

Globalising Macao's Food Culture

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ABSTRACT: This article reviews food expert Annabel Jackson's latest book, entitled *The Making of Macau's Fusion Cuisine: From Family Table to World Stage*, which displays the breadth and depth of global culinary encounters in this former Portuguese colony along China's maritime periphery. Exploring the continuity and changes of Macao's cosmopolitan cuisine from the past to the present, Jackson utilises the categories of food, identity, and memory as analytical windows onto larger historical, economic, and socio-cultural factors that have transformed the local culinary heritage. The essence of Macao's cuisine is remarkably pluralistic and inclusive, but the discrete components that are initially rooted in the Portuguese, Cantonese, Chaozhou, Indian, and Malay cooking practices have evolved over time. Even as the rapidity of changes and developments in the post-colonial era has inspired nostalgia for authentic local cuisine, this genuine desire is driven by a sentimental effort to romanticise one's favourite home-cooked food as an antidote against excessive commercialisation.

KEYWORDS: Cuisine; Macao; Macanese; Diaspora; Fertilisation.

Macao offers far 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 an authoritative account of the development of Macao's food culture through the analytical lens of cultural collaboration and modernisation. Building on her previous book, *Taste of Macau: Portuguese Cuisine on the China Coast* (Jackson 2003), a collection of family recipes that enable today's young readers to reconnect with previous generations and strengthen their sense of attachment to Macao, Jackson investigates the diverse circumstances which have shaped the fertilisation of Portuguese and Chinese food cultures in this port city. Carefully woven into this narrative is a colourful portrait of how Portuguese

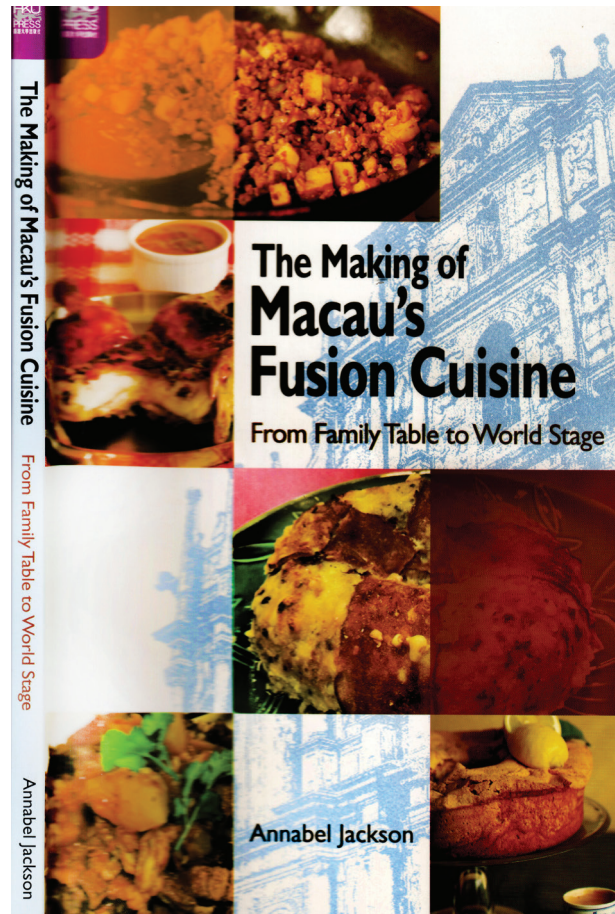
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and their descendants engaged in culinary exchange with Cantonese actors. Far from being a nostalgic coffee-table book, this volume contextualises the fascinating history of East–West culinary dialogues, showing opportunities for mutual collaboration 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 the COVID-19 pandemic, the months-long lockdown has resulted in huge TV ratings for a series of immensely popular foodie programmes 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 drama that helps audiences to find solace in food during the grief of losing loved ones. The growing appreciation of Macao's fusion cuisine reflects a nostalgia among Macanese residents and the 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 theorises cuisine as 'a nexus between human sensory experience of the environment and the cultural meanings attached to it' (Pilcher 2016, 886), and proposes the idea of 'embodied imagination' to examine the sensory, material and socio-cultural dimensions of culinary encounters at both global and local levels. 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



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

the same reasoning, one truly appreciates Jackson's insightful discussion of the sensory, material and socio-cultural elements in Macao's food culture.

Composed of seven concise and well-written chapters, *The Making of Macau's Fusion Cuisine* traces the continuity and changes of this unique local cuisine from the past to the present. The book begins with a thoughtful introductory essay, utilising the categories of Macanese (local residents of mixed Portuguese, Cantonese and other heritages) and Macanese diaspora as windows onto larger historical, economic, and socio-cultural factors that have shaped the local cuisine. The first three chapters draw on the qualitative findings from online surveys to address the complicated

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relationship between food and identity, the reception of Macanese food among different groupings, as well as the conscientious efforts to document Macao's culinary knowledge.

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. Macanese food matters to them 'because what is clearly very important is who cooks it (usually mum), whom it is eaten with (family, community, members of a Casa or club), and when it is eaten (Christmas, a christening, a wedding anniversary)' (Jackson 2020, 23). These performative acts of cooking and eating together during special family occasions and church gatherings are embedded in the intimate encounters between families and friends, evoking complex personal and social emotions.

