Foodways of Macao

Robert Antony

Reviewed title
The Making of Macau’s Cuisine: From Family Table to World Stage

In recognition of its unique cuisine in 2017 Macao became a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy and its cuisine has since entered the world stage.

Fusion cuisine
As Jackson explains, because Macanese food had its origins in the fusion of many diverse cuisines and has continued to evolve over the centuries, it is impossible to pinpoint what exactly constitutes Macanese food. Even within the Macanese community at large, there is little consensus as to what comprises Macanese cuisine. For purists, in fact, it has become a lost art, yet for most ordinary tourists, who want to enjoy a different cuisine, it is simply the food prepared in restaurants in Macao. Indeed, today in most restaurants in Macao, whether categorized as Portuguese or Cantonese, they all include dishes on their menus purporting to be Macanese.

Life under the palms
Anushka Kahandagamage

Reviewed title
Life Under the Palms: The Sublime World of the Anti-colonialist Jacob Haafner

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his book is the biography of Jacob Haafner, a Dutch traveler of German origin. He spent more than 20 years in South Africa, India, Sri Lanka, and Mauritius. According to the author, Haafner’s memoirs of many travelers, entrepreneurs, colonial officers, Haafner captured the cruelty and oppression of colonialism in his writings, Haafner’s narratives shows the cruel side of the slave trade, the maltreatment of slaves as animals and the abandonment of colonial subjects to death by famine.

The book consists of five chapters, including an introduction. The introduction maps the expeditions of Haafner and his writings. Further, the author locates himself in the study and within the world of Haafner by elucidating how he became attracted to Haafner’s writings. The author of the book, Paul van der Velde, is a historian and an expert on the Dutch in Asia. The book is translated from Dutch by English by Liesbeth Bennink.

The first chapter is marked as ‘Wandering Existence’, which includes Haafner’s first expedition to the East and his experiences and adventures. As an adolescent, Haafner secures the opportunity to sail to East with his father, a medical doctor. However, he does not sail solely as the doctor’s son but as a ship’s boy on the vessel. The second chapter is assigned to explain the troubled life he had in India. This chapter consists of his interactions with different colonial rulers who traveled to the East, and reveals details about famine in Haafner’s state and how to make money and survive in these difficult times by doing different jobs. The third chapter, ‘Where can our Soul Shelter’, is dedicated to his expedition to Ceylon with his young wife and life in Ceylon. The penultimate chapter is about his return to India, and the closing chapter concerns his final sorrowful years in Europe.

This title introduces the 19th century Dutch traveler, Haafner, and his writings to the world. The book opens a window onto the 19th century colonial world by including excerpts and examples of Haafner’s original writings and his sketches. The book provides an approachable point of view that gives an overview of the sources to a learner interested in studying the colonial past. Further, the author’s expertise and in-depth research in the field ensure an authentic account of Haafner’s writings. Haafner practiced drawing from a young age, and as an addition, the book introduces new sources that can provide the historian with a more nuanced and a subjective understanding of the present socio-economic and political structures on the past.

In conclusion, this is a concise and lucid biographical account of Jacob Haafner, the author points out, one must have some Portuguese ancestry. Like their cuisine, the Macao people are an eclectic mix of different and evolving ethnic groups. At first the Macaoese were the offspring of the original male Portuguese settlers and females from their colonies in Mozambique, Goa, and Southeast Asia. Later, in the 20th century, the Macaoese are the progeny of Portuguese or Macanese fathers and Chinese mothers. Thus, in terms of foodways, Macaoese recipes include a large mixture of different culinary tastes and techniques yet were nonetheless considered Macanese. As foodways have changed over time so too did perceptions of one’s identity. Interestingly, today there are more people who identify as Macaoese who live outside Macao than inside the city itself. There is a large Macanese diaspora spread across the globe. As a critical part of the research, Jackson conducted a large number of interviews and surveys of Macanese living in Hong Kong, Europe, North America, and Australia. Because many diasporic Macanese people have a sense of rootlessness, memories of home foods and recipes have become important identifiers of their common culture and heritage. In light of this fact, the sharing of recipes and the production of cookbooks have become crucial. As the author explains, today’s Macanese food has moved away from being everyday food to something more symbolic and ceremonial. However, the importance of certain foods is as important as the actual foods themselves. At the same time, with the diaspora Macanese cuisine has diffused around the world and the food in trendy ethnic restaurants. For most Macanese both at home and abroad, food is decisively embedded in their notions of identity. In conclusion, this is a concise and fascinating book on a little-known and often misconceived fusion cuisine that should be of interest to anyone wanting to learn about Macao and the dissemination of food culture in general. The author concludes, the Macao cuisine is a true mix of Portuguese and Chinese cuisines.

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The Macanese and what role does food play in their identity? Food is an important cultural marker for most groups of people. To be considered a true Macanese, as the author points out, one must have some Portuguese ancestry. Like their cuisine, the Macao people are an eclectic mix of different and evolving ethnic groups. At first the Macaoese were the offspring of the original male Portuguese settlers and females from their colonies in Mozambique, Goa, and Southeast Asia. Later, in the 20th century, the Macaoese are the progeny of Portuguese or Macanese fathers and Chinese mothers. Thus, in terms of foodways, Macaoese recipes include a large mixture of different culinary tastes and techniques yet were nonetheless considered Macanese. As foodways have changed over time so too did perceptions of one’s identity. Interestingly, today there are more people who identify as Macaoese who live outside Macao than inside the city itself. There is a large Macanese diaspora spread across the globe. As a critical part of the research, Jackson conducted a large number of interviews and surveys of Macanese living in Hong Kong, Europe, North America, and Australia. Because many diasporic Macanese people have a sense of rootlessness, memories of home foods and recipes have become important identifiers of their common culture and heritage. In light of this fact, the sharing of recipes and the production of cookbooks have become crucial. As the author explains, today’s Macanese food has moved away from being everyday food to something more symbolic and ceremonial. However, the importance of certain foods is as important as the actual foods themselves. At the same time, with the diaspora Macanese cuisine has diffused around the world and the food in trendy ethnic restaurants. For most Macanese both at home and abroad, food is decisively embedded in their notions of identity. In conclusion, this is a concise and fascinating book on a little-known and often misconceived fusion cuisine that should be of interest to anyone wanting to learn about Macao and the dissemination of food culture in general. The author concludes, the Macao cuisine is a true mix of Portuguese and Chinese cuisines.