

Chá Gordo — Historical Origin of a Macanese Custom

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ABSTRACT: The influence of Japanese culture in Macao can be traced back to the arrival of the Portuguese in 1553. This influence permeated all levels of social life including words incorporated into the Macanese language (Patois), widespread use of Japanese garments (*kimono*), the employment of *norimono* to transport ladies, cooking methods (*miçó*) and dishes (*minchi*). The many similarities between *Chá Gordo* and *Cha Kaiseki/Kaiseki Ryori* raise the possibility that the common features between the two banquets are not mere coincidence. We will explore a line of thought based on historical facts of maritime history and characterised by tragedy, resilience and devotion, that over time became a feature of Macanese identity.

KEYWORDS: *Chá Gordo*; Japanese influence; Japanese cuisine; Macanese cuisine and customs.

Chá Gordo and *Sentá Mesa* define Macanese cooking and social traditions at their best. They are closely connected with the Portuguese expansion in the Far East and especially with Macanese families

from Malacca, Nagasaki and later Canton and their descendants who have been in Macao since 1553¹.

Chá Gordo with its unique dishes represents, for the Macanese, much more than simply sharing food with family and friends. It is the final leg of a journey undertaken over more than four centuries of history and sociability which has shaped and consolidated the Macanese way of life. Together with the tradition of *Sentá Mesa* they are the expressions of identity and pride in belonging which awaken and reinforce the conviviality of the Macanese around the world.

Chá Gordo is a celebration banquet served in the afternoon around 18:00. Tradition dictates that a Macanese *Chá Gordo* should have savoury dishes such as *apa-bico*, *apa-mochi*, *mochi*, *bagi*, *ladu*, turnip cake with *chili-miçó*, *pan di minchi*, and *chilicote*. *Porco bafassá*, *tacho* or *chau-chau pèle*, *galinha-di-português*,

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chicu-di-porco, *lacassá*, congee, *mela-miçó di porco*, the symbolic dishes of rice and minchi, are main dishes accompanied by a *caldo di cambalenga*, *abóbra verdi* and *imbigo-di-frade* soup². Vinegary dishes such as *sambal di carambola*, *achar di limão* and *achar de gamên* are also placed on the table. Desserts include *bolo minino*, *sarã-surabe*, *cilicário*, *arroz dóci di Japam*, *cocada di tegilinha*, *bolo podre*, *ovas de aranha*, *bicho-bicho* cookies, *chawan no mushi* (egg custard pudding) and *chácha* (sweet *azuki* bean soup).

In searching for the origin of *Chá Gordo*, several questions arise, namely what does *Chá Gordo* mean and how did the name come about? What does it evoke? Is it simply a banquet to celebrate Christmas, Easter, a Christening or any other happy events in the life of the community or a Macanese family? Why is it served in the afternoon around 18:00? Did *Chá Gordo* start as a simpler meal? Does *Chá Gordo* evoke past events in our collective history that give meaning to cultural features that forge an identity? These are some of the questions that will be analysed and answered.

In the last 60 years, there have been diverse reflections on the origin of *Chá Gordo*. Some link *Chá Gordo* to the British and American residents in Hong Kong and Shanghai and to the nineteenth-century habit of high tea (*Revista Macau* 2014). However, this overlooks the fact that the habit of drinking tea was already a widespread custom among the Portuguese nobility in Macao and was introduced to the British nobility in the second half of the seventeenth century by Catherine of Braganza³, a Portuguese princess married to King Charles II in 1662.

Tea drinking became a prominent feature of British culture only in the eighteenth century⁴, whereas, the custom of *Chá Gordo* can be traced back to the first half of the seventeenth century in Macao, well before Catherine of Braganza became a British queen, and well before the presence of the British or Americans in the Orient.

Some Macanese see *Chá Gordo* as a habit afforded only in affluent Macanese households celebrating Christmas, weddings or the baptism of a newborn baby, among other happy events (*Revista Macau* 2014; *SCMP* 2015). History and custom point in a different direction, suggesting that economic scarcity or abundance, rather than the personal wealth of the host, influenced the quality and variety of dishes. For example, minchi was developed by exiled Portuguese-Japanese and Japanese Christians in 1636–1637, and was adapted by poorer Macanese families, or *gente pobre* (Rodrigues 2015), who were the neighbours of these refugees in the least affluent neighbourhoods of the city. These neighbourhoods included Baixo Monte, Bombeiro, Barra, Mainato, Patane, and Campo (Ljungstedt 1992), known as Bairro da Horta da Mitra, São Lázaro, Mong-Há, Areia Preta and Fai Chi Kei. Upper-middle-class Macanese families did not consume minchi until the economic downturn period following the founding of Hong Kong in 1842 (Rodrigues 2018). Minchi is a simple and inexpensive dish that can easily be enlarged, should unexpected guests arrive, by simply adding more potatoes. Minchi and white rice (Fig. 2) is a symbolic dish that represents tenacity and success in the struggle for survival of the Macanese (Rodrigues 2018). Furthermore, the dishes in a *Chá Gordo* are those consumed by the families of crew members who worked on commercial fleets and who were *Filhos da Terra*, or Macanese. The shipowners who were mainly *reinóis* or Portuguese born in Portugal, had different eating habits than those of the ships' crew (Gomes 1986). Social and cultural traditions of the Macanese do not support this position.

Historical, geographical and socio-cultural evidence suggest that Macanese cuisine and eating habits, in particular, may be rooted in Portuguese, Asian (Malacca and some Indonesian islands), Japanese and later Chinese customs. Portuguese men followed the custom set in the older settlements of marrying Asian women (Coates 1978). Most of those that married Portuguese men in the Far East in the

sixteenth to eighteenth centuries were neither from Portugal nor from China (Batalha 1974).

A large number of Macanese dishes were brought to Macao by these Asian-Portuguese families from Malacca and other islands of the Indonesian Archipelago. Banquets were served in these cultures. The fact that banquets were part of those societies led to the claim that *Chá Gordo* was based on the customs of Malacca and the Spice Islands.

