapter 2), aromatics bloomed in seconds (Chapter 3), and velveting meat (Chapter 4) all exist specifically to survive genuinely extreme, genuinely fast heat.

Mise en Place: Even More Critical Here

French Cookery's own mise en place chapter warns that several French techniques can't pause mid-cook. A real stir-fry is more extreme still — once the wok is genuinely hot, there is **zero** time to stop and slice anything. Everything must already be prepped, portioned, and arranged before the burner even goes on.

PRE-MIX THE SAUCE INTO ONE BOWL

Combine soy sauce, oyster sauce, a little stock or water, and Chapter 1's own cornstarch slurry into a single bowl ahead of time — so it can be poured in with one motion during the stir-fry itself, rather than reaching for several bottles mid-cook.

Getting the Wok Properly Hot

1 Heat the empty wok until it's genuinely smoking

Heat the empty wok on your highest burner setting until it's visibly smoking — a real, more extreme standard than the "hot pan" a Western sauté asks for.

2 Add oil, and let it heat for a few seconds

Add oil once the wok is smoking, swirling it to coat the surface, and give it just a few seconds to heat through before anything else goes in.

The Order of Ingredients

1 Aromatics first, for seconds only

Ginger, garlic, and scallion whites (Chapter 3) go in first, stirred constantly until just fragrant.

2 Velveted protein next

Add the par-cooked meat (Chapter 4), tossing to reheat and finish cooking it through.

3 Vegetables, hardest first

Add vegetables in order of hardness — firmer vegetables first, more delicate ones later — so everything finishes at roughly the same moment.

4 The pre-mixed sauce, then toss to coat

Pour in the sauce bowl you prepared ahead of time, tossing everything to coat evenly and let the cornstarch slurry thicken it almost instantly.

5 Scallion greens, right at the very end

Stir in scallion greens (Chapter 3) in the final few seconds, or scatter them on top as a garnish once plated.

What Wok Hei Actually Is

Wok hei — "breath of the wok" — is the smoky, slightly charred aroma real restaurant stir-fry carries. It develops when food briefly contacts the scorching-hot metal of a well-seasoned wok, and tiny droplets of oil and sauce flash against that surface, momentarily charring and depositing real, complex smoky flavour compounds onto the food.

HONEST LIMITS OF A HOME STOVE

Professional wok burners produce far more heat output than a typical home range — true restaurant-level wok hei is genuinely difficult to fully replicate at home. That's not a

reason to skip the technique, just an honest expectation: you can get meaningfully closer, not identical.

A few real habits help close the gap:

- **Use your highest heat setting**, and genuinely let the empty wok smoke before oil goes in.
- **Never crowd the wok** — exactly Saut  ing's own French Cookery warning, applied here too. A crowded wok drops in temperature and steams instead of searing, which kills any chance of real wok hei forming at all.
- **Work in smaller batches** if a recipe makes more than your wok and your stove's own heat output can comfortably handle at once.
- **Use a genuinely seasoned carbon steel wok** (Chapter 1), not a non-stick one — the bare metal surface is part of what makes the charring reaction possible.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Assemble a full stir-fry dish, using velveted meat from Chapter 4, aromatics bloomed per Chapter 3, and a pre-mixed sauce bowl — following the correct order of ingredients from start to finish, with every ingredient prepped before the wok goes on the heat.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Stir-fry the same vegetable in two batches — one properly spaced in the wok, one deliberately crowded. Compare colour and texture, the same test French Cookery ran for a saut   pan, reapplied here.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Preheat an empty wok until genuinely smoking before adding oil and food, then compare against adding oil to a merely warm, non-smoking wok. Note any real difference in aroma or char.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — STIR-FRYING & WOK HEI

- Prep and pre-mix everything, including the sauce, before the wok ever goes on the heat
- Heat the empty wok until genuinely smoking, then add oil and let it heat a few seconds more
- Order: aromatics (seconds) → velveting protein → vegetables, hardest first → sauce → scallion greens at the very end
- Wok hei comes from real charring at extreme heat — genuinely hard to fully replicate on a home stove
- Never crowd the wok — the same crowding warning as French Cookery's own sauté chapter

Next — Chapter 6: Steaming

Bamboo steamers, steaming fish and dumplings, and why steaming preserves delicate texture and flavour differently than boiling or stir-frying.

CHAPTER 6: STEAMING

Chinese Cookery

Chapter 6 · Steaming

Where Chapter 5 lived at the extreme high-heat end of the spectrum, steaming sits at the genuinely gentle end — moist, indirect heat that never actually submerges food in liquid. A major pillar of Chinese cooking, from a whole fish to Chapter 9's own dumplings.

