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## Globalizing Macau's Food Culture

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Jackson, A. (2020). *The Making of Macau's Fusion Cuisine: From Family Table to World Stage*. Hong Kong University Press.

Macau offers more than casinos and nightclubs. It has a rich historical heritage and its tasty cuisine plays a major role in this global cultural encounter, blending Portuguese with Cantonese, Malay and Indian flavours. In *The Making of Macau's Fusion Cuisine: From Family Table to World Stage*, Asian food expert Annabel Jackson gives a masterful and comprehensive account of the development of Macau's food culture through the analytical lens of cultural collaboration and modernization. Building on her previous book, *Taste of Macau*, a collection of family recipes that enable today's young readers to reconnect with previous generations and strengthen their sense of attachment to Macau, Jackson investigates the diverse circumstances which have shaped the fertilization of Portuguese and Chinese food culture in this port city.<sup>[1]</sup> Carefully woven into this narrative is a colourful portrait of how Portuguese and their descendants engaged in culinary exchange with Cantonese inhabitants. Far from being a

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1. Annabel Jackson, *Taste of Macau: Portuguese Cuisine on the China Coast* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003).

nostalgic coffee-table book, this volume contextualizes the fascinating history of East-West culinary dialogue, showing opportunities for mutual collaboration and innovation.

The timing also makes this work a welcome addition to one's kitchen library. As the world is still recovering from the aftermaths of COVID-19 pandemic, the months-long lockdown has resulted in huge TV ratings for popular foodie programs such as America's Test Kitchen, Cook's Country and *The Great British Baking Show*, featuring practical recipes to prepare comfort food for people in isolation. In addition, the Netflix features *Chocolate*, a heart-warming Korean romantic drama that help viewers to find solace in food during the grief of losing loved ones.

The growing appreciation of Macau's fusion cuisine reflects a nostalgia among Macanese (Portuguese natives in Macau) and Macanese diaspora for homemade food and the bonds it forges and nourishes, enshrining the familial domain as a refuge against fear and uncertainty. Conceptually, food historian Jeffrey M. Pilcher theorizes cuisine as "a nexus between human sensory experience of the environment and the cultural meanings attached to it," and proposes the framework of "embodied imagination" to examine the sensory, material and socio-cultural dimensions of culinary encounters at both global and local levels.<sup>2</sup> The sensory dimension focuses on the taste, flavour, and satiety of a specific cuisine; the material perspective captures the complexities of food preparation and consumption; and the socio-cultural abstraction explores the impacts of transnational spice trade, empire encounters and global migrations on food culture. These multiple components reveal the way in which human attachment to cuisine and locality has reinforced—and often divided—group identities. Along the same reasoning, one truly appreciates Jackson's insightful discussion of the sensory, material and socio-cultural elements in the evolution of Macau's culinary history.

Composed of seven concise, well-written chapters, *The Making of Macau's Fusion Cuisine* traces the continuity and change of this unique local cuisine from the past to the present. The book begins with a thoughtful introductory essay, utilizing the categories of Macanese and Macanese diaspora as windows onto larger historical, economic, social and cultural factors that have shaped the culinary practices. The first three chapters draw on the qualitative findings from online surveys to address the complicated relationship between food and identity, the reception of Macanese food in different ethnic contexts, as well as the conscientious efforts to document Macau's culinary knowledge.

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2. Jeffrey M. Pilcher, "The Embodied Imagination in Recent Writings on Food History," *The American Historical Review* 121:3 (2016): 886.

Taking a closer look at the social life of Macanese in Hong Kong, chapter one argues that food choice has always been an integral part of their collective identity. In particular, culinary narratives, suffused with nostalgia, provide Jackson's informants with a reservoir of social meaning and a reflexive lens through which to view the world. Macanese food matters to them "because what is clearly very important is who cooks it (usually mothers), whom it is eaten with (family, community, members of a Casa or club), and when it is eaten (Christmas, a christening, a wedding anniversary)."<sup>[3]</sup> These affective acts of cooking and eating together during special family occasions and church gatherings are essential for the intimate encounters between families and friends, evoking complex personal and social emotions.