Pigafetta describes in 1520 a banquet served by a Raja of Palawan in the Philippine archipelago in the following way:

[...] coming from the Governors house, nine men carrying wooden trays with 10–12 dishes each, of veal, capon, chicken, turkey and various types of fish. There were more than 30 different kinds of food. We sat on floormats and ate with golden spoons.

(Pigafetta 2020, 97)

In the Moluccas, Pigafetta describes another banquet as:

[...] 50 women dressed in silk loincloth carrying small trays of stew. Men carried big jugs of rice wine. All of the dishes were shown to the raja who was seated on a carpet with red and yellow stripes.

(Pigafetta 2020, 126)

The food and the eating habits described by Pigafetta do not provide enough support for the hypothesis that these banquets from the Indonesian islands and the Philippine archipelago evolved into *Chá Gordo*.

Chá Gordo has also been linked to Portuguese cuisine claiming that *Chá Gordo* is inspired by the Portuguese tradition of serving ‘*acepipes*’, small dishes of appetisers or savouries as starters to a meal or at ‘*copo d’água*’, a plentiful and varied buffet served at weddings and other celebrations.

The analysis of Portuguese eating habits indicates that banquets were held as early as 1507 in the households of the aristocracy, where servants placed large quantities of food on long tables, mainly roast meats such as lamb, venison and wild birds. The cutlery used then by the aristocracy was limited to spoons. Forks are first mentioned in 1507 (Arnault 2008).

The sixteenth-century manuscript containing Portuguese recipes as part of the dowry of Infanta Maria of Portugal does not provide additional information concerning banquets.

The earliest book in which banquets are mentioned is *Arte de Cozinha* by Domingos Rodrigues which was published in 1693, and contains recipes influenced by French and Italian cooking of the time promoted by Queen Maria Francisca, wife of King Peter II of Portugal (Rodrigues 2001).

Before Domingos Rodrigues, banquets were simply means of displaying the wealth of the host rather than the flavours and variety of the dishes. Game was predominant and birds were mainly swan and peacock. Venison was served cold and overcooked, topped with great quantity of spices from the Orient with little regards for the taste, aroma and texture of the food. It was to impress the guests and to show the socio-economic power of the host (Borges 2011).

Domingos Rodrigues, as the chef to Queen Maria Francisca, changed recipes and etiquette by accenting the variety, aroma and flavour of the dishes, using meat such as beef, goat and lamb, partridge, hare, chicken, turkey and duck. Poached fresh fish from the sea and fresh water, dried cod fish was not yet part of Portuguese eating habits, and seafood such as clams provided more delicate flavours in banquet food. Vegetables such as asparagus, aubergine and turnips were used. Sardines, pork and bread of different cereals consumed by the common people were not part of any banquets.

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Savouries, *acepipes*, first appeared in a Portuguese banquet in *Arte de Cozinha* by João da Mata, published in 1876. It includes a dinner menu for 36 to 40 guests comprised of two soups followed by rice with *game pâté* and *turbot au gratin*. The main dishes were pan-fried rib of lamb with mashed potatoes, chicken in aspic, roast turkey and quail with truffle sauce. For dessert there was apricot bavaois, whipped cream meringue and fruit followed by coffee, cognac or liqueur (Mata 1973).

The traditional '*copo d'água*' developed in the late nineteenth century became very popular in the twentieth century. It is a late development of the '*Ceia volante*' of João da Mata which included meat, chicken pasties and sandwiches.

Social and historical evidence does not support the claim that the Macanese *Chá Gordo* developed in the seventeenth century was based on Portuguese cuisine.

Some authors may put forward the hypothesis that *Chá Gordo* was inspired by Cantonese *dim sum* (點心) and the Chinese tradition of *yum cha* (飲茶). Historical and socio-economic considerations indicate that the Chinese population and the non-Chinese population had very little contact in Macao from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries.

Portuguese and Chinese communities shared the same living space, but they essentially lived in separate worlds, with little contact between them, as was mentioned by Friar Augustin de Tordesillas, a Spanish Franciscan, in 1579, and Alessandro Valigniano, a Jesuit priest, in 1599. They noticed that the Portuguese and the Asian Portuguese did not mix socially with the Chinese and any contact between the two groups was strictly commercial by an employee known as *comprador*⁵ (Boxer 1990).

Ou-Mun Kei-Leok (Macao Chronicle, 《澳門記略》), a historical, social and geographical study of Macao published in 1751 by two Chinese literati, Ian-Kuong-Iâm (in pinyin: Yin Guangren, 印光任) and Tcheong-Ü-Lâm (in pinyin: Zhang Rulin, 張汝霖), and that chronicles Macanese social and cultural customs, confirms the same behaviour by reference to the verses of the poet Wóng Hâu Lói (汪後來).

The verses describe the two communities living with backs turned away from each other during a Sunday cockfight in Macao in the early eighteenth century:

*The barbarian women richly dressed with jewels
fill the streets,
Fighting cocks armed with metallic spurs ready
to fight under the shade of a tree,
Chinese and Barbarians, backs turned away
from each other, shoulder to shoulder, watching.*
(Gomes 1950, 55; Yin and Zhang 2009, 19)

Moreover, Cantonese *dim sum* is served in the morning and not in the afternoon. However, in the twentieth century, the period to serve *dim sum* has been extended to include lunch, but still does not include the late afternoon, when *Chá Gordo* is served.

In addition, the Chinese population from 1553 to 1650 was mainly made up of fishermen, servants, tradesmen, *compradores* and suppliers of produce to the Portuguese. *Ásia Sínica Japónica, Macao conseguido e perseguido*, a manuscript written by Friar José de Jesus Maria between 1744 and 1745 notes that the Chinese who lived in this city in 1698 had food stalls and stands or *dai pai dong* (大牌檔), to serve the Chinese people who crossed the border daily and returned home at the end of the day (Maria 1988). The mandarin law that forbade the Chinese to remain in town after sunset was only lifted from 1800 to 1825. (Pires 1988).