Why Steam Instead of Boil

Boiling submerges food directly in turbulent water, which can toughen delicate proteins and pull real, water-soluble flavour compounds out of the food and into the water itself — water that's usually thrown away afterward. Steaming cooks with hot vapour instead, never actually submerging the food, so flavour stays where it belongs: inside what you're eating.

THE EXACT OPPOSITE GOAL OF FRENCH COOKERY'S OWN STOCK

French Cookery's Chapter 3 deliberately wants flavour to leach out of bones and vegetables into the surrounding liquid, since the liquid itself is the finished product. Steaming a piece of fish wants the precise opposite outcome — keep everything the food already has, rather than giving any of it away.

Bamboo vs. Metal Steamers

TYPE	REAL ADVANTAGE
Bamboo	Genuinely absorbs excess condensation into the material itself, rather than letting it collect and drip back down
Metal	Durable and easy to clean, but condensation collects on the lid and can drip directly onto food, leaving it soggy in spots

Stack bamboo steamer tiers over a wok or pot of simmering water, lining each tier with cabbage leaves or parchment paper to stop food sticking to the bamboo itself.

Steaming a Whole Fish

1 Score or leave the fish whole

A whole fish can be scored a few times on each side to help it cook evenly, or left plain.

2 Steam until just opaque and flaking

Steam over genuinely simmering water until the flesh turns opaque and flakes easily at its thickest point — check early rather than late, since fish overcooks fast.

3 Top with raw ginger and scallion

Once cooked, top the fish with fresh julienned ginger and scallion (Chapter 2's own cuts).

4 Finish with a drizzle of screaming-hot oil

Heat a small amount of neutral oil until it's just short of smoking, then pour it directly over the raw ginger and scallion on top of the fish — it sizzles audibly on contact, quickly cooking the aromatics' own surface and releasing their aroma right at the table.

DELICATE PROTEINS OVERCOOK FAST — HERE TOO

Fish in a steamer shares the same narrow doneness window French Cookery's own poached eggs and hollandaise warned about — a recurring theme across this entire Cookery Subject. Check early, and pull it the moment it flakes rather than waiting to be certain.

Looking Ahead to Dumplings

Chapter 9's dumplings are often steamed for the same underlying reason as the fish above — a delicate wrapper direct-boiled in turbulent water is at real risk of toughening or tearing, where

gentle steam heat cooks it through without ever subjecting it to that kind of direct, rolling contact.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Steam a whole or filleted fish until just opaque and flaking, then finish it with fresh ginger, scallion, and a drizzle of screaming-hot oil poured directly over the top.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Steam one portion of fish (or a delicate vegetable) and boil an equal portion of the same ingredient in plain water for a similar amount of time. Taste both directly, and taste the leftover boiling water too.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Steam the same food in a bamboo steamer and a metal steamer (or a metal steamer with and without a parchment liner) for the same amount of time. Compare how much condensation pooled on each and whether the food underneath turned soggy.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — STEAMING

- Steaming keeps flavour inside the food — boiling can leach it into water that gets thrown away
- Bamboo absorbs condensation; metal lets it collect and drip back onto the food
- Steam fish until just opaque and flaking — check early, it overcooks fast
- The classic finish: raw ginger and scallion, then screaming-hot oil poured directly over the top

- Delicate proteins share a narrow doneness window with French Cookery's own poached eggs and hollandaise

Next — Chapter 7: Red Braising (Hong Shao)

Dark soy, sugar, and Shaoxing wine as the real braising base — genuinely different from French Cookery's wine/stock reduction and Italian Cookery's soffritto-tomato braise.

CHAPTER 7: RED BRAISING (HONG SHAO)

Chinese Cookery

Chapter 7 · Red Braising (Hong Shao)

Hong shao means "red cooking" — the name describes the deep reddish-mahogany colour the finished dish takes on, not that anything red like tomato goes into it. This is the third genuinely different braising tradition across this Cookery Subject, and it shares almost nothing with either sibling's own approach.

Three Braising Traditions, Genuinely Different

COURSE	BASE	COLOUR & DEPTH FROM
Italian Cookery	Soffritto + tomato	A soft, sweated aromatic vegetable base
French Cookery	Mirepoix + wine + stock, thickened with a roux or beurre manié	A real stock and browned fond
Chinese Cookery	No stock, no vegetable base at all	Caramelized sugar and dark soy sauce

The Method

1 Blanch the meat first

Blanch the meat (pork belly is the classic cut) briefly in boiling water, then drain and rinse — this removes surface impurities, the same underlying logic as French Cookery's own bone-blanching for a white stock, applied here to meat instead.

