

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Beyond Sans Rival: French Influence on Philippine Gastronomy

Doreen G. Fernandez

Philippine Studies vol. 39, no. 1 (1991): 104–112

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

Beyond Sans Rival: Exploring the French Influence on Philippine Gastronomy

DOREEN G. FERNANDEZ

Filipino cuisine as we know it today is a multi-layered expression of our culture and history. It has an obvious Malay matrix in the "native" or indigenous foods like *sinigang* and *pinangat* and *pinais*, which bear relationships to food in other Southeast Asian cultures. It has very strong Chinese influences, as we see from everyday food like *lumpia*, *pansit*, and *mami*. The assertive Spanish layer is visible in fiesta food like *lechon*, *relleno*, and *morcon*; and Arab and Indian traces are seen especially in Mindanao. The American layer is manifested in the pies, fried chicken, and sandwiches of today. Is there a French connection, a bridge to French culture, consisting perhaps of *gateau le sans rival*, *petits choux*, *meringue*, and *filet mignon*?

It would seem not, because the sweets came to us as Spanish, through Spain (a recipe in a cookbook prepared by American ladies in Manila in 1922 calls *petits choux* "Spanish Cakes");¹ nor do they constitute a large body or a decisive trend. *Filet mignon* probably came in with American steaks. My hypothesis, however, is that some French influence did come into our lives—indirectly but definitely, and its character can be found in research into the lifestyle rather than the food.

PHILIPPINE TRAVELLERS TO FRANCE

The Frenchmen who travelled or lived here—Paul de la Gironiere, Guillaume Joseph Hyacinthe Jean Baptiste Le Gentil de la Galaisiere, Jean Mallat—commented quite extensively on the food of the natives (*sinigang*, "the aromatic paxio," etc.) but do not tell us if they taught or served their households or friends French cooking.

1. Carlos Quirino, ed., *Culinary Arts in the Tropics circa 1922* (Manila: Regal Publishing Company, 1978), p. 32.

The Filipinos who travelled to Paris, however, absorbed French cuisine, and in some cases wrote about it. A valuable witness here is Felix Roxas, who wrote for the Spanish newspaper *El Debate* in the years 1926–36. He had been Governor of Batangas for a few months in 1901, Judge of the Court of First Instance and of the Court of Appeals, mayor of Manila from 19 September 1905 to 15 January 1917, and was related to the Roxases in the Ayala and Araneta lines, as well as to President Manuel Acuña Roxas. In his newspaper pieces, collected as *The World of Felix Roxas*, he provides evidence that many well-to-do Filipinos travelled to Europe in 1890 to attend the Paris Exposition, the main attraction of which was the famous 300-meter Eiffel Tower; and that in 1899 there lived there “a group of respectable Filipinos composed in the majority of those who emigrated from the Philippines to escape the persecutions brought about by the revolution against Spain in 1896.”²

He writes of Filipinos schooling there, and vacationing in St. Jean de Luz, of the Roxas daughters who had a French governess, of the ladies they visited and wooed, of dances and dinners, and later of parties given for members of the Philippine Commission like Agoncillo, Riego de Dios, Burgos, Rivera. “I had learned,” he said, “to enjoy the inner soul of Paris.” And he quotes Isaac Lacson (later Senator), as saying: “He who has not stayed in Paris has not seen the world and has not lived.”³

He writes about food tasted in Paris homes and restaurants, and of how exquisite and luxurious and fine it was. Although he does not speak of actually transplanting these dishes to Manila, it seems safe to assume that these Filipinos in Paris brought back at least the taste for French food and wine, and perhaps the will to have them in their homes when the ingredients, the skills and the occasions were available to them.