A historical and socio-economic examination of that period does not support the suggestion that the Macanese *Chá Gordo* was inspired by the Chinese *dim sum* associated with the tradition of *yum cha*.

Japan has exerted a strong cultural influence in Macanese life since the very beginning because:

- (a) *the pivotal role of Macao both in the Christian effort to convert Japan from 1549 to 1650 and serve as the terminus for the Macao-Japan trade;*
- (b) *the small commercial Japanese community of*

traders established in Lam Pak Kau (浪白竈) and then in Macao since 1553, confirmed by Viceroy Tchéong Meng Kóng's⁶ (張鳴岡) Order of 1564 and Wanli Emperor's Imperial Decree of 1579 — Chapa n.º 10 (Múrias 1988);

(c) the large number of Portuguese men who found wives among the Christian women in Nagasaki compensating for the scarcity of suitable women in the Orient.

(Rodrigues 2021)

These circumstances led to the spread of Japanese culture among Macanese, namely the use of Japanese words in Patois, the use of the palanquin, *norimono*, as a means of transport for women⁷, clothing, *kimono*, cooking methods, *miçó*, serving utensils, *chawan*⁸ and new eating habits such as tea poured over rice, *conchas de frade*, just to name a few.

The Portuguese arrived in Kagoshima, Japan in 1542 and from then on, the Portuguese settlement of Liampó (寧波 Ningbo) on the coast of Fujian Province prospered on trade with Japan. Liampó was first settled in 1522 and later destroyed by Chinese armed forces. As a result, the Portuguese, their descendants or *Filhos da Terra* and the remaining population including Japanese, known as Wa Kwok (倭國)⁹ to the Chinese (Cooper 1994), took refuge on the Sanchoão Island or Saint John Island (上川島 Séong Ch'ün Tou) and later Lam Pak Kau on the mouth of the Pearl River. In 1553, they settled in Macao¹⁰ according to Chinese sources. Macao then became the main base for trade with Japan and the terminus of the *Nao do Trato* represented by the *kurofune*¹¹, the Black Ship from Macao that started to operate in 1550. It grew from a vessel with a load of 400 to 600 tons in the first year of trade, to carracks of 1,200 to 1,600 tons and in the final years of trade the size increased to 'monster' carracks carrying 2,000 tons and considered at the time to be the largest ship in the world (Boxer 1948).

Trade between Japan and Macao was not limited to Portuguese merchants and Jesuit missionaries on one side and to Japanese merchants on the other side. Many Macanese merchants, including Portuguese and Japanese

residents, became acting agents or 'fronts' for wealthy Indian and Chinese principals. At the other end, Japanese Daimyo (大名)¹², great merchant families such as the Nakano, the Suetsugu, and Ito Kozaemon, and even military dictators¹³, invested large sums of silver in commerce.

According to Luís Sequeira, who served as Bishop of Japan from 1598 to 1614, the Christian (キリシタン *kirishitan*) population in Nagasaki and in the rest of Japan reached 350,000 in 1603 (Murayama-Cain 2010), strengthening Portuguese and Jesuit influence¹⁴ in the Japanese society. This included the conversion of several Daimyo, such as Otomo Yoshishige of Bungo Daimyo of Arima and Omura (Boxer 1993) who, in 1580, ceded Nagasaki and the town of Mogi to the Jesuits in perpetuity (Pacheco 1989). The Jesuits, however, refused such an appreciable gift, fearing it would fuel religious resentment not only from Buddhist monasteries but also from other Christian orders, inducing suspicion and apprehension in the Shogunate (幕府 *bakufu*).

To curb Portuguese influence, Shogun Toyotomi Hideyoshi prohibited Christianity in Japan in 1587 (Fróis 1983). Then, in 1614, an expulsion Edict was issued by Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu ordering all Jesuits and Christians who did not renounce the Christian faith to leave Japan (Coutinho 1999). The formal prohibition of Christianity in 1587 and again in 1614 did not at first affect those trading with Macao, as they were specifically exempt because both Shoguns Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu were anxious to keep and foster foreign trade.

The restrictions imposed on Christians took a turn for the worse when in 1623 and 1624, Portuguese men, fathers and their sons, husbands and brothers, were banished from Japan (Boxer 1959). In 1627, five Japanese Christian noblemen, Samurai¹⁵, were delivered to the Portuguese to be taken to Macao. Again in 1636, the Japanese population¹⁶ in Macao was increased by the arrival of 287 women and female children who were the relatives or dependants of the Portuguese who exiled to Macao in 1623 and 1624 by order of the *Bakufu*¹⁷ (Fróis 1976; Teixeira 1993; and Boxer 1993).

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These Portuguese–Japanese and Japanese Christians brought their cuisine, *ryori* (料理), clothing and eating habits which influenced Macanese food to include new dishes like minchi, *chácha*, *imbigo-di-frade* soup, *apa-mochi*, *mela-miçó*, *miçó-cristão*, *chili-miçó*, *chawan no mushi*, *concha di frade*, and *mochi*, among others.

Japanese influence was felt in Macanese households. Peter Bundy, who arrived in Macao on 5 July 1637, described the garments worn by Macanese women and how they were transported:

Women are carried in norimono hand chairs like the sedans at London, all covered, which are very costly and rich, brought from Japan. The women when they are within doors wear overall a certain large wide sleeved vest called Japan kamaones or kerimones (kimonos) because it is the ordinary garment worn by Japanese.
(Boxer 1993, 67–68)

Later, in a description of the origin of the Macanese, Austin Coates wrote:

Sarong and cabaia, the distinctive woman's tunic which originated in Portuguese Malacca, was the commonest women's attire. Even the Japanese wives wore sarong and cabaia when going out, though on returning home they changed into kimono.
(Coates 1978, 34–35)

The arrival of Japanese members of the military aristocracy, samurai, broadened the cultural features of the local Japanese and Portuguese–Japanese community, which already had sailors¹⁸ and traders linked to the *Nao de Trato*, as well as artists and artisans who helped build the Church of Mater Dei (also known as Church of St. Paul's), and religious novices or catechists, or *dojuku* or *doshuku*, in the Seminary of Saint Ignatius in Macao. They were important members of Macanese society and

some of them were buried in the Church of St. Paul's (Teixeira 1993).

