

LOR BAK & HEH CHNEE

Lor Bak is made by marinating strips of meat with five-spice powder (ngoh hiang hoon), soya sauce, among other ingredients, and rolling the meat in a beancurd skin or tau phoi. It is then deep fried. Many recipes use minced meat, but the hawker version and my mother's recipe uses strips of pork.

The *lor*, which gives the dish its name, is a starchy sauce made from stock, soya sauce and five-spice powder. Egg white is stirred in to give this brown sauce its characteristic white streaks. *Bak* is 'meat' in Hokkien.

As a hawker food, Lor Bak is served with other appetizers in a platter, the main ones being prawn fritters (Heh Chnee) and soya bean cake (tau kwa). Items which are also traditionally served include Sting Ray (Ikan Pari), boiled eggs, century eggs and cucumber wedges. Boiled pig ears and squid are sometimes served as well. These foods are cut into bite-size pieces and dipped into two condiments – the *lor* and the special chilli sauce – before eating. Hair pins were used in the old days for serving Lor Bak, but they have now been replaced with bamboo picks. It is a pity because I find it a bit fiddily when dipping my Heh Chnee or tau kwa pieces into the sauces using a single point bamboo pick. With the hairpin, which has two points, I can manoeuvre my food to completely coat it with the sauces.

There are two good places to eat Lor Bak – off Penang Road at Kampong Malabar and Sri Bahari Road. I think the prawn fritters at the Kampong Malabar Lor Bak stall is the best. It is crispy, doesn't have too much batter, and you can taste the prawns. You order any number of appetizers that you like at the hawker stalls. There is no standard order. Good Lor Bak was served by one of the many hawker stalls at a well-known Penang *kopi tiam* at the junction of Penang Road and Dicken Street, next to the old Queen's Theatre. Sadly, this heritage *kopi tiam* is no longer there. There is another variation of Lor Bak which can be found at a hawker stall at the junction of Malay Street and Carnavon Street. You have to go early because it sells out quickly. Here, marinated belly pork is deep fried without the beancurd sheets. At home and in Hainanese restaurants, Lor Bak is normally served with cucumber wedges as a dish but without the *lor* or Heh Chnee.

There is something similar to the Penang Lor Bak platter in Singapore. The Singapore version of Lor Bak is known as Ngoh Hiang, named after the five-spice powder, and minced pork is generally used. It sometimes finds its way into cold appetiser platters in restaurants. I have not seen the Singapore version served with *lor*.

They say that it is difficult to make *lor*. I went to London to study engineering and learned to make *lor*. I worked for many years in Holborn. I moonlighted and studied to make *lor*! My mother explained to me how *lor* is made but I have never seen her prepare it before. I learned to make *lor* by trial and error. This recipe is based on my mother's.

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