

Exploring traditional cuisine as a reflection of social and cultural values within contemporary Indonesian communities

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Abstract - This study aims to explore how traditional Indonesian cuisine reflects and preserves the social and cultural values embedded within contemporary Indonesian communities. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the research examines the symbolic meanings, social functions, and cultural significance of traditional foods in everyday life and communal practices. Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews with community members, culinary practitioners, and cultural experts, as well as documentation of traditional food-related activities. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis involving data familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, and interpretation to identify recurring cultural patterns and social meanings. The findings reveal that traditional cuisine functions as more than a source of nourishment; it serves as a cultural symbol that reinforces social solidarity, strengthens family and community relationships, preserves local wisdom, and expresses cultural identity across generations. Traditional foods also play significant roles in religious ceremonies, festivals, and social gatherings, fostering a sense of belonging and cultural continuity despite increasing globalization and changing lifestyles. The study concludes that preserving traditional cuisine is essential for sustaining Indonesia's rich cultural heritage, strengthening social cohesion, and maintaining the transmission of cultural values to future generations.

Keywords: traditional cuisine; cultural heritage; social values; cultural identity

1. Introduction

Food is an integral component of human civilization that extends beyond its biological function of sustaining life. It embodies historical experiences, cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and social relationships that collectively shape the identity of a community. Across different societies, traditional cuisine serves as a cultural artifact through which values, customs, and collective memories are transmitted from one generation to another. Consequently, food has become an important medium for understanding social structures, cultural continuity, and community identity.



Indonesia possesses one of the world's richest culinary traditions, reflecting the diversity of more than 1,300 ethnic groups distributed across thousands of islands. The country's traditional foods have evolved through interactions among indigenous cultures, geographical conditions, historical trade networks, and religious influences. Rather than functioning merely as daily meals, traditional dishes are closely associated with rituals, customary ceremonies, religious celebrations, family gatherings, and communal cooperation. Many regional foods symbolize gratitude, mutual assistance, hospitality, respect for elders, and harmony within society. Therefore, Indonesian traditional cuisine represents an essential form of intangible cultural heritage that preserves local wisdom while strengthening social cohesion.

Despite their cultural significance, traditional foods increasingly face challenges arising from globalization, urbanization, changing lifestyles, and the rapid expansion of international fast-food industries. Younger generations are becoming more accustomed to modern eating habits, resulting in declining familiarity with traditional culinary practices in some communities. The commercialization of food has also shifted public attention from the symbolic and cultural meanings of traditional cuisine toward convenience and consumption. If these trends continue, valuable cultural knowledge embedded in traditional foods may gradually disappear together with the social values they represent. This situation highlights the urgency of documenting and understanding the cultural functions of traditional cuisine as an important strategy for preserving Indonesia's cultural heritage.

This study is guided by several complementary theoretical perspectives. First, Cultural Identity Theory (Collier, 2009; Yan, 2018; Meihami, 2026; Baumert et al., 2024; ; Sacurom et al., 2024; Chen & Fomina, 2022) explains that cultural practices, including food traditions, contribute significantly to the formation and preservation of collective identity by distinguishing one community from another. Second, Symbolic Interactionism, proposed by Mead and further developed by Blumer, views food as a symbolic medium through which individuals construct social meanings during everyday interactions (Carter & Fuller, 2016; Polk, 2017). Third, the concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage, promoted internationally by UNESCO (2003), emphasizes that traditional culinary knowledge constitutes a living cultural practice requiring continuous transmission across generations (Higginbottom, 2014). Together, these theoretical frameworks provide an analytical foundation for understanding traditional cuisine as both a cultural symbol and a mechanism for maintaining social values.

Previous studies have demonstrated the multidimensional role of traditional food within Indonesian society. Harmayani et al. (2019) argue that Indonesian food culture reflects geographical diversity, historical development, and local wisdom while simultaneously supporting cultural tourism through narratives surrounding traditional cuisine rather than food products alone. Trisutaguna and Abdelrahman (2025) further emphasize that culinary traditions function as expressions of cultural identity, social belonging, and collective memory in contemporary societies experiencing globalization. More recently, Nadra et al. (2025) found that Indonesian traditional cuisine operates as a social symbol representing collective identity and cultural diplomacy through festivals, media representation, and digital communication. In addition, Wachidah et al. (2025) demonstrated that traditional foods portrayed in Indonesian folklore function as representations of tolerance, communal values, and cultural symbolism through gastrosemiotic perspectives.