The samurai aristocracy brought two customs among others: namely, the carving of fish and meat¹⁹ in the preparation of food, which was considered along with archery and target shooting with guns, *kemari*, an integral part of a warrior's activities; and *bibutsu*, the prestigious dishes of *samurai* cuisine, *honzen ryori* (本膳料理), which was a banquet tradition from the Heian period between the late tenth and early eleventh centuries.

Banquets were served at long tables for a large number of guests. The food was served all at the same time (Fróis 2019) according to an established table setting protocol which dictated the placing of main dishes in the centre and secondary dishes, desserts and sweets, on the outer edge of the tables.

Different kinds of soups were available in proportion to the number of main dishes. According to João Rodrigues (Tçuzu), the Jesuit interpreter of Shoguns Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu, Japanese could not eat a meal without soup (汁 shiru). This is apparently still true today.

In general, Japanese banquets did not include sake but rather tea which had been introduced at around the eighth century from China. The introduction of sake in banquets dates from the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries according to the protocol manual *Jōjō kiki goki teijo sho*, which indicates that 'rice and soups are consumed in proportion to the number of main dishes and when eating is over, sake is served to indicate the end of the banquet'.

Shōjin ryōri (精進料理), a type of vegetarian cuisine, was developed by Zen Buddhist monks. The tea ceremony (茶の湯 chanoyu) was preceded by *cha kaiseki* (茶懷石) which consisted of a bowl of rice, soup and two or three dishes, *ichiju sansei* (一汁三菜).

Kaiseki (懷石) literally means 'breast-pocket stone'. It is based on a Zen Buddhist practice in which monks put a warm stone in the breast pocket of their robes, near the stomach, in an effort to ward off hunger. Therefore *cha kaiseki*, can be defined as a comforting

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meal. Over time, *cha kaiseki* adopted part of the *bibutsu* tradition and became *kaiseki ryori* (懷石料理), a formal multi-course meal or banquet. Later, it evolved into the present-day nine-course meal, though one can find variants with anywhere from 6 to 18 courses.

Fernão Mendes Pinto described a banquet given to him and his crew by the Lord of Bungo in Japan in 1556:

E mandando-nos preparar a mesa muito abastada de iguarias muito limpas e bem guisadas e servida por mulheres muito formosas, nós nos entregámos todos no que nos punham diante, bem à nossa vontade.

[Translation by author: And a table was set with very clean and abundant well-cooked delicacies served by alluring women, we ate freely enjoying everything put before us.]

(Pinto 1614, 298)

The Japanese dictionary *Kōjien* (広辞苑), describes *kaiseki* as a cuisine for a get-together banquet. *Kaiseki* blends a number of traditional Japanese cuisines, notably court cuisine *yūsoku ryōri* (有職料理), from the ninth century during the Heian period; Buddhist temple cuisine *shōjin ryōri*, from the twelfth century in the Kamakura period; *samurai* cuisine of warrior households *honzen ryōri*, from the fourteenth century in the Muromachi period; and the tea ceremony cuisine *cha kaiseki*, from the fifteenth century during the Higashiyama time of the Muromachi period.

The banquet dishes include seafood such as fresh abalone, *awabi*, finely sliced dried abalone, *awabi-noshi*, clams, *hamaguri*, and lobsters. Raw Japanese carp served as sashimi is always present because according to legend, the carp is the only fish capable of swimming up river and surmounting turbulent water and other obstacles to reach the mythical Dragon's Gate of the Yellow River. It became for the Japanese the symbol of accomplishment and success (Sellier 2014). Meat includes wild fowl,

crane, swan, wild duck and goose, and venison. Among the fish dishes there is fish cake, *kamaboko*, for steaming or frying, grilled fish, and fermented fish, *naresushi*. Sweets²⁰ include Portuguese inspired *konpeito* and *aruheito*. There are also savouries, *sakana* (肴), such as *mochi* and *mochi* wrapped in bamboo leaves, *sasomochi*. Cookies are cut into squares, *sembei*, some *mochi* is filled with red bean paste, and rice cookies and millet pancakes are part of the fare. Cakes are usually comprised of mirror cake, *karumela*²¹ and *castella*²², also known as *kasutera* from Nagasaki. Accompanying dishes include dressed vegetables sprinkled with fish flakes, shitake mushrooms, salads, *su-sakana* (酢肴)²³, such as *umeboshi* and vegetable pickles, different types of miso soup, noodles and rice. Sake is served normally at the end of the meal.

A Shogun Iemitsu banquet hosted by Shimazu Iehisa Daimyo of Satsuma in 1630 had dishes beautifully arranged and garnished with cut paper²⁴, leaves and flowers. The banquet ended with *castella* and *konpeito* hard candy.

By comparison, *Chá Gordo* is also rooted in socio-economic and historical events. Its genesis can be placed at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese residents in Nagasaki. Members of the Japanese military aristocracy, samurai, the Japanese wives of Portuguese men and their children, as well as Japanese Christians were expelled by the Shogun between 1623 and 1636. The war with the Dutch in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and maritime disasters compounded what was already a difficult period in the history of Macao.

The survival of Macao depended entirely on maritime trade with other countries in the Orient (Boxer 1990). In 1625, an English trader reported 10 to 22 Portuguese ships in Makassar from Macao, Malacca and the Coromandel Coast. At times there were as many as 500 Portuguese on shore (Boxer 1948). The Macanese merchant marine fleet was vulnerable to shipwrecks because of storms or typhoons, and piracy and conflict also imperiled the lives of the crew, as described in St. Francis Xavier's letter to Simão

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Rodrigues, SJ dated 20 January 1549 (Fróis 1976). These factors shaped the response of the population, as did the Dutch invasion of 1622.