2 Caramelize sugar in oil

Melt rock sugar (or regular sugar) in a little oil over medium heat, swirling gently, until it turns a deep amber colour — this is the dish's own real source of colour and depth, achieved with nothing at all like a roux.

3 Toss the blanched meat in the caramel

Add the blanched meat directly to the caramelized sugar, tossing to coat every piece — this is what gives the finished dish its signature glossy, reddish-mahogany surface.

4 Add whole aromatics

Add ginger slices, smashed garlic, scallion, and whole spices — star anise and a cinnamon stick are classic — a genuinely different "bouquet" than Chapter 3's fresh trinity, closer in spirit to French Cookery's own bouquet garni, but with a completely different spice profile.

5 Add dark soy, a little light soy, wine, and water

Add dark soy sauce (for further colour and depth), a smaller amount of light soy for seasoning, Shaoxing wine, and enough water to partially cover the meat.

6 Cover and simmer low and slow

Cover and simmer gently for an hour or more, depending on the cut, until genuinely tender.

7 Uncover and reduce to a glaze

Remove the lid for the final stretch and let the sauce reduce until it's thick and glossy, clinging to the meat rather than sitting as a thin, separate liquid around it.

CARAMELIZING SUGAR HAS ALMOST NO MARGIN FOR ERROR

Sugar can go from perfectly amber to genuinely burnt and bitter in a matter of seconds — a narrower margin even than Chapter 3's own aromatics warning. Watch it constantly, and pull it from the heat the moment it reaches a deep amber colour rather than waiting to be sure.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Make a full hong shao pork belly from start to finish — blanching, caramelizing sugar, tossing the meat to coat, adding whole aromatics and dark soy, simmering low and slow, and reducing the sauce to a glaze at the end.

[→ Solution](#)**KITCHEN PRACTICE 2**

Practice caramelizing sugar on its own, pulling one batch at the correct deep amber stage and deliberately letting a second batch go too far, until it visibly burns. Compare the smell and taste of both.

[→ Solution](#)**KITCHEN PRACTICE 3**

Taste the braising sauce partway through the covered simmer, and again after it's been reduced uncovered at the end. Compare thickness, glossiness, and how well each version clings to the meat.

[→ Solution](#)**QUICK REFERENCE — RED BRAISING (HONG SHAO)**

- No stock, no vegetable base — colour and depth come from caramelized sugar and dark soy sauce instead
- Blanch the meat first, exactly the same logic as blanching bones for a French white stock
- Caramelize sugar to a deep amber before the meat ever goes in — watch it constantly, it burns in seconds
- Whole spices (star anise, cinnamon) stand in for a bouquet garni, with a genuinely different profile
- Uncover near the end and reduce to a thick, glossy glaze that clings to the meat

Next — Chapter 8: Deep-Frying, Chinese Style

Velveting meat into a hot fry, the double-fry technique for real crispiness, and a quick sweet-and-sour or salt-and-pepper finish.

CHAPTER 8: DEEP-FRYING, CHINESE STYLE

Chinese Cookery

Chapter 8 · Deep-Frying, Chinese Style

The double-fry principle behind real crispiness isn't new — Japanese Cookery's own karaage chapter already covers it. What's genuinely different here is the coating and the finish: a cornstarch-heavy dredge instead of a batter, and a sauce or seasoning tossed on at the very last possible moment.

Coating Velveting Meat for Frying

Chapter 4's own velveting coating (egg white and cornstarch) is built to protect meat through a gentle blanch or oil-pass, ahead of a stir-fry. For deep-frying, the coating changes: a heavier, mostly cornstarch dredge — sometimes with a small amount of flour or a pinch of baking powder for extra lift — coats the meat in a dry layer built specifically for a crisp, fried exterior rather than a moisture-sealing one.

The Double Fry, Applied to a Chinese Coating

THE SAME PRINCIPLE JAPANESE COOKERY'S KARAAGE ALREADY TAUGHT

A first fry at a lower temperature cooks the meat through gently without over-browning; a second, hotter fry immediately after flash-crisps the exterior. That's the identical physics behind Japanese Cookery's own double-fried karaage — the coating and flavour profile here are what genuinely differ, not the underlying two-stage technique itself.

1 First fry: lower temperature, cook through

Fry the coated meat at a moderate oil temperature until just cooked through, then remove and let it rest briefly on a rack.

2 Second fry: higher temperature, flash-crisp

Return it to hotter oil for a short second fry — this is what produces the real, shattering crispness a single fry alone can't match.

