

# Macau, Bali and the Malay World: A Gastronomic Perspective

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**Abstract:** Macau's location on the South China Sea suggests that any syncretic activity would have been of Sinitic-Portuguese variety. However, the situation is rather more nuanced, as the culture of the Macanese people, who consider themselves the 'sons of the land', reflects Portuguese colonial activity across the Indian Ocean and especially Malacca. Links between Macau and the 'Malay World' are deep and complex, and this paper approaches this issue through historical and political analysis, but also through the specifics of etymology and cuisine. The paper also draws comparisons with other 'creolised' cuisines in Southeast Asia such as *Peranakan* food in Malaysia and Western-Indonesian hybrids that have arisen in the tourism context of Bali. Given the importance played by women in preparing dishes for Portuguese men in Macau, parallels are drawn with the role of enslaved Hindu-Balinese women in colonial Batavia (Jakarta) who prepared pork dishes for their Dutch masters.

**Keywords:** Macau; Macanese; Malacca; Malay; Bali; Asia; cuisine, Kristang, gastronomy

## 1. Introduction

The tiny territory that we know as Macau (also spelt Macao), located on the South China Sea, is historically accessible to China by both land and sea. Certainly, its geographical situation, together with post-colonial politics and its status as a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China, are suggestive of it being a 'Chinese' city. Its rich history would suggest otherwise or, at least, nuance this view. Today it is known as the Vegas of the East. In the seventeenth century it was known as the Venice of the East. It has occupied a profound status as a city "on the edges of nations, oceans, cultures, languages, economies, laws, and civilisations..." (Clayton 2009. p. 67). Even its status as an official colony of Portugal is contested, and it is argued that Macau's ambiguous status as being

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outside the laws and conventions that structured both Chinese and Portuguese societies “was precisely what allowed the city to become a major hub of world trade in Asia for over 300 years, anchoring trade routes that spanned the known world” (Clayton, 2009, p. 68).

To understand the complex history of Macau it is first important to trace the earliest days of Portuguese presence in Asia. A linguistic approach is a useful starting point for understanding more deeply the social-cultural conditions in Asia ahead of the arrival of the Portuguese – the first European power to establish Asian colonies, of which Goa (1511) was the steppingstone. When ships came ashore here, the community was not homogenous. Two examples of lingua franca already existed – one based on Arabic, and one of Malay type. In the same year, the Portuguese established a base in Malacca, but Malay influence had already begun in Goa. The Malay language is also known in Sri Lanka and the second author of this paper has conversed in Malay in Colombo in the 1990s with people who self-identify as Malay.

Months later, when the Portuguese arrived in Malacca, they found an already thriving trading centre. It had been founded in the early 1400s for its ideal situation through which to facilitate trade – the Straits of Malacca remain the busiest shipping route in the world. This was already a plural society – early Portuguese seafarers claimed that 84 languages could be heard spoken in the marketplace (Sarkissian, 2005, p.149). One of these was the Baba (sometimes written as Baba Nyonya – father and mother) Malay variant, emerging in the already established Peranakan (Straits-born Chinese married to local and Southeast Asian women) syncretic community (Ansaldo, 2009, p. 150), which would be followed by the directly Portuguese influenced Papiiah Kristang. Kristang (Christian) is a creole Malay-Portuguese term used in Malacca to refer to the Eurasian Christian community of Portuguese and Asian descent, though some claim a more diverse heritage that embraces Dutch, British and other ancestries. The culture that arose out of this interchange is referred to as Macanese and it is largely seen in binary terms as a Chinese-Portuguese synthesis, which is reflected in official definitions, including those used by the Macao Government Tourist Office. Unlike the concept of pluralism which was conceived of as a separate kind of society in Java and Burma (Myanmar) by J.S. Furnivall (and later by M.G. Smith), in which cultures mix in the market place but do not combine, Macanese culture represents a synthesis, a combination of cultures (Smith, 1960).

This study, however, goes beyond the binary explanation that is widely used and argues that Macanese culture can be more fully understood with reference to insights from the Malay-Indonesian world, notably in the use of words of Malay origin in its gastronomic terminology. The novelty in this study

resides in its use of etymology to understand the origins of words and the way in which meanings have changed over time, and draws parallels with Southeast Asian societies of mixed heritage, namely the Peranakan.

## 2. Literature Review

Malacca was important not only as an entrepot with links to the Moluccas (the Spice Islands), the source of cloves, nutmeg, and mace, but as a leading Sultanate with a longstanding literary tradition of writing histories, religious texts, and poetry in Malay. It was one of the leading Malay kingdoms, straddling the Straits of Malacca and encircling the island of Borneo, and thus lay at the heart of the ‘Malay World’. However, the term Malay World is not simply restricted to Malay speaking kingdoms, as polities that were not traditionally Malay speaking, such as the Sultanate of Bima on Sumbawa, adopted Malay for both religious and artistic reasons, as well as for record keeping (Hitchcock, 1996). Malay was also used widely as a language of commerce, often developing a distinct local form such as *Melayu Timur* (Eastern Malay) in the islands of eastern Indonesia. Interestingly, there are Cantonese speakers of Indonesian origin in Macau, who were refugees, or descendants of refugees from the turmoil of Indonesia in 1965 who were either denied the right of entry to Hong Kong by the British or simply had contacts in Macau. As the second author of this paper found when he lived in Macau (2012-2014) these families remain very proud of their facility with the language, with even some grandchildren being able to speak it.

