

# Lusophone Gastrodiplomacy and Tourism: Macau and the BRICS

**Carla Figueira, Michael Hitchcock\***

**Abstract:** Given its history, Macau's significance as a gateway between China and the Lusophone countries remains undiminished in the 21st century, and, underpinned by gastrodiplomacy and tourism, appears to becoming even more important in this respect. Gastronomy is an intrinsic element of Macau's cultural identity and an important differentiation factor for its tourism industry. It also has the potential to be a key participant in the BRICS network through gastrodiplomacy and as a focus of cultural and culinary exchange.

**Keywords:** BRICS, Macau, Gastrodiplomacy, Tourism

## Introduction

Macau was renowned as a Portuguese colony until 1999, when it was returned to China and became a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC). It retains many elements of its Portuguese heritage, with Portuguese law still being recognized and Portuguese remaining, along with Cantonese, as one of the territory's two

---

\* Carla Figueira and Michael Hitchcock are the Research Fellows of Institute for Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship, Goldsmiths of University of London.

official languages. However, Macau is not just linked to Europe via Portugal, but through myriad networks that connect it to the many Portuguese speaking people of the Lusophone World. In fact, it may be said that Macau's significance as a gateway between China and the Lusophone countries remains undiminished in the 21st century, and, underpinned by gastro-diplomacy and tourism, appears to becoming even more important in this respect. Ironically, the name of Macau in Chinese conveys the sense of a gateway as it is referred to as 澳門, meaning "bay gate." The name Macau appears to have arisen from a mistake whereby the Portuguese misheard the local Cantonese fishermen referring to the Bay of the Goddess A-Ma, a reference to the famous temple dating from 1488 that overlooks the southern part of a sheltered waterway that first attracted Portuguese seafarers. The name of the northern most island, the misnamed Macau, is given to three small islands—Macau, Taipa, and Coloane—lying on the western side of the Pearl River delta flanked by Hong Kong to the east. In fact, the Pearl River Delta has long been an important artery for trade, as it links the important city of Guangzhou to the South China Sea and ships could find shelter in what is called the Inner Harbour, a stretch of water protected from rough seas and weather by the hills of Macau.

The main inhabitants of these small islands were the Cantonese, the dominant population of Guangdong Province, but fishermen from neighboring Fujian province also settled there. Sailors from the Persian Gulf presumably knew about Macau as they had a long history of trading with the Chinese in the Pearl River Delta, but the island group appears to have remained unknown to Europeans until the arrival of the Portuguese in the delta in 1513. However, it was not until 1535 that these Europeans were granted the right to anchor in the Macau's inner harbor by the ruling Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). The Portuguese eventually settled Macau and built a series of carefully planned forts that guarded the sea entrance to the

coveted Inner Harbour. They eventually built grand houses and fine churches and, over a period of some four hundred years, created a splendid city that combined European and Chinese styles of architecture. But it is something of a misnomer to refer to these incomers as “Portuguese.” Because peoples from Portuguese territories in Africa and Southeast Asia were also included, Macau gradually came to be quite culturally mixed. This is not surprising when one considers the attrition of a long sea voyage from Europe in which many sailors perished—often having to replace deceased Portuguese sailors with seafarers and servants from the lands visited en route to Macau. This synthesis is not only reflected in the mixed building styles of Macau, but also in many other ways, most notably its indigenous cuisine. Macau was also important in other ways not least because it became part of the forum for the exchange of civilizational ideas between Europe and China, especially with regard to the evangelization of St Francis Xavier, and a church commemorating his achievements still stands in the island of Coloane. Macau is also famously associated with the Italian Jesuit, Matteo Ricci, who arrived in 1582 and began to learn Chinese; it was he who first translated the Confucian classics into a Western language, Latin, with the vital assistance Xu Guangqi.