Macao lost 48 ships between 1728 and 1792. Friar José de Jesus Maria in his manuscript written between 1740 and 1745 described Macao as becoming a city of women, a majority of them destitute (Maria 1988; Vale 1997, annex 12).

The impact can be seen in the 1774 population census, which shows a total of 4,973 non-Chinese people living in Macao. There were 109 Portuguese born in Portugal, and known locally as *reinóis*; 3,756 Macanese, of which 321 were widows; 527 married women; 1,354 unmarried women; and 627 children. The remaining population was composed of slaves and members of religious orders. This information allows us to estimate that there were 848 families or households, about the same number of families indicated by Bocarro²⁵ 130 years earlier, in 1635 (Boxer 1993; Subrahmanyam 1993).



Fig. 1: *A Tempestade*. The Great Ship from Macao, painting by unknown author (c. 1552), representing St. Francis Xavier calming a stormy sea on the *Nao Santa Cruz*. Picture taken by the author at the Ajuda National Palace, Lisbon, where exhibition 'Uma História de Assombro, Portugal-Japão — Séculos XVI-XX' was held in November 2018.

38% of the households were headed by widows and about 7% by married women. The reason for having such a large percentage of households, accounting for nearly half of the number of families, led by women was because husbands spent long periods of time on trading ships, and as much as three years at sea. Many ships never returned to port, having been lost at sea for reasons already explained (Teixeira 1979; Vale 1997).

In Malacca, St. Francis Xavier met a Japanese nobleman Anjiró (Anjirō or Yaijiro), a Japanese who came from Liampó²⁶ and spoke pidgin Portuguese, known as Patois (Fróis 1976). Anjiró described Japan to St. Francis Xavier as a country inhabited by a highly-cultivated society, and he later accompanied St. Francis Xavier to Goa and then to Japan by a Chinese pirate junk, and arrived in Kagoshima on 15 August 1549. In 1551, St. Francis Xavier left Japan on his way to mainland China and died on 3 December 1552 on Sanchoão Island, a few nautical miles from Macao.

During his voyages in the Orient, a number of miracles have been attributed to St. Francis Xavier (Thomaz 1993). On the *Nao Santa Cruz* he is credited with having made sea water drinkable, saving the crew from dying of thirst. *A Tempestade* (Fig. 1) portrays St. Francis Xavier in the Great Ship from Macao calming a stormy sea.

To celebrate the safe return of ships and crew, every year on 10 December a mass of Thanksgiving, or *Te Deum*, was organised at the Church of St. Paul's which was built with the profits from the Macao-Japan trade and with the help of the Portuguese-Japanese and Japanese Christians living in Macao. The mass was followed by the Procession of the Navigators in honour of St. Francis Xavier, known as the Apostle of the Indies or Apostle of Japan, celebrated in the afternoon according to the tradition of the Catholic church. The costs were covered by the Senado²⁷ (Teixeira 1979).

3 December, the day St. Francis Xavier died, was initially chosen for the *Te Deum* and the Procession of the Navigators. However, they were moved to 10 December because 3 December fell on the Novena of Our Lady of Conception, patron saint of Portugal (Teixeira 1979).

The Procession was led by the Great Cross, followed immediately by 12 standard-bearers of saints, martyrs and Jesus, all carried by members of the congregations, confrarias and brotherhoods dressed in white capes holding torches and candles. The Prefect of the confrarias and brotherhoods carried a silver cane. The first standard-bearer was of St. Francis Xavier Pilgrim, the fifth standard-bearer was of Martyr Saints of Japan, and the twelfth standard-bearer was again of St. Francis Xavier. People holding crosses and candles followed the standard-bearers. The Sacred Host and a company of armed soldiers commanded by officers completed the Procession. This is José Montanha's description, a Jesuit priest who was in Macao between 1742 and 1745.

After the procession a comforting meal consisting of minchi, rice, *imbigo-di-frade* soup and two or three savouries such *apa mochi* or *apa-bico*, turnip cake with *chili-miçó*, and *chilicote* was served to the members of the confrarias, congregations and brotherhoods who were at the procession. This meal was very similar to the comforting meal of *ichiju sansai* served at *cha kaiseki*.

In Portuguese, a meal is called *gordo* when the dishes are substantial or corporal (filling), varied, and comforting, consumed outside regular meals. *Tomar chá* is another Portuguese term meaning having afternoon tea which became a common habit in the early-sixteenth-century Macao. However, the expression *Chá Gordo* does not come from Portuguese but rather from Japanese customs brought back by Portuguese–Japanese (*Filhos da Terra*), Japanese Christians and Macanese from Nagasaki where Japanese Christians were accustomed to this ritual of a comforting meal before or after a religious or secular event. This tradition or ritual of sharing a meal is described in the following manner by Luís Fróis, SJ for the Christmas celebration, on 25 December 1563, in his manuscript *História de Japam*, covering the period from 1549 to 1593 and written between October 1585 and February 1594:

Pela festa do Natal mandou de Firando Dona Isabel²⁸ seus filhos, para se acharem naquela

sagrada noite às missas. E quando se fizeram horas de Ave Marias²⁹ já não cabião, pela muita gente que tinha vindo de fora. E depois de tomarem huma refeição corporal, puzerão-se por ordem na igreja.

[Translation by author: For Christmas, Dona Isabel from Firando requested that her sons go with her to holy evening mass. By the hours of Ave Marias the church was already full of people who had come from the surrounding areas. After sharing a comforting meal, they organised the seating of people in the church.]

(Fróis 1976, 357)

A decade later in 1573, Luís Fróis, SJ also describes the procession of the martyrs of Vomura at the Santa Cruz Church in Curi:

[...] aonde houve grande festa, danças e alegria dos christãos, banquetes e autos conforme a seo costume.

[Translation by author: [...] where there was a grand feast, dancing and happiness among the Christians, banquets and recitals according to their custom.]

(Fróis 1981, 387)

This suggests that the comforting meal had become a banquet according to the Japanese Christian custom.