While the Portuguese sought to establish themselves in Malacca through – according to their strategy – the closely linked processes of trade and marriage, Papiah Kristang emerged as the ‘contact language’ born between speakers of Portuguese (including their wives, servants and concubines) and speakers of local – and other – languages. However, this patuá did not constitute the “classical model of contact between a European group and indigenous group”. Rather, “the mixes were multiple” (O’Neill, 2018, p. 330). The vocabulary derived mainly from older varieties of Portuguese; however, its grammar and phonology show considerable Malay influence in addition to Portuguese, Hokkien and Indian varieties – plus some original elements. In turn, at least three varieties of Creole Portuguese derived from Papiah Kristang were later to develop in Asia variously in Macau, Java, and Timor (Baxter and de Silva, 2004).

Portuguese influences can still be seen in the Indonesian national language, *Bahasa Indonesia*, which retains many Portuguese loanwords such as *mentega* (butter), *keju* (cheese), *garpu* (fork) and *sepatu* (shoe). Portuguese musical influences can be detected in the folk music of Jakarta (*Kroncong*) and religious influence is ongoing in eastern Indonesia, notably Flores, Timor and Rote, where

the Portuguese introduced Catholicism. As cartographers they were often the first to name the islands they came across, sometimes using local terms such as Sumbawa, albeit slightly inaccurately (Hitchcock, 1996) or bestowing their own Portuguese terms such as Flores (flowers). Sometimes even the use of local terms arose out of misunderstandings. Islanders from Rote are quick to tell the story of how the Portuguese named the landmass after the name of a man (Lote) who thought the newly arrived seafarers were asking him for his name and not the name of the island. Incidentally, a similar confusion can be detected in Macau. When the Portuguese asked where they were, they were said to have been given Ama-gao, the bay of Ama, named after the temple of Ama dedicated to the patron goddess of seafarers. The local name for this island group is 澳門 (*Aomen*) in traditional Chinese, which means ‘bay gate’, but the Portuguese were not yet conversant with this written language.

Similar etymological confusions were also known in the last remaining Portuguese territory in Southeast Asia as the Portuguese also used the Malay for east, *timur* (Timor in Portuguese) to describe last major island of the chain known in Indonesian as *Nusa Tenggara*. The Portuguese colony on the east of the island became known as East Timor (literally ‘east east’), as well as ‘Portuguese Timor’ until the end of colonial rule 1975 and the subsequent annexation by Indonesia. Following the United Nations sponsored in 1999, which ended the Indonesian occupation, it became known as Timor Leste, which has a similar connotation as ‘leste’ means ‘east’ in Portuguese. Although relations between Macau and Timor Leste are subjects of interest in their own right, they do not feature prominently in this paper.

### 3. Research Methods

This study combines desk research and ethnography with a particular focus on describing and analysing gastronomy with the help of etymology. Desk research is considered here as the use of written and largely published sources, which are combined with ethnographic observation in which the researchers, notably the first author of this paper, have had long terms contacts with and immersion in a given society, in this case Macau. In particular, this paper draws inspiration from the work of the American anthropologist, Clifford Geertz (1973), who re-popularised Ryle’s work on ‘thick description’ in what may be called symbolic and interpretative anthropology. Geertz critiqued the approaches of his era that sought universal truths and theories in favour of approaches that highlighted culture from the way people in those cultures perceived and experienced life.

Geertz emphasised a more analytical approach as opposed to observation alone that had hitherto been a key component of ethnography in order to

develop a more interpretative approach, hence the term ‘thick description’. It is the authors’ conjecture that etymology sheds light on the cultural complexities of gastronomy that cannot be deduced from observation alone. In other words, the overall understanding may be called a *mélange of descriptors*, which may be better understood in Lincoln and Gruba’s (1985) sense of being ‘thickly described’ and opposed to being the result of just ‘thick description’.

As mentioned above, etymology is used here in the sense of tracing the origin and use of a word or phrase, which in the case of cuisine provides greater analytical detail than the binary Portuguese-Chinese explanation provided in popular and official sources. It is argued that this approach sheds more light on the complexities of so-called ‘creolised’ cuisines that may be found in places like Penang and Bali, often within, albeit not exclusively, the context of tourism.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Etymology and Cuisine

Language is only one aspect of pluralistic societies where “variation and fusion of elements originally belonging to different systems” reflect new identity alignments between communities (Ansaldò, 2009, p. 151). Other syncretic cultural elements would also emerge from these broad and mixed communities in the fields of, for example, beliefs, attire, and cuisine – and cuisine is a central research concern here. While the application of linguistic theory to the exploratory study of cuisine may not be suitable in its entirety, it represents the opportunity “to reconstruct as precisely as possible the socio-economic and cultural conditions of creolization” (Chaudenson, 2001, p. 314). While trade and its associated contact languages appeared in the marketplace, the emergence of new ‘contact’ cuisines took place in the far more intimate setting of the domestic kitchen. Monikers attributed to cuisines which emerged from mixed communities include fusion, creole and hybrid. Certainly, these cuisines are ‘melting pots’ of multiple culinary traditions.