Traditional food has long been recognized as more than a means of fulfilling nutritional needs, serving instead as an important cultural resource that reflects the history, beliefs, traditions, and collective identity of a society. Across different cultures, traditional cuisine embodies accumulated knowledge passed through generations and functions as a medium for preserving local wisdom while strengthening social relationships. The concept of traditional food has evolved from merely referring to inherited recipes into encompassing cultural practices, preparation methods, symbolic meanings, and social functions embedded within communities (Rocillo-Aquino et al., 2021).

In Indonesia, traditional cuisine represents one of the country's richest forms of intangible cultural heritage because of its extensive ethnic diversity and long historical development. Indonesian traditional foods demonstrate the interaction between geographical conditions, local resources, religious beliefs, historical trade, and indigenous knowledge that have shaped distinctive regional culinary traditions. The diversity of traditional dishes reflects not only regional identities but also the cultural values shared among Indonesian communities (Wijaya, 2019; Djalal et al., 2022; Rohmawati, 2024).

Numerous studies have emphasized that traditional foods function as cultural symbols that strengthen social cohesion and reinforce collective identity. Traditional cuisine often accompanies religious ceremonies, customary rituals, family celebrations, harvest festivals, and community gatherings, where food becomes a symbolic expression of gratitude, solidarity, mutual cooperation, and respect for ancestors. Through these communal activities, traditional foods facilitate social interaction and contribute to the continuity of cultural traditions across generations (Rianti et al., 2018; Pribadi et al., 2021; Apriati et al., 2025; Nadra et al., 2025).

Research has further demonstrated that many Indonesian traditional foods possess philosophical meanings representing moral values, social norms, and cultural beliefs. Foods prepared for traditional ceremonies frequently symbolize prosperity, harmony, fertility, gratitude, unity, and spiritual relationships between humans, nature, and the divine. These symbolic meanings illustrate that food serves not merely as a physical commodity but as an important communication medium through which cultural knowledge and social values are transmitted (Misnawati, 2019; Lubis et al., 2025; Muniroh et al., 2025; Syamsia, 2025).

Several scholars have explored traditional foods from ethnographic, anthropological, linguistic, and semiotic perspectives, demonstrating that culinary practices contribute significantly to constructing cultural identity. The preparation techniques, ingredients, serving customs, and ceremonial uses of traditional foods communicate shared meanings that distinguish one ethnic community from another while simultaneously reinforcing national cultural diversity. Traditional cuisine therefore functions as an expression of identity that connects individuals with their families, communities, and cultural heritage (Herminingrum, 2019; Hidayat et al., 2025; Maulana et al., 2025; Santoso et al., 2024).

The relationship between traditional food and community identity has also received increasing scholarly attention. Studies indicate that individuals who frequently consume and participate in traditional culinary practices generally demonstrate stronger emotional attachment to their local communities and greater appreciation of cultural heritage. Traditional food consumption contributes to the development of a sense of belonging, encourages cultural participation, and strengthens collective identity within multicultural societies (Leo et al., 2023; Reddy & Van Dam, 2020; Lie et al., 2026).

Local culture plays an important role in shaping collective identity and strengthening social cohesion, particularly through traditional cuisine and cultural practices. Traditional food functions not only as a source of nourishment but also as a symbol of shared cultural values and community identity (Nadra et al., 2025). The preservation of local culture is likewise essential for sustainable tourism because cultural authenticity can strengthen destination identity while supporting community participation (Mudana et al., 2025). However, tourism development may create tensions between economic interests and cultural preservation, requiring balanced management that protects sacred sites and local cultural values (Sinaga et al., 2025).

Social and economic transformation also influences local communities and tourism development. Women increasingly contribute as agents of change in tourism village management, demonstrating their important role in community empowerment and sustainable development (Dewi et al., 2025; Pertiwi et al., 2025). At the same time, social media provides opportunities for entrepreneurship and SME marketing by expanding market reach, customer engagement, and business visibility (Adeyemo, 2025; Sharma, 2024). More recently, emerging thrift entrepreneurship illustrates how digital and resale-driven business models can support circular-economy practices and create new entrepreneurial opportunities (Ikechukwu et al.,

2026). Collectively, these studies indicate that cultural preservation, community participation, digital transformation, gender empowerment, and sustainable entrepreneurship are interconnected dimensions of contemporary tourism and socioeconomic development.