One source, therefore, of the French influence would be the Filipinos who lived in Europe, especially in Paris, for some time. E. Aguilar Cruz points out that Rizal and his companions usually ate in their boarding houses to save money, contributing cash and efforts for parties or banquets, and cooking chicken and *adobo* just as Filipino graduate students abroad do today. It is recorded that he was once sent out to buy champagne, and that he thought it extravagant. Vicente Soto of Cebu, nationalist editor and playwright, was quite a Francophile,

2. *The World of Felix Roxas, Anecdotes and Reminiscences of a Manila Newspaper Columnist 1926–36*, translated by Angel Estrada and Vicente del Carmen (Manila: The Filipiniana Book Guild, 1970), p. 163.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 331.

addicted to restaurants, theater and the Folies Bergere. When he returned home, he is said to have kept a chef, had a menu to announce the dishes as well as the music to be played, and had wine with his meals.⁴

Felix Roxas also mentions food and feasts in the Philippines, especially the fiesta of Sulipan, and his stay at the house of his classmate, Cayetano Arnedo, son of Capitan Joaquin Arnedo, "in a spotless room furnished with a comfortable bed, a European wash-stand, *kananga* toilet water and other colognes," when he was given "new slippers, bed-clothing, perfume, brush, and soap." The dining room, he records, was "extremely luxurious: the dishware, glassware, and silverware were all French; the food was unimaginably exquisite"; the napkins were hand-embroidered, the menus "more select and exquisite . . . than the best Manila restaurants could offer: from the tiny *maya* or rice bird, deliciously seasoned, to the rarest shellfish. The most savory fruits, inimitably perfect ices, and 'syrops' were enjoyed by even the most demanding of guests." And then when the guests left, "a pot full of Sulipeño sweetmeats was placed among their luggage for those members of their guests' families who had not attended the Sulipan festivities."⁵

Gene Gonzalez, Joaquin Arnedo's great-grandson, tells of the chefs of the Arnedo family, Capitan Juan Padilla and Emilio Gonzalez, who were responsible for the inaugural banquet of the First Philippine Republic on 29 September 1898. The famous "Sulipan chefs" cooked the families' banquets, daily meals, and pastries, and some of their recipes are now enshrined in his own restaurants: *Lapu-Lapu al graten*, *Pistou Sulipan*, *Jamon Sulipeña*, *French White Soup*, etc. Although Gene does not remember the family as being wine-drinking, he says that many empty bottles of Mumm's Champagne were found under the house.⁶

Solid evidence of the French-influenced lifestyle is a magnificent set of Sevres tableware (possibly for 300, the family believes, calculating from the remaining pieces), all plates and glasses monogrammed, complete with large platters for *pieces montées* and carafes for wine, gift of the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia—and a set before that, both of which prove that the family not only used European style service, but probably also European style food and wine. Gene further

4. Ambassador Emilio Aguilar Cruz, writer, painter, Francophile and gourmet, various interviews and conversations, 1986–90.

5. *Felix Roxas*, pp. 18–21.

6. Gene Gonzalez, chef and restaurateur, various conversations and interviews, 1988–90.

remembers hearing family tales about the sailors on French ships (Sulipan being a port) teaching the natives from whom they brought produce, how to cook food their way. The Sulipan port and wealth were therefore both entries for the French connection into the native lifestyle.

To return to the food at the Malolos Congress and the inauguration of the First Philippine Republic, this is what was served:

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| HORS D'OEUVRE | |
| HUITRES - CREVETTES ROSES - BEURRE - | |
| RADIS - OLIVES - SAUCISSON DE LYON - | |
| SARDINES AUX TOMATES - SAUMON HOLLANDAIS | |
| COQUILLES DE CRABES | |
| VOL-AU-VENT | a la Financiere |
| ABATIS DE POULET | a la Tagale |
| COTELETTES DE MOUTON | a la Papillote |
| Pommes de Terre Paille | |
| DINDE TRUFFÉE | a la Manilloise |
| FILET | a la Chateaubriand |
| Haricots Verts | |
| JAMBON FROID | |
| Asperges en branche | |
| DESSERT | |
| FROMAGES - FRUITS - CONFITURES | |
| GELÉE DE FRAISES - GLACÉS | |
| VINS | |
| BORDEAUX - SAUTERNE - XEREX - CHAMPAGNE | |
| LIQUEURS | |
| CHARTREUSE - COGNAC | |
| CAFE - THE | |

Although the Abatis de Poulet a la Tagale may well have been a Tagalog *adobong atay at balun-balunan*, and the Coquilles de Crabes a *relyenong alimasag* in the shell, the rest seems almost surely French.