In 2017, Macau was granted status as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, with UNESCO (UNESCO, 2020) describing Macau as a combination of eastern and western culture, and as “home of the *first* “fusion food” – the Macanese cuisine, now designated as Macao’s intangible heritage by the local government” [italics added]. How should Macanese cuisine be defined? Typical ingredients include onion, garlic and potato, chicken and pork, fish and seafood, while both rice and bread are staples. Flavours are built with an array of condiments, spices and herbs such as soy sauce, fresh chillies, tamarind, turmeric, cinnamon and bay leaf. Dishes are variously fried, steamed, roasted and baked, but rarely raw – with the exception of the odd lettuce leaf-based salad. Not necessarily spicy, dishes might be very salty, or

rich and sweet. Vegetables rarely take main stage. Soups and appetisers are popular. It is presented Chinese style with multiple dishes brought to the table at once, though fork and spoon are the most usual implements of consumption – a Southeast Asian practice. Is it a fusion of Portuguese and Chinese? A hybrid cuisine of Portuguese origins with Asian influences? Such descriptions do not get us very far.

One approach through which to deepen our understanding of the cuisine of the 450-year-old Macanese community in Macau is that of etymology, and such an approach gains traction in the analysis of the names attributed to dishes. This approach sheds light on the broad cross-Asia cultural interactions existing beyond the shores of southern China of this Portuguese-descended group, though it is not always possible to identify clearly the origins of dishes (Ansaldo, 2009, p.156). According to historical linguist Tom Hoogervorst, the culinary history of the Indian Ocean “is palpable in the Macanese cuisine” (Hoogervorst, 2018, p. 533) – a striking example of the geographical stretch of gustatory dialogue.



Photo 1. African Chicken (Source: Koon Ming Tang)

The apparent jumble of dish names, and words or terms incorporated in written recipes (such as they are) are certainly suggestive of a cuisine with a long history and multiple influences. Winter hotpot *Tacho* is named after the Portuguese vessel in which it is cooked, while the steamed dumpling *Apabicos* takes its name from the Tamil *apa* (a thin, flat pancake) and the Portuguese *bico* (beak). African Chicken is one of the best-known Macanese dishes in Macau, also known among the Macanese as *Galinha Africana* and *Galinha à Cafreal* (Photo 1). *Cafres* (or *Kaffirs*) refers to individuals of African descent who are more-or-less mixed with other races (Chaudenson, 2001, p. 30). The dish is indicative of culinary links with Lusophone Africa, and there is a dish of the same name in Goa. Beloved *Minchi* – a main course based on minced pork (and/or beef) sautéed in olive oil with onion and flavoured with soy sauce, is believed to have been created by the Macanese community in British Hong Kong, its name a derivation of the English word “mince” or “minced” (Photo 2).



Photo 2. Preparing *Minchi* (Source: Koon Ming Tang).

Particularly of note, however, is the high number of Malay or Malay-inspired food names, such as the coconut milk cake *bebinca* (*bebingka*) and the fermented shrimp sauce *balichão* which form “an integral part of the city’s culinary traditions” (Hoogervorst, 2018, p. 533). *Balichão* derives from Malay, possibly *belacan* or *belachang*, two of several Malay words for fermented shrimp paste. However, the roots of this preparation may be more specific to the Malaccan *cincaluk/cincalok* which is also prepared in liquid form rather than as a block, though unlike *balichão*, cooking in not required prior to consumption for *cincaluk*. These are in the same family as Thai *nam pla* and Vietnamese *nuoc mam*.

Macanese *balichão* is a unique, semi-fermented preparation for which tiny shrimps - similar to Malaysian and Indonesian *balacan* - are placed in a sealed jar for about three months with salt, peppercorns, bay leaf, chillies, lemons, Portuguese brandy and Chinese Shaoxing wine (a Sherry-like wine used in marinades). It is an indispensable ingredient in the sweet and sour braise called *Porco Balichão Tamarinho*, which can sometimes be found on Macanese restaurant menus in Macau. *Porco* is the Portuguese word for pork, while the Portuguese term for tamarind is *tamarindo*. *Tamarindo* is derived from an Arabic word, *Tamar Hindī* (*Asam Jawa* in Malay), and became part of the Macanese patuá, as *tamarinho*. This dish is served with pressed glutinous rice (possibly of Malay influence) brushed with lard, a fat used in both Malay and Portuguese cooking. Tamarind is a popular souring agent in Southeast Asia, here used as a flavour balance for the *jaggery*, an unrefined cane sugar.

*Balichão* is also the key flavouring for *Sopa de Lacassá* – rice vermicelli served in a bowl of steaming shrimp broth. This dish, in turn, derives from Malaysian laksa – rice noodles served in a seafood and coconut milk soup. *Lacassá* can also be prepared as a fried dish, very similar in nature to Singapore Noodles with its inclusion of shrimp and *char siu* (Cantonese barbecued pork). Another Macanese condiment with Malay-Indonesian origins is *sambal*, a sauce designed to accompany various dishes and which, in its Indonesian form, comprises a red and green chilli paste combined with other ingredients such as garlic, shallots, lemon grass, *galangal*, tomatoes, and shrimp paste.