Today, Macau is renowned as a gambling resort whose revenues outclass those of better known Las Vegas with an annual influx of around 30 million visitors, though it is often difficult to disaggregate tourists from other kinds of arrivals such as cross border traders and commuters. Macau may be famed for its casinos, but it is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the Macau Government Tourist Office has policies designed to diversify the basis of its tourism industry through a focus on its cultural heritage. One vital aspect of Macau’s heritage is its culinary tradition, and recent research by Zhang and Hitchcock (2014) has shown that Chinese visitors to the SAR are very interested in exploring this aspect of its cultural legacy.

## I . The Composition of Macau's Lusophone Gastronomy

To describe Macau's culinary traditions as Portuguese is only part of the story, as a variety of forms of food preparation are found on the island. The Portuguese themselves are, in Macau, a diverse population comprising several different groups: Portuguese from Europe, Macanese, and Angolan Portuguese. The Macanese are the indigenous Portuguese, whose families have long been settled in the territory and usually speak fluent Cantonese in addition to Portuguese, as well as excellent English—a legacy of their proximity to Hong Kong, the former British territory that reverted to China two years before Macau. Many Macanese also have mixed Eurasian origins, though they usually bear Portuguese names and consider themselves to be Portuguese of Macau.

It is the food eaten by Macanese families, this was documented by British food author Anabel Jackson, which may be considered to be central to the distinctive culinary tradition of Macau. It brings together many elements such as Cantonese, Portuguese, and Southeast Asian and is characterized by a number of signature dishes that are served in both specialist Macanese restaurants and Portuguese restaurants. In blogs written by female Chinese visitors to Macau, mention is often made of the surprising Asian taste sensations of these kinds of dishes with tourists expecting a much more European flavor when they order these local dishes. A more European style of Portuguese food is also on offer in Macau in restaurants owned by both Macanese families and more recent migrants from Portugal itself. Menus often include dishes that are popularly associated with Portugal such as salt cod, but flavors may be subtly modified to appeal to Chinese visitors. Interestingly, the staff serving in these restaurants may themselves be quite diverse comprising mainland Chinese, Filipinos, Brazilians, as well as others.

The other main style of food from the Lusophone world is Brazilian, and, though not as ubiquitous as Macanese and Portuguese, it is starting to make

inroads. Some Brazilian restaurants are small-scale affairs, but some of the larger resorts, such as the Venetian, have introduced food with Brazilian style entertainments and have experimented with versions of the Brazilian Carnival. Other forms of Lusophone foods are also known in Macau, but do not have the prominence of the big three mentioned above. Nonetheless, they are significant. Annually, Macau hosts its Lusophone Festival in the heritage village of Taipa where stalls representing the fullest extent of the Lusophone World are erected. Some of these stalls offer food alongside handicrafts, and there is a stage located next to the lagoon where dance and music from around the Lusophone world are performed.

## II . The BRICS and Tourism

Macau is overwhelmingly a destination for Mainland Chinese tourists, and it is these visitors who are the biggest consumers of Macau's culinary products. It is clear from the blogs studied by Zhang and Hitchcock (2014) that many of these visitors are curious about Macau's gastronomical heritage. The "C" in the BRICS acronym is very well covered by these Chinese visitors, but what of the others? Although tiny in volume as compared with the Chinese, Indian tourists have started to arrive in Macau in significant numbers, but little is known about their culinary interests and preferences as yet. However, worth noting is that among the professionals working in the hospitality sector there are a growing number of Indians, and many of those met by the British author of this paper, are well aware of the connections between Goa and the Portuguese and their shared culinary heritage; some of these managers are also themselves of Goan origin. It would not be surprising if via the connections of these individuals and the existence of the Lusophone Festival that the cuisine of Goa should one day—if not already—become part of the Lusophone culinary portfolio of Macau.

The "C" and the "I" in BRICS may be accounted for in Macau, but what

of the other three letters: “B”, “R”, and “S”? As mentioned above, there is already a Brazilian cultural and culinary presence in Macau, and though still very small on the ground in terms of numbers, there are some Brazilian tourists. But perhaps more important is the small but growing presence of Brazilians in other fields—such as law, academia, and commerce—whose presence owes much to Macau’s reputation as a gateway to the huge Chinese economy. Russian tourists are certainly found in Macau, but their numbers remain small; however, there are many of these nationals represented in the hospitality sector, most notably as dancers and acrobats, as well as various other kinds of entertainers. Regarding South Africa, Macau can enable the development of tourism links by further diversifying its offer of Lusophone gastronomy: After all, Nando’s, the international Mozambican-Portuguese peri-peri chicken originating from South Africa, operates in over 35 countries, including Singapore and Malaysia, but not yet in China.

