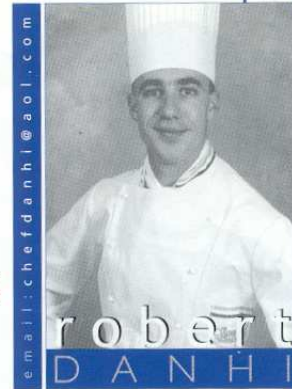


PONG TEH

WHEN WE ARE IN MALAYSIA DURING THE CHINESE NEW YEAR, VISITING GOOD FRIENDS AND RELATIVES ON A GASTRONOMIC JOURNEY IS NOT ONLY A ROUTINE BUT ALSO A REQUIREMENT.



AS WE ENTER EACH HOME the familiar rich aroma of *pong teh* fills our noses. The copious amounts of garlic and shallots are the first to hit us, then fermented soy beans and finally the dried Chinese mushrooms. This dish is a classic example of Nonya cuisine - a combination of Chinese and Malay elements.

Pong teh is a good dish to begin with when exploring Malaysian foods - which American does not like a rich stew with potatoes and chicken? The garlic and shallots were traditionally pounded in a mortar and pestle, but now they are pureed in a blender to form a smooth paste.

The readily available Chinese fermented soybeans, often labeled 'brown bean sauce,' have a similar flavor to *miso*, and in a bind we have substituted it with successful results. Simply pulse in a food processor if you buy the fermented whole beans - we usually buy the brown bean sauce.

The thick black soy sauce is just that - thick, gooey, black, rich, slightly sweet and also bitter. Hong Kong manufacturer Koon Chun sauce factory makes an acceptable, readily available product, which is slightly more bitter than Malaysian versions. *Kicap manis*, the thick soy sauce from Indonesia can be also substituted.

RD & Estrellita C. Leong



Rempah (spices): The term used to describe a pounded paste of aromatic ingredients. Most *rempahs* contain garlic and shallots, and often lemongrass (*serai*), *galangal* (*lengkuas*), and chili shrimp paste (*belachan*).

MALAYSIAN CHICKEN STEW (PONG TEH)

- 20 chicken thighs, skin off
- 1/4 cup soy sauce, thick
- 1/4 cup soy sauce, light
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 40 cloves garlic
- 30 shallots, 1/4 inch slices
- 1 cup ground bean sauce
- 2 lb new potatoes, 1 1/2 inch diameter; cut in half
- 1 1/2 cups chicken stock

To make a chicken and shiitake stew (*pong teh*) large enough for ten persons, rehydrate 20 dried shiitake mushrooms in water overnight, then remove their stems, halve their caps and decant the water for later.

Marinate the chicken in soy sauces and sugar for one hour, and meanwhile blend garlic and shallots with oil. Heat the garlic/shallot mixture over medium heat, stirring often for about five minutes until the oil begins to separate. Add the brown bean sauce and cook until a rich aroma develops then add mushrooms and potatoes, followed by chicken, and mix thoroughly.

Strain the reserved mushroom liquid and add it to the mixture, together with chicken stock. Bring to a boil, lower to simmer, cover, and cook for about an hour, stirring occasionally. Then taste sauce, adjust seasoning, and mash some of the potatoes to thicken if necessary.