*Chá Gordo* is a Macanese celebratory afternoon-tea style feast – still very popular today – combining savoury and sweet snacks. A popular element on this lavishly decorated table is *Chilicote*, a half-moon shaped, deep-fried pastry stuffed with a slightly spicy minced meat and potato mixture. The name has been traced to the Malay word *chelakuti*, meaning cake or sweetmeat, though its similarities to Indian *samosa* are also noted (Jorge da Silva, 2016, p. 84). However, another Macanese fried savoury pastry known as *Chamuças*, also associated with Goa, bears similarities to the samosa and could conceivably have taken its name from this. Another version is *Chilicote-Folha*, which is a minced meat filling contained in a rice flour wrapper, and then steamed in banana leaf. Banana leaf, in Portuguese, is *folha de bananeira*. Steaming and grilling in banana leaf is traditional in Southeast Asia. Interestingly, the term ‘banana’ may be of West African (possibly Wolof) or Arabic origin that possibly came into English via Portuguese.

#### 4.2 Malacca Communities and the Macanese

Among the Portuguese colonies with which Macau had contact, the ties with Malacca were particularly strong “due to the triangular trade between



Melaka, Macau, and Nagasaki, in which spices and other products from southeast Asia and China were exchanged for silver in Japan” (Ansaldo, 2009, p. 163). The ecclesiastical relationship was also significant. The diocese of Malacca was created in 1557 but was under the jurisdiction of Macau (O’Neill, 2018, p. 332). However, the human dimension should not be overlooked.

The affinities between Macau and Malacca were close “because of the large number of Portuguese in Macao who married women from Malacca” – women who then carried recipes with them (Rodrigues, 2020. p. 21). Thus, though Macau, which was settled by the Portuguese in 1557, was geographically part of China, it had strong cultural ties with Southeast Asia, and strong links with the islands and ports of the Indian Ocean, which had become “a Portuguese lake” in the sixteenth century (De Silva Jayasuriya, 2008, p. 3). A parallel may be drawn with the role of enslaved Balinese women in colonial Batavia who as Hindus could prepare pork dishes for their Dutch masters often becoming concubines or possibly wives. A renowned portrait of one of these women in Batavia in around 1700 was engraved in Cornelis de Bruin’s *Voyages de Corneille le Brun* in 1718.

Claude Levi-Strauss (1963) held that the joint approach of history with anthropology could be an effective vehicle for illuminating the past, an idea developed by anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) with his “thick description” and insistence on interpretative structures. He argued that culture is best seen not as “complexes of concrete behaviour patterns” such as customs and traditions but through the “control mechanisms” which are essential for ordering human behaviour. Within this category he includes, alongside the plan and the program, the recipe (Geertz, 2017, p. 50). A deeper investigation – away from the popular definition of Macanese cuisine as a fusion of Portuguese and Chinese/Cantonese – certainly forms a part of what has been identified as the “continuing debate on the changing patterns of historical interaction and the formation of complex identities in the Lusophone world” (Havik and Newitt, 2005, p. 15).

In the consideration of the cultural relationships between Macau and the Malay world, it is pertinent to take into consideration the mixed *Peranakan* community of Malacca, which was establishing itself prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, and most particularly to examine the community’s cooking traditions. The problem of definitions aside, the first “fusion” or “hybrid” cooking to emerge in Asia was not Macanese, as UNESCO would have it, but almost certainly the Baba Nyonya cuisine of the Peranakan, the Straits Chinese. In the case of Nyonya cuisine, while it may be convenient to use the term hybrid to describe it, “it is more helpful to study it as a product of cultural localization, arising from Chinese and non-Chinese cultural interaction in the context of

the Malayan environment” (Tan 2007, p. 171-172). This blending of Chinese and Malay has been viewed less as “mixture” but more as “genuine synthesis - something which not only incorporates but also transcends the component parts out of which it springs” (Clammer, 1980, p. 1).

*Peranakan* refers to the descendants of early southern Chinese traders (mostly of Hokkien ancestry) who settled in Malacca during the sixteenth century and, because women were not legally allowed to leave China, married local non-Muslim Malay women and others including Siamese and Burmese (Ng and Karim, 2016, p. 94). Inter-marriage between these groups eventually ceased, after which, for centuries, “the Babas married exclusively amongst their own, becoming an endogamous and elite group” (Lee, 2008, p. 162). While they maintained a broadly Chinese identity, in order to be defined as Straits Chinese, one had to adopt the exterior markers such as language – a creolised form of Malay and Javanese (Tan, 2007, p. 171) – and dress and food, which were principally of Malay origin. While the cooking of the Peranakan community has been easily distinguishable from Malay cooking through its incorporation of pork (Tan, 2007, p. 181), that distinction is no longer relevant, as Nyonya restaurants in Malaysia become part of a trend to obliterate pork from menus to appeal to a greater proportion of (Muslim) tourists.

