

Gibas, Piotr

To eat or not to eat? : the curious affair of Western missionaries with Chinese food

Religio. 2023, vol. 31, iss. 2, pp. [213]-237

ISSN 1210-3640 (print); ISSN 2336-4475 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/Rel2023-2-2>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.79306>

License: [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 International](#)

Access Date: 17. 02. 2024

Version: 20240122

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

To Eat or Not to Eat? The Curious Affair of Western Missionaries with Chinese Food

PIOTR GIBAS

1. Introduction

Scholars of the Chinese language are certainly familiar with James Legge (1815-1897), a Scottish missionary and a prominent Sinologist. Legge was one of the first settlers to arrive in Hong Kong soon after the territory became a British colony and was the first (and the only one to date) to translate into English the so called “Five Classics” — the entire canon of classical Chinese thought and literature. After spending more than thirty years in China, he returned to Britain, where he became the first Professor of Chinese at Oxford. Legge built a church in Hong Kong and engaged in missionary work among the Chinese; he spoke fluently several Chinese dialects and mastered literary Chinese, which he could both read and write; and he was part of a special team of missionary experts working on the first Chinese translation of the Bible and coining the Chinese word for “God”. He even ventured out of the colony and traveled all the way to Beijing, visiting the hometown of Confucius on his way. Legge was a true connoisseur of all things Chinese. However, he did not eat Chinese food.

What *did* he eat, then? And how was living in China without eating Chinese food even possible? This study focuses on two groups of missionaries and their foodways – the Portuguese Jesuits (Catholics) based in Macau between the 16th and 17th centuries, and the British and American Protestants in Hong Kong and Shanghai in the 19th and early 20th centuries – and aims to reveal what they ate, what they refused to eat, and why. Naturally, food choices must have reflected the missionaries’ ideas about China, Chinese culture, and Chinese people in general. While examining ideological and cultural factors that modelled the diet of Christian missionaries in China, this study will also analyse Western ideas, perceptions, and phobias regarding Chinese food.



Religio: Revue pro religionistiku 31/2, 2023, 213-237.

<https://doi.org/10.5817/Rel2023-2-2>

This work can be used in accordance with the Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 4.0 International license terms and conditions (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

There was a stark contrast between the two groups of missionaries and their foodways. While Jesuits did have some religious concerns when approaching Chinese cuisine, they, for the most part, embraced it. The Protestants, on the other hand, who arrived much later and during the peak of Western domination in China, acted from the position of power and rejected local food on cultural and ideological grounds as inferior, unhygienic, and potentially poisonous. Jesuits came to “sell” Christianity and were willing to negotiate their way with Chinese cuisine; Protestants, on the other hand, intended to “civilize” the Chinese by imposing on them both their religious beliefs and their lifestyle, including their foodways.

Missionaries were unlike any other foreigners who travelled to China. Typical lay visitors were businessmen, who mainly sought profit and lived in the bubble of their own enclaves. Missionaries, on the other hand, as their very name implies, went to China with a “mission”, which was to transform the country and its culture. To be successful, they needed to interact with the local population as closely as they could; therefore, it may seem as a paradox that they would not eat their food. As we will see, the attitudes of the “holy men” towards Chinese food had much broader political, cultural, and social implications, and to better understand the history of food in China, it is important to consider the foodways of these purposeful visitors.

2. The Age of Exploration

2.1 Jesuits in Macau

By the time they reached China, the Portuguese were already established as world explorers and quite familiar with Asian and other non-European foodways. The center of their Asian operations was Goa in India. From there, they travelled farther east to the Malay Archipelago, where they settled in Malacca and on the island of Timor, and to Japan. In 1557, they established an outpost in Macau, which initially served as a stopover on their way to Nagasaki. Portuguese traders, explorers, and adventurers were closely followed by Catholic missionaries, most notably Jesuits, who founded their residence in Macau in 1562. It was a city dominated not by trade, but by the Jesuits and their mission. The cuisine the Jesuits brought with them was not Portuguese, but a fusion, heavily influenced by the cuisines of India, Malaya, and the Philippines, but also Africa and Brazil, from where they sourced many new ingredients.

Macau was but a tiny island and it naturally lacked a lot of basic resources, such as water. With no arable land of its own, Macau depended on

food imported from the Chinese mainland. However, after Macau fell under Portuguese control, relations with the Chinese became complicated and food supplies were not always reliable.¹

Since the territory was too small to grow food and raise animals, the local economy was based on fishing and oyster farming. Macau was one of the largest fishing ports in China, exporting fish to Hong Kong and other cities. According to various accounts, the Jesuits had access to a variety of fruits, chestnuts, as well as all sorts of fish. When Peter Mundy visited Macao in 1637, he was amazed that the Jesuits had managed to turn a rocky little island into a profitable orchard. He reported that lay Portuguese were growing beans, mustard seed, and other edible plants in pots on the balconies of their homes.²

As members of a religious order, Jesuits could not afford to be picky with food, but they had to observe certain monastic and religious rules, such as frugality, eating in a community refectory, and fasting. They kept their own kitchens, and their food was prepared by Jesuit brothers.³ Jesuits did not refrain from physical work, and in Macau they kept their own gardens and livestock. This eliminated a lot of foods Jesuits would choose to eat, but also determined what and how they had to eat. For instance, they were advised to avoid lavish feasts and parties; at the same time, though, because much of their diet was shaped by the requirements of the Catholic liturgy, they found leavened bread and wine indispensable. For the sake of ritual purity, they insisted on using proper wheat flour to make the holy host wafer and on grape wine imported from Portugal to use during Mass.⁴ In Macau, Jesuits baked their own bread, which they considered one of their official duties, as it had been a Jesuit tradition since the Order's foundation.

The Portuguese introduced many new foods to China, and the Jesuits greatly contributed to the process of dissemination of these foods. In Macau, they were eager to learn about Chinese food items, most notably tea. Francesco Carletti, a Florentine merchant and traveler in 16th century Macau, reports having tasted for the first time leaf tea, as opposed to powder tea that he had in Japan. According to his account, the tea was brought

1 Marques A. H. Oliveira, *História dos Portugueses no Extremo Oriente*, Vol. 3, Lisbon: Fundação Oriente 2000, 343.

2 Charles R. Boxer, *Commentaries of Ruy Freyre de Andrada*, Abingdon: Routledge Curzon 2005, 175.

3 "Brothers" were members of the order who were not ordained as priests and typically took care of menial chores. In China, Jesuits also hired servants to cook for them. In Macau, they had both servants and slaves (Liam Brockey, personal communication).

