

Cuisine as Cultural Identity of Palembang Residents

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ABSTRACT

Diverse ethnicity in Palembang has existed since the era of Sriwijaya unity to the Palembang Sultanate and continued until today. The existence of this ethnic originated from the trade that occurred between Palembang residents and foreign traders. One of the local-wisdom forms in Palembang is its cuisine. There are many kinds of Palembang cuisine such as *manan sahmin*, *lupis*, *wajik*, *kare kambing*, *nasi minyak*, *bubur asyuro*, *pempek*, etc. From this various cuisine, it can be served as the identity of the Palembang residents. This cuisine also holds the philosophical meanings both from social and religious perspectives. This research aimed to find out that cuisine can be used as a cultural identity in Palembang and to find out the philosophies of Palembang cuisine from social and religious perspectives. The research method used was descriptive qualitative research method, with data collection techniques using interviews, observation and documentation. Based on the data analysis, cuisine can be categorized as a cultural identity if the main tools and ingredients for making the dish originate from its locality and the spices used are based on recipes that have been passed down from generation to generation, so that the cuisine has its own taste.

Keywords: *Local culture, Cuisine, Philosophy, Palembang residence.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Local wisdom comes from things that are good and have been believed and carried out by the residents in an area by regeneration. Local wisdom can be a characteristic that is recognized by the local residents. Local wisdom is a description of the cultural identity of the area which is used as a livelihood for the local community [1].

Local wisdom is also often combined with the same lifestyle patterns as environmental preservation. Therefore, local wisdom can describe residents habits or local characteristics [2].

Local wisdom that is carried out from generation to generation certainly requires a flexible nature and always changes with time and development in order to be accepted by every generation. Local wisdom can be related to the local culture that becomes its characteristic, such as the city of Palembang with its cultural wealth. Thus, local wisdom in general is a number of rules practiced in a community that is trusted faithfully and becomes a guide in everyday life [3].

Based on its own definition, local wisdom is a tradition or knowledge which belongs to certain societies that can produce creativity adapted to the local geographical conditions by using the existing tradition or knowledge which passed on [4]. Local wisdom is formed as an advantage of the local culture of the residents according to the existing geographical conditions, but every local culture has its own values contained therein [4].

Local culture from Palembang is often found in the form of native culture and acculturation resulting from outside cultures, such as Malay and Arabic [5]. Palembang, with its abundant cultural treasures including traditional cuisine, still maintains its culinary existence as a cultural identity and local wisdom. The food is meaningful, purposive, valueable, and varied. The variety of food in Palembang is also influenced by foreign nations such as Arabs, Indians, Chinese and Malays, whose arrival brought traditions or customs, one of which is the cuisine [6]. The tradition of the cuisine is also used and adapted by the Palembang locals depending on the food availability and the tastes of the Palembang locals.

The culinary tradition that forms the basis of local food is a part of local wisdom in the form of a picture

showing people's lives that are able to create an identity that collaborates and represents socio-cultural patterns in conceptualizing food and social functions of food [7]. Cuisine is related to individual creativity, discipline and assessment of the results obtained [8]. Then that traditional food embedded in their production areas combine with culture properties [9].

From a historical perspective, culinary developments have had a long journey. The food industry was started even in prehistoric times [10], starting from the era of the food gathering when humans collected and took food directly from nature. With the advancement of the humans' mindset, the food producing era was created which is when humans began to produce their food by farming and raising livestock. Up to now, culinary sector has developed as humans' creative process so that food variations are formed in each region forming a local cultural heritage in the form of traditional cuisine.

The initial foundation of culinary culture was based on the gradual changes to cooking, beginning with the first humans, then the hunting and gathering period. The ability to use fire, develop agriculture and livestock, control changes in a controlled manner and ultimately globalization and the internet [11]. Cooking is defined as a unique endeavor that forms its core one's cultural identity. Culinary systems around the world undergo changes over a period of time with well structured, related backgrounds the interaction of various socio-cultural factors including geographic, climatic and genetic influences [12].