The Macanese of Macau had more in common with the Baba community of Malacca – as well as the Malays of Sri Lanka – than with the Kristang who, it can be surmised, played second fiddle to the Babas. The term *Peranakan* is also used to refer to those communities of Chinese descent and means ‘children of’ in the sense of being children of Malaysia or Indonesia (and Singapore). The Babas and the Macanese showed similar traits with regard to power-brokerage as “intercultural, multilingual mediators” in the ecologies in which they resided, a clearly defined internal identity, and endogamy (Ansaldo, 2009, pp. 150-51). But, for the community to which the Macanese shared tighter *cultural* ties, we look to the Kristang who, ahead of the formation of the Macanese community in Macau, had developed their own *patuá* and cooking traditions. It can be assumed that members of the Kristang community themselves also moved to Macau.

Kristang cuisine represents itself as a potted history of Malaysia; a cuisine representing this plural society with its tranches of colonial encounters. “Kristang cooking is influenced by Portuguese, Dutch and British cuisines, and it also bears the markings of local Malay, Chinese and Indian cuisines. It is characterised by fiery sambals, curries made using dried spices, fragrant coconut and tamarind curries, and light and tasty vegetable dishes” (Nunis, 2014, p. 11; Photo 3). Kristang cuisine has even been represented as one for which Portuguese elements were introduced to the already established ‘hybrid’

Baba Nyonya cooking of the Peranakan community (Katayose, 2013) though such an explanation appears insufficient – if only because the ‘Chinese’ or ‘Baba’ settlement was quite different to any kind of European colonising project.

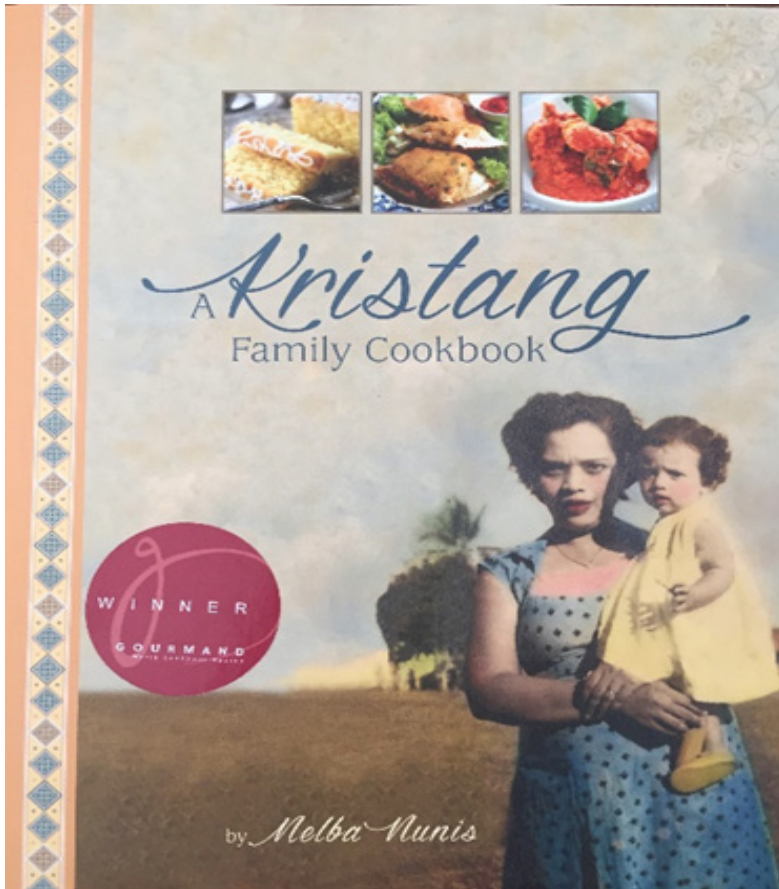


Photo 3. Book cover reproduced by kind permission of Melba Nunis and her family.

There is certainly crossover in dishes such as *Kari Ayam Kapitan Nyonya* (Nyonya *Kapitan* chicken curry) from Penang and the Kristang Kari Captain (*Kapitan*). *Kari* was originally a Tamil word meaning ‘sauce’ that became widely adopted across Asia and found its way into English as ‘curry’. *Kapitan* or *Kapten* is Malay for ‘Captain’ and the name *Kapitan Cina* was given to the leaders of the Chinese community in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore with various degrees of power by the Dutch and British colonial authorities, and was also used by the Portuguese colonialists to refer to the head of the Chinese community (Musa, 2016, p. 95), while the Kristang always use the English term Captain (Nunis, 2014, p. 82).

The *Ponteh Ayam* of the Baba, a distinctly ‘Chinese’ dish with a Baba name, based on fermented soybean paste, is very similar to the *Pongteh* of the Kristang. The Peranakan mixed vegetable dish *Chap Chai* has a Kristang version (which may include fish); and the Kristang curry puff *Epok-Epok Sayur* has a similar filling to the Nyonya *Kueh Pie Tee* or *Popiah* (spring rolls) whose origin is China’s Fujian Province. The term *Epok-Epok Sayur*, which is used to refer to popular curry puffs in Singapore and Malaysia, has a contested etymology as it is on one hand thought to be inspired by the Portuguese *empada* brought in the 1500s to the Malay Peninsula, while on the other was said to have been created in Singapore to placate British palates that brought over the Cornish Pasty, prepared by Indian cooks (who knew curry and potatoes all too well).

