O Galo de Barcelos talks to the Peking Duck

There is a Chinese idiom that refers to a situation where there are people from different cultural backgrounds interacting. 雞 同 鴨 講. It translates as “the chicken communicates with the duck.” This idiom explains a situation where misunderstandings might arise between people of distinct linguistic backgrounds during social interactions, extremely common in ancient China’s polyglot society.

The initial Luso-Sino encounters led to many cultural misinterpretations.

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to reach the far regions of the Eurasian continent via a maritime route. Jorge Álvares in 1513 landed on the island of Tamão in southern China.¹ It is believed that Álvares was familiar with the Malay language.² Before the famous landing of the Europeans whom the Chinese called by the blanket term Fo-lang-ki³ in Cathay, the Portuguese had already established contact with Chinese merchants in Malacca, which had fallen to the Portuguese in 1511. Moreover, Chinese and Malay pilots played key roles in the Portuguese navigation

¹ Christina Miu Bing Cheng, Macau a Cultural Janus (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1999), 18.
³ Fo-lang-ki was a term, possibly introduced by Muslims traders deriving from Franks, which was used to describe all Europeans in the Middle East and China.
and knowledge of the southern Chinese coast. The Fernão Pires de Andrade Expedition had Chinese pilots who accompanied the Portuguese from Tamão up the Pearl River Delta to Canton.\(^4\) Portuguese contacts with Tamão and other small islands resulted in a prosperous illicit trade, which because of its nature is ill-documented. This unofficial small-scale trade economically tied the Chinese islands with Malacca under Portuguese auspices.\(^5\)

The voyage to establish official relations between Portugal and China, led by Tomé Pires, sailed from Tamão prior to moving on towards Canton and Peking.\(^6\) This trade mission was a disaster. Despite the fact that there was a Chinese interpreter Huo-Che Ya-san among them, the delegation failed.\(^7\) According to historian T’ien-Tsê Chang, the interlocutor made the grave mistake of translating the letter of the King Dom Manuel to fit the Sino-centric worldview. In other words, the translated letter honorifically addressed the Ming Emperor (who in the early sixteenth century was Emperor Chengtian Dadao) situating the Portuguese in a subordinate position similar to that of a vassal from a traditional Sino-tributary state—unlike the original Portuguese letter, which addressed the Middle Kingdom Emperor as an equal.\(^8\) The interpreter could not successfully justify the discrepancy between the letters.

\(^4\) Old spelling of Guangzhou. This thesis will use Canton, based on the Wade-Giles, instead of Guǎngzhōu, which follows the Hanyu Pinyin system. T’ien-Tsê Chang, *Sino-Portuguese Trade from 1514 to 1644* (Leyden: Late E. J. Brill, 1934), 42.


\(^6\) Peking is based on the Wade-Giles and will be used instead of Beijing.

\(^7\) Chang, *Sino-Portuguese Trade*, 50.

\(^8\) Ibid., 64-65.
The linguistic faux pas along with the unlawful acts committed by the Portuguese, such as the refusing to pay customs, interfering in the Chinese trade with Asian merchants, the kidnapping of prominent children, the illegal fortification and settlement on the island of Tamão, coupled with warnings from the sultan of Malacca led to the prohibition of trade with foreigners by the mid-1520s.\(^9\) The execution of Tomé Pires’ interpreter Huo-Che Ya-san served as a warning to the Chinese interpreters who collaborated with the *Fo-lang-ki* and exemplified the perilous state of interpreting. Huo-Che Ya-san was seen by the Chinese as a traitor and the chief criminal among the Portuguese.\(^10\) The encounters between the Portuguese and Chinese during the sixteenth century exemplify the aforesaid Chinese idiom about cultural misunderstandings and the Yiddish proverb relates to the risks interpreters faced.

This thesis analyzes the rise and role of the *Jurubaças* (儒 巴 薩 interpreters) in Macau\(^11\) and the *Extremo Oriente*.\(^12\) The Jurubaça emerged in the sixteenth century and in the seventeenth century and they were institutionalized by Macau’s *Senado da Câmara as Línguas da Cidade* in 1627, when an important *Regimento* was issued.

\(^9\) Ibid.
\(^10\) Ibid., 50.
\(^11\) This is the Portuguese spelling and will be use in this thesis. The change from Macao to Macau occurred in the 20th century as a result of the Portuguese orthographic reform. Macau is becoming more common in English.
\(^12\) 儒 巴 薩 is the transliteration of *Jurubaças*. Interestingly, the first character 儒 means a scholar or learned person. It is also the Chinese character for a Confucianist. The word *jurubahasa* means interpreter in modern Malaysian.
Third Space Theory\(^\text{13}\), which argues for re-interpreting the historical relationship between the west and non-western world, will be utilized to examine sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century documents to assess the evolution of the Jurubaças in Macau’s social, economic, and linguistic histories. This literary theory provides new avenues for interpreting the colonial legacy in America, Africa, or Asia.

The Aftermaths of the Tomé Pires Expedition

On the first official Portuguese embassy’s return voyage from Peking, Tomé Pires was imprisoned in Canton. Many scholars think Tomé Pires died in prison in 1524. However, others argue that he continued to live many more years in China and that he even fathered a daughter.\(^\text{14}\) The daughter was named Inês de Leiria.\(^\text{15}\) This account has Tomé Pires living in China’s Jiangsu province as a sexagenarian.\(^\text{16}\) Despite Portuguese intentions, the first embassy to China did not produce amicable Sino-Luso relations. China forbade trade with Portugal and non-Chinese were expelled from Canton.

Despite the ban on having economic relations with foreigners, Chinese merchants in Ningpo in Chekiang and Amoy in Fukien province, whose economic interests conflicted with Peking’s policy, continued to trade with the Portuguese and

\(^\text{13}\) Third Space Theory has it origins in postcolonial discourse. See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 53-56.


\(^\text{15}\) Luis Madureira argues that Salazarist historians who argued for a non-racist view of Portuguese Colonial History compared to other Europeans promoted the later death of Tomé Pires. Luis Madureira, “Tropical Sex Fantasies and the Ambassador’s Other Death: The Difference in Portuguese Colonialism,” *Cultural Critique*, No. 28 (Autumn, 1994), 151.

\(^\text{16}\) Ibid.
other foreigners. The scholar Souza highlights the role of lançados in continuing the Luso-Sino smuggling: “Those members of Portuguese society who were primarily responsible for the expansion of direct commercial contacts with China in the 1530s and the 1540s were the lançados from other Portuguese communities in Asia and who had congregated on the Fukien coast.”

Furthermore, some Portuguese entered the provinces north of Canton in non-Portuguese vessels pretending to be Thai or Malay merchants. Since the livelihood of many southern Chinese depended considerably on trade with the non-Chinese world, officials in Canton were at times lax in enforcing the trade laws and smuggling proliferated throughout the South China Sea.

Prior to the “official” Portuguese settlement of Macau in the 1550s, the Sino-Luso illicit trade seems to have been a cyclical pattern of expulsion and re-establishment of trade: Chinese officials would expel the Portuguese and trading centers would emerge in new locations. The expulsion of Portuguese from the island of Tamão and the emergence of a trade center in Ningpo illustrate the point. This city was the connecting port in Sino-Japanese trade relations. Thus, it was Ningpo and other temporary trade centers in the South China Sea that were instrumental in developing the Lusophone trade along the Malacca-Macau-Nagasaki route.

18 Chang, Sino-Portuguese Trade, 71.
Bibliography