Two Finishes: Sweet and Sour, or Salt and Pepper

FINISH	WHAT IT IS
Sweet and sour	A wet glaze — vinegar, sugar, and a tomato-based component, thickened with Chapter 1's own cornstarch slurry, tossed with the just-fried meat
Salt and pepper	A dry finish — toasted salt, white pepper, and often stir-fried chili, garlic, and scallion, tossed over the fried meat with no wet sauce at all

SAUCED FRIED FOOD GOES SOGGY FAST — TOSS AND SERVE IMMEDIATELY

A wet sweet and sour glaze starts softening that hard-won crisp coating the moment it touches it. Toss the fried meat in the sauce only right before serving, and serve it immediately — letting it sit even ten minutes undoes real work from two separate fries.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Coat a portion of meat in a cornstarch-heavy dredge and double-fry it, then toss it in a quick sweet and sour sauce and serve immediately.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Fry one portion of coated meat with a single fry only, and a second, equal portion with the full double fry. Compare crispness directly.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Toss two equal portions of freshly double-fried meat in sweet and sour sauce — taste one immediately, and let the second sit for 10 minutes before tasting. Compare texture directly.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — DEEP-FRYING, CHINESE STYLE

- A cornstarch-heavy dredge, genuinely different from Chapter 4's own egg-white velveting coating
- The double fry (lower temp to cook through, higher temp to crisp) is the same principle as Japanese Cookery's own karaage
- Sweet and sour: a wet, cornstarch-thickened glaze; salt and pepper: a dry seasoning finish
- Toss sauced fried food only right before serving — sogginess sets in within minutes

Next — Chapter 9: Dumpling Making

Dough and filling, wrapping and pleating technique, and boiled, steamed, or pan-fried variations.

CHAPTER 9: DUMPLING MAKING

Chinese Cookery

Chapter 9 · Dumpling Making

Dumplings genuinely pull together several earlier chapters — the cleaver's own mincing (Chapter 2), the holy trinity as a raw filling aromatic (Chapter 3), and steaming as one of three real cooking methods (Chapter 6). This is also the last technique chapter before the capstone.

The Dough: A Middle Ground on Gluten

Dumpling dough occupies a genuinely different spot than either of this Cookery Subject's own extremes — Italian Cookery's pasta dough actively wants strong gluten development; French Cookery's *pâte brisée* treats gluten as the enemy. Dumpling dough wants some real elasticity for stretch and durability while wrapping, without needing the full structure a bread dough builds.

1 Combine flour, water, and a pinch of salt

Mix flour with water (and a small pinch of salt if you like) until it forms a rough dough.

2 Knead until smooth and elastic

Knead for several minutes until the dough is smooth and springs back gently when pressed.

3 Rest, covered

Let it rest, covered, for at least 20–30 minutes — the same relaxing-the-gluten logic behind resting in both Italian Cookery's pasta dough and French Cookery's own pastry, applied here for a genuinely different reason: making the dough easier to roll thin without springing back.

PRE-MADE WRAPPERS ARE A GENUINE, HONEST SHORTCUT

Store-bought dumpling wrappers are widely available and a completely reasonable substitute if you'd rather focus on the filling and folding technique — nothing about

using them is "cheating" for a home cook.

The Filling

A classic filling combines ground pork, finely minced napa cabbage and chives, the holy trinity in raw minced form (Chapter 3), soy sauce, sesame oil, and a splash of Shaoxing wine.

SQUEEZE EXCESS WATER OUT OF SALTED CABBAGE FIRST

Salting cabbage draws out real moisture — squeeze it firmly dry before mixing it into the filling. Skipping this step leaves a watery filling that can burst wrappers during cooking, especially when boiled.

MIX JUST UNTIL COMBINED — DON'T OVERWORK IT

Unlike a bread dough that benefits from real kneading, dumpling filling only wants light mixing. Overworking it can make the meat mixture dense and rubbery rather than tender.

Wrapping & Pleating

1 A modest spoonful in the centre

Place a modest spoonful of filling in the centre of the wrapper — overfilling is the most common cause of a torn or burst wrapper.

2 Moisten the edge

Dab a little water around the wrapper's own edge to help it seal.

3 Fold and pleat one side

Fold the wrapper in half over the filling, pressing the back edge flat while pleating small folds along the front edge, sealing each pleat as you go — the classic half-moon shape.

Three Cooking Methods

METHOD	HOW	DONENESS
Boiled	Drop into a pot of boiling water	Ready once they float to the surface
Steamed	Chapter 6's own method, gentle indirect heat	The wrapper stays tender without direct, turbulent water contact
Pan-fried (potstickers)	Sear, steam, then re-crisp — see below	Golden, crisp base; tender top and filling

1 Sear the base

Arrange dumplings flat-side down in a hot, oiled pan and sear until the bottoms turn golden.