Chapter two evaluates the popular media representations of Macanese food before and after the handover of the city's sovereignty to China in 1999. Originally derived from Portuguese cooking practices, Macau's cuisine has undergone a centuries-long process of adaptation, change and renewal in a predominantly Cantonese society. The rapid growth in tourism in recent years, however, has blurred the boundaries between Macanese and other regional cuisines. Outside visitors do not necessarily know what an authentic Macanese meal is. Many tourists often associate Macau with a popular dish known as "African chicken" in English, or as "Galinha à Cafreal" in Portuguese, literally meant "blackened chicken" — spicy African chicken and potato marinated with chili and onions, and baked in pepper, peanut and coconut sauces, even though this dish has allegedly been introduced in upscale restaurants for tourists since the 1990s.<sup>[4]</sup>

Food memories have strong emotional resonance, a topic of investigation in chapter three. In the past, Portuguese matriarchs prepared meals for relatives and guests in tightly knit social settings. Keen to outperform each other in cooking competitions, they held the recipes as family secrets. With the dramatic changes in post-colonial economy, however, many Macanese are scattered worldwide and have begun to share their recipes in order to transmit culinary knowledge and skills in the diaspora. Beyond providing practical instructions, these recipes serve as "a medium for aesthetic contemplation," enlivening the memory of sharing homemade dishes together.<sup>[5]</sup> It is through the widespread circulation of these recipes, both online and offline, that Macanese food has established a visible presence in the landscape of global cuisine.

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3. Annabel Jackson, *The Making of Macau's Fusion Cuisine: From Family Table to World Stage* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2020), 23.

4. Jackson, *The Making of Macau's Fusion Cuisine*, 28.

5. Pilcher, "The Embodied Imagination," 878.

By documenting the spread of Portuguese culinary habits across Asia, chapter four historicizes the globalization and localization of Portuguese food culture. Jackson situates her study against the history of transnational spice trade across the Portuguese outposts in Goa, Malacca and Macau. A merry mix of Portuguese, Indian, Malay and Chinese spices evolve not only strong flavourings for food, but also perfume, medicine, and an imagined paradise that connects humans with the divine.<sup>[6]</sup> It was actually in the Portuguese Catholic maritime belt, spreading from Goa and Malacca to Macau and Nagasaki where the transformation of Western culinary practices took place. The widespread embrace of Portuguese grape wine and fermented fish sauce epitomizes culinary hybridity.

While the conventional historiography on Sino-Christian encounters has dealt with the political and ideological pressures forced upon late imperial China, Jackson shows vividly that food and eating lied at the heart of everyday Catholicism in Macau at both symbolic and substantial levels.<sup>[7]</sup> New societal relationships and culinary practices emerged inside and outside the parishes. Ever since establishing themselves in Macau, the Jesuits and other religious orders found it hard to come to grips with sacrificial food offerings in Chinese ancestral worship, a ritual designed to bridge the supernatural and mundane world.<sup>[8]</sup> Intense dialogues about the cosmological nature of food had a profound effect on the early Catholic missionary movement, and led to the centuries-long Rites Controversy. Meanwhile, Portuguese missionaries taught Cantonese mission staff the art of preparing Western food at local dioceses and parishes. As time passed, the kitchen staff blended European and Chinese ingredients into the cooking. This fruitful culinary exchange resonates with the publication of *Zao yangfan shu* (造洋飯書; *Book on Western Cooking*) by Martha Foster Crawford, wife of American Presbyterian missionary Tarleton Perry Crawford, in 1909. The first collection of non-Chinese recipes for Chinese readers, Crawford's cookbook signified a popularization of Western recipes in urban China.<sup>[9]</sup>

In chapter five, Jackson problematizes the definition of Macanese cuisine and culture in the twenty-first century. Out of fear being marginalized by neighbouring Hong Kong and Zhuhai, many Macanese hold onto their own food culture and dietary choice as a cultural resource while navigating their authentic "in-between" identity in an increasingly Sino-centric world. Seen from this per-

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6. Pilcher, "The Embodied Imagination", 875.

7. Jackson, *The Making of Macau's Fusion Cuisine*, 77-79.

8. Roel Sterckx, *Food, Sacrifice, and Sagehood in Early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

9. Gang Song, "Trying the Different 'Yang' Taste: Western Cuisine in Late-Qing Shanghai and Hong Kong," *Journal of Oriental Studies* 45: 1/2 (2012): 45-66.

spective, Macau's cuisine is in constant transition in the same manner as its larger social and cultural identity.