Macau’s Lusophone fusion gastronomy is a distinct selling point in the international tourism market, as food is strongly associated with origin. Food is also a key element in connecting people, building trust and understanding, and constructing and representing identities. Thus, Macau’s unique cuisine can contribute to the development of Macau’s role as the gateway between China, the Lusophone and the BRICS countries through gastro-diplomacy.

### III . Gastrodiplomacy and Macau

Gastrodiplomacy can be described as winning hearts and minds through stomachs (Rockower 2012). It is part of cultural diplomacy, a public policy tool used by governments for communicating in the area of culture with foreign publics. If we see gastronomy as culinary nationalism (a set of gastronomic practices that are an expression of collective or national identity), then gastrodiplomacy can be seen as its outward equivalent that represents the group’s identity. Culinary exchanges can also be seen to

contribute to the development of trusting relationships between people(s)—although there is also the potential for food feuds (for example between Japan and South Korea over kimchi).

Being a universal experience, the emotional response food is able to create in people—fostering identity, community, and trust—is of added value in the realm of international cultural relations. These benefits for the international society can be framed by Western and Chinese conceptions of international relations. Gastrodiplomacy activities can be seen to reinforce the nation or place brand, and thus increasing soft power—Joseph Nye’s concept of the power of attraction of a country through culture, political ideals, and policies (Nye 2004). Culinary exchange can be simultaneously understood as a positive practice to build a harmonious world within the concept of “Tianxia,” meaning All-Under-Heaven (Hu 2005 and Zhang 2010).

Gastrodiplomacy became popular in East and Southeast Asia. Thailand was the first country to organise such a campaign implementing the “Global Thai” program to increase the number of Thai restaurants overseas (*The Economist*, 2002)—this was followed by the campaign “Thailand: Kitchen of the World.” The campaigns sought to entice more tourists to visit Thailand, while helping to deepen relations with other countries. Similar campaigns have been developed by South Korea, Japan, and Malaysia to distinguish their unique cuisines and seeking to improve their power of attraction (see Zhang 2015 for comprehensive comparison of the different campaigns). The Malaysian campaigns have been particularly praised for going beyond ad hoc culinary tastings and demonstrations and for developing a holistic approach combining culinary and cultural diplomacy elements to target foreign publics, which includes the setting up of night markets in top tourist sites of major cities abroad, such as London’s Trafalgar Square (Rockower, 2012). These campaigns are no doubt costly and, as in other cultural diplomacy activities, evidencing their effectiveness is still a developing task.

As we have seen, the underlying intention of gastrodiplomacy is to

pave the way for the achievement of foreign policy interests. These are normally set by states and achieved through diplomatic activities. However, globalisation has challenged the role of states, so non-state actors (such as cities and regions) are developing activities traditionally performed by states. This is called para-diplomacy. However, the case of Macau is special. Although a sub-state actor, as a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, Macau is able to conduct its own international engagement. The 1987 Macau Joint Declaration reads:

[T]he Macao Special Administrative Region may on its own, using the name "Macao, China," maintain and develop relations and conclude and implement agreements with states, regions and relevant international or regional organizations in the appropriate fields, such as the economy, trade, finance, shipping, communications, tourism, culture, science and technology and sports. (Macau Joint Declaration, 1987, Annex I, Chap. VIII; and Macau Basic Law, 1993, Chap. VII - Domestic Affairs, Art. 136).

Thus cultural diplomacy activities, including gastrodiplomacy, are opportunities for Macau to further leverage its geopolitical and economic importance. Its unique linguistic and cultural Lusophone heritage and Macanese cuisine can increase its international visibility and foster its role as a cooperation platform between China and other countries with either Lusophone heritage or curiosity.