2 Add water and cover to steam

Add a small amount of water to the pan and cover immediately — the trapped steam finishes cooking the filling and the wrapper's own top through gently.

3 Uncover and re-crisp

Remove the lid once the water has mostly evaporated, letting the remaining moisture cook off and the base re-crisp for a final minute.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Make dumpling dough and filling from scratch, and wrap a full batch, practicing the fold-and-pleat technique.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Cook your batch of dumplings three ways — boiled, steamed, and pan-fried as potstickers. Compare texture and eating experience directly across all three.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Make two small batches of filling — one with the salted cabbage properly squeezed dry, one left unsqueezed — and boil dumplings from each. Compare how many wrappers burst.

[→ Solution](#)

QUICK REFERENCE — DUMPLING MAKING

- Dough: flour, water, a pinch of salt — kneaded for real elasticity, then rested
- Filling: mixed just until combined — overworking makes it dense, not tender
- Squeeze excess water out of salted cabbage, or the filling can burst wrappers
- Fold and pleat, sealing as you go — a modest amount of filling avoids tears
- Boiled (ready when they float), steamed (Chapter 6's own gentle method), or pan-fried as potstickers (sear, steam, re-crisp)

Next — Chapter 10: Capstone: A Family-Style Chinese Meal

A stir-fry, a steamed dish, and a braise planned and served together rather than in sequence — the real Chinese dining structure.

CHAPTER 10: CAPSTONE — A FAMILY-STYLE CHINESE MEAL

Chinese Cookery

Chapter 10 · Capstone: A Family-Style Chinese Meal

*Every sibling capstone in this Cookery Subject builds a sequence — courses served one after another. A real Chinese family meal does something genuinely different: several dishes, brought to the table **together**, shared communally, with everyone taking a little of each onto their own bowl of rice. This capstone builds that structure instead.*

Planning: Work Backward from the Slowest Element

1 The braise anchors the timeline

Chapter 7's hong shao braise needs real prep (blanching, caramelizing sugar) plus an hour or more of low, slow simmering. Start it first.

2 The steamed dish fits in the middle

Chapter 6's steamed fish needs only a short, active cook time once the braise is simmering unattended — a natural window to prep and steam it.

3 The stir-fry goes last, right before serving

Chapter 5's stir-fry is genuinely the fastest element of the whole meal, and — exactly like French Cookery's own sauté main — tastes best made last and served immediately, not left waiting.

4 Rice runs quietly in the background throughout

A pot or rice cooker of steamed rice needs almost no attention once started, and is the real, constant staple every other dish is eaten alongside.

The Menu

DISH	CHAPTER(S)	TECHNIQUE REUSED
Hong shao pork belly	1, 2, 7	Dark soy and sugar, blanching, caramelizing, red braising
Steamed fish	1, 6	Gentle steaming, the hot-oil finish
Stir-fried vegetable and meat dish	2, 3, 4, 5	Bias cuts, fast aromatics, velveting, wok hei
Steamed rice	—	The constant staple every dish is eaten alongside

Serving It Family-Style

Bring the braise, the steamed fish, and the stir-fry to the table together, each in its own serving dish, alongside a large pot or bowl of rice and individual bowls for each diner. Everyone serves themselves a little of each dish onto their own rice, rather than eating one dish through before moving to the next — genuinely different from every sibling course's own sequential structure in this Cookery Subject.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Plan and cook the full family-style meal — a hong shao braise, a steamed fish, and a stir-fry, plus rice — writing out a backward timeline anchored on the braise before you start cooking anything, and bringing all the dishes to the table together.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

While the braise simmers unattended, prep the stir-fry's mise en place and steam the fish in that same window. Note where the timing genuinely overlaps.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Add a simple soup as a fourth shared dish, reasoning through where it fits into your existing backward timeline.

[→ Solution](#)

QUICK REFERENCE — PLANNING A FAMILY-STYLE MEAL

- Several shared dishes served together, not in sequence — the real Chinese dining structure
- Plan backward from the slowest element — here, the braise's own hour-plus simmer
- The stir-fry goes last, closest to serving, since it's the fastest and best fresh
- Rice runs quietly throughout, needing almost no attention once started
- Every dish in this capstone reuses a real technique from earlier chapters — nothing here is new

Course Complete

That's Chinese Cookery, start to finish — from a well-stocked pantry through to a genuine family-style meal built entirely from technique you now actually understand, not just followed once.