In 1575, João Rodrigues, SJ (Tçuzu) included in his *História da Igreja no Japão* a large section on 'A Arte do Chá' (The Art of Tea), describing *cha kaiseki* as a banquet:

O banquete antes do chá, de poucos mas excelentes e substanciais manjares de coisas entre eles prezadas e custosas, [...] um grou fresco que se dá em xiro, [...] e o melhor e mais precioso pescado que há, e outras várias coisas.

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[Translation by author: *The banquet before tea, with few but substantial and excellent dishes, among them prized and costly delicacies [...] fresh crane made into shiru (soup) [...] and the best and most precious fish there is, among other fare.*] (Rodrigues 2019, 93)

In June 1586, Fróis describes the euphoria of the Japanese Christians on a visit of the Jesuit Vice Provincial in Miaco (Kyoto):

Acabando o Padre de comprar com a sua visitação em Vozaca, se foi ao Miaco; [...] o forão receber os cristãos, que havia dias o estavam esperando, e ali traziam seos presentes de comer conforme a seo costume, assim homens como mulheres e meninos, todos vestidos de festa.

[Translation by author: *After the visit to Vozaca, the Jesuit Vice Provincial went to Miaco; The Christians who had been waiting for him for several days, brought gifts of food according to their custom, men, women and children were dressed in their Sunday best for the celebration.*] (Fróis 1983, 239)

This description of men, women and children dressed for celebration with gifts of food according to their custom, conjures up an image of a Macanese get-together, or *Convívio* with *Chá Gordo*, where everybody is dressed up for the occasion.

A careful comparison of *Chá Gordo* and *Cha Kaiseki* illustrates characteristics and similarities that go beyond mere coincident. For details, see Table 1.

This analysis of the similarities and differences between *Chá Gordo* and *Cha Kaiseki* allows us to infer the following conclusions:

- It is likely that the name *Chá Gordo* is a transliteration and adaptation of the expression *Cha Kaiseki*, a custom developed

in Macao by the Macanese, descendants of Portuguese–Japanese (*Filhos da Terra*) and the Japanese Christian population.

- The Macanese *Chá Gordo* is a meal served in the afternoon by the hours of *Ave Marias*, at 18:00, in memory of the events described by Fróis in 1573.
- Both *Chá Gordo* and *Cha Kaiseki* are comforting meals (corporal meal in *Chá Gordo* and *ichiju sansai* in *Cha Kaiseki*) which evolved into a multi-course banquet.
- The Macanese *Chá Gordo* is based neither on Portuguese eating habits nor Portuguese cuisine.
- According to Chinese and non-Chinese historical sources, the Macanese *Chá Gordo* was not inspired by Cantonese *dim sum* or the Chinese tradition of *yum cha*.
- It is not likely or possible that the British and American residents in Hong Kong and Shanghai and their habit of high tea, a nineteenth-century tradition, could have influenced the Macanese *Chá Gordo*, which was developed two centuries earlier.
- It is not likely that the Macanese *Chá Gordo* was developed by the affluent Macanese families because *minchi* is a symbolic Macanese dish associated with the legacy of the exiled and the forgotten *gente pobre*.
- Southeast Asian cuisine did not inspire the development of the Macanese *Chá Gordo*.
- Both Luís Fróis, SJ³⁰ and João Rodrigues, SJ (Tçuzu)³¹ lived in Macao for several years in the seventeenth century. It is likely that both priests may have helped to spread and reinforce Japanese Christian traditions among the Macanese.
- *Cha Kaiseki* and Macanese *Chá Gordo* have similarities both in name, historic background, type and variety of dishes, in other words, they share similar characteristics.

Table 1 Comparative analysis		
Name	<i>Chá Gordo</i>	<i>Cha Kaiseki</i>
Period	From the seventeenth century onwards ¹	From the late sixteenth to seventeenth centuries onwards
Definition	It is a comforting meal (corporal) consisting of soup, rice and three dishes, associated with an event (Thanksgiving and Procession of the Navigators).	It is a comforting meal, <i>ichiju sansei</i> , consisting of miso soup, rice and three dishes, associated with an event (<i>Chanoyu</i> ; tea ceremony).
Developed into	<i>Chá Gordo</i> banquet	<i>Kaiseki ryori</i> banquet
Number of dishes	6 to 18 dishes on the table	6 to 18 dishes on the table
Placement on the table	Main dishes at centre of the table	Main dishes at centre of the table
Savouries	<i>Mochi</i> , <i>apa-mochi</i> and others	<i>Mochi</i> , <i>sasomochi</i> and others
Soups	Bean based soup (<i>imbigo-di-frade</i>)	Bean based soup (miso)
Sauces	<i>Miçó</i> (<i>chili-miçó</i> , <i>mela-miçó</i> and <i>miçó cristão</i>)	Miso (different kinds)
Symbolic dishes	Associated with tenacity and success	Associated with success and accomplishment
Vinegary side dishes	<i>achar</i> (pickled <i>gamên</i> , lemon and carambola)	<i>su-sakana</i> (pickled vegetables, ginger and <i>umeboshi</i>)
Main dishes	Warm and cold dishes	Warm and cold dishes
Desserts	Puddings and cakes ²	Puddings and cakes ³
Drinks	Tea (<i>Chá</i>) and wine	Tea (<i>Matcha</i>) and sake
Garnishes	Cut paper, fruit and flowers	Cut paper, fruit and flowers
<p>1. Conversion of the Japanese started in the sixteenth century. In 1551, St. Francis Xavier left a community of about 1,000 Christians and churches in Hirado (Firando), Kagoshima and Yamaguchi which were familiar with the <i>Cha Kaiseki</i> traditions.</p> <p>2. <i>Chawan no mushi</i> pudding, <i>bolo minino</i>, <i>sarãn surabe</i> and <i>celicário</i> cakes.</p> <p>3. <i>Chawan no mushi</i> pudding, <i>castella</i>, <i>konpeito</i> and <i>aruheito</i> sweets. All Portuguese-inspired cakes and candies.</p>		

Source: Analysis by the author

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Fig. 2: Rice, minchi and cake garnished with 'bate saia'. *Chá Gordo*, Qinzena de Macau, Casa de Macau, Lisbon, 26 May – 22 June 1971. *Revista Portuguesa de Culinária, Banquete*, no. 143, January 1972. Photo courtesy of Maria João dos Santos Ferreira.