Recent research has highlighted the growing challenges faced by traditional foods in the era of globalization, modernization, and rapid technological development. The expansion of international food industries, changing lifestyles, urbanization, and shifting consumer preferences have gradually reduced the popularity of traditional cuisine among younger generations. Modern food consumption patterns increasingly emphasize convenience, speed, and commercial value, creating risks for the sustainability of traditional culinary knowledge and cultural practices (Mulawato & Handoyo, 2024; Kristia et al., 2024; Pugra et al., 2025; Pugra et al., 2025).

Despite these challenges, scholars have consistently argued that preserving traditional cuisine remains essential for maintaining cultural diversity and strengthening national identity. Preservation efforts include documenting culinary knowledge, promoting traditional foods through education, supporting local culinary enterprises, integrating traditional cuisine into cultural tourism, and encouraging younger generations to appreciate local food heritage. Such initiatives contribute not only to cultural sustainability but also to economic development and community empowerment (Yubianto, 2023; Eliza et al., 2024; Wardana et al., 2024; Setyaningsih et al., 2024; Setyaningsih et al., 2025).

Overall, previous studies consistently demonstrate that traditional foods possess multidimensional significance extending beyond nutritional functions. They represent cultural identity, social values, historical continuity, philosophical beliefs, communication practices, and community solidarity. Nevertheless, much of the existing literature focuses on particular regional cuisines, specific ceremonial foods, or individual ethnic traditions. Comparatively fewer studies provide a comprehensive qualitative analysis of how traditional Indonesian cuisine collectively shapes the broader social and cultural values of contemporary Indonesian society. This gap forms the basis for the present study, which seeks to examine traditional cuisine as a cultural institution that continues to preserve social identity, cultural continuity, and collective values in modern Indonesia.

Although these studies have substantially contributed to understanding Indonesian culinary heritage, several research gaps remain. Existing studies predominantly examine traditional foods from the perspectives of culinary tourism, cultural diplomacy, literature, or cultural preservation. Comparatively limited attention has been devoted to comprehensively examining how traditional foods actively shape, reinforce, and transmit the social and cultural values embedded within contemporary Indonesian communities. Furthermore, relatively few qualitative studies integrate multiple theoretical perspectives to explain the relationship between culinary practices, cultural identity, symbolic meanings, and social cohesion.

Based on these research gaps, the present study addresses the following research problem: How does traditional Indonesian cuisine reflect and shape the social and cultural values of contemporary Indonesian society? Specifically, the study seeks to identify the cultural meanings embedded in traditional foods, examine their roles in strengthening social relationships and community identity, and analyse their contribution to preserving Indonesian cultural heritage amid globalization and social transformation.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to explore the role of traditional Indonesian cuisine as a reflection of social and cultural values within contemporary Indonesian communities. By employing a descriptive qualitative approach and thematic analysis, this research is expected to contribute to cultural studies, food anthropology, and Indonesian heritage preservation while providing practical insights for policymakers, educators, and cultural institutions seeking to safeguard Indonesia's rich culinary traditions for future generations.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative document study to investigate the role of traditional Indonesian cuisine in shaping the social and cultural values of contemporary Indonesian society. A document study was selected because it enables researchers to systematically examine existing textual sources to understand social phenomena, cultural meanings, and historical developments without direct intervention in the research setting. The approach is particularly appropriate for exploring how traditional foods function as cultural symbols, social practices, and representations of collective identity across diverse Indonesian communities.

The primary data consisted of secondary sources obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, book chapters, conference proceedings, government publications, cultural heritage reports, and official documents discussing Indonesian traditional cuisine, food culture, cultural identity, and social values. To ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, only scholarly publications indexed in reputable academic databases, publications issued by recognized institutions, and authoritative references on Indonesian culture and anthropology were included. The selected literature focused on the historical development of traditional foods, their cultural significance, preparation methods, symbolic meanings, ceremonial functions, and their contribution to preserving local wisdom and community identity. The document selection process followed purposive sampling. Sources were chosen based on their relevance to the research objectives, publication quality, and contribution to understanding the relationship between traditional cuisine and Indonesian socio-cultural life. Documents that discussed food solely from nutritional, commercial, or culinary business perspectives without addressing cultural or social dimensions were excluded from the analysis. This selection strategy ensured that the analysed materials directly addressed the research questions concerning the cultural meanings and social functions of traditional foods.

