Main dishes / China

Hong Shao Rou (Shanghai Red-Braised Pork Belly)

Pork belly cubes braised for hours in Shaoxing wine, soy, and rock sugar until the skin trembles and the fat is no longer fat but a quivering, amber lacquer — Shanghai's most beloved slow-cooked indulgence.

Time 150 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 800 g Pork belly, skin-on, cut into 4cm cubes
- ☐ 40 ml Regular soy sauce (light soy)
- ☐ 40 g Rock sugar (or brown sugar)
- ☐ 20 g Fresh ginger, sliced into coins
- ☐ 5 g Cinnamon stick
- ☐ 400 ml Water
- ☐ 30 ml Dark soy sauce
- ☐ 80 ml Shaoxing rice wine
- ☐ 30 g Scallions, tied in knots
- ☐ 4 g Star anise
- ☐ 20 ml Neutral oil

Let's make it.

01 Place the pork belly cubes in a pot of cold water. Bring to a boil over high heat. Boil for 5 minutes — you will see grey foam rising. This is myoglobin and impurities. Drain, discard the water, and rinse each cube of pork under cold running water. This step is not optional — it ensures a clear, clean-tasting braising liquid rather than a murky, funky one. Pat the pork dry with paper towels.

02 Heat the oil in a wok or heavy pot over medium heat. Add the rock sugar and stir until it melts into a golden caramel — about 3 minutes. The caramel should be amber, not dark. Immediately add the pork belly cubes and turn them to coat in the caramel. The skin side should spend the most time in contact with the pan. Cook for 3–4 minutes, turning, until the pork is lightly caramelized and the skin is turning golden.

03 Add the Shaoxing wine to the pot — it will sizzle and steam dramatically. Add the dark soy, light soy, scallion knots, ginger coins, star anise, cinnamon stick, and enough water to just cover the pork. Bring to a boil, then reduce to the lowest possible simmer. Cover and braise for 1.5 hours, turning the pork every 30 minutes. Remove the lid for the final 20–30 minutes and increase heat to medium-low to reduce the sauce to a glossy, lacquer-like consistency that coats each cube heavily. Remove the whole spices and scallions before serving.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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