Culinary tourism is currently one of the main attractions for one to visit an area. Visits made by outsiders will be an opportunity for local residents or people who want to preserve culture to introduce the local wisdom from a culinary perspective. Culinary tours are also interpreted as deep experiences so that they can provide knowledge about how to appreciate and be able to preserve branded traditional dish [13]. The culinary arts show itself as an interesting example of the complex art of mixing ingredients and spices. Individual cultures have unique concepts for the use of ingredients, spices, cooking methods and their combinations in making recipes. Cultural differences value diverse views on food [14].

As written by Kartika and Harahap, regarding the development of Palembang's Pempek culinary as gastronomic tourism, their study discussed about local cuisine being used as a gastronomic educational tour that introduces the taste and new insights from pempek producers in Palembang [15]. The preservation of Palembang cuisine, especially pempek as its traditional dish, can also be introduced in the era of the industrial revolution 4.0, with adjustment to the current era. The introduction of this traditional cuisine can also be assisted by the use of local languages which are the distinction for the Palembang area, thereby increasing the culinary attractiveness of this [16].

The introduction of Palembang's local wisdom culture will be presented slightly different in this paper. Where in this paper, researchers do not only discuss pempek as a Palembang traditional cuisine which is widely known by people outside Palembang, but also highlight various kinds of Palembang Lamo (Old-school) culinary specialties, such as Apem Banyu/Bekuwa, Bubur Asyuro, Ragit, Kare Kambing, Nasi Minyak, Wajik, Maksuba and so on, which are the identity of Palembang's local wisdom, as well. This paper will also put forward the philosophies of Palembang Lamo tradisional food, which of course contains each own meaning.

The discussion about how cuisine as a cultural identity is indeed not a new thing. For example in an article written by Utami, it explained how cuisine can embody a cultural identity in cross-cultural communication [17]. Furthermore, Rahman, explained about the formation of national cuisine from Indonesian independence day to the time when first Indonesian national cookbook Mustika Rasa was published in 1967 [18].

The discussion in both articles is about cuisine as the identity of a residents. However, those articles have not specifically presented cuisine as a society identity in certain narrower locations. Therefore, this article will present a specific locality of cuisine, which is in Palembang society so that the discussion in this article is more specific and the values observed can also be focused and deeper.

Based on the explanation discussed above, the researchers prepared two problem formulations, namely (1) How can cuisine be used as a socio-cultural identity in local wisdom in Palembang? and (2) What is the meaning of Palembang's culinary philosophy seeing from a social and religious perspectives?

2. METHOD

Researchers in this paper used descriptive qualitative research method. Qualitative descriptive is a writing method that describes all signs or conditions in the field, either in oral form or in written form (script) as a whole [19].

In accordance with the method used, researchers used data collection techniques by means of interviews, observation and documentation. Interviews were conducted with major figures in Palembang such as culturalists and cultural observers of Palembang [20]. In addition, researchers also carried out observational activities in tracing Palembang's cuisine whether or not they still develop in Palembang and then for the final stage, the researchers carried out documentation in every interview and observation activity. The significance of this research is to describe the information so that it can add to the readers' insight in

the future. The objectives of the study are to find out how cuisine can serve as cultural identity in Palembang and to find out how the philosophies of Palembang cuisine are, from the social and religious perspectives.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Socio-Cultural Identity of Palembang Residents

Palembang is a city that has a diverse society culture. The diversity of culture is evidenced by the existence of ethnic communities in Palembang City, such as Chinese, Arabic, Indian and indigenous residents. Previously, the ethnic presence in Palembang existed during the Sriwijaya unity era. The factor influencing the presence of those ethnics in Palembang was due to trade. Many foreign merchant ships stopped at the port of Sriwijaya at that time, such as China, Arabia and India [21]. The existence of these ethnic groups in Palembang continues to this day, as evidenced by the existence of special settlements for non-indigenous people, namely Arabs and Chinese.

The amalgamation process of certain ethnicities increasingly influences the diet, causing the crossing and piling of different foods. process of migration, travel, and communication. Continuously recording the identity of the increasingly changing local food, with the activation of the appeal of the process of change and interpretation that continues to shape and redefine the beginning of identity before food changes [22].