4 *Boletim do Governo Ecclesiastico da Diocese de Macau* 1/5, November, 1903, Macau: Typographia do Seminario Episcopal de S. José.

from Beijing by a Jesuit in a terracotta jar as a special, precious new treat.⁵ Later on, tea became the Jesuits' most popular drink, which they introduced to India through Goa.⁶

2.2 Food and Medicine

Jesuits considered taking care of the poor and the sick as part of their religious mission and wherever they arrived, they explored the local flora and fauna in search of pharmaceuticals, set up infirmaries and pharmacies, and made their own drugs, potions, and tonics. Jesuits practiced medicine according to Western methods, but they kept improving the augmentation of their recipes with new ingredients and techniques they encountered in the colonies. In Macau, Jesuits came across new ailments that local specialists knew how to cure; therefore, they did not shy away from native medicines, embraced some of the drugs and healing techniques used by Chinese doctors, and imported Chinese pharmaceuticals from Canton as early as 1625.⁷

Medical practice, and especially pharmacology and drug making, were directly related to foodways. Drugs were not only edibles developed from ingredients often used in cooking, but often evolved into food. In her study on local Macanese cuisine, Ana Maria Amaro discusses traditional culinary recipes preserved in the notebooks of Macanese "ladies",⁸ which they inherited from their grandmothers. As these documents reveal, some of the recipes from Jesuit secret manuscripts migrated into Macau's home cooking and local folk medicine and were still practiced in the 1960s. *Hang ian cha* aka "almond tea", a popular Macanese refreshment, was originally a medicinal tonic developed by Jesuits.

5 Elisabetta Colla, "Macao as Described by Francesco Carletti (1598-1599)", in: Jorge Manuel dos Santos Alves – Luís Filipe Barreto, *Macau During the Ming Dynasty*, Lisbon: Centro Científico e Cultural de Macau 2009, 218-219.

6 M. A. H. Oliveira, *História dos Portugueses...*, 463.

7 Ana Maria Amaro, "The Influence of Chinese Pharmacopeia in the Prescriptions of the Jesuit Dispensaries," in: *Religion and Culture, An International Symposium Commemorating the Fourth Centenary of the University College of St. Paul*, Instituto Cultural de Macau, Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History, University of San Francisco 1999, 117-119.

8 Macanese "ladies" were the wives of local Portuguese residents, many of them Chinese. They preferred to maintain their native medicine and cooking, and were the first to introduce Chinese food to their Portuguese husbands. In their home kitchens, they developed what is now known as Macanese fusion cuisine. Their notebooks, discovered and studied by Amaro, contained recipes for some popular Macanese refreshments, such as *hang ian cha* "almond milk", or orgeat, which was originally a medicinal tonic invented by the Jesuits. A. M. Amaro, "The Influence...", 120-121.

If Jesuit doctors did not refrain from local medications — not merely the ingredients, but actual prepared drugs —, why then would they reject Chinese cuisine? For the Jesuits, healing techniques and everyday diet were also part of their evangelical agenda and as such were influenced by their religious beliefs. As can be imagined, some religious ideas and practices would be reflected in the Jesuits' attitudes towards local foodways. Jesuits believed that native medicine and foodways to a large degree kept the locals attached to their old practices and beliefs. They hoped, however, that healing “miracles” performed by the missionaries by means of their drugs could attract people to the new religion; likewise, encouraging the locals to change their eating habits was part of the process of abandoning old religion and therefore was regarded as an important element of evangelization. Father Francisco de Sousa argued that it was permissible to practice medicine as long as it was done “in our own way.”⁹ This “way” meant taking advantage of local methods, which was not the same as adopting them. Jesuits displayed the same degree of openness and creativity in their approach to local customs and beliefs: they studied China, adopted certain elements of Chinese customs, such as the dress code, and they even played with philosophical ideas, trying to adapt them to the Christian message, but they were careful not to cross the line and compromise the principles of their own faith. Did food and foodways play any role in this?

2.3 Food and Religion

From the Jesuit standpoint, food was not as imbued with religion as medicine, which was regarded as one of the Jesuits' missions and ways of gaining converts. They did express concern about certain local foodways being related to religious practices, e.g. Chinese Buddhists were vegetarians and Muslims abstained from pork; however, the Jesuits' own religious concerns about food, i.e. what they were or were not allowed to eat, were very minor.

In East Asia, Christian missionaries were approaching ancient and well-established societies that were in many ways more civilized and sophisticated than the Europeans themselves. The Jesuits studied indigenous belief systems so that they would be able to explain Christianity in a way that made sense within the existing frameworks, but, apart from that, they also needed to know how people lived and dressed, and what they ate.

⁹ A. M. Amaro, “The Influence...”, 116.

According to Brockey, “they saw their best chance for starting a new enterprise in the adaptation to local customs.”¹⁰

One of the first and most influential Jesuits active both in Japan and in Macau was Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606). He envisioned Macau as an outpost in Asia that would host a Jesuit college for training and dispatching missionaries to Japan.¹¹ The residents were expected to live in a Japanese setting and according to Japanese customs, including clothing, food, and daily routine. As he prescribed in his writings, the Portuguese were to adapt to the Japanese, not vice versa.

Perhaps it is worth mentioning that, in contrast, native Chinese and Japanese who converted to Christianity and were trained to become priests had to adopt a Portuguese lifestyle. Valignano described the first two Chinese who were admitted to the College as “Portuguese in all appearances [...] in every way except by blood,” which was the way he envisioned it should be.¹² The locals were supposed to become Westerners, but not the other way around — Jesuits had to adapt to local customs for strategic reasons, but not to become permanently “acculturated.”

In embracing local customs, Jesuits were looking for the right balance to make the transition to Christianity easier on the one hand, and to not compromise Catholic doctrine on the other. Encouraged by their success in Japan, the Jesuits decided to try the same strategy in China. Because the Chinese also practiced Buddhism, Jesuits in China started off by imitating Buddhist monks: they dressed in similar robes and shaved their heads. Since Chinese Buddhists were vegetarians, Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607), an Italian missionary active in Macau, suggested Jesuits should also become vegetarians to earn the respect and trust of the locals, as he believed vegetarianism was associated with holiness in Chinese beliefs. However, his colleagues criticized him for this and before the idea was dropped, it sparked a minor theological debate among the Jesuits.¹³ Many Jesuits were concerned that by adopting too many local customs they would be compromising the orthodoxy of their own faith. For some of them, embracing

10 Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724*, Cambridge (MA): Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2007, 33.

11 *Portrait of a Jesuit Alessandro Valignano*, Macau: Macau Ricci Institute, Jesuítas Publications Series 2013, 89-90.

12 Isabel A. Murta Pina, “Jesuits from Macao in the China Mission: 1589-1689”, in: Jorge Manuel dos Santos Alves – Luís Filipe Barreto, *Macau During the Ming Dynasty*, Lisbon: Centro Científico e Cultural de Macau 2009, 138-151: 147.