Chapter two critiques the literacy and media representations of Macanese food before and after the Handover of Sovereignty of Macao to China in 1999. Originally derived from Portuguese cooking practices, Macao'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 Hong Kongers and mainlanders of China often associate Macao with a popular dish known as 'African chicken' in English or 'Galinha à Cafreal' in Portuguese, literally meaning 'blackened chicken' — spicy African chicken and baked potato that is marinated with chili and onions, and baked in pepper, peanut and coconut sauces, even though this dish has been introduced in upscale restaurants for tourists since the 1990s (Jackson 2020, 28).

Food memories have strong emotional resonance, a topic of investigation in chapter three. In the past, the Portuguese matriarchs prepared meals for relatives

and guests in tightly knit social settings. Keen to outperform each other in cooking competitions, they kept the recipes as family secrets. But with the dramatic changes in post-colonial politics and the economy, many Macanese are scattered worldwide, and have shared 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 (Pilcher 2016, 878). 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.

By documenting the spread of Portuguese culinary habits across Asia, chapter four historicises the globalisation and localisation of Portuguese food culture. Jackson situates her study against the history of transnational spice trade across the Portuguese outposts in Goa, Malacca, and Macao. A merry mix of Portuguese, Indian, Malay and Chinese spices evolves not only strong flavourings for food, but also perfume, medicine, and an imagined paradise that connects humans with the divine (Pilcher 2016, 875). It was actually in the Portuguese Catholic maritime belt, spreading from Goa and Malacca to Macao and Nagasaki, where the transformation of Western culinary practices took place. The widespread embrace of Portuguese grape wine and fermented fish sauce epitomises 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 Macao at both symbolic and substantial levels (Jackson 2020, 77–79). New societal relationships and culinary practices emerged inside and outside the parishes along the Chinese coast. Ever since the Jesuits established themselves in Macao, they strove to come to grips with sacrificial food offerings in Chinese ancestral worship, a ritual

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designed to bridge the supernatural and mundane world (Sterckx 2011). Intense dialogues about the cosmological nature of food impacted the early Catholic missionary movement, and led to the centuries-long Rites Controversy in which the Jesuits defended the selective adaptation to Chinese rituals against their Dominicans and other critics until the Vatican and the Qing Emperor discontinued the China mission. Meanwhile, in Macao, Portuguese missionaries taught Cantonese mission staff the art of preparing Western food. As time passed, the kitchen staff blended European and Chinese ingredients into the cooking. This culinary exchange resonates, in the Protestant circle, 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 time in food history that a collection of non-Chinese recipes was published for Chinese audiences, this cookbook signified a popularisation of Western recipes in modern China (Song 2012).

In chapter five, Jackson problematises the definition of Macanese cuisine and culture. Out of fear being marginalised 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. From this perspective, Macao's cuisine is in constant transition in the same manner as its larger political and cultural identities.

The conclusion revisits the symbiosis between food and memory. As post-colonial Macao continues to unfold, local residents and people with emotional attachment to the place have promoted the fusion cuisine globally. In the appendices, Jackson comments on her methodologies and discusses the Casa movement, a grassroots effort to organise voluntary associations among the Macanese diasporas 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 essential dimension of their private sphere and the integrated webs of mutual 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 thrived in Macao. European expansion into East Asia began in the early 16th 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 Macao, a peninsula to the west of the Pearl River estuary. God, gold, and glory underlined the Portuguese expedition into East Asia. Because of the Chinese official bans on coastal and foreign trade, the Portuguese had to reside in Macao, which remained their colony for over 440 years and was returned to the People's Republic of China on 20 December 1999. From their early arrival as captains, sailors, diplomats, merchants, and missionaries, the Portuguese were pioneers in connecting continental 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 Macao the heart of international maritime encounters and networks (Willis 2002). These maritime encounters and networks entail a variety of overlapping organisational, human and cultural relationships that tie peoples and communities together. The commitment of both international and local actors who enriched the city's finance and cosmopolitan culture contrasted sharply with the earthbound imperial rulers inside China's Forbidden City who always perceived Macao as a distant horizon.

The second lesson concerns the pluralistic nature of Macao's cuisine. Mark Swislocki (2008) applies the concept of 'regional cuisine' to analyse the invention of Shanghai's fusion cuisine, reconciling local and foreign culinary practices in an era of

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globalisation. In a similar fashion, the essence of Macao's food culture is remarkably diverse and inclusive, but the discrete components that are initially rooted in the Portuguese, Cantonese, Chaozhou, Indian and Malay cooking practices have evolved along separate routes as well as 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 Macao and elsewhere, nostalgia for authentic local cuisine displays a human sentiment that romanticises one's favourite home-cooked food as an antidote against excessive commercialisation. This attachment to domesticity and purity manifests a deep desire among Macanese that enshrines their home as a refuge from

a largely materialistic society. Perhaps it is fair to say that adaptability and durability of this fusion cuisine exemplify the living spirit of Macao. The story of the restaurant Henri's Galley is illustrative (Jackson 2020, 78). Henri, a Cantonese sailor, learnt the Portuguese cooking techniques in his early career. When he settled in Macao and opened his restaurant in 1976, he utilised his culinary knowledge and entrepreneurial talent to popularise 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 Macao's history and culture. **RC**

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