A direct translation from Malay and Indonesian is also possible as *epok-epok* means epochs and *sayur* means vegetable. However, curry puffs (*Karipap Pusing*) can also be considered Malaysian (Musa, 2016, p. 50) or Indonesian; *karipap* may be a Malay-Indonesian rendering of curry puff whereas *pusing* means ‘turn’ in Malay and ‘dizzy’ in Indonesian. Other Malay crossover dishes might include prawn and pineapple curry, and desserts incorporating glutinous rice or sago with coconut milk, such as the palm sugar-rich *Gula Melaka*.

Added to this complex matrix of influences is the Portuguese component. As with Macanese cuisine, the origins and development of Kristang cooking are not always well understood, nor is it clear how many recipes or dishes have been lost along the way, or why some have persisted. The core difference between Kristang and Macanese is the former’s use of the *rempah*, an Indonesian word meaning ‘spice’ or seasoning, which in Malacca takes the form of a ground spice mix which may feature rhizomes such as lemon grass and galangal which do not grow in Macau. However, there are dishes in both canons which feature no spice at all and are very similar in derivation, such as crab cooked in its own shell, cabbage leaves stuffed with minced pork, and English-style baked cakes based on dried fruit at Christmas. Also notable is the frequent inclusion in recipes of Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce – a condiment commercialised in 1837 in England and believed to be based on an Indian preparation popular among British colonialists.

While the compiling cookbook *Macaense Cuisine: Origins and Evolution* (2016), which included many recipes from his mother, Olga, author António Jorge da Silva noted the particular popularity of this condiment in 1940s Hong Kong, and comments on how he either omits it or at least reduces the quantity when transcribing those family recipes. The most ‘famous’ of the Kristang so-called Portuguese dishes are Portuguese Baked Fish, and Devil Curry – though at least based on contemporary recipes, there’s really nothing particularly Portuguese about them at all. It can be noted, however, that the Macanese also

prepare a dish with similarly fiery connotations – *Diabo* (Devil) – particularly at Christmas as a way to use up leftovers.

Striking is that, in our context of a meeting point of southern China with Southeast Asia, the creativity of Eurasians has been so marked that culinary fusion “has sometimes left very little vestige of any Western influence” (Arvela, 2019, p. 79). At the same time, these cuisines can be seen to have roots in the gastronomy of Medieval Europe with their combinations of sweet spice and savoury elements – such as the use of cinnamon in the Macanese beef stew *Vaca Estufada*, and the combination of sweet potato, pork meat, cinnamon and nutmeg in the Kristang *pang suis* (Arvela, 2019, p. 82). The French were the first in Europe to remove spice from the culinary lexicon, to be replaced by humble herbs such as parsley, and there remain few remnants of spice across Europe today, save the cinnamon sprinkle on the sweet Portuguese egg tart, *pastel de nata*, and the grated nutmeg atop the English baked custard.

Both the Kristang and Macanese communities represent themselves to the wider community through food, and while restaurants are still relatively scarce, communication about food has been achieved chiefly through the publication of cookbooks. The style of these cookbooks can be seen as rather similar – both fix food identity within the extended family and the kinship community. The two most prominent Kristang cookbooks, *Kristang Family Cookbook* by Melba Nunis, and *Cuzinhia Cristang. A Mallaca-Portuguese Cookbook* by Celine Marbeck are far more than repositories of recipes but also accounts “of Kristang culture and foodways” and contain “detailed personal accounts” (Arvela, 2019, p. 79). Names of Macanese cookbooks place recipes firmly in a domestic context, such as *A Cozinha de Macau de Casa Meu Avô* (‘The Food of Macau from the House of my Grandfather’) by Graça Pacheco Jorge, and *Traditional Recipes from my Auntie Albertina* by Cintia Conceição Serro. António M. Jorge da Silva’s cookbook is generically titled *Macaense Cuisine: Origins and Evolution* – but the cover shot presents “an image of his (very elegant) mother preparing an apparently rather elaborate dish” (Jackson, 2020, p. 45). Even the first Macanese cookbook to be published in English, *Taste of Macau: Portuguese Cuisine on the China Coast*, includes vignettes of Macanese talking about their relationship with Macanese food, alongside photographic portraits.

#### **4.3 The Portuguese Legacy: Malay, Macanese and Balinese Cuisine**

The widening of the analysis of Macanese cuisine to embrace consideration of Malay-Indonesian and Balinese references adds another layer to our understanding on the intercultural exchanges between Portuguese and Southeast Asian culinary traditions. While direct influences in Bali may be less pronounced than those from the broader Malay world, the Portuguese colonial

history in Macau and its culinary impact extend subtly into the Balinese food culture. The primary vector of this influence lies in the presence of the Portuguese in the Malay Archipelago, notably Malacca, and southern China, notably Macau, which served as pivotal hubs for the spread of culinary ingredients, both Asian and European, eventually reaching Bali and integrating with local traditions. For example, the use of spices in Bali such as cloves and nutmeg—spices that were heavily traded by the Portuguese—can be traced back to this period of intense maritime activity. Spices, initially brought to the region by Portuguese traders, are now integral to Balinese dishes like *Babi Guling* (roast pork) and various spice pastes used in everyday cooking (Photo 4).