13 “Alcuni aiuti circa il modo di aiutare i Cinesi”, in: ARSI, Jap. Sin. 101 I, fols. 109v-110r.

the tea ceremony in Japan was already a grave transgression.¹⁴ Ruggieri's opponents argued that vegetarianism was a practice associated with a foreign religion, and therefore prohibited for Christians. They feared that keeping a vegetarian diet was tantamount to practicing Buddhism. However, this notion was soon abandoned. André Palmeiro (1569-1635) – the Father Visitor dispatched by the Society of Jesus from Portugal to inspect all the missions between East Africa and Japan – observed that the accommodations Jesuits made were inoffensive and unimportant in Catholic moral terms: "I examined this important point, and I found that in their dress, their food, their courtesies, and their manner, they all adhere to local customs, and in this there is no flaw, nor anything worthy to note." For us, though, it is "worthy to note," because in his statement Palmeiro reveals that Jesuits in China ate local food.¹⁵

Communal gatherings and meals were very important for the Jesuits, who were a religious order that followed their own rules to maintain a sense of community. It did not matter *what* food they ate during such gatherings, whether it was Indian, Chinese, or Portuguese, but what did matter was sharing a meal together. Ruggieri's suggestion to adopt a vegetarian Buddhist diet in Macau caused concern, because it implied changing the Jesuits' own rules and adopting the ways of the Chinese, which was deemed both excessive and unnecessary. In the end, Macau Jesuits neither adopted local foodways nor completely rejected them. They felt free to eat any kind of food, except when religious circumstances forced them otherwise, e.g., on a fasting day.¹⁶ However, they did create special dietary requirements and rules for their Chinese converts.

Ruggieri's zeal to adopt vegetarianism in Macau was rejected by other missionaries, who otherwise had no issues with a vegetarian diet *per se*, especially since Catholics practiced fasting as well.¹⁷ However, Jesuits had a problem with the reasons that drove the Chinese to abstain from meat, which followed the Buddhist belief that killing animals was wrong.¹⁸ That

14 M. Antoni J. Üçerler, SJ, "Alessandro Valignano: Man, Missionary, and Writer", *Renaissance Studies* 17/3, 2003, Society of Renaissance Studies, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 337-366.

15 Liam Matthew Brockey, *The Visitor: André Palmeiro and the Jesuits in Asia*, Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press 2014, 301.

16 Jesuits were allowed to maintain a vegetarian diet periodically or for all kinds of other, often personal reasons; Menegon reports that Tomás Pereira (1645-1708), a Portuguese Jesuit living at the court in Beijing, refrained from meat, most likely because of his health issues. Eugenio Menegon, "Ubi Dux, Ibi Curia: Kangxi's Imperial Hunts and the Jesuits as Courtiers," in: Artur K. Wardega, SJ – António Vasconcelos de Saldanh (eds.), *In the Light and Shadow of an Emperor*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2012, 289.

17 Technically, vegetarianism is not fasting, but abstinence from meat.

18 L. M. Brockey, *The Visitor...*, 302.

notion was unacceptable from a Christian perspective and the Jesuits were determined to root it out. They insisted a Christian must believe that eating meat is not wrong and, for this reason, all Christians were obliged to eat meat just to manifest their Christianity.¹⁹ Pork especially was crucial to the Jesuits, as it was filled with symbolic significance. Anthropologist Claudine Fabre-Vassas calls pork “a Christian flesh, endowed with a soul of blood.”²⁰ For Christians back in Europe, eating pork was especially important as it marked the break with Judaism. In Portugal, it was indispensable during the meals celebrating important Catholic festivals such as Easter and Christmas. The consumption of pork was an affirmation of their Christianity and a demonstration of their difference from Jews and Muslims, who still represented a considerable challenge on the Iberian Peninsula. In Goa, Catholic converts were required to eat pork as a demonstration of devotion to Christianity and those who refused to do it were tortured.²¹ Also in China, according to these new injunctions, in order to become a Christian, a prospective convert had to eat meat and was required to demonstrate it in anticipation of baptism.²² This was to make sure that freshly confirmed Catholics abandoned any habits and practices associated with Buddhism. Jesuits also wanted to make sure the converts harboured no Muslim sympathies. Therefore, they specifically required that the meat to be eaten had to be pork (there was a significant Muslim population in the Canton area that the Jesuits were concerned about). As we know from confession manuals, priests frequently checked on their Chinese converts to make sure they ate pork in everyday situations.²³

2.4 Further Afield

Jesuits soon realized that the actual intellectual, cultural, and political elite in China were not the Buddhists, whom they were trying to emulate, but the Confucian scholars-officials. As they found out, it was the

19 Thierry Meynard, “Could Chinese Vegetarians be Baptized? The Canton Conference and Adrien Grelon SJ’s Report of 1668”, in: *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu*, vol. LXXXVII, fasc. 173 (2018-1), 75-145.

20 Claudine Fabre-Vassas, *The Singular Beast*, trans. Carol Volk, New York (NY): Columbia University Press 1997, 325.

21 *Ibid.*, 125, 290.

22 L. M. Brockey, *The Visitor...*, 302.

23 This is funny, considering that their namesake, Jesus Christ, if he existed, most certainly never ate pork. Liam Matthew Brockey, “The Society of Jesus and Confession in Seventeenth-Century China,” in: Nicolas Standaert – Ad Dudink (eds.), *Forgive us our sins: Confession in Late Ming and Early Qing China*, Monumenta Serica Monograph Series 55, Sankt Augustin, Nettetal: Steyler Verlag 2006, 156.

Confucian doctrine that constituted the foundation of the Chinese worldview. Jesuits found much more in common with the mandarins, even though, or perhaps precisely because the latter were not particularly religious. Therefore, they decided to associate themselves with the mandarins and succeed in impressing them with their scientific skills, especially their knowledge of mathematics and astronomy.²⁴ Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) was even admitted in Beijing as an adviser to the emperor.

In their interactions with the mandarins, food was not particularly relevant. Jesuits had no problems with their Chinese colleagues' diet. The sources tell us almost nothing about what the Jesuits ate during their sojourn in China, but the circumstances in which they lived and the accommodations they had to make to befriend the literati are revealing enough to assume that the missionaries were not picky regarding food. Jesuits such as Ricci, who were guests at the imperial court in Beijing, had to adjust their lifestyles to local customs. Ricci even grew his hair and beard in a Chinese fashion. Jesuits who served at the Chinese court received allowances from the government, including "food and daily necessities."²⁵ They preferred to rent a house rather than stay at the palace, but they kept Chinese servants; most likely, they were not always able to choose what to eat.²⁶ In their letters and diaries, Jesuits mention participating in receptions, banquets, and various court events, such as imperial hunts. They were offered and accepted gifts from the emperor, which usually included food, e.g., spoils from the hunts. Missionaries who died in China were given Christian funerals, which were, however, organized by the State and contained many Chinese elements. e.g., the food and drink served at funerals were Chinese.²⁷ Again, we do not know the details, but we can assume that the missionaries ate whatever was offered to them. It seems inconceivable that they would refrain on principle from eating Chinese food at the imperial court. From the Jesuit point of view, though, food was not an essential issue. They needed to curry favor with the court officials, hoping to convert them and ultimately to win over the emperor, who would then declare Christianity a state religion. Such was their goal and Jesuits were willing to swallow whatever food was necessary to achieve it, or to the extent, as Duarte de Sande (1547-1599) put it, "in what our Holy Faith permits."²⁸

Accepting gifts and invitations to banquets was of concern to Palmeiro, who was worried that priests would overindulge in mundane pleasures, or,