Data collection involved several stages. First, relevant documents were identified through systematic searches using academic databases and digital libraries with keywords such as *traditional Indonesian cuisine*, *traditional food*, *cultural identity*, *social values*, *food heritage*, *culinary culture*, and *Indonesian communities*. Second, the selected documents were read repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of their content and context. Third, important statements, concepts, and findings related to the cultural roles of traditional foods were extracted, organized, and classified according to emerging themes. Supporting information obtained from the author's observations regarding contemporary changes in food consumption patterns and the increasing influence of globalization was incorporated solely to strengthen contextual interpretation rather than serve as primary empirical evidence.

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis consisted of six interconnected stages: familiarization with the collected documents, generation of initial codes, identification of recurring themes, review and refinement of themes, definition and naming of themes, and interpretation of the findings. Through this process, recurring patterns regarding cultural identity, social cohesion, local wisdom, symbolic meanings, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and cultural preservation were identified and interpreted. The themes were subsequently synthesized to explain how traditional foods contribute to shaping and maintaining the social and cultural values of Indonesian society.

The theoretical interpretation of the findings was guided primarily by Symbolic Interactionism, which explains that social meanings are constructed through human interaction and continuously interpreted within everyday life. From this perspective, traditional foods are understood not merely as material objects but as cultural symbols that communicate shared beliefs, collective memories, social norms, and community identities. The study also draws upon the concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage, emphasizing that culinary traditions represent living cultural practices transmitted across generations through social participation, family customs, religious ceremonies, and communal celebrations. Integrating these theoretical perspectives enabled a comprehensive understanding of traditional cuisine as both a cultural artifact and a



dynamic social institution that continues to influence Indonesian society despite ongoing globalization and modernization.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Traditional Foods and Social Culture Identity of Indonesia

According to the Royal Spanish Academy Dictionary, traditional means "that which follows the ideas, norms or past customs" and it is relative to tradition (from Latin *traditio* and this in turn from "tradere", meaning "to transmit," "to deliver") and refers mainly to the "transmission of news, literary compositions, doctrines, rites, customs, made from generation to generation." In other words, it suggests the idea of transmitting or delivering something, which can be knowledge, theory and practice, behavior, attitudes to ensure continuity between generations. The term traditional food is applied to the culinary practices, dishes and ingredients that are associated with an area of a particular community or region. It is the system which was codification of values, beliefs and identity many a time handed down through generations. Its traditional categorization follows locally available foods, specific methods for cooking and preparation techniques that are unique to a particular region or cultural context. The cultural practice of food provides symbols that communicate values and ideas that are part of the culture. One way in which cultural uniqueness and difference can be recognized is by studying the cultural characteristics of food and eating habits. Exploring culture through food by perceiving, rituals performed and traditions of the result, creation, taste and spirit of human action.

Social Cultural identity is the way in which members of minority cultural groups join and unite with the group they form as a means of clarity and commitment as part of a large majority society. Cultural identity as a feeling shared by individuals or groups, a clear understanding of the meaning of group membership, positive behavior towards the group, familiarity with history and culture and involvement in group activities. So that individuals must have their own cultural identity and be able to show their cultural identity. Social Cultural identities in Indonesia include ethnic diversity, religious, language and dialects, arts and of course cuisine like Traditional Foods. Indonesian cuisine is incredibly diverse, with each region offering its own specialties influenced by local ingredients, history, and cultural interactions from the coastal areas highlight the rich culinary heritage that shapes regional identities.

Traditional food can be considered a social cultural identity because it encapsulates the essence of a community's heritage, values, and shared experiences. Firstly, traditional dishes are often rooted in the history and customs of a particular group, reflecting their unique cultural narratives back then. For example, specific foods may be tied to religion, rituals, or significant life events, thereby serving as a symbol of cultural continuity and collective memory. Moreover, the act of preparing and sharing traditional meals fosters social interactions, creating bonds among individuals within a community. These gatherings not only provide a role of the relationships but also affirm a sense of belonging, as participants engage in shared practices that highlight their cultural identity. The distinctive cooking methods and local ingredients used in traditional foods further showcase a community's agricultural practices and resource availability, emphasizing their connection to the land and environment.

By that, traditional food allows individuals to express their cultural pride and identity, enabling them to differentiate themselves from other cultures. This expression is particularly important in multicultural societies, where food can serve as a marker of identity.