#### IV. Developing a Gastrodiplomacy Strategy for Macau

Macau, as one of the oldest cultural contact settings in Asia, produced a distinct Lusitanian-Chinese identity that strongly flavored the Macanese fusion cuisine. The development of this unique gastronomy has been part of

cultural nationalism and mediation processes that provide “a means of self-definition and survival” for the Macanese community (Cheng, 2013) and a distinct international cultural identity and brand to Macau.

So, how can Macau effectively use food to communicate its culture to foreign peoples, advance its brand in external markets, and reinforce its role as a gateway between China, the Lusophone countries, and the BRICS? As noted by Wilson (2011:14), “food can function as a non-threatening way to gain favor among and make a connection with a foreign audience.” Considering that Macau’s cuisine merges elements of a variety of countries and regions, experiencing it is a good way of fostering familiarization between different foreign peoples, opening avenues for a diversified and deeper engagement.

We should start by considering that Macau is already using gastronomy within its territory to engage foreigners visiting as tourists. Gastronomy is becoming a distinct characteristic of its touristic offer. However, for those activities to become a gastrodiplomacy campaign, a holistic approach has to be put in place, set within an overall international engagement strategy, and communicated to the foreign publics. Only then will it be able to efficiently harness benefits and translate them commercially and financially, for example through tourism revenues and general advantages obtained from reinforcing its reputation as a good business partner.

Macau authorities can utilize for the development of a gastrodiplomacy campaign some of the work already being developed by public and private institutions in the territory and abroad. This is, for example, the case of the Forum for Economic and Trade Co-operation between China and Portuguese-speaking Countries (Macau), also known as Forum Macau. The Forum Macau is composed of Portuguese-speaking countries—Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, East Timor, Mozambique, and Portugal—along with the People’s Republic of China. The Forum aims to enhance the role of Macau as a platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries and

to promote mutual benefits and development opportunities. As stated on its website, “[t]hanks to Macao’s unique history and cultural background, the Central Government strongly supports the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) as an economic and cultural co-operation platform between Mainland China and Portuguese-speaking countries.” (Forum Macau, 2015) The Lusofonia Festival and the Cultural Week of China and Portuguese Speaking Countries are activities developed by the Forum (in collaboration with the Civic and Municipal Affairs Bureau and the Macau Government Tourist Office) that feature the arts and gastronomy of Portuguese-speaking communities. However these activities on their own are limited, and their resources need to be reinforced.

Another interesting entity developing business, culture, and tourism connections in the Latin world is the Macau Association for the Promotion of Exchange between Asia-Pacific and Latin America—MAPEAL. Unlike Forum Macau, this is a private non-profit organization that promotes Macau’s unique Sino-Latin cultural identity and its bridging role between Asia-Pacific and Latin America. MAPEAL activities include the Latin-American Festival which features events related to arts and gastronomy and the parade Macau, Latin City. MAPEAL’s president, Gary Ngai, believes culture should be Macau’s cornerstone and has a progressive vision for the SAR: Macau should be a hub for all the Latin language-speaking countries in the world, not just for Portuguese-speaking countries (Ngai, 2012). This is an ambitious outlook for Macau’s international engagement that can provide a fertile ground for the diversification of Macau’s economic partnerships.

Another important area of activity beyond formal government initiatives that is occurring abroad is that of the diaspora communities, which can play a significant role in informal or people-to-people gastro-diplomacy. Macau can make use of existing diaspora initiatives, such as the Casas de Macau (Macau Houses) scattered around the world. Present currently in Portugal, UK, Canada, US, Brazil, and Australia, they celebrate the cultural identity

of the Macanese diaspora and are thus a tool for the potential engagement of foreign publics with the Macau and the wider Lusophone world. In the setting of the Casas de Macau, food is an important element of their activity: you only have to browse the webpages of the different Casas, scroll through recipes, and feast your eyes on the photos of Macanese cuisine workshops or their community celebrations (Casa de Macau Inc. Australia n.d.). However, these Casas are often under-resourced, surviving on the quotas and good will of local members and some subsidies of the Fundação Casa de Macau—no doubt additional external support, for example, for the development of gastro-diplomacy activities in partnership with governmental authorities would be welcomed and serve the interest of all parties.