24 L. M. Brockey, *Journey to the East...*, 46.

25 A. K. Wardega, SJ – A. Vasconcelos de Saldanha, *In the Light...*, 90-91.

26 L. M. Brockey, *Journey to the East...*, 60.

27 A. K. Wardega, SJ – A. Vasconcelos de Saldanha., *In the Light...*, 125.

28 L. M. Brockey, *Journey to the East...*, 44.

as he put it, “spend their days in gluttonous revelry.”²⁹ However, he understood the politics of it, and it was not exactly the food that concerned him, but the moral aspect of attending banquets and making merry with the Chinese. Gluttony was only one of the lightest sins that could be committed at Chinese banquets; the “dinner theater,” on the other hand, which included music and female performances and services, was much more problematic. It was the content of the plays they watched that offended the Jesuit priests, not the food they ate. Inconveniences also occurred during Lent or other fasting periods, when Jesuits were obliged to avoid excess. Jesuits, according to Palmeiro, should adhere to the rules of their religious order. As he decided, though, attending banquets “neither bothers nor impedes, and even less conflicts with divine precepts or those of our order,” and pointed out that Saint Francis Xavier attended “heathen feasts” to great profit.³⁰

Ceremonial visits were equally necessary. Jesuits were permitted to indulge in a cup of tea or a snack during visits to their local friends, because, as they explained, “it is a Chinese custom and they would find us very strange if we refused.”³¹

Indeed, feasting and banqueting were extremely important in the Chinese cultural context and seemed particularly attractive to the Chinese. It was not only necessary to attend banquets as a way of building trust, making connections, and establishing relationships with local elites, but hosting and organizing parties was equally essential. The Jesuits noticed that during the celebration of the opening of a new church in Yanping in 1657, the procession and the festivities they organized were attended by many non-Christian literati, which excited the organizers, who realized that the festival was a crowd-puller and a great way of promoting their religion.³² In 1660, two Jesuits in Shanxi overheard a rumor among locals complaining that Christianity was extremely severe and provided “no such feasting and happiness” like that of the Chinese New Year, for example. To prove them wrong, they organized a feast to celebrate the Purification of the Virgin on February 2 of that year.³³

29 Indeed, the Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Panzi (1734-before 1812) describes one of the dinners with Chinese officials at which they ate “well like beasts;” he also describes the residence of Portuguese Jesuits as well prepared for such events according to the Chinese custom, properly equipped for receiving Chinese guests and offering them Chinese standards. A. K. Wardega, SJ – A. Vasconcelos de Saldanha, *In the Light...*, 192.

30 L. M. Brockey, *The Visitor...*, 302.

31 *Ibid.*, 301.

32 César Guillén Nuñez, *Macao's Church of Saint Paul: A Glimmer of the Baroque in China*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press 2008, 49.

33 L. M. Brockey, *Journey to the East...*, 117.

Thus, the Jesuits had to make a special effort to organize feasts and banquets. They started using church rituals to attract converts.³⁴ Peter Mundy relates that he was received by the Jesuits with a feast at the College. They served sweets and Chinese fruit lychee, making a particular impression on him.³⁵

However, individually, Jesuits often kept their own diet based on personal preferences and religious practices. Palmeiro himself was famous for fasting a lot. His daily diet consisted only of bread (the Western kind), rice, and a bit of boiled beef at lunch, with a slice of bread and a glass of water for dinner, and only in his last years did he begin to take a sip of wine with his evening meal, “but not enough to fill a nutshell.” He insisted that Jesuits in Macau adhere to the same rules and maintain the “santa pobreza”. It was believed that a higher-than-average number of deaths that occurred at the Jesuit College in Macau were directly related to the regimen of monastic frugality imposed by Palmeiro, both in diet and leisure. Palmeiro’s strict diet was later regarded as the reason for his own early demise.³⁶

While visiting China, Palmeiro traveled from Macau to Beijing, to inspect the Jesuit mission there. During his journey, he enjoyed local food and was particularly happy to be able to find many types of wheat bread, either steamed or baked, some of which “reminded his stomach of his distant homeland.”³⁷ Palmeiro declined the only invitation to a banquet that he received during his stay in China, an offer from an illustrious local Christian, because he stuck to his own rules of frugality, but he nonetheless provided “mouthwatering details” in his descriptions, which shows that he considered Chinese food acceptable.³⁸

As we can see, Jesuits made many accommodations to the lifestyles of the literati, with whom they generally got along quite successfully and found many things in common. However, back in Macau and down in the provinces, Jesuits had to deal with the Buddhists, who became their main adversaries and the main target group from which to extract converts. As we have seen, in their dealings with Buddhism, food was much more relevant. Even though, as Christians, Jesuits had nothing against vegetarianism and some of them abstained from meat, in China, they regarded it as

34 Charles A. Boxer, *Portuguese Society in the Tropics: The Municipal Councils of Goa, Macao, Bahia, and Luanda, 1501-1800*, Madison (WI): University of Wisconsin Press 1965, 39.

35 Charles A. Boxer, *Seventeenth Century Macau in Contemporary Documents and Illustrations*, Hong Kong: Heinemann 1984, 40.

36 L. M. Brockey, *The Visitor...*, 279-281.

37 *Ibid.*, 251.

38 *Ibid.*, 271.

a form of adherence to a different faith. From the point of view of the Jesuits, what mandarins ate was irrelevant, but Buddhist foodways had to be contested. In order to convert to Christianity, the mandarins were expected to change their ideas, but not their lifestyles, such as dress or food (polygamy, however, was a big problem); as for the Buddhists, though, the converts were required to abandon vegetarianism and eat pork.

2.5 Food in Jesuit Macau

Macau was established as a Jesuit mission and the Jesuits left a profound and lasting impact on its culture. The Jesuits' influence on Macau's foodways was perhaps less apparent and direct, but still quite significant. The missionaries mostly kept to their own and did not develop a unique culinary tradition – there is no “Jesuit food” to speak of.

The staple food in Macau was rice, which was in fact not introduced from China, but a common food throughout the Portuguese empire.³⁹ Bread was less common, but available and eaten with hands, like other foods, too, which was another habit that the Portuguese picked up from India. The Jesuit Residence in Macau depended on food supplies from Goa, including rice, which only later was imported from Canton in China, but the delivery was sometimes blocked by Chinese officials and could not be depended upon; therefore, later, most of Macau's rice came from the Philippines.

According to Teixeira, in 1595, Macau traded with virtually all Portuguese colonies, including Ceylon, Burma, Cochin China (Vietnam), Tonkin, Siam, and different parts of India.⁴⁰

Portuguese wine was imported from Goa. Directly from Portugal came olive oil, later supplemented with coconut oil, vinegar, and olives. The Portuguese living in Macau used local lentils to supplement their rice diet. They also imported some spices that they liked to use frequently, such as ginger, cloves, and cinnamon, as well as chocolate from Manila.⁴¹ Chili and salt came from Batavia. As for cooking utensils, pots, pans, and other European-style table utensils, such as plates, bowls, cups, tablecloths and napkins, and even special cutters for fish, were preferred. On top of that, every Jesuit was “equipped” with his personal knife, fork, and spoon. The native Chinese population of Macau got their food from neighboring islands and China and maintained a traditional Chinese diet. Most pork

39 M. A. H. Oliveira, *História dos Portugueses no Extremo Oriente...*, 521.

40 Manuel Teixeira, *The Portuguese Missions in Malacca and Singapore (1511-1958)*, 3 volumes, Macau: Instituto Cultural de Macau 1987.

