



Pulse of China

September 2024

FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD!

**WHAT TOPICS, DISHES AND REGIONS
OF CHINESE CUISINE DO CONSUMERS EXPLORE?
WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATION
FOR CONDIMENTS AND
FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRY?**

REGULAR FEATURES

What were the most searched and viewed topics in the month of August in China?

Your Monthly update on what Chinese consumers are thinking, feeling and exploring

Brought to you by **Searchlight Management Consulting**

Data provided by **Xiaohongshu (小红书)**

Searchlight



The wonderful world of Chinese cuisine

Chinese cuisine is very diverse and an area of tremendous interest and exploration for consumers. While there are eight broadly recognized schools of cuisines in China, each province and every region within a province will have its own distinctive flavour palette and unique, famous dishes.

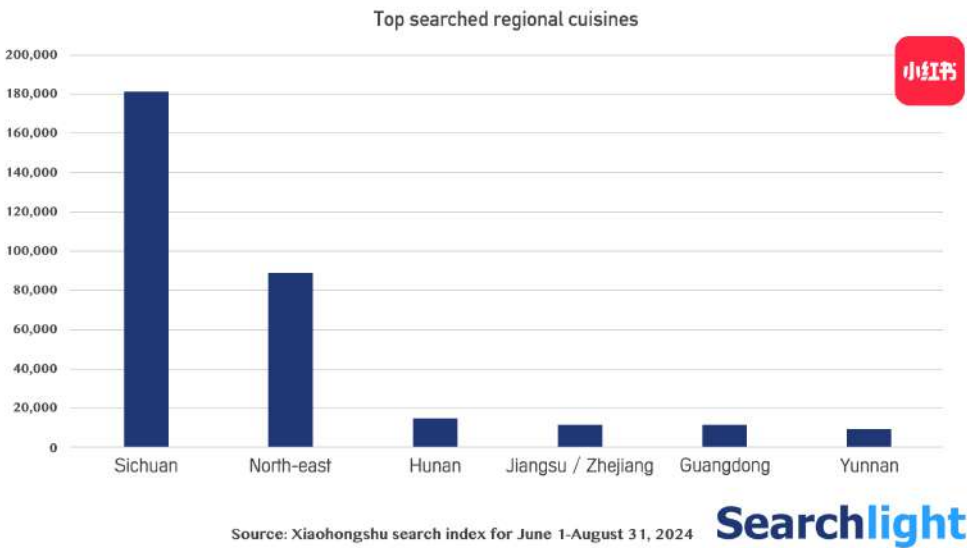
Given that this is not a season-specific topic, this month we've looked at data over three months – June to August – to build a more representative picture of the topics and areas of interest people have in the context of Chinese cuisine.

To start with, we looked at both the regional cuisines as well as what are considered standard formats for food in China to understand what are the most searched topics.



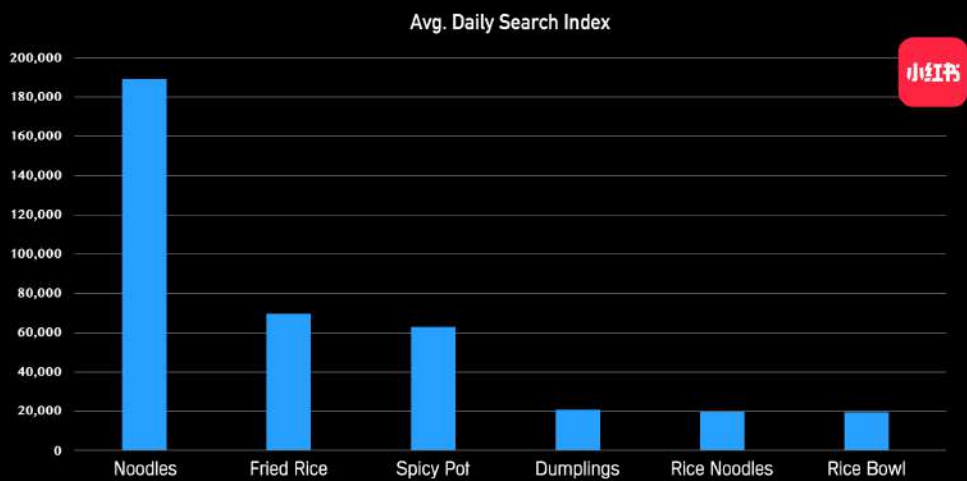
1. Sichuan cuisine as a regional origin tops the most searched topics, underlining its perception as the most popular Chinese regional cuisine