The development of gastrodiplomacy campaigns certainly involves considerable financial investment. In the case of Macau, this could be met by a multilateral public-private partnership harnessing the resources of the different parties (including the casinos) and serving common objectives in the promotion of the Lusophone gastronomy to win hearts, minds (and wallets) through stomachs. Seeking economic advantages is a major motivator of every country's foreign policy. Macau can obtain those benefits for itself and for China by using gastrodiplomacy to develop strong bilateral and multilateral relations with the people of the Lusophone and the BRICS countries.

## Conclusion

Gastronomy is an intrinsic element of Macau's cultural identity and an important differentiation factor for its tourism industry. From research already undertaken by Zhang and Hitchcock (2014) it can be seen that sampling food from the Portuguese speaking countries is something that tourists readily engage in when visiting Macau, especially with regard to Chinese women who are often surprised by its distinctiveness. Macau offers

many types of cuisine and this is an important element in its attraction as a tourism destination. It also has the potential to be a key participant in the BRICS network through gastrodiplomacy and as a focus of cultural and culinary exchange.

## References

- Casa de Macau Inc. Australia (n.d.) Casas de Macau Worldwide, <http://www.casademacau.org.au/links/links.htm>.
- Cheng, Christina, *Cultural Significance: The Identity of Macao*, 2013, [http://www.macauheritage.net/en/knowledge/vision/vision\\_053.pdf](http://www.macauheritage.net/en/knowledge/vision/vision_053.pdf).
- Forum Macau, Mission and Objectives, 2015, <http://www.forumchinapl.org.mo/about-us/mission-and-objectives/>.
- Ngai, Gary, "O Forum nao e suficiente: interview to Gary Ngai by Helder Beja," *Ponto Final*, September 7, 2012, <https://pontofinalmacau.wordpress.com/2012/09/07/o-forum-nao-e-suficiente/>.
- Nye, Joseph, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: Public Affairs, 2004.
- Rockower, Paul, "Recipes for Gastrodiplomacy," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy Journal*, 2012, pp. 1-12, [http://publicdiplomacymagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/pb201217\\_AOP-1-copy.pdf](http://publicdiplomacymagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/pb201217_AOP-1-copy.pdf).
- Statement by Hu Jintao, President of the People's Republic of China at the United Nations Summit, "Build Towards a Harmonious World of Lasting Peace and Common Prosperity," New York, September 15, 2005, <http://www.un.org/webcast/summit2005/statements15/china050915eng.pdf>.
- The Economist*, "Food as ambassador: Thailand's gastro-diplomacy," 21 September 2002, <http://www.economist.com/node/999687>.
- Wilson, R., "Cocina Peruana Para El Mundo: Gastrodiplomacy, the Culinary Nation Brand, and the Context of National Cuisine in Peru," *Exchange: The Journal of Public Diplomacy* 2 (2), 2011, pp. 13-20, <http://www.exchangediplomacy.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/2.->

Rachel-Wilson\_Cocina-Peruana-Para-El-Mundo-Gastrodiplomacy-the-Culinary-Nation-Brand-and-the-Context-of-National-Cuisine-in-Peru.pdf.

Zhang Feng, "The Tianxia System: World Order in a Chinese Utopia," *China Heritage Quarterly*, No. 21, March 2010, [http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/tien-hsia.php?searchterm=021\\_utopia.inc&issue=021](http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/tien-hsia.php?searchterm=021_utopia.inc&issue=021).

Zhang Juyan, "The Foods of the World: Mapping and Comparing Contemporary Campaigns," *International Journal of Communication* 9, 2015, pp. 568-591, <http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/viewFile/2847/1316>.

Zhang Y. & M. Hitchcock, "The Chinese Female Tourist Gaze: A Netnography of Young Women's Blogs on Macau," *Current Issues in Tourism*, 2014, pp. 1-16, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2014.904845>).