41 *Ibid.*, 13.

consumed in Macau by both the Chinese and the Portuguese was also sourced from China's mainland.

In the 19th century, Macau Jesuits became known as great entertainers. They organized dinners and banquets for visitors and were famous for their resourcefulness. The food they served was mostly a fusion of European (not specifically Portuguese, but French or Italian, etc.) and Asian (Indian, Southeast Asian, sometimes even Chinese), but two elements defined such receptions as "Portuguese" – namely, sweets and wine. Wine was one of the official supplies sent to Jesuit missions abroad. They insisted on importing and drinking exclusively Portuguese wines, which were cheaper than the French; the latter were even banned later across the entire Portuguese Empire.⁴²

During the seventeenth century, confectionery-making in Portugal developed into a national industry. In Macau, the Clarissan nuns specialized in it. Their egg tarts, especially, inspired by the *pasteis de nata de Belem* from Lisbon, became famous worldwide. Jesuits themselves also made sweets and even sent them as gifts to the Chinese court.⁴³

19th century Macau was becoming very similar to Hong Kong, also because of the influx of British settlers in the colony. Bread at that time was no longer made by the Jesuits, but produced commercially by local Chinese people, who were commissioned to do it.⁴⁴ Portuguese wine was common and of good quality, especially port and madeira preferred by the British. Judging by the cuisine, Macau was the most ethnically diverse of the Portuguese colonies. According to Boileau, before Canton was opened to foreign commerce in the 19th century, Macao served as a base for traders of all nationalities seeking to access the Chinese and Japanese markets.⁴⁵ It is important to bear in mind that Macau was not China, and that most goods, including food, were imported from other Portuguese colonies. Therefore, Jesuits did not need to and as a matter of fact would not have been able to depend solely on Chinese cuisine.

In general, Jesuits did not refrain from Chinese food. However, they tended to adapt local ingredients to their own uses, rather than embrace Chinese cuisine and cooking styles. This was not for ideological reasons, but rather because of cultural preferences and for practical reasons, which led to the spontaneous mixing of ideas and traditions. However, Chinese

42 Janet P. Boileau, *A Culinary History of the Portuguese Eurasians: The Origins of Luso-Asian Cuisine in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, [manuscript of a Ph.D. thesis], Adelaide: University of Adelaide 2010, 258-259; M. Teixeira, *The Portuguese Missions...*, 40-46.

43 J. P. Boileau, *A Culinary History...*, 80.

44 M. A. H. Oliveira, *História dos Portugueses...*, 397.

45 J. P. Boileau, *A Culinary History...*, 317.

influence in Macau was remarkably small. Only native Chinese residents ate Chinese food; otherwise, Macau cuisine was subject to heavy influences from Africa, India, Malaya, and the Philippines. If Jesuits who stayed there did not frequently eat Chinese food, it may just be because it was not very common in Macau.

3. The Age of Conquest

3.1 *Legge in Hong Kong*

The shortest answer to the question of why Legge did not eat Chinese food is that he was afraid to get sick. However, Legge was unusual in his attitude and choices. He respected China and Chinese culture, and we may even go as far as to assume that he liked it. Feeling and acting this way, he did not share the sentiments and opinions of most of his fellow missionaries, British compatriots, and even members of his own family. He was often criticized by the authorities of his church for being too open and accepting of Chinese culture, and for devoting too much of his time and effort to studying and translating Chinese “classics”, at the expense of his missionary work.

Let us emphasize at the very beginning one fundamental difference between the Portuguese in 16th century Macau and the British in 19th century Hong Kong: The latter were coming to China from a position of power. Following the Treaty of Nanking in August 1842, after the First Opium War, China was forced to open her ports to foreign trade, cede Hong Kong to Britain, and allow Christian missionaries to preach in China. The “holy” men (and women) in China no longer needed to be nice and curry favor with Chinese officials. The British, including the missionaries, believed they surpassed the Chinese in every respect: They had a better fleet, a better god, and better food. They believed it was their God-given right and duty to transform China in their fashion, including its foodways.⁴⁶

James Legge arrived in Hong Kong in 1842 as a representative of the London Missionary Society (LMS). In Legge’s times, Hong Kong was *not* only the bustling city of today and a food capital of the world, but an empty and barely livable little island. A deadly disease, known at the time as the “Hong Kong fever”, decimated foreign settlers. Legge himself often fell severely sick and on a few occasions nearly died. His first wife, Mary

46 Kathleen L. Lodwick, *How Christianity Came to China*, Minneapolis (MN): Fortress Press 2016, 67.

Isabella Morison, died after a few years in Hong Kong, as did their first-born child.⁴⁷

On top of their struggles with a lack of resources and an inclement climate, early British settlers had to deal with a hostile local Chinese population, who tried to sabotage them at every step. In one incident in 1857, the Chinese employees of the only bakery in Hong Kong attempted to kill all the British in Hong Kong by poisoning the bread with arsenic. Legge, who started his day at 3AM and ate bread with butter for breakfast, was one of the first people who noticed that the bread was poisoned and immediately warned the others.⁴⁸ After such a rough welcome and considering the general living conditions in the new colony, one cannot blame Legge for feeling rather suspicious of Chinese food.

3.2 “*We make our home as English as possible*”

After the early demise of his first wife, Legge married a widow, Hannah Mary Willetts (née Johnstone), who applied all her energies to becoming a real British memsahib. We learn some interesting details about the Legges’ daily life from Hannah’s letters to friends and family. Their first years together were still rather hard. James was just a poor missionary and the means provided by the church were very modest. Hannah, who was running the house, had to be thrifty and creative. She kept her daily costs for food just under nine dollars.⁴⁹ As Hannah declared in one of her letters, she tried to “make [their] home as English as possible.”⁵⁰ It may come as a surprise, then, that every day they ate ... curry.

James got up every day before sunrise and put himself to work. The rest of the family had their first breakfast at 7AM, which consisted of tea and toast with some butter that Hannah deemed “doubtful” and usually avoided. The second breakfast around 9 or 10 was hearty and included meat, rice, curry (!), eggs, and rice cakes. There was an early dinner at 3PM

47 Missionary wives died at an exceptionally high rate, which is a sad phenomenon worthy of a separate study. See Andrew Cole, *Chop Suey: A Cultural History of Chinese Food in the United States*, New York (NY): Oxford University Press 2009, 61-62.

48 Marilyn Laura Bowman, *James Legge and the Chinese Classics: A Brilliant Scott in the Turmoil of Colonial Hong Kong*, Victoria: FriesenPress 2016, 306.

49 *Ibid.*, 345.