Most popular regional cuisines :
unsurprisingly, Sichuan cuisine as a regional cuisine is the most searched, reflecting its popularity



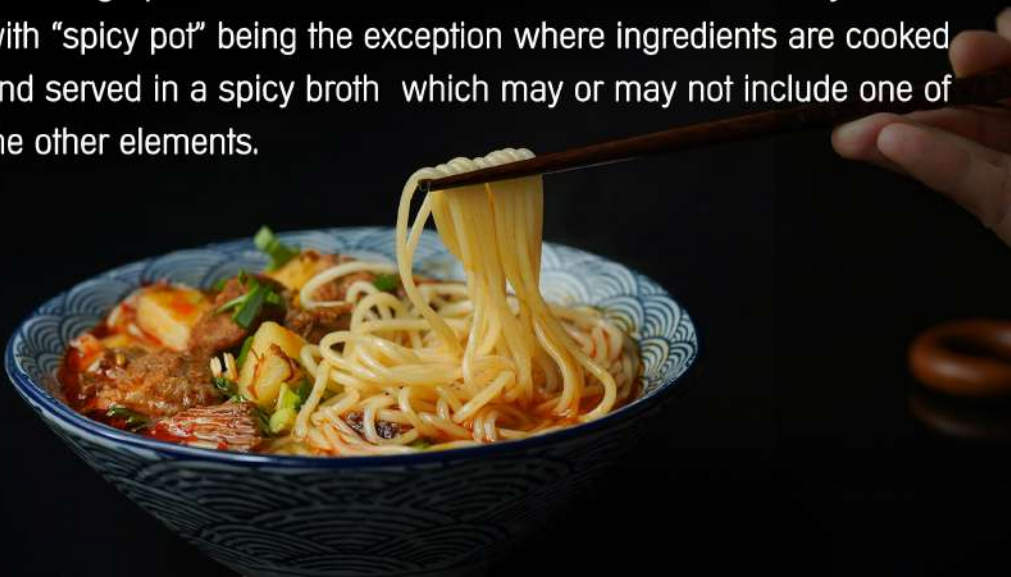
2. Noodles as a food format tops the most searched topics, again in line with popular perception of noodles being the most popular form of Chinese food

Typical food formats – noodles top the list of searched categories



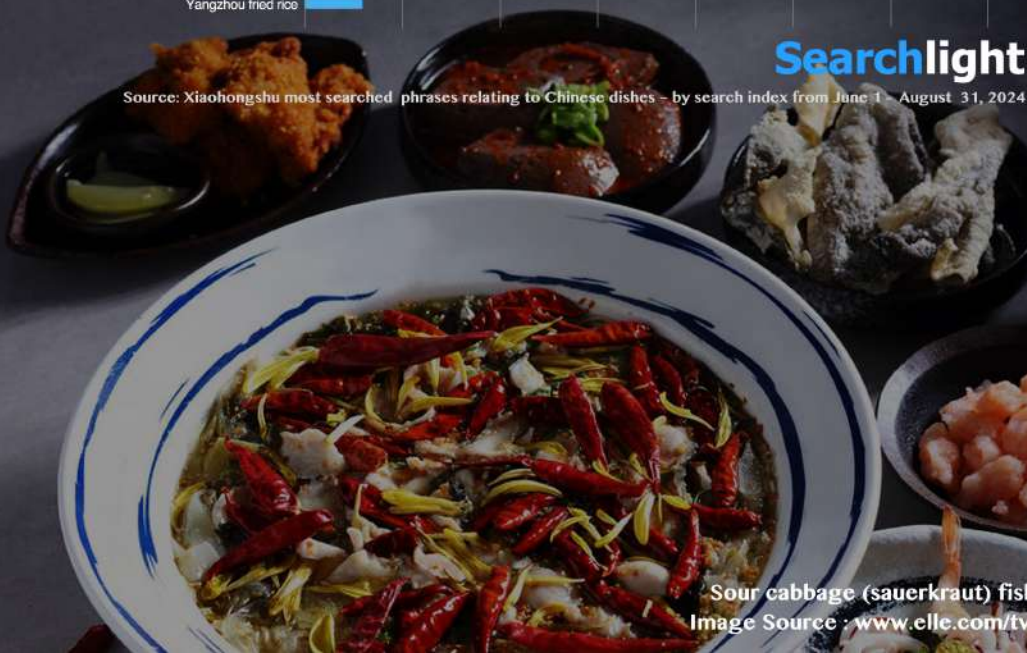
Source: Xiaohongshu search index for June 1-August 31, 2024 **Searchlight**