Photo 4. Balinese mixed rice with roast pork or *babi guling* dish (Source: Darma Putra, 2022)

*Babi Guling* moreover, though inherently Balinese, seems to echo the Portuguese culinary tradition of utilising every part of the pig. The use of pork which was eschewed due to Muslim prohibitions in much of the Malay world was also possible in largely Hindu Bali. Interestingly, the Dutch colonial practice of *Rijsttafel*, or “rice table,” bears resemblance to the Balinese tradition of *magibung*, where a variety of dishes are served together to emphasize communal dining, possibly another example of a European and Asian synthesis that has been widely embraced in Asian-style restaurants in Europe (Pitanatri & Putra, 2016).

Balinese dishes also bear traces of Malay influence, notably in the spicy condiments known as *sambal*. In Bali, *sambal matah*, made with raw shallots and lemon grass, showcases the adaptation of Malay sambal techniques, using local

ingredients to suit Balinese tastes. Other culinary practices in the Bali culinary that appear to reflect Malay influences include the use of food offerings in Balinese Hindu rituals (Zuryani, 2020). Additionally, Balinese *nasi campur*—a mixed rice dish—has parallels with the Malay Nasi Lemak whereby both dishes are accompanied by a variety of side dishes, demonstrating a regional preference for rice-centric meals adapted to local tastes and available ingredients (Pratama, 2023; Zuryani, 2020). In common with Macau, Bali's cuisine was influenced via colonialism, in the latter case Dutch, and more lately through tourism and globalisation. These later processes can be seen through the mushrooming of Japanese restaurants and accompanying cooking classes (Bestari et al., 2022; Subadra, 2024)

#### 4.4. Commodification of Creole Cooking Cultures

The Kristang have across history been described as an abandoned race, as the “bastards of the Portuguese Empire” (Fernandis, 2003, p. 288) – though there was an elite group known as the “Upper Tens”, perhaps referring to the upper 10 per cent of the community, likely with Dutch or British rather than Portuguese family names (Sarkissian, 2005, p. 152). The living conditions of the majority, many of whom worked on fishing boats or as fishmongers, were deemed so poor that in 1926 Parish priests, using the Indonesian name for village, *kampung*, put forward the idea of creating a ‘reservation’ to save the community from almost total oblivion. The first families moved in around 1935 but it was not until after World War 2 that the settlement began to expand and a coherent community was established (Sarkissian, 2005, p. 156). Then, in the 1980s the Malacca state government identified tourism as a major growth industry and, particularly given the lack of natural resources such as sandy beaches and spectacular mountains, began marketing Malacca as Malaysia's ‘historic’ city.

In the middle of the settlement the tourist attraction Portuguese Square was established to facilitate tourism through the provision of ‘Portuguese’ food and entertainment. The process has been described as representing the Kristang as ancestrally a kind of “relic people” (O'Neill, 2018, p. 331), particularly through the adoption of (mainland) Portuguese folk songs and dances performed for tourists. During the 1990s “it was virtually impossible to read promotional literature about Malacca without coming across the image of smiling Portuguese dancers. They became one of the visual symbols associated with Malacca” (Sarkissian, 2005, p. 157). Margaret Sarkissian (2005) has noted that although costumes for boy dancers were locally made, those for girls were donated by an organisation in Macau, and that a Kristang dance troupe from Singapore was trained by dancers from Macau.

In the restaurants of Malacca's Portugal Square, though, we struggle to find very much of Portugal in the typical spread of restaurant dishes. At an alfresco dinner attended by this paper's first author in July 2017, at a restaurant run by two sisters, the eclectic selection was thus: Prawn Sambal, Sweet & Sour Fish, Chicken Curry *Debal*, *kailan* stir-fried with garlic, fried *bringal*, squid with turmeric, clams with ginger and garlic, and, even more surprisingly, crab with salted egg, and baby scallops on their shells, smothered in butter. The Portuguese tourist would be disappointed to find barely a Portuguese term on the menu, rather English dish names and the occasional Malay or Papia Kristang word (O'Neill, 2018, p. 326). The Kristang community may have preserved its own cooking style, having obviously borrowed aspects of Malay, Indian and Chinese cooking styles, yet at the same time chooses to project "an epithet of "Portuguese cooking" for tourist purposes" (O'Neill, 2018, p. 327). While the Kristang Upper Tens had aligned with both British and Dutch colonial projects, long-standing associations with the British had become a liability in the face of the 1950s independence movement. Slowly, being 'Portuguese' was becoming expedient, suggestive that a Portuguese identity is a recent invention.