The similarity between the meals described by Luis Fróis, SJ and João Rodrigues, SJ (Tçuzu) in the second half of the sixteenth century provides the historic background that led the Macanese to name the meal served at 18:00, the hours of *Ave Marias*, after the Procession of the Navigators in honour of St. Francis Xavier, *Chá Gordo*.

To this day, the *Chá Gordo* banquet and the *Cha Kaiseki* banquet have similar underlying features. The number, variety and quality of dishes evolved over time for *Cha Kaiseki* becoming multi-course *kaiseki ryori*. *Chá Gordo* also followed this pattern and evolved into a multiple course banquet held on religious festivities such



Fig. 3: Cake garnished with paper lace dress 'vestido de papel rendado'. *Chá Gordo*, Qinzena de Macau, Casa de Macau, Lisbon, 26 May – 22 June 1971. *Revista Portuguesa de Culinária, Banquete*, no. 143, January 1972. Photo courtesy of Maria João dos Santos Ferreira.

as Christmas, Easter or christenings, as well as secular occasions such as anniversaries, birthdays, *convívios*, special get-togethers (Fróis 1983) and any other events worth celebrating by Macanese families. Both banquets could have 8 to 16 different dishes.

In both banquets, the food is served all at the same time with main dishes, meat and fish, placed in the centre of the table. Rice, sweets, other savouries and cakes are placed on the sides of the table. Rice and soup are an integral part of the meal. Symbolic dishes of minchi and rice are always present (Fig. 2). Dishes are garnished with cut paper, flowers and edible cut vegetables. Vinegary dishes such as *sambal di carambola* and *achar di gamên*

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(sweet pickled sauce) are included in *Chá Gordo* as *su-sakana* is served in *Cha Kaiseki* banquets.

The cakes are garnished with a '*bate saia*' and '*vestido de papel rendado*'³², which is tissue paper finely cut in *Chá Gordo* (Fig. 2 and 3) and *Cha Kaiseki*.

Wine and sake have replaced tea in *Chá Gordo* and *Cha Kaiseki* banquets. Like any cuisine, creativity contributes to the development of new dishes. In the last few centuries, this has been a constant factor without affecting history and traditions.

Today, *Chá Gordo* takes place to celebrate special events³³. The menu is comprised of up to 18 different dishes (Fig. 2 and 4) plus the symbolic dish of minchi and plain white rice. It includes savouries like *apa-bico*, *apa-mochi*, *bagi*, *chilicotes*, *bebinga de nabo*, turnip cake, accompanied by *chili miçó* sauce; cakes such as *bolo minino*, *sarā-surave*, *cocadas di tegilinhas* and individually wrapped fruit cakes (Fig. 5) at Christmas celebrations; sweet desserts such as *ovas de aranha* — spider eggs, *arroz*

dóci di Japam, *alua*, *chawan no moshi* and *formigos*; and main dishes such as *lacassá*³⁴, *bafassá*, *tacho*, *capela*, *galinha di português*, roasted *capon* and *impada*, accompanied by different types of *achar* and *sambal*.

In 2019, the following *Cha Kaiseki* menu was served in a Tokyo restaurant: Pan of forest. Baby sweet fish³⁵ tempura and sakura, Japanese yam (*yamanaimo*), oyster, green caviar, *hamaguri* clam, *aosanori*, *sunomono* (vinegary cucumber) and *wakame*, blowfish, abalone with bamboo shoot, langoustine, scallop soup (*haotategai shinjo-wan*), Kobe beef in bamboo leaf, strawberry, *chawan no mushi*, new sake and *Yame matcha*.

With the founding of Hong Kong and the establishment of the International Settlements in China in the nineteenth century in the aftermath of the Opium War, Macao has long lost the status as the only European city in China (Bikers 2012).



Fig. 4: *Chá Gordo* at Christmas 2019. Photo courtesy of Casa de Macau, Lisbon.



Fig 5: Individually wrapped Christmas fruit cake. *Chá Gordo* at Christmas 2019. Photo courtesy of Casa de Macau, Lisbon.

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The decline in the social and economic environment began in the early 1850s with the relocation of shipping companies to Hong Kong, forcing Macanese to seek better working conditions abroad, first in Shanghai and then in Hong Kong (Machado 1997).

The extinction of the Shanghai International Settlement in 1945, and the Handover of Sovereignty of Hong Kong and Macao to the People's Republic of China in 1997 and 1999, respectively, loomed large in the Macanese decision to seek better working conditions and stability in other countries. This resulted in the wave of immigration to Australia, Portugal, Canada, Brazil, and the United States of America in the 1960s.

The Church of St. Paul's burnt down in 1835, leaving behind a façade. Macao no longer has a commercial fleet and few if any Macanese are employed as crew members on merchant ships. Without a commercial fleet, Macanese maritime commerce ceased to exist and there was no need for sailors to man the ships. Without sailors, the 'Procession of the Navigators' was no longer carried out.

Today, when the Macanese gather in Macao, they do not have to brave the dangerous seas, fight pirates,

or face storms like the voyages made hundred of years ago by their ancestors. The prayers of Thanksgiving no longer echo in the Church of St. Paul's, and the Procession of the Navigators no longer travels the cobblestone streets of this historic city in honour of St. Francis Xavier, who made sea water drinkable and stormy seas safe, allowing the Great Ship from Macao to arrive in a safe haven.

Chá Gordo is the iconic Macanese banquet of Thanksgiving and celebration prepared for religious occasions such as Christmas, Easter and baptisms or any secular festivity such as 'Macanese *Convívios*' and the 'Encounters of the Macanese Community' (*Encontros das Comunidades Macaenses*). It is an opportunity for families and friends who live in every corner of the world to meet in Macao and renew bonds forged long ago.