A lot of Chinese food is delivered as a “one-dish” meal built on a base of noodles, rice or dumplings as the core carbohydrate and delivery mechanism for sauces and flavours. This is why the second graph above defines the formats searched the way it does, with “spicy pot” being the exception where ingredients are cooked and served in a spicy broth which may or may not include one of the other elements.



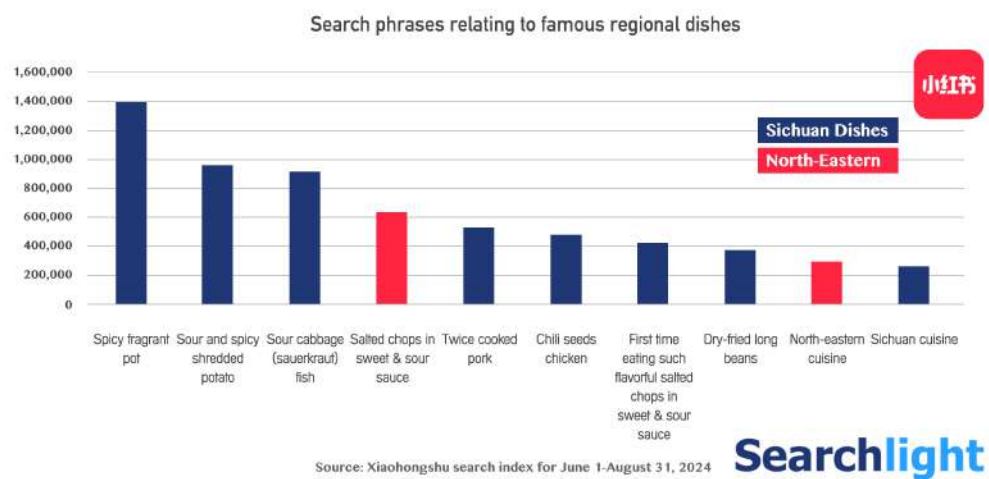
3. Curiosity and interest in specific dishes and formats: dishes from the Sichuan region dominate, and while rice-based dishes are at the top of the search list, noodle based dishes make up a very long middle and tail which dominate overall search numbers

Typical food formats and famous dishes – while there are a few rice based dishes at the top of the list, there is a long list of noodle based dishes which ultimately dominate overall search patterns



Seemingly mundane dishes like egg-fried rice are widely searched – suggesting that people from regions where this is not a common dish are still curious and want to learn more about typical dishes. Some dishes are more esoteric – like the hand-stretched noodles from Henan province which are not commonly found elsewhere and involve stretching a small piece of dough into a flat noodle before dropping it in water to cook.

8 of the top 10 search-phrases relating to specific “famous” regional dishes or cuisines relate to Sichuan cuisine, with the remaining 2 relating to the North-East



Specific search-phrases relating to famous regional dishes or cuisine types underline the dominance of Sichuan cuisine in consumer's minds. 8 of the top 10 search phrases relate to Sichuan cuisine.



4. Search activity around Chinese cuisine, famous dishes, home cooking and the like rival the numbers we saw for international cuisine a few months ago

In April 2024, we covered international cuisines in our newsletter. The dominant cuisines were still of Asian origin (Thai, Japanese, Korean) and the search numbers for top Chinese regional cuisines / formats or for specific dishes are very comparable to those we saw for top international cuisines or specific dishes.