The division of settlements for non-indigenous people took place during the Palembang Sultanate era. As for the division for ethnic Arabs, they were given settlements in the Ulu-an and Seberang Ulu mainland areas. As for the ethnic Chinese settlements, Kapitan settlements were formed on the sides of the Musi River. The placement of ethnic Chinese on the sides of the Musi River was due to the fear of the Sultan of Palembang at that time against the dominating Chinese in Palembang who would fight against the government of the Palembang Sultanate, so that during the Sultanate of Palembang the urban land area was only occupied by the sultans and the indigenous residents [23].

The presence of foreign ethnicities that came to Palembang certainly brought a culture that was inherent in them. The culture brought could be in the form of language, religious teachings, habits, and even culinary processing.

This culinary process mostly creates acculturation, especially those in Palembang residents. However, despite the acculturation of culinary process, the residents in Palembang still use raw materials and spices that suit the tastes of the local residents in order not to eliminate the peculiarities of culinary processing in Palembang itself. This fact is in line with the definition which states that ethnic food is food originating from a heritage and culture of an ethnic group that uses its knowledge of local plant and/or animal ingredients [24].

Traditional cuisine, as generally known, is a food that has been cultured in an area so that it becomes its own characteristic for that area. Culinary as a cultural heritage that serves as a link for existing cultural communication [25]. This cuisine is very closely related to local wisdom. Local wisdom is all forms of understanding and literacy of customs and habits in a certain environment [26]. Local wisdom also arises as a result of a process of internalization of reasoning values that continuously inherit from generation to generation [27].

Local wisdom in terms of Palembang culinary acculturation that we know today is *Martabak Har*, *Kare Kambing*, *Malbi*, *Nasi Minyak* and *Pempek* which are famous for their Chinese influence in introducing them. Cuisine such as *Martabak Har*, *Kare Kare Kambing*, *Malbi*, and *Nasi Minyak* are the acculturation of Arabic culture, however the raw materials for food processing use Palembang spices. Then, the cuisine *pempek* is famous for its Chinese influence in introducing this food. It is said that the use of the name *pempek* at this time occurred because of the ancient Palembang people's habit of calling a *pempek* seller named Apek from the Chinese ethnic group (Source: South Sumatra Culturalist Vebri Al-Lintani). *Pempek* used to be called *kelesan*, but because of this habit, eventually the name *kelesan* changed to *pempek*.

There are many kinds of Palembang cuisine. It can be seen from the presentation, the environment, or the adaptation from foreign nations. In this case, Palembang cuisine is not only food that is needed for consumption, but it has its own philosophical meaning from the food given. The philosophy of Palembang food has a lot to do with the social and religious life of the Palembang residents.

Cuisine is often said to be the identity of a culture. Social identity is defined as the relationship between components that exist in the local scope [28]. Food consumed by the residents in an area can confirm their identity, depending on the state of the natural resources

in the environment where the person lives [29] A cuisine or food consumed can explain the origin and culture of who the person is. Because cuisine itself is an intermediary to explain who that person is. Culinary existed, because of the needs of humans at that time, so that it took advantage of existing natural resources [30].

Food habits are used as the behavior of a series of cultures regarding food standards expressed by people who grow up in an environment of cultural traditions. This eating habit can be shown as the rules that people use in using food, from how to choose, obtain and trade, to anyone before serving, processing or eating it. This rule comes from several factors that shape, including natural resources (environment, land, water), a belief, an ethnic group, and the technology used [31].

Food is determined on the basis of basic rules based on foods with a more dominant culture, and the environment in the culture reflects their history. This is what makes the culinary center [32]. Predicting food choice is a complex step with personal, religious, economic, educational, and ethnic factors, all of which are ultimately reflects one's cultural education [33].

Cuisine or food can be said to be an identity if the raw materials for making the food are only found in the area [34]. Liu, explains that food culture can motivate visitors to come to the area so that local people can show the authenticity of the area through food [35].



Figure 1. Interviewing Mr. Rm. Alihanafi/ Mang Amien

Palembang cuisine can also be used as a socio-cultural identity because the process or stage of making the cuisine uses the main ingredients or main spices that come from the area so that it has its own taste [36]. This is also in line with what is said by Palembang cultural observer, Mr. Yudhi Syarofie, who stated that cuisine has a big relationship with the economic conditions of the residents's food and clothing in

certain areas, which makes these people process existing food ingredients into delicious food.

