Gang of One

Thought for Food

Ta Chien serves both Szechuan and Mandarin style cuisine. Szechuan is the spicer of the two. For appetizers we chose their Peking ravioli ($2.80 for six), which were very spicy and not greasy, a welcome change. The fried wontons ($1.90); however, were completely tasteless when eaten plain, but provided a crunchy base for the excellent honey dipping sauce. Although many soups are listed on the menu, I'm partial to a stinging riz soup ($3.25 for chicken or beef) with healthy portions of beans, mushrooms, chicken, and the superior snap-crackle-pop from which the soup takes its name. Wonton soup ($1.00) suffers from a weak broth, but die-hard eater would like the soup for its better than average wontons.

We began our ordering from the lengthy and varied poultry menu, and agreed on boiled rice to accompany all the dishes (which makes any Chinese meal fun — watch your coordinated friends botch the chopsticks and revert to forks). The chicken with almonds and the alternative with cashews ($3.50) were not too spicy; the subtle tastes escaped analysis, but both dishes went well with tea or beer. Orange flavored chicken ($1.95), a strongly spiced orange dish with vegetables, was hot enough to require more tea, but didn't cut into the beer supply. The Ta Chien chicken ($5.95), from the restaurants specialty list, however, was a rather hot Szechuan dish which really stood out from the rest of the plate; it put the beer to good use. The pork menu looked incredibly appetizing, making a choice difficult, but we settled on moo she beef ($4.75), with chicken, beef, and pork fried and served with vegetables. Unfortunately, the dish won't stand on its own merits; we liked it best when eating it with other chicken dishes, which accentuated the subtle spices.

The beef menu looked incredibly appetizing, making a choice difficult, but we settled on moo she beef ($4.75), with chicken, beef, and pork fried and served with vegetables. Unfortunately, the dish won't stand on its own merits; we liked it best when eating it with other chicken dishes, which accentuated the subtle spices.

The fried rice ($3.75), which complemented the meal, and forced the dexterity issue with the chopsticks again. The ten served as a constant reminder of the terrific Szechuan dishes. Fortune cookies were served at the end of the meal; and mine read, 'You will be the hearer of good news.' The news is — Go to Ta Chien!

Take note: the crowds arrive after 6 p.m. but before 8 p.m., but outside of those times it isn't difficult to obtain a table (The restaurant doesn't accept reservations.)

Ta Chien Restaurant is located at 18 Elliot Street in Cambridge, down the street from the Harvard-Brattle 'T' stop. Phone 491-9800. No reservations. American Express.

Michael Battat

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