What that tells us is that, to Chinese consumers, there is much to explore in the world of Chinese cuisine and it is just as interesting (if not more so) than the world of international cuisine.

5. There is considerable interest from home-chefs in “how-to” information on replicating famous dishes in their own kitchens

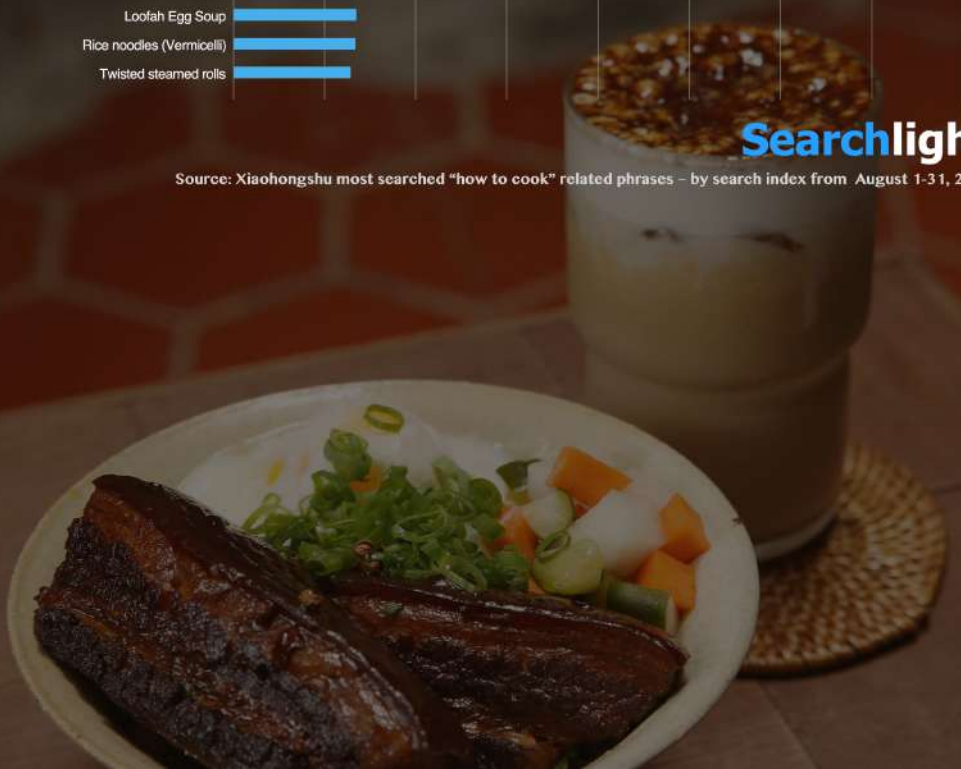
Interest in cooking some of the famous dishes at home leads to a very consistent pattern of search for “how-to” content around specific dishes. (The wording of most of these search phrases is around “how-to” make a specific dish at home, although specific search phrases vary slightly). When it comes to “how to cook...”, apart from the top search - Hong Shao Rou (Braised Pork) - most of the search phrases are around the ingredients or parts instead of regional flavours, famous dishes or cooking methods. The volume of searches also speaks to the large number of home-chefs who are constantly trying to upgrade their repertoire, suggesting that the home-chef market in China is very significant.

There is considerable interest in making some of the most famous Chinese dishes at home – here are some of the most searched “how to” dishes for home cooking



Searchlight

Source: Xiaohongshu most searched “how to cook” related phrases – by search index from August 1-31, 2024



Summary

Despite the closer familiarity and easier access to various regional cuisines within China, consumers find a great deal to explore and search around this topic. It was interesting to note that the volume of search on top Chinese cuisines or dishes rivals what we've seen for international cuisines and dishes in our April issue. This suggests, that for most consumers, Chinese cuisine represents an area of tremendous exploration and they are not yet at the stage where international cuisines are of significantly greater interest. (If you refer to our April issue, the most popular international cuisines were, in any case, mostly Asian in origin). The implication for food related industries is that there is still considerable opportunity to garner consumer interest by focusing on Chinese cuisines and famous regional dishes.