The conclusion revisits the symbiosis between food and memory. As post-colonial Macau continues to thrive, local residents with emotional attachment to the place have advanced the fusion cuisine globally. In the appendices, Jackson comments on her methodologies and discusses the Casa movement, a grass-roots effort to organize voluntary associations among Macanese diaspora in Hong Kong and beyond. Combining historical narratives with fieldwork observations, Jackson pays attention to the sensitivities and concerns of her informants. Friendship enables her to access their family domain and listen to their thought on food and identity. This engaging approach shows us a way forward to use the subject of food as an investigative lens to study this private sphere and the integrated webs of relationships across generations.

There are two major takeaways from this book. The first lesson concerns the dynamics of maritime encounters and networks that have grown and flourished in Macau. European expansion into East Asia began in the early sixteenth century with the arrival of Portuguese soldiers, traders and missionaries on the South China Coast, and the founding in 1557 of a trading settlement at Macau, a peninsula west of the Pearl River estuary. God, gold and glory underlined the Portuguese expedition. Because of the Chinese official bans on coastal and foreign trade, the Portuguese had to reside in Macau, which remained their colony until 1999. From their early arrival as captains, sailors, diplomats, merchants and missionaries, the Portuguese were pioneers in connecting Europe with their overseas outposts in Africa and South Asia, and with China. They brought along their unique lifestyle, dietary practice and religious heritage, thereby making Macau the heart of international maritime exchanges.<sup>[10]</sup> These maritime links entailed a variety of overlapping human and cultural relationships that tied peoples and communities together, and prevented them from falling apart.

The second lesson concerns the pluralistic nature of Macau's cuisine. Mark Swislocki applies the concept of "regional cuisine" to analyse the invention of Shanghai's fusion cuisine, reconciling local and foreign culinary practices in a globalized era.<sup>[11]</sup> Whether Macau's fusion cuisine would soon become as popular as the Cantonese dim sum, Korea's *soju* and *kimchi*, or Chaozhou's *shacha*

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10. Clive Willis, ed., *China and Macau. Portuguese Encounters with the World in the Age of the Discoveries* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002).

11. Mark Swislocki, *Culinary Nostalgia: Regional Food Culture and the Urban Experience in Shanghai* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

sauce remains to be seen.<sup>[12]</sup> Perhaps the best way to avoid potential traditionalist and nationalist traps in this interconnected age is to impress people with tasty, authentic dishes of specific localities. After all, popularization of a unique cuisine is only possible when people from around the world embrace and transform it. Thus, the essence of Macau's food culture is remarkably pluralistic and inclusive, but the discrete components that were initially rooted in the Portuguese, Cantonese, Chaozhou, Indian and Malay cooking practices have changed along separate and parallel modes of intersection. Jackson recalls many tales of Portuguese matriarchs and Chinese cooks who purchased fresh ingredients from local wet markets, and who prepared celebratory meals for everyone after Sunday masses. In Macau and elsewhere, nostalgia for authentic local cuisine displays a human sentiment that romanticizes one's favourite home-cooked food as an antidote against excessive commercialization. This attachment to domesticity and purity manifests a deep desire among Macanese that enshrine their home as a refuge from a largely materialistic society. It is fair to say that adaptability and durability of this fusion cuisine exemplifies the living spirit of Macau. The story of the restaurant Henri's Galley is illustrative.<sup>[13]</sup> Henri, a Cantonese sailor, learned the Portuguese cooking techniques in his early career. When he settled in Macau and opened his restaurant in 1976, he utilized his culinary knowledge and entrepreneurial talent to popularize a number of dishes including "Macanese African chicken."

In short, *The Making of Macau's Fusion Cuisine* is a must-read for food writers, anthropologists, historians and diaspora scholars. Its easily accessible prose is appropriate for general readers, and its extensive illustrations and recipes complement many popular books on Macau's history and culture.

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12. Hyunhee Park, *Soju: A Global History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Lin-Yi Tseng, "An Accidental Journey: Sha-cha Sauce and Beef Consumption in Tainan Since 1949." *Social Transformations in Chinese Societies* 14: 2 (2018): 107–116.

13. Jackson, *The Making of Macau's Fusion Cuisine*, 78.

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