In the years after the revolution, Filipinos who travelled abroad did not usually do so for political reasons, as had the friends and relatives of Felix Roxas. Travel was for the wealthy, and they often travelled with chefs or valets. Martin Tinio, Jr., himself an accomplished cook and a devotee of food and wine, talks of recipes that he or his family prepare for holidays and other special occasions, and which his parents or he himself had first encountered in France. For example, there is a roast chicken from the Pyrenees (stuffed with olives and garlic, charcoal-broiled with rosemary and thyme), and from Les Halles,

glazed oranges with syrup and Cointreau. He points out that the Nakpil family's specialty, stuffed bell peppers served on the tree, represents not a Spanish, but a French verve and style of presentation. He also suggests that the favorite Pescado en Mayonesa of legions of Philippine parties probably started out as a French (perhaps Escoffier-influenced) dish as did the luxurious *relleno* of the Ermita Guerreros, stuffed with Oxford sausage, *pâté de foie gras*, and truffles.⁷

The Guerreros of Ermita have been written about by their famous members, Carmen Guerrero Nakpil and Wilfrido Ma. Guerrero, but anyone who knows them knows that a special family fame lies in the fields of food and drink. Leny Guerrero Joven, whose mother was French, tells of her family's paramount interest in food. Not only did her mother cook French dishes; her brother used to bake elaborate cakes to give to his girlfriends. When she opened a restaurant called Costa Brava in the sixties, one of her centerpieces was an excellent *Bouillabaisse*, and another was *Pollo a la Veronica*, which in French menus is called *Poulet Veronique*. Her mother, moreover, brought her French tastes to Filipino dishes as well, and to the pairing of foods. Her *sinigang sa pinya*, for example, soured with green pineapple and *alibangbang* leaves, came with a *sawsawan* of tomatoes, bagoong, green mango, and onions, and with *inihaw na baboy*. Her *paksiw na banak* made with Paombong vinegar, had a *sawsawan* of *patis*, *chicharron* and *wansoy*.⁸

Martin Tinio indicates still another possible source of French influence: Spanish officialdom, and their own devotion to French as well as Spanish gastronomy. Studying the last will and testament of Governor General Aranda, he found listings such as: seventy-two gold *bandejas*, and silver mustard pots—possible evidence of banquets and a lifestyle beyond the usual Spanish mold.

If the men travelled to sample the foodpots and the fleshpots, the women often travelled to study cooking, since this was one of the few areas of study and accomplishment acceptable for and available to women in pre-feminist times. E. Aguilar (Abe) Cruz observes that in the 1920's women of San Fernando, Pampanga were among those who went to study at the Cordon Bleu in Paris. Doña Luisa Lichauco, the legendary teacher of cooking, is remembered by her pupils and descendants for dishes like *cocido*, *paella*, *ensaimadas* and *baba au rhum*. She studied at the Fannie Farmer School of Cooking in Boston, at a School for Dietetics in the US (in order to cook for her husband, who

7. Martin Tinio, Jr., member of the Imperial family of Albay, and the Tinio family of Nueva Ecija, various conversations and interviews, 1988-90.

8. Elena Guerrero Joven, former restaurateur and teacher of cooking, various conversations and interviews, 1980-90.

had certain ailments), and at the Cordon Bleu, from 1928–29. When she returned, she opened a school in her house, and later in another building, where she offered an eight-month course in cooking.⁹

THE COOKBOOKS

Mariano A. Henson of Angeles, Pampanga, who has written more than thirty publications (e.g. histories and genealogies of Pampanga), also has a cookbook in Pampanga entitled *Cusinang Capampangan, Patina Ding Linutu Nang Ibat Caring Americano, Castila, Frances, Intsik, Italiano, Polaco, Turco, at Aliwa Pa, Nayun Qng Paglasa Nang Sarili* (1968). Each recipe gives exact measurements, the price for each condiment, the total price for each dish, and the date when he tested it. Among the French recipes he obviously cooked and served to his family are: *Salmon au Gratin*, *Chuletas a la Papillote*, *Bouvillavaise* [sic] *de Marsella*, *Oysters a la D'Uxelles*, *Mechadong solomillo a la Francesa*, *Fish au Beurre*, and *Glorified Fondue* (note the mix of languages and spelling).¹⁰

The early cookbooks tell a story of their own. *Condimentos Indigenas*, 1918, was written by Pura Villanueva de Kalaw because she wanted to buy a billiard table for her husband, Teodoro M. Kalaw, who had not only lost his court case for "Aves de Rapiña," but had also had a leg amputated.¹¹ This does not have any recipes even minimally French, a fact that attests to her intention to record indigenous recipes.