Palembang cuisine which is very famous for its specialty is the culinary *pempek*. *Pempek* in Palembang is a traditional cuisine example that adapts to the conditions of natural resources in Palembang, which are abundant fish and sago palms. The abundance of sago trees in Palembang has been recorded in the *Talang Tuo* inscription during the Sriwijaya Kedatuan era. The *Talang Tuo* inscription states that at that time the residents had already known about food made from mixed sago and fish, besides that the *Talang Tuo* inscription was found in a location where there were sago trees among the *Areceae* plants (*palem-paleman*) and bamboo trees [37].

Based on its development, Palembang cuisine has its own serving function in the Palembang *lamo* era. There are even some cuisine that used to exist but are now very difficult to find and even no longer exist like the *ketolo* cake cuisine. The researchers themselves in the process of finding sources made observations to several places where the typical Palembang *lamo* cuisine was sold, and indeed there are still several cake shops that provide Palembang *lamo* cake such as the *Sera-sera* cake shop in 7 Ulu selling various cakes such as *kue enggak medok*, *gunjing*, *skrikaya*, *ragit*, *laksan* and so on. Likewise the *Haji Madinah* cake shop in *Pasar Kuto Palembang* (market) area which provides a variety of similar cakes, but at the *Haji Madinah* shop, more cakes are provided and all cakes are served on the table including whole cakes (slices) such as *maksuba*, *kue lapis*, *kue lapan jam*, and other small cakes such as, *dadar jiwo*, *enggak ketan*, *enggak medok*, *wajik*, *gunjing*, *srikaya*, *gegodo*, *kumbu kacang*, *pempek*, and so on. Then, *Harum* cake shop on *Jalan Merdeka Palembang* in front of the 26 Ilir market which provides Palembang culinary food in the form of a snack box dish, so the packaging seems more modern. The cakes provided in this shop are *manan sahmin*, *kue kojo*, *enggak medok*, *enggak ketan* and so on.

The cuisine served in each shop provides a variety of Palembang specialties and the way the cake is served is unique, especially at the *Hajj Medina* shop. At each long table in the shop, there is a long line of food on the table, which is a variety of culinary foods on the table.

The presentation at the *Hajj Madinah* shop is also a local wisdom in Palembang. This local wisdom is an adaptation of local wisdom from *Bolu Sebatang* tradition at wedding dishes, but was previously served

on the floor of a house covered with cloth, while now it is served on a long table.



Figure 2. Dish Presentation at Haji Madina Cake Shop

3.2. Palembang Cuisine Based on the Meaning of Social and Religious Philosophy

Palembang traditional cuisine is actually not only used as daily food in Palembang people's households. Palembang cuisine is also consumed at certain events such as religious events, *tahlinan* events, or weddings [38]. This culinary food has its own philosophical meaning based on the process of making it or the use of the food at the events that are held. The meaning contained in typical Palembang cuisine has a lot to do with social and religious values. The social aspects of residents are complex and unique so that there are many things that need to be resolved [39]. Social value in a community has its own function, namely as environmental maintenance, the relationship between residents and the environment, cultural value inheritance, and as recreation [40].

3.2.1. Bubur Palembang (Palembang porridge)

Palembang porridge or known as *Bubur Asyuro* is a typical Palembang porridge served at the ceremony to welcome 10th Muharam, which is usually consumed on the day of the *Asyuro* month ceremony. This 10th Muharam night is highly trusted by the people of Palembang for its kindness, so people are encouraged to give alms to this 10th Muharam. Therefore, most people in ancient times distributed *bubur asyuro*. The distribution of *bubur asyuro* has been going on for about 30 years by the people of Palembang. Until now, the distribution of *bubur asyuro* is still carried out by several people in Palembang.

