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A trip to the Moon gets you good, affordable Chinese food

By Stephen Bitsoli, Macomb Daily Restaurant Reviewer

November 15, 2002



Macomb Daily photo by Ray J. Skowronek

China Moon in Clinton Township serves a variety of good Cantonese and Szechuan dishes, including, from left, kung pao, almond boneless chicken and sesame chicken.

China Moon, (586) 791-8787; for delivery, (586) 445-2469

34328 Harper Ave., Clinton Township

Outward appearances can be deceiving, as I'm continually re-learning. A humble exterior can conceal a superior eatery.

Take the China Moon Cantonese and Szechuan restaurant in Clinton Township. It looks like nothing more than a Chinese carry-out place, and indeed it does seem to do brisk business in that area. At the dinner hour, bagged phone-in orders abound on a table near the register. (Delivery is also available.) But the food and the setting are more than acceptable for dining in.

(One drawback for some might be the lack of a liquor license. I don't drink much, and prefer hot tea with a Chinese meal anyway.)

China Moon, located in a strip mall on Harper south of I-94 since 1995, is another Chinese restaurant that doesn't hit you over the head with a lot of kitschy Chinese decoration or paper place mats with the signs of the Chinese zodiac. There is some framed calligraphy, some of the condiments are in ornate Asian-style containers, and the music gently and quietly flowing from the overhead speakers seemed to be Chinese, but other accents (a topiary in the corner, a painting of fish) aren't particularly Oriental. The color scheme is mostly green, burgundy and wood.

The menu is completely Chinese, however, with a mostly familiar assortment of chop suey, sweet-and-sour, fried rice and Szechuan dishes. Prices are very reasonable.

The appetizers include few, if any, American ringers (though "wing dings" sounds suspiciously like bar food), with both egg rolls (with seasoned pork and chicken) and spring rolls (shrimp, mushrooms and veggies), fried won tons, crab Rangoon (won tons filled with crabmeat and cream cheese) and pan-fried dumplings. Teriyaki skewers, beef or chicken (basically barbecued meat on a stick) on a bed of lettuce, were a little heavy on the sauce, but tasty. They come four skewers per order, more than adequate to split with a dining companion. The egg roll was fine also, although I didn't care for the accompanying sauce.

Soups are fairly familiar. I enjoyed the egg drop, which was slightly better than the usual. Other choices are won ton, hot- and-sour, Chinese vegetable and sizzling rice, plus a house won ton (available only by the quart) featuring sliced roasted pork and shrimp, plus bok choy, mushrooms, carrots, water chestnuts and bamboo.

Entrees (accompanied by a choice of won ton or egg drop soup, plus an egg roll) encompass traditional American Chinese restaurant choices such as chop suey or chow mein, plus subgum, fried rice or egg foo young, sweet & sour, Szechuan, and "House Specialties" (such as pressed duck, Singapore noodles and garlic ribs). Many dishes come in a choice of seafood, beef, chicken, pork or vegetable. Maybe a third come with a pepper icon, warning they're hot and spicy (kung pao, chicken with mild curry sauce, Hunan beef, for example).

The good "Buddha's Delight" features lots of vegetables (broccoli, pea pods, baby corn) and large pieces of tofu in a light sauce. The Szechuan cashews with pork (also available with beef, shrimp, chicken, vegetable and "seafood") included similar veggies, plus mushrooms, bell peppers, in a somewhat spicy sauce.

Dessert, never plentiful on Chinese menus, is here restricted to cookies -- fortune or almond. But you probably won't have room for much else. Portions are large enough that you'll probably have to take some of your meal home, and good enough that you won't mind.

If you have a restaurant recommendation, call (586) 783-0262, or e-mail steve.bitsoli@macombdaily.com