Two different cookbooks, however, *Aklat ng Pagluluto, Hinango sa Lalong Bantog at Dakilang Aklat ng Pagluluto sa Gawing Europa at sa Filipinas, na Kapuwa Nasusulat sa Wikang Kastila, at Isinatagalog ng Boong Katiyagaan ni Rosendo Ignacio*, 1919; and *Kusinang Tagalog ng Aklatan at Limbagan ni P. Sayo Balo ni Soriano (Ang Aklat na ito ay naglalaman ng mga sari-sari at maraming Kiyas ng Lutuín sa Lalong Madaling Paraan at Napakatipid na Paggugugol)*, 1916, are obviously from the same source, possibly translations of the very same cookbook, as an examination of the recipes and introductory portions clearly shows.¹² Although Spanish recipes predominate, some possible French influences are

9. Mercedes Lichauco, daughter of Dona Luisa Lichauco, interview, 10 February 1990.

10. Mariano A. Henson, *Cusinang Capampangan* (Angeles, Pampanga copyright 1968). The cookbook is mimeographed, and published by the author.

11. Pura Villanueva de Kalaw, *Condimentos Indigenas* (Manila: Imprenta de E.C. McCullough y Cia., 1918).

12. Rosendo Ignacio, *Aklat ng Pagluluto* (Manila: Imprenta, Libreria at Papeleria ni J. Martinez, 1919); *Kusinang Tagalog* (Manila: Limbagan at mga Aklatan ni P. Sayo Balo ni Soriano, 1916).

visible: *Salsa holandesa*, *Puchero a la francesa*, *Cocido parisien* (French pot-au-feu), *Manitas de ternera en fricase*, *Salchichon de Lyon*, *Queso a la Borjoña*. These few recipes may have been adapted into and already considered part of our Spanish heritage, but the French origins and influences are visible.

There is, however, a French cookbook published in Manila: *Pasteleria at Reposteria Francesa at Española*, *Aclat na Ganap Naglalaman ng Maraming Palacad sa Pag-gaua ng Lahat ng mga Bagay-Bagay na Matamis at mga Pasteles* ni P.R. Macosta; Isinalin sa uicang tagalog ni Crispulo Trinidad, Professor sa Latinidad (1919).¹³ The cover features a tall mounted French piece like those in traditional classic French cookbooks, captioned: *Croquemboucheng caranuian*. The word *croquembouche* (*croque-en-bouche*) designates "all kinds of patisserie which crunches and crumbles in the mouth," like chestnuts, oranges or cream puffs glazed with sugar cooked to the crack stage.¹⁴ The recipe illustrated instructs one in the assembling of *croquignoles* (egg whites and icing sugar baked in various shapes, similar to meringues), and is called "caranuian" (ordinary) in contrast to *Croquembouche a la Reina*, which includes "almendras dulces na dinurog na mabuting mabuti, gagauin itong lalong matigas ng caonti."

Among the other recipes illustrated are elaborate pastry creations like: *Mga trufas* (truffles) *empanadas*, *Pastel na mainit ng faisán* (pheasant) *may casamang trufas*, *Pastel na mainit ng cogujadas* (crested larks) *a las finas hierbas*, *Timbal ng mga pichones* (squabs) *na may trufas*, *Molde para sa mumunting pastel na gelatina na may codornices* (quail), *Turron a la Turca*. Although there are recipes that may conceivably have been cooked, and even become popular locally, like *flan*, and *buñuelos a la española*, most of the recipes are of nineteenth century French pastries and party pieces that have left no contemporary evidence of ever having been current. We do not know, therefore, if anyone ever used this cookbook (many copies were and are probably still available at Libreria Martinez for less than ₱5.00); but they do show an interest in French cuisine strong enough to motivate the translation and printing of a cookbook.

