

PATUÁ: WHERE PORTUGAL MEETS MACAU

EDUARDO MELO
(Photography)

FEDERICO BOSSONE
(Text)

Universidade Católica Portuguesa
ORCID ID 0000-0001-5060-3457
fbossone@ucp.pt

It's a busy November afternoon at Patuá, the go-to spot for family-style Macanese cuisine in Lisbon. Opened in 2019 and run by chef Francisco (Chico) Jesus, whose mother is from Macau, and Daniela Silvestre, the restaurant reopened in December 2024 at its new home on Rua Angelina Vidal 71B, in Anjos.

“Chico is busy prepping for service, but he will join us later,” Daniela said, guiding me to our table. My first visit to Patuá was in October 2022, shortly after moving to Lisbon. Invited to a birthday dinner, I was immediately captivated by the cuisine's unique flavours: five-spice, coconut milk, black cardamom, turmeric, soy sauce, and shrimp paste.

Macanese cuisine emerged from Macau's long history as a Portuguese territory, established in the mid-16th century when Portugal secured trading rights along China's southern coast. As Macau grew into a bustling port linking Europe, China, Southeast Asia, and parts of Africa, its kitchens absorbed the influences of traders, missionaries, and migrants. Portuguese settlers adapted their home recipes using local Chinese ingredients while also incorporating flavours brought from Goa, Mozambique, Malacca, and beyond.

The restaurant— Patuá — is named after the creole language of Macau, *patois*. It blends Portuguese with Cantonese, Malay, Sinhalese, Hindi, and other influences from the diverse communities that shaped the region. This linguistic hybridity

mirrors Macanese cuisine itself: a fusion of multiple identities and histories. Historically, the Patuá macaense was the mother tongue of many families, used in homes, songs, and oral storytelling. Today, the language is considered endangered, with only a few fluent speakers remaining, though efforts are underway to preserve it through literature, music, and cultural initiatives.

Chico and Daniela met in the kitchen of Damas, where he worked as a chef and she as a sous-chef. Initially, neither had formal culinary training: Chico was an engineer, and Daniela studied anthropology and art. Their shared passion for food, however, led them to retrain professionally and eventually open Patuá. “When I decided to stay in the business, I also went to culinary school. It was crucial to learn the proper terms and techniques,” Daniela recalls.

The restaurant’s menu began organically and was not exclusively Macanese. Over time, however, they decided to offer guests Chico’s family recipes, giving Patuá its distinctive family-style character. Daniela recalls cooking being part of her life from a young age. “When I was a kid, there was a lady who looked after me—I called her Nani—and she taught me how to cook. Later, I would invite friends over saying, ‘Today I am going to cook something French,’ always experimenting.” Hosting, she says, has become part of her identity: “I’m very lucky to be able to do what I love.”

I asked them about the connection between food and identity at Patuá. “Macanese food is fusion cuisine per se,” Daniela said. Indeed, Macanese cuisine is considered one of the world’s earliest examples of true culinary creolisation. Its dishes reflect centuries of cultural exchange and diverse identities in Macau. Recognising its significance, UNESCO has acknowledged Macanese food as an essential element of Macau’s intangible cultural heritage, emphasising its role in preserving the city’s multicultural identity and traditions.

Daniela clarifies: “It’s not fusion in the modern sense. It’s about the multilayered identities of Chinese cooking, mostly Cantonese with influences from Hong Kong, alongside Portuguese traditions, and the flavours of Angola and Mozambique—all mixing together to create this unique blend.”

The authenticity of Patuá’s menu lies in its diversity. The *Cafreal*, a dish from Mozambique, is just one example. “We mainly serve dishes from the 1980s and 1990s, the years I grew up,” Chico says. Daniela adds: “Sometimes customers are

surprised to see a Mozambican or Malaysian dish, and we explain that it's part of the Macanese tradition.”

Daniela and Chico do not cater to those simply seeking something exotic or mild. “We stick to the classics,” Daniela says. “Our menu offers so much that everyone can find something to suit their palate—and learn about Macanese food at the same time.” She continues: “We do the classics from Macau, but with our own interpretation. It changes over time. Traditions always evolve. It's impossible not to put a little of yourself into what you cook.”

Our touch is, in a way, the opposite of what it was in the past. Back in the day in Macau, the Portuguese tried to cook dishes from their tradition using Chinese ingredients. We cook Macanese food using traditional blends, but the chef adds his own seasoning, and we also use produce from Portugal.”

Chico's family history also plays an essential role in the menu. The *Camarão à Tio Gégé* is a dish inspired by his uncle Rogério, who travelled frequently between Portugal and Macau, bringing tea, tobacco, and seasonings. For Chico, the dish that best represents Patuá and what they aim to convey about Macanese cuisine is *Minchi*, a traditional Macanese dish of minced or ground meat stir-fried with vegetables and seasonings. *Minchi* is widely regarded as Macau's national dish. Each family has its own version, but the combination of rice, minced pork, and potatoes is a defining feature. Patuá has also become a touchstone for members of the Macanese diaspora, whether in the United States or in Lisbon, who come to rediscover their culinary heritage. Chico and Daniela recall guests who bring family recipes, or ingredients that are difficult to source in Lisbon, like dried scallops, and describe how they prepare certain dishes at home. These exchanges spark conversations that feel like passing down traditions across kitchens and generations.

The restaurant has also been the backdrop for personal milestones of its guests: the first Patuá location, for example, hosted a couple on their first date; years later, they returned with their child, continuing the ritual – a journey across continents captured on a plate.

Creative Commons Attribution License | This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.



