The distribution of *bubur asyuro* itself is a form of hereditary habit carried out by the Palembang residents as a form of joy and gratitude for the month of Ashuro. *Bubur asyuro* has its own philosophical meaning in establishing social relationships, meaning that *bubur*

asyuro has high social value because considering that in the past the process of making porridge required a lot of people. Apart from having a social meaning, *bubur asyuro* also has religious significance because this traditional food is a means of religious ceremonies carried out by the residents (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Project for the Preservation and Development of Traditions and Beliefs, 2004)



Figure 3. Bubur Asyuro

3.2.2. Apem Banyu/Bekuwa

Apem Banyu is one of the snacks for Palembang people which has high cultural value, both religiously and socially. Socially, these foods are eaten together and facing the dish that has been served. Meanwhile, in religious understanding, this food is usually eaten during the seventh day ritual *tahlilan* (commemoration of the death of a family member on the seventh day).

This food is believed to be food for prayer and for alms for family members passing away. The function of this food is believed to be able to help the spirits of the deceased to avoid hellfire [41]. In ancient times, *apem banyu* was the main snack for *tahlilan* food which was always served by lower-class residents during the seventh day, while for the middle and upper class residents, they usually served rice-based meals with side dishes as the main snack while *apem banyu* was used as the appetizer (Ministry of Culture and Tourism Project for Preservation and Development of Traditions and Beliefs, 2004).



Figure 4. Apem Banyu/Bekuwa

3.2.3. Ragit

Ragit is a typical Palembang cuisine which has a similar look to *Roti Canai* from India. The difference is that the *ragit* has a mesh shape. The main ingredient for making *Ragit* is wheat flour. *Ragit* is usually served in traditional and religious ceremonies in Palembang such as marriage ceremonies and child shaving. *Ragit* itself is consumed after the prayer for the host or the bride and groom. The *ragit* is served with sauce, which is a yellow curry. *Ragit* is usually served during *tahlinan / tadarus (Beratib)* events at weddings and marriage proposal ceremonies [42].



Figure 5. Interviewing Mrs. Izzah Zen Syukri

This food, according to the beliefs of Palembang people, has existed from their ancestors, meaning that this *ragit* has been in the city of Palembang for a very long time, namely since the arrival of the Arabs. In *ragit*, there are good values seen from the ingredients, the cooking process, the consumption, the tools and whenever the food is served. These values include economic values, social values and cultural values. *Ragit* contains economic value; at the time of manufacture, for example, although to entertain guests in a large number of invited guests, *ragit* was made by oneself. This is more economical and the taste of *ragit* is also better. *Ragit* contains social value because *ragit* is served to welcome guests at the house of the event held without paying expenses. Apart from these two values, namely economic and social values, *ragit* also contains cultural values. This has been proven by the people of Palembang, namely by preserving their special cuisine through food used in religious ceremonies.



Figure 6. Ragit

3.2.4. Kare Kambing (Goat Curry)

Kare Kambing is Palembang's culinary delicacy which is often found in religious and traditional occasions. This dish is generally served in the context of carrying out a religious ceremony, marriage ceremony, circumcision, naming / cutting baby hair, and others. Curry is served as a complement to rice, both white rice and *samin* rice.



Figure 7. Kare Kambing

3.2.5. Nasi Minyak

Nasi Minyak is a typical Palembang food which is categorized as a special food. This food will only appear if there is a certain celebration such as a party ceremony and religious ceremonies and traditional ceremonies. It is even said that in the past, *nasi minyak* was often eaten by the Sultan when he finished Friday prayers at the time of the celebration. As the name implies, the ingredients of making *nasi minyak* are rice mixed with ghee. Palembang's typical oil rice is served with separate pieces of meat and other side dishes that can be adjusted according to taste.



Figure 8. Nasi Minyak

4. CONCLUSION

Based on data analysis of this research, cuisine can be said as cultural identity if the main tools and raw materials for making the cuisine originate from the area concerned and the spices used are based on recipes that

have been passed down from generation to generation so that the cuisine has its own taste. The cuisine in Palembang has their own philosophical values which are taken from social, economic and religious perspectives.

In this study, researchers only discussed some typical Palembang foods from social and religious perspectives. Meanwhile, in Palembang itself, there is actually Palembang *Lamo* food, which is currently not found much anymore and some are not found anymore at all.

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