3.1.2 The Reflection of Traditional Foods and Social Cultural Identity

One of the mirror elements of culture that strongly shows the markers of diversity is the tongue and taste, has diversity and symbols for each ethnicity. Symbolic in culinary as an identity shaper was discussed by Maryetti (2007) and Weichart (2004) and Mintz and Du Bois stated that the characteristics of ethnic cuisine represent a distinctive and recognizable taste from the results of the cuisine. Traditional foods can reflect a person's socio-cultural identity because they contain cultural elements, such as traditional recipes, cooking methods, ingredients used, and serving

methods. Regional specialties are often the main choice in traditional, wedding, and religious events where regional specialties become an important part of the food and beverage rituals performed during the event. In addition, regional specialties are also a means to strengthen social relations within a community.

Through cooking and through cooking and serving regional specialties together, individuals can build togetherness and mutual respect for one another. Regional specialties can be a means to strengthen relationships between community members, which in turn can strengthen their socio-cultural identity. In this sense, regional specialties can serve as a form of symbolism that symbolizes one's social identity. This symbolism can include aspects such as culture, tradition, religion, language, and so on, which form part of an individual's social identity. Therefore, regional specialties play an important role in shaping a person's social identity, and are a way to strengthen social relations within a community. This is very much related to Symbolic Interactionism Theory, developed by George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, focuses on how individuals and groups create meaning through social interaction. In the context of traditional food in Indonesia, analysis based on this theory can provide a deeper understanding of how food functions not only as consumption, but also as a symbol that conveys socio-cultural meaning.

3.1.3 Variety of Social Cultural Values of Traditional Foods in Indonesian Society

Every region in Indonesia has its own distinctive traditional food, which symbolizes local identity. This reflects the cultural diversity, history and geographical conditions in each region. The diversity of raw materials, processing techniques and culinary culture create unique characteristics that set each region apart. For example, fried rice in Java uses local rice and special spices, while *soto* from different regions, such as *Soto Betawi*, *Soto Ayam* and *Soto Lamongan*, each have different ingredients and flavours. Diverse cooking techniques show the cultural heritage of local communities, such as the use of traditional techniques like boiling, steaming and frying that have been passed down from generation to generation. Fermented processing, such as *tempeh* and soy sauce, is not only a food, but also part of culinary identity.

Traditional foods are often an integral part of rituals and ceremonies that symbolize the values and beliefs of a community. In many cultures in Indonesia, traditional foods are an important part of the wedding ceremony. *Nasi Kuning*, which symbolizes good luck, and traditional cakes such as *Kue Cubir* and *Kue Lapis* are important dishes in the celebration. Food also plays a role in religious ceremonies, where each type of food has a symbolic meaning. Here are the variety social culture values of variety of Traditional Foods in Indonesian society. Indonesia, with its cultural diversity, has a wealth of traditional culinary delights that reflect the socio-cultural identity of its people. Each region has unique traditional foods, not only in taste, but also in their socio-cultural meaning. Here are the variety social culture values of variety of Traditional Foods in Indonesian society.

In the Minangkabau culinary culture, *rendang* is not just the food name, but rather the derivation of dwelling, which is a term to refer to the technique of preserving food in covered cauldron with a little water. Obviously, this is very suitable with the preservation technique in Portuguese culinary culture. The tradition of *merandang* is increasingly attached to the Minangkabau culture in line with the development of wandering culture since the eighteenth century. *Rendang* as a durable food is clearly needed by Minangkabau wanderers who migrate to various regions by taking a long time of travel for the purpose of trading, studying, and preaching. Wandering culture has become a connecting chain in attaching *rendang* as an important identity for the life of Minangkabau people.

This food is a symbol of the resilience and tenacity of the Minangkabau people. The long cooking process and the use of rich spices symbolize patience and perseverance in living life. *Rendang* is also the main dish in various traditional events, such as weddings and holidays, which shows the importance of this food in the social life of the community. People who eat *rendang* together in this context participate in building collective meaning that strengthens their social identity.