Chá Gordo is a centuries-old Macanese tradition that evokes past events in our collective history that gives meaning to a social and cultural heritage characterised by tragedy, resilience and devotion, and that expresses pride in belonging, reinforcing the conviviality of the Macanese and perpetuating an identity. **RC**

NOTES

- 1 According to a Chinese narrative *Hou Kéng Ou* (《濠鏡澳》, *Oyster Mirror Bay*) in 1750, the Portuguese first settled in Macao in 1553.
- 2 *Imbigo-di-frade* soup is last mentioned in an 1888 letter from Maria Varê-Rua (Pereira 1995).
- 3 She was Queen of England, Scotland and Ireland from 1662 to 1685 and the dowry given by her father King John IV of Portugal included the seven Islands of Bombay, Tangier and the Island of Ceylon.
- 4 The first tea shop was opened in London in 1706 by Thomas Twining.
- 5 *Comprador(es)*. Portuguese origin meaning buyer, purchaser or contractor. In the nineteenth-century China, the word meant principal servant responsible for purchase or contracts.
- 6 Tchéong Meng Kóng (張鳴岡) was the Viceroy of the two Kwangs (Kwangtung 廣東, present-day Guangdong, and Kwangsái 廣西, present-day Guangxi). He died in 1616.
- 7 Bundy's description in 1637 (Boxer 1993, 67–68) and *Ou-Mun Kei-Leók's* (1751) drawings (Gomes 1950, 193–235).

- 8 I remember when I was growing up in Macao that bowls were called *chawan* at home instead of *tigela* (Portuguese).
- 9 Japanese or Wa Kwok (倭國) were considered pirates by the Chinese authorities and traders by the Portuguese.
- 10 In the fifteenth-century Chinese maps, Macao was also known as Hou Kóng (濠江) or Hou Kéng (濠鏡).
- 11 *Kurofune* was the name given by the Japanese to the black ship used in the Macao–Japan trade.
- 12 Daimyo Otomo, Arima and Hosokawa.
- 13 Shogun.
- 14 The Japanese started to copy Portuguese naval and maritime techniques as well as fire arms (muskets and cannons). The *Nanban-ryu*, or Southern School of Medicine, and a number of seminars were established to train native clergies.
- 15 Including Leão Reoquei (Ryôkei), son of Vicente Reoquei — governor of Shiki Island, great-grandson of Reoquei Kudô — nobleman from Sakai (Fróis 1976, 235) and my mothers' ancestors Sanguiwon (*Sanguadono*).

- 16 There were Japanese residing in Macao since 1564. See Viceroy Tchéong Meng Kóng's (張鳴岡) Order of 1564 and Wanli Emperor's (萬曆皇帝) Decree (*Chapa n.º 10*) of 1579 (Múrias 1988, 110).
- 17 *Bakufu* is the Japanese term for Shogunate.
- 18 On 7 July 1618, a squadron of well-laden galliots from Macao to Nagasaki fell in with a Dutch frigate *Jacatra*, which blew up and sank. Description given by a Japanese crew member of a Portuguese galliot (Boxer 1959).
- 19 The scroll painting *Shuhanron emaki*, a seventeenth-century screen attributed to Kanō Motonobu shows a samurai carving a fish in the preparation of a banquet. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.
- 20 *Konpeito* is a hard sweet and *aruheito* is a softer sweet, both are Portuguese sweets known as *confeite* and *alfeola*.
- 21 *Karumela* is a Portuguese fluffy sugar cake known as *carumela*.
- 22 *Castella* is the Portuguese *pão-de-ló* or *kasutera* — a speciality of Nagasaki.
- 23 *Su-sakana* (酢肴) are vinegary appetisers or side dishes used to cleanse the palate.
- 24 Fowl and spiny lobsters decorated with cut paper and flowers were served in a banquet to Shogun Iemitsu in 1630 by Daimyo Shimazu Iehisa (Rath 2008).
- 25 António Bocarro, principal chronicler of Portuguese India.
- 26 Anjirō was born in Nagasaki in 1512 and baptised by St. Francis Xavier in Goa as Paulo de Santa Fé. He became a pirate in the later part of his life (Fróis 1976).
- 27 The Senado (Senate) was responsible for the selection of the patron saints of Macao, namely Our Lady of Conception; St. John the Baptist; St. Francis Xavier and St. Catherine of Siena. The organisation of the religious processions of Corpus Christi, Passion of Christ, the Navigators, St. Anthony with a military honour guard and St. John with a gun salute from Mount Fortress was the responsibility of the Senado and respective brotherhood, congregations and confrarias.
- 28 D. Isabel is the wife of D. António (*Koteda Saemon-no-jō*), Lord of Firando, present-day Hirado (Fróis 1976).
- 29 *Horas de Ave Marias* means at 18:00.
- 30 Luís Fróis, SJ was in Macao in 1563 and from 1591 to 1593, he died in Nagasaki in 1597.
- 31 João Rodrigues, SJ went to Japan in 1577, was ordained in 1594 in Macao and returned to Japan. He left Japan in 1614 and lived in Macao where he died in 1633 (Cooper 1994).
- 32 *Bate saia* (skirt making) and *vestido de papel rendado* (paper lace dress) were made by D. Aurelina and it is the art of tissue paper cutting to garnish cakes.
- 33 I recall a *Chá Gordo* in the early 1950s celebrating the release of my cousin Albino Pacheco Borges (Salesian priest) from captivity in Shanghai for preaching the Catholic faith. The *Tē Deum* was in the Salesian Chapel followed by a *Chá Gordo* in my grandaunt Angeolina's home in Rua Lobo de Ávila; the second event was the christening and first communion of my elder brothers Alberto and José at the St. Lawrence's Church followed by a *Chá Gordo* at Vila Verde with their godfathers. The third *Chá Gordo* I recall was to celebrate my eldest brother António's admission to University of Lisbon to study Economics.
- 34 *Lacassá* should not be confused with *lacassá* soup. The latter has been added recently to *Chá Gordo* menu.
- 35 Baby sweet fish is a river fish similar to carp.

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