50 Helen Edith Legge, *James Legge: Missionary and Scholar. By his Daughter Helen Edith Legge*, London: The Religious Tract Society 1905, 122-124.

prior to a family walk in the cooling air, then an adult “tea” later after the youngest children were in bed at 8PM.⁵¹

But Hannah was ambitious, and she believed that being a missionary wife granted her a higher social status. As a member of the local “high society,” she wanted to be able to host parties and dinners. She especially enjoyed entertaining soldiers and officers stationed in Hong Kong. Hannah observed that officers became weak and pale during their stay in the colony. This, she believed, was due to their “narrow” diet of beef and rice in the barracks, with only a weekly rice pudding.⁵²

Dinners at the Legges’ home were regarded as “paradise” by Hannah’s guests, who attested that she provided “wonderful food in great variety.”⁵³ She invited visitors over to hearty late meals, ranging from 6-12 people on ordinary days, running up to 20 or 50 officers and soldiers occasionally. These were “jolly dinners” that started with soup or fish, progressed to either beef, mutton, pork, fowl, duck or goose, a dish of cold meat or hash, rice, and a dish of curry with mango chutney, which was James’s favorite. Ale or wine were served alongside the meals. Then, there were “puddings,” the sometimes-elaborate desserts including pastries made by Hannah and her daughters, followed by “dubious” cheese, and fruits with wine to end the meal. Embellishments included oranges, pineapples, pears, pomegranates, and ginger.⁵⁴

To host these dinners, Hannah had to order large quantities of food and supplies directly from Britain, which she subscribed for “the operation of the mission household.”⁵⁵ On those rare occasions when she had no guests, the family dinner was considerably simpler, and consisted of jugged hare, curry, and plum pudding.

The Legges’ often attended lavish dinners organized by others. There is an account of one such dinner hosted by Sheriff Mitchell, where the menu included “mulligatawny and oxtail soup, baked oysters and fish, turkey, goose, pheasants, mutton, beef, hare, plum pudding, gooseberry pie, fruit green peas, potatoes, turnips, carrots, magnificent Christmas cakes, fruits, champagne and coffee.”⁵⁶

As a real Scot and true to his nature, James Legge loved whiskey and enjoyed a drink of it every day. He also attended special events celebrating

51 M. L. Bowman, *James Legge and the Chinese Classics...*, 345. In the sources, there is a hint that “adult” here means they were drinking alcohol. Normally, in the colonies, children went to bed early, while the adults stayed up and had drinks later at night.

52 *Ibid.*, 346.

53 *Ibid.*

54 *Ibid.*

55 *Ibid.*, 397.

56 *Ibid.*, 347.

Scottish traditions, such as this one: “1865 ended with a raucous St. Andrew’s dinner in mid-December that featured bagpipes, Robbie Burns’ poetry, dinner that included cockie leekie, haggis, and minced collops, along with the ‘national beverages’ of Glenlivet and punch.”⁵⁷

As we can see, even Scottish food was available in Hong Kong, and Legge managed to partake in it; but he still did not touch anything Chinese. The inclusion of curries at practically every meal is very remarkable. Along with chutney, curry is obviously of Indian influence. As we will see later, these curries were not cooked exactly in an Indian way, but rather were created using a fusion of culinary styles, or were even “curries” in name only. Still, the British enjoyed them and consumed them in the colonies, as well as back in England, making them one of the most enduring British colonial legacies. The iconic mulligatawny soup listed in one of the menus above may serve as a classic example.

3.3 *“Every nasty thing you can imagine, and every nice thing made nasty”*

Chinese people, their lifestyle, their religious practices, and their food horrified Hannah. During her singular trip outside of the city and along the Mainland coast, she was for the first time exposed to Chinese life, an experience that left her aghast. In her account of this trip, she expressed her disgust at the poverty and the filth she saw everywhere, and she mentions with horror a religious celebration she saw when passing by a Chinese temple, refusing to accept that “idolaters” worshipping “josses” still existed.⁵⁸

We know Hannah’s feelings about Chinese food from her own account of the biggest party she ever hosted, a special dinner for 130 men, women, and children from James’s Chinese congregation. There are two versions of this account, the official one, released by Hannah after the dinner, and an unofficial one, which she shared in a letter to her daughter.

According to the official version, a 30-course Chinese meal was served to groups of Chinese people sitting on chairs around a dozen tables in different rooms. Chinese distilled spirits were served, and Hannah joined in drinking the toasts offered. She also tried the food, using chopsticks for the first time in her life. According to this account, she fully participated in the Chinese dinner, and “her one concession to her homeland culture was

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 431.

⁵⁸ E. H. Legge, *James Legge...*, 122-124.

her confession that she did not enjoy Chinese food.”⁵⁹ Hannah revealed her feelings about the event more truthfully in a letter to her daughter: “We had to entertain to dinner between one and two hundred Chinese. [...] There were perhaps thirty courses, each course containing a dozen of different things – every nasty thing you can imagine, and every nice thing made nasty. Everyone had chopsticks and a tiny cup, with a little tea pot containing a spirit obtained from rice.” As she then complains, she was “obliged to honor the table”: “I took on a chopstick a bit of pineapple, then a bit of hard pear; then I had to put the spirit to my mouth and drink healths [...] The dinner lasted three hours – oh! The mosquitoes – and then they dispersed.”⁶⁰ So much for the adventure of using chopsticks, tasting Chinese food, and drinking Chinese wine. Hannah’s fear of, and prejudice against Chinese cuisine were so strong she did not trust it even at her own dinner. As we will see in what follows, Westerners generally regarded the Chinese as backward people who needed to be reformed and civilized also by means of cuisine. In Hannah’s own words, “the maintenance of a full-fledged British way of life should be taken as a lesson for filthy heathens in the superiority and cleanliness of Christian civilization.”⁶¹

3.4 “*I was never in better health*”

Legge was a government official —a “board” missionary, as classified by Lodwick, which endowed him with a special status and privileges, such as official support from the authorities and institutions back home.⁶² Many other missionaries, however, could not enjoy such luxuries, particularly those who had to live and work side by side with Chinese people in the provinces, sharing their poverty and misery, far away from colonial cities and Western communities.

There was a second group of so called “faith” missionaries in China. Many of them shunned secular authorities and instead decided to “rely on God” to pursue their goals; they created their own churches and adopted various conversion strategies, including that of “going full native”. The biggest and most famous mission of this kind was the controversial China Inland Mission (CIM) established by James Hudson Taylor (1832-1905),

59 M. L. Bowman, *James Legge and the Chinese Classics...*, 346.

60 E. H. Legge, *James Legge...*, 122-124.

61 Norman J. Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China. James Legge’s Oriental Pilgrimage*, Berkeley (CA) – Los Angeles (CA) – London: University of California Press 2002, 56.