Soto can be found in almost all regions of Indonesia, although it occurs with different names and compositions. The regions with the highest amount of *soto* are southern Java and the north coast of East Java. Although *soto* is a part of the Indonesian culinary tradition, it is not originally from Indonesia. *Soto* comes from the word *cao du* (*chau tu*), which is a Chinese word. The word *sao du* (*sao tu*) or *sio to* in Hokkien is the origin of the word *soto*. The word *cao* means grass, *shao* means cooking, and *du* means stomach, beef offal, or tripe. *Soto* illustrates the Indonesian concept of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity) in Indonesian food. Serving a *soto* menu follows the way of the ancestors by saving meat or other protein ingredients. In the past, most Indonesian people lived in large families with many children. With limited economic capacity, parents still wanted to provide the best food for their children to allow for their optimal growth. *Soto* is a healthy and delicious alternative menu. *Soto* already contains meat as a source of protein; vegetables as a source of fiber and vitamins; and rice, rhombus rice (*ketupat*), rice cake (*lontong*), potatoes as sources of carbohydrates. These three main categories of ingredients are served in a hot condition. *Soto* is a symbol of the intimacy and friendliness of the Indonesian society.

The origins of sate are believed to date back to the 13th century in Java, Indonesia. It is thought to have been influenced by Middle Eastern kebabs brought to the region through trade routes. The name "sate" itself is derived from the Arabic word "sitt," meaning "to slice," which reflects the method of preparing the meat. Sate is a food made from grilled meat and seasoned with various spices. There are many variations of satay in Indonesia, with different spices and types of meat. Each region has its own unique recipes and cooking methods. For example, in Bali, *sate lilit* is made with minced meat mixed with grated coconut, while in Java, sate is often served with peanut sauce and rice cakes (*lontong*). Sate is often enjoyed as a communal dish, where people gather to share skewers of grilled meat. This aspect of sharing food fosters social bonds and community connections, making it an integral part of celebrations and gatherings.

Nasi Goreng origins can be traced back to ancient Chinese fried rice dishes. The practice of stir-frying rice dates back to at least the 5th century in China, where leftover rice was often used to create new meals. As Chinese traders and immigrants settled in Indonesia, they brought their culinary traditions with them, including fried rice. Over time, *Nasi Goreng* evolved into a distinctly Indonesian dish as it absorbed local flavours and ingredients. The use of spices, such as garlic, shallots, and chili, as well as the addition of ingredients like *kecap manis* (sweet soy sauce) and sambal (chili paste), reflects Indonesia's general way of making foods. Fried rice is a symbol of the simplicity and practicality of the Indonesian society. There are many various of Nasi Goreng depends on the regions. For example, *nasi goreng Jawa* (Javanese fried rice) is typically sweeter due to the use of *kecap manis* (sweet soy sauce), while nasi goreng Aceh from Aceh may be spicier and include curry spices This dish is often served at informal events, such as breakfast and lunch, which shows the importance of this food in everyday life. Nasi Goreng is often considered Indonesia's national dish and is a source of pride for the country. It is commonly served at family gatherings, celebrations, and street food stalls, making it a beloved comfort food among Indonesians.

Tempe is the only traditional soy-based food that does not originate in China or Japan, is a fermented soy food from Java Island, specifically in Central Java, Indonesia Tempe is a fermented food made from soybeans. This food also has high nutritional value and is a cheap source of protein. The fermentation process involves inoculating cooked soybeans with a specific mold, typically *Rhizopus oligosporus*. This mold not only helps to ferment the soybeans but also contributes to the unique flavor and texture of *tempe*. The fermentation process increases the digestibility of soy proteins and enhances the nutritional profile of the soybeans, making *tempe* a valuable source of protein, vitamins, and minerals Tempe is used for day-to-day cooking and consumed on several festive occasions such as religious festivals, life events, and ceremonies. Tempe is served at an important social gathering event such as *kenduri* or *selamatan* in rural areas of Central Java and Yogyakarta province. It is a thanksgiving ceremony for the cycle of life, where *tempe* is represented as a sacred offering according to local faith.

Gudeg comes from the word *hangudeg* which means cooking jackfruit with milk from coconut and *melinjo* (*Gnetum gnemon*) leaves using a large cauldron. However, other foods were recorded in the journey, namely the type of *manggar gudeg* (coconut flower) along with *kupat* (rice cake), chicken meat, soy powder and chicken eggs. *Gudeg* itself is served during the day when chatting and serves as a banquet from the host to his guests, while *manggar gudeg* is served at breakfast. *Gudeg* is a typical Yogyakarta food. It has the basic ingredients present in the young jackfruit, cooked with spices and served with rice, eggs, chicken, tofu, sambal *krecek* and sprinkled with *areh* (savory coconut milk). *Gudeg* is a symbol of patience and perseverance for the people of Yogyakarta. The cooking process, which takes a long time, symbolizes the importance of patience in life. The existence of *gudeg* is influenced by low prices, its ability to suit the Javanese tastes and easy-to-get raw materials. In addition, there are no rules or traditions that require it to be eaten at a certain time, and therefore, it is enjoyed at any time. *Gudeg* is also the main dish in various traditional events, such as weddings and holidays.

