

## Cheng Du 23

By [Nadia Ghattas](#), [Epoch Times](#) | February 18, 2011 | Last Updated: February 18, 2011 4:32 pm



PEACOCK CENTERPIECE: Multilayered and elegant. (Nadia Ghattas/The Epoch Times)

techniques. Jiang began his 8-year culinary journey in China at age 18. His master was the well-known, respected Jang Jing Leng who had won many gold medals. To graduate as a qualified, certified chef in China requires many years of training. Jiang came from a family of chefs and graduated after eight years as Sichuan Chef de Cuisine. His grand uncle Mr. Luo was a legendary Sichuan-style chef. He trained Jiang's uncle, an Iron Chef, who first introduced Sichuan cuisine to Japan.

It comes as no surprise that Jiang won the first prize in the Sichuan competition during the July 2010 New Tang Dynasty Television's International Classical Culinary Competition last September in New York.

When my friends and I arrived at Cheng Du 23, we found ourselves in an inviting Chinese-style setting that was captivating. Every dish served showcased meticulous workmanship with flavors diffused from many layers.



SEA BASS: Refined and elegant flavors. (Nadia Ghattas/The Epoch Times)

intensely aromatic with a woody fragrance that leaves a lingering sensation on the tongue, with smooth, addictive, and tantalizing heat.

The Scallops in Ginger in a sweet and creamy sauce was a revelation—surprisingly mild—a refined and flavorful dish. It was smothered in ginger. The scallops' natural juices blended fantastically with the sauce.

Good Chinese cuisine requires fresh, high-quality ingredients. They are cooked on very high

Cheng Du 23, located in a corner of a small shopping mall in Wayne, N. J., is close to the well-known Willowbrook Mall. The Cheng Du 23 eatery, a treasure trove of Asian cuisine, serves some of the best Sichuan cuisine one can find among Chinese restaurants in the New York metropolitan area. It is an ideal place to become exposed to true Chinese cuisine.

Chef-partner Yong Yi Jiang is like a poet who combines ingredients to achieve artistically beautiful presentations with flavors that sneak their ways into your soul. He pairs his offerings with tradition and classical

"It was an imperial experience," a Chinese friend said. We had 17 dishes. I urge you to starve before you go there because you will want to try everything on the menu.

The menu is unlike what you see in run-of-the-mill Chinese restaurants—it lists authentic dishes. Crispy tender Conch Slices in Chili Oil, a starter, is tricky to prepare. It needs the right amount of timing and temperature to avoid being tough. The presentation is an example of the precision of a Chinese technique: every piece is sliced in the same size, as thin as paper.

While we think that chili is hot, Sichuan peppercorns are unlike any other. They have their own personality. The spice grows in the mountains of Northwestern Sichuan and is

heat or in very hot oil for only seconds, allowing the food to cook on the inside but remaining juicy and tender. This method produces a crispy texture on the outside.

The Peacock Centerpiece with abalone, seaweed, and cucumber arrived with the special ingredient, Sichuan-style peppercorn, and had multi-layered flavors. The abalone is a rare commodity. Preparing it requires care and time: it was steamed for at least 12 hours. The Chinese-peppercorn preparation left a numbing yet gentle breeze of heat as one eats it. Sichuan cuisine concentrates on bringing out the natural quality of the ingredients: taste, color, and texture.



JADE TOFU: Creamy and smooth beyond imagination. (Nadia Ghattas/The Epoch Times)

of my favorites. I do like slowly cooked beef, and this is cooked for hours and was covered with different types of peppers. You only have to try these peppers to understand that they are not as harsh and strong as what we are used to but are hot in their own way.

Jade Tofu is a nice contrast to the beef. It was a good balance of mild and gentle. It is a mixture of shrimp, egg white, and tofu topped with pickled mustard root. It was fragile and delicate, smooth, and melted in one's mouth.

Then came the skillfully prepared, sensational, and luxurious Sea Bass with Garlic Sauce. Lightly fried with hardly any batter—a sign of the perfect execution.

Many other dishes were just as good. I highly recommend you try for yourself. I am happy to say that this was a discovery of what true Chinese food should be like and should be shared with everyone.

The service was good and friendly and the servers speak fluent English.

Average price range for appetizers was \$8 and for main courses \$15. Special Combo Lunches (\$7) and Dinners (\$9) are available.

*Open seven days a week; from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.*

*Saturday and Sunday Dim Sum from 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.*

*6 Willowbrook Blvd, Wayne, NJ 07470. (West Belt Plaza)*

*973-812-2800*

[Chengdu23.com](http://Chengdu23.com)

The Clear Sea Bass Soup was one I had never encountered before. The several nuances of flavors in this delicious clear broth are a delight ultimate, subtle perfection and a gentle overture to the main courses.

What followed were dishes that not only dazzled the eyes but also the palate. My Chinese friend said how spoiled he felt— this food was much better than what he had at home.

The Sichuan Spicy Dumplings swam in hot peppercorn oil. What makes the sauce interesting is the addition of sugar to impart a contrast to the hot.

Poached Beef slices in hot chili oil was one of my favorites. I do like slowly cooked beef, and this is cooked for hours and was covered with different types of peppers. You only have to try these peppers to understand that they are not as harsh and strong as what we are used to but are hot in their own way.

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