There is considerable interest in replicating dishes in the home-kitchen – again an area of opportunity for companies selling ingredients, flavouring agents or even ready-to-cook convenience meals.



XIAOHONGSHU **HOT TOPICS** **of THE MONTH**

As we do every month, we looked at top topics without any filters on the areas of discussion to arrive at our generic hot topics of the month. We see some of the perennial favorites – design, pets, fashion and beauty/skincare (in the context of dating) in the top read topics. Also, given the end of summer and the imminent reopening of schools, that becomes a seasonal topic that rises to the top. It's also interesting to see that “Black Myth: Wukong” leads to an associated interest in the topic of ancient architecture and buildings as seen in the video game.



Topic	Content Description	Number of Reads
#good design near me	Reinterpret everyday design that is all around you - creative products, beautiful packaging - waiting for you to pick it and tell us about it	37 million
#Follow the black myth to explore ancient architecture	The launch of "Black Myth WuKong" made everyone pay attention to ancient architecture - we invite you to follow the black myth and explore ancient architecture with us	24 million
#pre-date skincare routine	Share your pre-date skincare hacks with us	11 million
#my name is new classmate	2024 school season is starting, we cover school openings all over the country and welcome all students to share scenes from their own schools	9 million
#retro thin-soled shoes	Thin-soled shoes are the rising trend of the moment - get yourself a pair quickly before prices go up and complete your retro checklist!	4 million
#pets first car ride	Pets are an integral part of our families and lives. Share your furbaby's first experience of riding in a car	2 million



the platform, the users, and the consumers

Xiaohongshu is China's leading lifestyle platform that inspires people to discover and connect with a range of diverse lifestyles. As of the end of 2023, Xiaohongshu has attracted over 300 million monthly active users sharing content about their daily lives on the platform. On Xiaohongshu, consumers can search, read and share authentic content about all kinds of product categories and lifestyle related experiences and services. On Xiaohongshu, 90% of content on the platform are UGC (user-generated content) coming from ordinary users. Xiaohongshu has truly become the trusted source where ordinary people turn for making consumption decisions. Its average number of searches daily has exceeded 300 million. Xiaohongshu's users engage through authentic, interesting and useful content, building a relationship based on trust. They share, discuss and are constantly "seeding recommendations" about their favorite products and lifestyle trends. 70% of users are from the post-90s generation, and 50% of users come from first-and second-tier cities in China, representing strong spending power. Consumers can directly engage with a feed based on topics they are interested in, follow certain specific content creators or influencers, or search for content on specific topics and subtopics.

Marketers can look at broad sweep statistics to get a sense of what's hot in their category, which brands / segments / consumer needs and questions are most current. They can examine what content consumers are engaging with, separate brand content from UGC, and see consumer trends expressed in posts, content views, and searches.

If you want to know more about Xiaohongshu, come and explore our consumer experience for yourselves via the web on

<https://www.xiaohongshu.com>

小红书

ABOUT
XIAOHONGSHU



ABOUT US

Searchlight

Set up in early 2020, Searchlight is a boutique management consulting firm headquartered in Shanghai. We focus on helping brands understand and prioritize their opportunities and overcome their barriers to growth. We do this by working closely with our client teams over an extended period of time, facilitating their process of decision-making, building capability by guiding and training their teams, and also helping with organization redesign if necessary.

Our team of 14 associates covers a wide range of specialist areas – business management, brand management, marketing, communication, media, HR, CRM, sales management, technology, and. Each of us has at least 20 years of work experience, a large part of that in China

We coach and assist client teams to make quality decisions for the business. We also assist in the design of organizational processes and financial models, especially building internal and external capabilities for strategy implementation.

We've worked with both international and local brands, startups and public listed companies - J&J, Hollister Medical and Pandora as well as SUNNER Foods (a listed company that focused on food processing category and became one of the fastest growing B2C brand now) and startups like Little Ondine, LeBunna and Youxin coffee. For more about us visit

www.searchlightchina.com

If you want to convert information into usable insights and strategy, contact us:

enquiries@searchlightchina.com