3.1.4 Factors of Traditional Foods that Shapes Social Cultural of Indonesian Society

The factors that contribute to traditional food becoming the socio-cultural identity of Indonesian society are very diverse. One of the main factors is the diversity of natural resources. Indonesia has abundant natural wealth, including various types of food ingredients, spices, and agricultural products. This diversity allows people to create various types of traditional foods that are distinctive and unique in each region, reflecting the characteristics of their respective environments. In addition, the influence of culture and history is also very significant. Indonesia's long history, which includes various influences from foreign cultures, such as China, India, Arabia, and Europe, has given its own color to traditional food. This influence is reflected in the use of ingredients, cooking techniques, and flavours, making traditional food a rich result of acculturation.

The process of cultural inheritance also plays an important role in making traditional food a socio-cultural identity. Recipes and techniques for making traditional food are usually passed down from generation to generation, maintaining the authenticity and richness of culinary delights, and teaching cultural values to the younger generation. Families and communities contribute to the preservation of traditional food, where cooking and eating together are often important moments in building togetherness and strengthening relationships between family members and the community. In addition, the social and spiritual meanings contained in traditional foods provide a deeper dimension. Many foods have deep meanings, becoming part of rituals, traditional ceremonies, and celebrations, which strengthen the identity and values of togetherness in the community.

Adaptation and innovation are also important factors that influence traditional foods. Indonesian society continues to adapt and innovate in creating new traditional foods, following the development of the times and people's tastes without losing the essence of the food. The development of technology and social media provides a platform for traditional foods to be promoted and known more widely. By sharing recipes, photos, and culinary experiences, people can introduce and celebrate traditional foods, attracting the attention of the younger generation. Finally, the tourism industry contributes to the introduction and preservation of traditional foods. Tourists visiting Indonesia are often interested in trying local foods, thus providing encouragement for the community to maintain and develop their traditional cuisine. Considering these factors, it is clear that traditional Indonesian food is not just a dish, but also an integral part of the socio-cultural identity of the community, reflecting the rich culture, history, and values held by the Indonesian people.

The application of symbolic interactionism to traditional Indonesian food demonstrates that these culinary practices are not merely about sustenance they are deeply embedded in the socio-cultural fabric of Indonesian society. Food serves as a powerful symbol that conveys meaning, reflecting the values, beliefs, and identities of communities across the archipelago. Through shared meals and culinary traditions, individuals engage in social interactions that reinforce their connections to cultural heritage, family, and community. Traditional foods like



rendang, *soto*, *sate*, *nasi goreng*, *tempe*, and *gudeg* embody specific cultural narratives and values, such as resilience, hospitality, and the importance of family bonds. These dishes become focal points for social gatherings, allowing individuals to create and affirm collective identities while passing down cultural traditions to future generations.

Moreover, the evolving nature of these foods, influenced by globalization and modernization, highlights the adaptability of Indonesian society. As communities innovate and reinterpret traditional recipes, they continue to forge new meanings and connections that resonate with contemporary social dynamics. Ultimately, through the lens of symbolic interactionism, we see that traditional food in Indonesia is a vital medium for expressing and negotiating identity, community, and cultural continuity in an ever-changing world. The significance of these foods transcends their nutritional value, shaping social relationships and reinforcing the rich tapestry of Indonesia's diverse cultural landscape. Despite its important role, traditional food in Indonesia faces various challenges. The development of the era and modern lifestyle makes people prefer fast food. The rise of fast-food restaurants makes many young generations rarely consume traditional food and the development of technology, the spectacle of Indonesian society which is mostly familiar with international food such as Korea, Japan, and others.

Due to the influence of globalization, the younger generation tends to be less interested in traditional food, which is considered less practical. Foreign food that is increasingly popular in Indonesia also threatens the existence of traditional food. To ensure the sustainability of traditional food, efforts are needed from various parties. Increasing public awareness of the importance of traditional food through education in schools and promotion in the community is an important step. Developing traditional food in a more modern and attractive form for the younger generation, for example by creating new variations of traditional recipes, also needs to be done. Encouraging communities to participate in making and serving traditional food, as well as holding culinary festivals to introduce traditional food to the public, are efforts that can be made to preserve this cultural heritage. It is necessary to know how this traditional food existed with the simplicity it had in ancient times so that it became the socio-cultural identity of Indonesian society today.