In many ways such processes have been mirrored in Macau, through heritage tourism. Efforts to move away from the mono touristic provision of gambling to position Macau as a more inclusive and varied destination made it pertinent for the post-colonial government to maintain the city's appeal: its "small-town, colonial (perhaps exotic) and Mediterranean-European character" (Lam, 2010, p. 663). In 2005, in a submission commuted through Beijing, Macau received a UNESCO tangible heritage listing for the historical and cultural importance of a series of twenty-two sites including many with Portuguese heritage including Largo de Senado, Leal Senado, Casa Garden, and the Moorish barracks, alongside Chinese architectural heritage including A-Ma Temple and the Mandarin House (Photo 5). Far from shrinking away from Macau's colonial history, the post-colonial government has been active in the preservation – and indeed cultivation – of that past as a cultural tourism project (Lam, 2010, p. 665). Macau is whimsically portrayed, just as it was during the colonial era, as a historic and cultural centre; as a mutually accommodating melting pot of east and west. This notion is perfectly embodied in popular projections of Macanese cuisine, and indeed in 2017 Macau's application for UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy status was ratified, with Macanese cuisine to the fore of the pitch.

In the past two decades, since the liberalisation of Macau's gambling provision, new casino hotels have been required to offer Macanese or Portuguese dishes (and Portuguese wine) to obtain operating licences. However, Macanese food in these circumstances is often conflated with Portuguese food, to inhabit a vaguely "European" category of cuisine. Its sublimation under the Portuguese



moniker succeeds in commercial terms as the availability of “Portuguese” dishes is particularly attractive for tourists from China (and various Asian countries), who believe they are eating “authentic” European food on their doorstep (Zhang and Pang, 2012). But, this can compromise the tourist experience, aptly illustrated in an observation by a mainland Chinese tourist after (mistakenly) ordering a Macanese dish. “I ordered the most representative dish of Portuguese food, the Portuguese chicken... I thought this dish is supposed to be like other European food with a butter flavour and tomato paste. However, there is some coconut cream and curry in the sauce” (Zhang and Hitchcock, 2014). Portuguese Chicken is assumed to be a Macanese dish but is widely known as *Po Kok Gai* (Cantonese) and argued to be a Chinese creation (Jorge da Silva, 2016, pp. 58-9). At the same time, local restaurants and cafés garner fiscal advantage when serving Macanese dishes. The Macanese are disdainful of this process, even referring to it as “hijacking” (Jackson, 2020, p. 33), but this practice surely comprises part of its evolution towards a different kind of “authenticity” under the tourist gaze.



Photo 5. Mandarin House, Macau (Source: Cammy Yiu).

Macau was the last colony to be relinquished by Portugal, in December 1999: not, of course, as a result of winning independence, but to be ‘returned’ to China as a Special Administrative Region (SAR), a term also used to refer to the status of Hong Kong. Malacca, on the other hand, was under Portuguese domination only from 1511-1641, a shorter period than the Dutch (158 years)

and the English (157 years), yet its effects were enduring, or at least reinvented, “as the Kristang community in today’s Malaysia demonstrates” (Arvela, 2019, p. 76). The respective status of the Macanese and the Kristang have changed through different eras, and both communities now find themselves as outsiders without ‘local’ identities in countries with politicised attitudes to ethnicity.

While it is useful to draw parallels between the hybrid Macanese and Peranakan cuisines, it is worth mentioning another Western-Asian creole style of cooking that has arisen in the context of tourism in Bali. From around the late 1970s dishes started to appear that appealed to both visitors and local peoples, some of the most popular being the so-called *bistek* styles of cooking where pieces of chicken (*bistek ayam*) and pork (*bistek babi*) were served on a plate in the style of beefsteak (*bistek*) with accompanying vegetables (‘meat and two veg’). However, these dishes were not disconnected from their Balinese roots as the meat and vegetables continued to be flavoured with local spices. Interestingly, all three cuisines – Macanese, Peranakan and Western-Balinese – continue to flourish in the context of tourism, which lies beyond the scope of this paper, but certainly merits further research.

## 5. Conclusion

Despite Macau’s location on the South China Sea, its unique culture cannot simply be regarded as a synthesis of Chinese and Portuguese as is widely shared in popular discourse, as well as in the tourism promotion of the territory. As this paper investigates through the study of Macanese cuisine, particularly through etymology and Geertzian ‘thick description,’ this description remains inadequate as trade and cultural links with the Malay world, notably Malacca, need to be taken into account, as well as connections with Bali where ingredients and cooking styles bear a Portuguese imprint.

Indeed, Macau’s status as a former Portuguese colony also needs some qualification as it was initially leased by China as a trading post and remained under Chinese sovereignty until 1887 when Portugal began to consider and administer it as one of its colonies. From its moniker as Venice of the East to Vegas of the East, this historic trading hub has operated on the edges of economies, nations and languages, its cultural imprint reaching from as far away as the Indian Ocean, with ties to Bali and the ‘Malay World’ illustrated in this paper. Links between Macau, Bali and the ‘Malay World’ are deep and complex and their exploration sheds light on not only how and where syncretic communities and new identities emerge, but the ways in which they have historically interacted with and influenced each other as part of, but also beyond, colonial projects.

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