62 K. L. Lodwick, *How Christianity Came...*, 73.

who, among other things, insisted on wearing Chinese clothes and fake “pigtailed” (queues) to look similar to the Chinese.⁶³ The reason he and some other missionaries did that, however, was not to share things with the Chinese, but to deceive them: They imagined people would believe they were actually Chinese and convert more easily.⁶⁴ These “faith” missionaries were more likely to eat Chinese food, also because of the lack of other options.⁶⁵

“Faith” missions were harshly criticized by the “board”, as well as by James Legge himself. The naïve evangelical approach to converting people without proper knowledge and preparation by uneducated and self-proclaimed “priests” was certainly not something formal churchmen could stomach, but what they rejected even more was the nativist idea of adopting a Chinese life style, which they deemed both useless and dangerous.⁶⁶ Whereas wearing Chinese clothes could be dismissed as a mere masquerade,⁶⁷ food and hygiene had much more serious implications, as can be seen from the case of a certain Mr. Burns, a missionary who died after adopting a fully Chinese life style, including its foodways. According to the doctor’s report, the cause of his death was “low diet”:

It is difficult for those who knew Mr. Burns when he was in the south of China to understand this. He was always rationally careful of his health, both in food and clothing, and even in the choice of healthy houses, however humble. If he did give way to the attempt to live as Chinamen live, when he began to dress as Chinamen dress, we can only say it was an unhappy departure from his former habits, and think the evil must have been done by the enforced use of Chinese diet during his voyage from Shanghai to New-chwang.

63 Alwyn Austin, *China’s Millions: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society, 1832-1905*, Grand Rapids (MI) – Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 2007, 28.

64 There was another, practical reason why “faith” missionaries dressed in Chinese clothes: There were no tailors in rural China who knew how to make Western clothes and later missionaries traveled with their own sewing machines to make their clothes. K. L. Lodwick, *How Christianity Came...*, 67.

65 *Ibid.*, 92-93.

66 *Ibid.*, 65-66.

67 Bob Whyte, director of the China Study Project of the British Council of Churches, said that Hudson Tylor’s habit of dressing in a Chinese fashion “was a superficial means of adaptation, masking a rigid and narrow theological understanding.” (A. Austin, *China’s Millions...*, 28.) A. J. Broomhall, “an aristocrat within the CIM”, describes how Taylor appeared to the “board missionaries”: “This nobody, this pauper without degree or title, neither flotsam of the mercantile and seafaring world nor accredited representative of any church, hatless and “pigtailed,” was disgracing the respectable community he had entered.” (Anthony James Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor and China’s Open Century*, 7 volumes, Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton and OMF 1981-1989, 294.)

In the end, it was Chinese food that killed him:

There is little, if any, doubt that the life of Mr. Burns was sacrificed, through no fault of the committee, to an attempt to live as the Chinese do. [...] Whether Mr. Burns only suffered from eating the coarse diet of the sailors in passing from Shanghai to New-chwang, which was entirely involuntary, or whether he had previously suffered from attempting to live like the common Chinese, we cannot be sure; but in any case, it was the diet that cut short his noble career.⁶⁸

The gist of the report is that a Chinese lifestyle and Chinese food were simply not fit for Westerners. Soon, the belief that Chinese food was deficient and unhealthy prevailed, and all Westerners, among them also the missionaries, started to promote Western food and uphold Western sanitary standards. Wherever they could, the missionaries grew their own vegetables in the mission gardens, and they taught their Chinese servants to cook Western dishes, as well as bake bread and make desserts, including ice cream. To be able to eat like at home, they ordered ingredients all the way from Shanghai and Hong Kong.⁶⁹ They tried their best to maintain a Western lifestyle, including dressing up for dinner, even if they lived in the jungle, where men attended in tuxedos and women in floor-length gowns. Most board missions held these dinners regularly, at least once a month.⁷⁰ Taylor, the founder of CIM, who most obstinately insisted on living like a Chinese, despite his efforts was unable to stop other CIM missionaries from eating Western food.⁷¹ Mr. Trickey, another prominent “faith” missionary, who wore Chinese garb and lived in a Chinese style house, reportedly “never ceased to be an Englishman” and therefore “ate pudding.”⁷² However, the missionaries ate Western food not only because they missed home cooking or wanted to distinguish themselves from the Chinese. First and foremost, they believed Western food was healthier and made them stronger; in fact, they were convinced food was one of the main reasons why Westerners were better than the Chinese. In his definitive study of the history of Western food in China, Marc Swislocki quotes Charles Dyce, who spent thirty years living in Shanghai at the beginning of the 20th century, and who observed the following: “We were different from them; we ate strong flesh of cows and sheep, which they avoid; and they looked upon our violent games as perhaps necessary to work off the effects of beef

68 James Johnston, *China and Formosa: The Story of a Successful Mission (1898)*, London: Hazel, Watson and Viney, Ld. 1898, 187.

69 K. L. Lodwick, *How Christianity...*, 93.

70 *Ibid.*, 91-92.

71 *Ibid.*, 106.

72 A. Austin, *China's Millions...*, 23-24.

and mutton. 'Belong foreign man custom,' they would say, as they turned to their diet of rice and fish and cabbage."⁷³

The Westerners perceived themselves as a physically stronger, more virile, naturally dominant and successful race and that was also how they were perceived by the Chinese. Swislocki describes how in the context of cultural Darwinism, the Chinese in Shanghai started experimenting with eating more meat, especially beef, Western style, to become as big and strong as the Westerners. They too started to believe that diet was key in coping with foreign domination in China.

"Faith" and "board" missionaries alike insisted that the locals needed to change their diets according to what they perceived as "Christian" rules. Very similarly to the Jesuits a couple of centuries earlier, they too were at odds with the Buddhists, whom they categorized and always referred to as "vegetarians." As the missionaries insisted, "Once they became Christians, [they] could not remain vegetarians: they had to participate in a public ceremony during which they ate meat, for, as one missionary explained [...], 'without shedding of blood is no remission' of sins."⁷⁴

As we will see below, the missionaries made a conscious effort to change the diet of the Chinese in a Western fashion, which can be considered a mission in its own right. They served Western food to their Chinese students and patients at Christian schools and hospitals they established all over China. As for Legge, he ventured outside of his little enclave and saw "real China" only once, when he went on a tour of the North and visited the grave of Confucius in Shandong. During the journey, he depended for the most part on his own provisions. On the way to Tianjin, Edkins, Legge's travel companion, "went in a good deal for Chinese food." Legge says that he had little liking for such food, except "in the matter of boiled eggs, bread, and sometimes a bowl of rice." Here is his own description of his daily routine:

Leeu Chin village. 5 o'clock, the landlord brings in a kettle of boiling water. I make some milk from a tin of the condensed article, and we have a cup of tea and a biscuit, and start. On we go, till about two o'clock, for the most part with nothing to eat unless we buy something by the way, which we generally do; sometimes it is a sweet potato or two, but more often some bread, and very good wheaten bread can be bought. About two we halt for an hour and rest and feed the mules; to have our own breakfast, or tiffin or dinner, whichever you like to call it. First tea is made as in the morning, and then my tins of preserved meat, butter, and biscuits are overhauled. It is a rough and ready way of living certainly, but I was never in better health.⁷⁵

73 Marc Swislocki, *Culinary Nostalgia: Regional Food Culture and the Urban Experience in Shanghai*, Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press 2009, 102.