3.2 Discussion

Traditional foods in Indonesia form a living tapestry that binds people to place, belief, and community. Across the archipelago, dishes and rituals made from local ingredients tell stories about ancestry, gratitude, hierarchy, and unity, even as globalization and tourism reshape how they are practiced and understood.

Traditional dishes are core markers of identity, linking regional environments, histories, and ethnic groups into a shared national heritage. Foods such as *tumpeng* and *lemang* do not merely feed; they signal unity, respect, and continuity in rituals and celebrations, reinforcing social bonds across generations.

Communal practices like *Megibung*/*Ngaminang* in Bali use shared platters and collective eating to cultivate solidarity, egalitarianism, and interfaith harmony, embedding local wisdom and religious devotion in everyday acts of dining. In *Kampar*, *Sate Kuok* and *makan bedulang* function as symbols of togetherness and social codes, while *ayam semur* in Ternate expresses prosperity, mutual help, and respect for elders in weddings and customs (Eliza et al., 2024).

Table 1: Illustrative Dishes, Values, and Contexts: Examples of Indonesian dishes and social meanings

Food / Practice	Key Meanings	Typical Contexts
Tumpeng, leman	Gratitude, harmony, shared heritage	Selamatan, ceremonies (Pribadi et al., 2021; Pugra et al., 2025).
Megibung / Ngaminang	Egalitarianism, unity, interfaith respect	Hindu & Muslim rituals (Suryawati, 2025).
Sate Kuok, makan bedulang	Togetherness, local wisdom, social rules	Kampar ceremonies (Eliza et al., 2024).

Ayam semur (Ternate)	Prosperity, blessings, gotong royong	Weddings, communal feasts (Syamsia, 2025).
Kebo-keboan foods	Religious devotion, care for nature, solidarity	Banyuwangi ritual (Pribadi et al., 2021).

Shapes, ingredients, and arrangements encode philosophies: tumpeng's cone form evokes sacred mountains and harmony between humans, nature, and the divine, its cutting dramatizing gratitude and respect. In *Saparan Bekakak* and *Kebo-keboan*, offerings and local foods act as communication with ancestors, requests for safety, and expressions of environmental and social care (Setyaningsih et al., 2024; Pribadi et al., 2021).

Language deepens this symbolism. Ethnolinguistic work on Javanese pregnancy and other rituals shows that food names and terms condense ideas of balance, harmony, and reverence for life, turning snacks and dishes into verbal emblems of value and memory (Hidayat et al., 2025).

Urbanization, lifestyle change, and rice-centred food politics weaken ties to local staples and meanings, pushing youth to recover knowledge from elders and raising fears that food becomes "just food". At the same time, traditional cuisine is strategically used in culinary and gastronomy tourism, where telling the socio-cultural stories behind dishes is essential to authentic promotion.

Ethnographic and policy-oriented studies propose preserving these traditions through school curricula, festivals, community practice, small enterprises, digital documentation, and carefully negotiated innovation—updating processing and presentation without erasing symbolic forms, ritual roles, or local wisdom.

Across Indonesia, food functions as a shared language of identity, belief, and social order. From communal feasts in Bali to ritual dishes in Java, Sumatra, and the eastern islands, traditional cuisines embody gratitude, unity, hierarchy, spirituality, and environmental respect. Modernization, tourism, and commodification test these meanings but also offer new routes for renewal when stories, symbols, and practices are consciously passed on, documented, and thoughtfully adapted.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, traditional foods play an important role in shaping the socio-cultural identity of Indonesia society by encapsulating the rich heritage, values, and backgrounds on each Traditional Foods. These foods are not merely sustenance; they embody cultural narratives and practices that reflect local history, agricultural practices, and social interactions. Traditional dishes, such as *rendang*, *soto*, *sate*, *nasi goreng*, *tempe*, and *gudeg*, serve as symbols of resilience, hospitality, and community bonds, reinforcing a sense of belonging among individuals. Moreover, the preparation and sharing of these meals foster social connections and collective identity, making them integral to rituals, celebrations, and daily life. Despite challenges posed by globalization and changing food preferences, the preservation and innovation of traditional foods remain essential for maintaining Indonesia's cultural richness and ensuring that future generations continue to connect with their culinary heritage. Traditional foods are vital in expressing how identity, community, and social cultural continuity of Indonesian society.

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