A famous and well-used cookbook is *Everyday Cookery for the Home* by Sofia R. de Veyra and Ma. Paz Zamora Mascuñana (1930, in English and Spanish).¹⁵ It was published in the American period, when

13. P.R. Macosta, *Pasteleria at Reposteria Francesa at Española* (Manila: Limbagan ni J. Martinez, 1919).

14. Prosper Montagne, *Larousse Gastronomique* (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1961), p. 324.

15. S. R. Veyra and M.P.Z. Mascuñana, *Everyday Cookery for the Home* (Manila: The Philippine Education Co., 1930).

housewives were eager to learn new recipes aside from "our own cooking" (which meant Filipino and Spanish), and new techniques of home economics and nutrition. Here we find a dominance of American recipes (sandwiches, punch, waffles, muffins), but some whiffs of France: *Potatoe Galletes*, *Sopa "comptesse," Sopa "creme Clamart," Homard a la Newberg*, *salmon al gratin*, *Filet de veau viennoise*, *relleno para el petit chous*.

Nowhere in sight, by the way, is *gateau le sans rival*. This *torte* of meringue-nut and butter-cream layers is today very much present in bakeshops and housewives' repertoires, and along with *petits choux* (more often pronounced and spelled *pitisu*), constitutes what is locally considered the French influence in Fil-Hispanic cuisine.

THE FRENCH INFLUENCE

In conclusion then, French dishes and cooking styles came into the country through Filipinos living and travelling abroad, Filipinas studying in European cooking schools, French men and women marrying and/or living in the Philippines, and more recently French restaurants, menus, chefs, and books on cooking and wine. No French dishes can be said to have become part of, adapted and indigenized into, our cuisine, as have Spanish *paella*, *morcon*, *relleno*, *puchero*; and Chinese *lumpia*, *siomai*, *camaron rebozado*; and American hamburgers, hot dogs and sandwiches.

It seems that, as E. Aguilar Cruz has said, "French influence is to be found in the high regard for everything French in food and drink among Filipinos of a certain cultural level. They indulge their taste for French food and drink in restaurants. Their own pantries are not equipped to cater to their preferences for such items."

In other words, the French influence is not on our cooking, our dishes, or our daily bread, but on gastronomy—the art or science of good eating, the aspiration to or passion for epicurism. French has become the standard, and anyone seriously interested in good food strives to learn about, experience, and imbibe French cuisine. In the sixties came the first local French restaurant, *Au Bon Vivant*. Abe Cruz says that there was a *Restaurant de Paris* near the *Ideal Theater* early in the century, but he doubts if it was really focused on French food. But *Au Bon Vivant* was, and so were later restaurants and dining rooms in the five-star hotels.

Although Filipinos learned to drink wine in the Spanish colonial period, this was usually *vino tinto*, *rioja*, *jerez*; and among the brands that became familiar were *Diamante* and *Valdepeñas*. Abe Cruz points

out that this was drunk throughout the meal, or during a tertulia with little sweetmeats, rather like the way beer is drunk today, and not as the French drink wine, pointedly pairing the white with the fish, the red with the meat for reasons of appropriateness. Today, however, many epicures and would-be gourmets have learned to drink wine by studying or travelling abroad, by reading and tasting, and some even keep wine cellars. There are societies and associations like the *Chaine des Rotisseurs*, the Wine Society, the Cheese Society. There are articles in the papers on wine-tasting. The arrival of Beaujolais *nouveau* is awaited and heralded.

The French connection, therefore, does not run in our veins, as the Spanish and Chinese connections do. We did not absorb it and make it ours. Perhaps it did not fit in with our Malay tastebuds; or did not stay long enough to be adapted and adopted. It lives, however, in standards aspired for—in the ideal, so to speak. And the French ideal remains and grows. Today every food-lover wants to be called a gourmet, even while the real gourmets (and there are Filipino gourmets) humbly call themselves learners or Francophiles, acknowledging that they love, but have a lot to learn about French cuisine.

Today French food is served by housewives, by caterers, and of course by the young chefs (male and female) trained in the hotels and in culinary institutes abroad. Today our French-speaking President serves French meals as well as Filipino meals in Malacañang; and our gastronomic vocabulary extends far beyond *petits choux* and *sans rival*.