74 A. Austin, *China's Millions...*, 13.

75 H. E. Legge, *James Legge ...*, 185.

4. Christianity Through Food

As Hong Kong continued to grow into a Western city, where Chinese life was not mainstream, the restaurants in the colony were also not Chinese, but Western. The Victoria Hotel opened as early as 1840, and Zetland Hall, the first serious restaurant in Hong Kong, in 1845. By the 1880s, Western style restaurants were quite common and served colonial fusion cuisine, such as baked pork chops with rice, shredded chicken fried rice, and even fried rice noodles. Some restaurants specialized in Southeast Asian cuisines picked up by the British from other colonies, such as Hainan chicken rice, Singapore-style fried vermicelli, and fried noodles with a spicy sauce. Macau egg tarts were a popular snack.⁷⁶ In 1876, Watsons opened a soda water company, serving drinks named “Holland water,” because the first batch was transported on a Dutch ship to China. It was not until 1898 that a Chinese named Fung Fook Tien founded the Kwong Sang Hong restaurant.

Other colonial cities in China followed a similar path. Shanghai, originally a quaint Chinese peach orchard, was transformed in the 1900s into China’s greatest urban center, built from scratch in a Western fashion. But the missionaries’ ambitions reached further than that; they envisioned civilizing the Chinese by converting them to Western lifestyles. In 1885, the American missionary Martha Foster Crawford (1830-1909) published the first Western cookbook written in Chinese, titled *Zao Yangfan shu* (“Cooking Western Food”).⁷⁷ The book was equipped with an English language index, to make it easier for the Western master to indicate to the servant which dish to cook, but it was aimed at a larger audience than just Chinese housekeepers; the contents of the book also reveal what kind of food the Westerners ate in China and what was generally considered “Western cuisine.”⁷⁸

76 Cheng Po Hung, *Early Hong Kong Eateries*, Hong Kong: University Museum and Art Gallery, The University of Hong Kong 2003, 135-136.

77 Martha Foster Crawford, *Zao yangfan shu*, Shanghai: Meihua Shuguan 1885.

78 Crawford was an interesting and complicated character. She was a Southerner from Alabama and a Confederate patriot. She went to China before the Civil War as a Southern Baptist fundamentalist and an outspoken anti-abolitionist. Her mission was to represent Southern values and beliefs, as opposed to the version of Christianity taught by American missionaries from the North. After the Civil War, she had a change of heart and she decided to live like a Chinese person, which she did for the rest of her life. She dressed in Chinese clothes, spoke Chinese, and lived side by side with Chinese people, but she still ate Western food, which she promoted by writing her cookbook. Wilbert R. Shenk, “Missionary Returns and Cultural Conversions in Alabama and Shandong: The Latter Years of Madam Gao (Martha Foster Crawford)”, in: Wilbert R. Shenk (ed.), *North American Foreign Missions, 1810-1914*, Grand

Crawford begins with her “Kitchen Rules,” where she stresses the importance of maintaining kitchen hygiene. This introduction is followed by 267 recipes, including a separate section for “Curries.” The book contains four additional sections with instructions how to clean, prepare, and store food. Many recipes in the book are not easily identifiable. For the most part, what makes them “Western” is the preparation method (baking, roasting, braising, etc.), the ingredients (vegetables, such as carrots and lettuces), and the use of cream and butter in almost every dish. The cook-book does not present traditional Western dishes that could be linked to any particular region or nation, such as French or British ones. Instead, Crawford intends to instruct the Chinese how to apply what she considers more “civilized” cooking methods, particularly in terms of cleanliness and hygiene, and to use what she believes are healthier and more nutritious ingredients, rather than how to cook traditional and typical Western dishes. Let us consider as an example one that is simply labeled as “Curry”:

To make a curry, any kind of meat can be used, but chicken is most common. Cut the chicken, cook it and place in a pot. Add some broth and cream, and boil again. Prepare a spoon of curry powder, half a cup of cooked rice, one tablespoon of flour, one tablespoon of cream, one cup of broth, half a teaspoon salt, mix together, pour the mixture over the chicken and cook for 10 more minutes. Eat over plain rice.⁷⁹

Adding cooked rice to the curry sauce is very unusual, but even apart from this, the dish is unlike any Indian curry or any other typical Western or Asian dish. All other curry recipes in the book are similar and simply call for a spoon of curry powder added to the sauce. Other Western cook-books published later in China offer similar recipes. We may wonder, therefore, whether the curries Legge enjoyed every day in Hong Kong at his “as English as possible” home had much in common with actual Indian curries.

5. In Conclusion

James Legge did not eat Chinese food, because he was concerned about his health and because he lived in a colonial city, which was socially and culturally far removed from native Chinese life. As for many of his fellow missionaries, however, it was their cultural prejudice that prevented them from fully partaking in local life. For them, to use Swislocki’s words,

Rapids (MI) – Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 2004, 243-260.

⁷⁹ M. F. Crawford, *Zao yangfan shui*, recipe No. 57.



“food was an important component of foreign efforts to shore up a sense of native culture and an identity as civilized people.”⁸⁰ Those who lived among the Chinese in rural and impoverished parts of the country tried to distinguish themselves from the natives by maintaining their Western lifestyles, including their foodways. Not only did they intend to demonstrate to the locals what “civilized people” lived like, but they believed that a Chinese diet would weaken or even kill them.

Not all Christian missions in China were the same and especially in different time periods missionaries took different approaches. Jesuits, one of the first Christian missionaries from the West, were open to Chinese foodways and did not reject them on principle. Much later, missionaries operated under completely different socio-political circumstances. As colonialists, they sought to convert the Chinese to their ideas of Christianity, which were tantamount with Western cultural practices. They linked Christianity with civilization and rather than accommodate themselves to Chinese society, they set out to change China and make it more like the West. Consequently, they denounced Chinese culture as inferior to Christianity and they deemed Chinese food inedible.

80 M. Swislocki, *Culinary Nostalgia...*, 101.

SUMMARY

To Eat or Not to Eat? The Curious Affair of Western Missionaries with Chinese Food

What did Western Christian missionaries eat in China and why, for the most part, was it not Chinese food? This study focuses on two groups of missionaries and their foodways – the Portuguese Jesuits (Catholics) based in Macau between the 16th and 17th centuries, and the British and American Protestants in Hong Kong and Shanghai in the 19th and early 20th centuries – and aims to reveal what they ate, what they refused to eat, and why. While examining ideological and cultural factors that modelled the diet of Christian missionaries, this study also analyzes Western ideas, perceptions, and phobias regarding Chinese food.

While the Jesuits did have some religious concerns when approaching Chinese cuisine, they, for the most part, embraced it. The Protestants, on the other hand, who arrived much later and during the peak of Western domination in China, acted from a position of power and rejected local food on cultural and ideological grounds as inferior, unhygienic, and potentially poisonous. The early missionaries came to “sell” Christianity and were willing to negotiate their way with Chinese cuisine and culture, “christening” some aspects of them and adopting them as their own. In the age of imperialism, on the other hand, Christian missionaries intended to “civilize” the Chinese by imposing on them both their religious beliefs and their lifestyle, including their foodways.

Keywords: China; Jesuits; missionaries; colonialism; foodways; vegetarianism

Asian Studies/Chinese
College of Charleston
9 Glebe Street
Charleston, SC-29424
USA

PIOTR GIBAS
gibaspp@cofc.edu