**JAVANESE AND BASHU CUISINE: UNCOVERING THE UNIQUENESS OF TWO CULINARY HERITAGES AND THE GASTRONOMIC POTENTIAL OF SALATIGA CITY**

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**Abstract**

Food plays a significant role in a nation's cultural aspects and identity. This has made culinary experiences a primary focus of tourism. As a result, gaining recognition as a gastronomy city by UNESCO has become a desired goal for many cities, including Indonesia. This research aims to provide a clear depiction of how a gastronomy city should be manifested by comparing Chengdu's flavours and culinary characteristics. This comparative method is conducted through a literature review of various articles and journals. The findings reveal that Salatiga can meet the criteria of a gastronomy city by highlighting its unique and appealing Javanese culinary features. Despite having many differences in taste, ingredient usage, and techniques compared to Bashu cuisine, collaboration with the government, cooperation among culinary industry stakeholders, training programs, and the fusion of local traditions with new customs can generate fresh ideas in the culinary world while preserving existing characteristics. Consequently, Indonesian culinary wisdom can gain global recognition and reach an international level.

***Keywords:*** *culinary; java; bashu; gastronomy; identity; cultural diplomacy*

**INTRODUCTION**

Indonesia is an archipelagic country rich in cultural heritage and boasts a variety of delicious and captivating traditional cuisines. One is Javanese cuisine, which plays a significant role in Indonesia's culinary heritage. This is due to the substantial influence of Javanese cuisine on the taste preferences of the Indonesian people, as approximately 60% of the population resides in Java and Madura Islands, not to mention the presence of Javanese communities in other regions of Indonesia (Sutardjo, 2021). Furthermore, many foreign tourists are becoming acquainted with the diverse Indonesian culinary offerings, with some even introducing these flavours to their home countries. On the other hand, the Bashu region encompassing Sichuan and Chengdu offers a wealth of culinary delights that tantalize the taste buds. To be more precise, these dishes are known for being quite spicy and oily, which can leave one's taste buds dancing with excitement.

Although food may appear trivial, it plays a crucial role in all aspects of human life, including culture. Food can be seen as a crossroads separating and connecting one community to another. For example, Chinese cuisine is now recognized worldwide. Based on a review of culinary literature, it is evident that cultural communication is taking place under the influence of globalization. This process represents a dialogue between the cultural identities of various communities, resulting in a multicultural identity (Utami, 2018). A French gastronomist and epicurean named Brillat-Savarin also stated, "Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are" in his work "The Physiology of Taste." This statement suggests that not only norms, arts, and language define a nation's identity, but food also plays a significant role (Priyogo, 2015).

In China, traditional food is a cultural element that significantly influences their way of life and habits. Traditional food also serves as a symbol for cities, such as Sichuan, which is renowned for its Sichuan pepper. Even more so, traditional food is critical to the development of urban culture in the region (Shen et al., 2022). This phenomenon is not unique to China, as culinary traditions worldwide are deeply intertwined with local customs. For instance, dishes like "nian gao" are closely associated with Chinese New Year celebrations, and "ketupat" is always linked with the Eid al-Fitr festival. Each food carries specific meanings and hopes, even becoming a sacred symbol (Christianto, Venus, & Putri, 2023).

"Get Fed in China, Get Delicacy in Chengdu." From this statement, it is evident that Chengdu is the culinary heart of China. They not only have famous places like Kuanzhai Street, Jinli, or restaurants with ancient Shu style, but also inexpensive, simple, and delicious street food that provides a clear picture of the true culinary essence of Chengdu (Dai et al., 2021). Therefore, it's no surprise that Chengdu has gained recognition worldwide as a gastronomic city.

Global attention to cuisine as a potential commodity in the creative industry is on the rise in the 21st century. This has increased competition for UNESCO recognition as a "city of gastronomy." Currently, five cities hold this title: Östersund in Sweden, Popayán in Colombia, Zahlé in Lebanon, Jeonju in South Korea, and Chengdu in China. Indonesia also deserves recognition as a gastronomy city due to its distinctive use of spices and abundant and unique culinary offerings. A city like Chengdu is designated as a gastronomy city undoubtedly due to its impressive culinary characteristics (Achiel, 2022).

Javanese cuisine is still predominantly characterized by traditional dishes. While there are occasional creations like red velvet bakpia, mozzarella martabak, and others, these innovations haven't overshadowed the traditional recipes passed down through generations. This makes the comparison between Javanese and Bashu cuisine intriguing, as each region has distinct characteristics, including cooking techniques and ingredients. These distinctions reflect the preferences and cultures of the respective areas.

**METHODS**

This research uses a comparative method by collecting information from relevant sources such as scholarly journals, books, online articles, and more. The data obtained is then analyzed to gain a deeper understanding of the culinary diversity of Indonesia and China and to explore the potential of Salatiga as a gastronomic city by comparing it with Chengdu, a recognised gastronomic city. This approach and maximizing local potential through preserving and developing a culture with a touch of creativity will also drive Indonesian culinary wisdom to the international level.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

***Characteristics of Javanese Cuisine***

The flavours of Javanese cuisine typically lean towards sweet and savoury, but some regions have distinctive spicy and umami tastes. For instance, in East Java, particularly in the Surabaya area, the cuisine is known for its salty and quite spicy flavours. East Javanese dishes often use ingredients like shrimp paste (terasi) and fermented shrimp paste (petis) to create a unique taste. Food in East Java is prepared using various methods such as frying, steaming, grilling, and wrapping in banana leaves (pepes). Examples of quintessential East Javanese dishes include rujak cingur, tahu campur, lodho ayam, and tahu tek (Hasanah, 2021).

The ancestral heritage of the Surakarta and Yogyakarta palaces and Chinese and Dutch influences have influenced Central Javanese cuisine. The food from Central Java is characterized by its relatively milder, less spicy, and somewhat sweet flavours. This is partly due to the forced cultivation of sugarcane during the Dutch colonial era and the presence of many sugar mills at the time. Chinese culinary influences are more pronounced in the northern coastal regions of Java, particularly around Semarang, due to the historical docking of Chinese ships (Gardjito et al., 2018). Common ingredients in Central Javanese dishes include garlic, coconut milk, and palm sugar, making the cuisine appealing to various tastes and featuring unique characteristics (Hasanah, 2021).

***Characteristics of Bashu Cuisine***

The distinctive feature of Bashu cuisine is its incredibly strong spiciness. The term "spicy" might not be entirely accurate because the hallmark ingredient in every Bashu dish is Sichuan pepper, which imparts a unique tingling sensation to the tongue. Indonesia also has a similar ingredient, called Andaliman pepper, but it produces a warm feel in the mouth with slight numbing, making it quite different from Sichuan pepper.

Sichuan cuisine boasts a multitude of flavour combinations characterized by a dominant profile of spiciness, numbing sensations, and heat. Other taste elements like sweetness, bitterness, and saltiness complement these. Sichuan cuisine is highly aromatic due to the extensive use of distinctive spices, such as Sichuan pepper, dried and fresh chilli peppers, ginger, garlic, and shallots (Fajriana, 2018).

One of the most well-known Sichuan dishes is "mapo tofu." As the name suggests, this silky tofu dish is seasoned with various ingredients, including doubanjiang (a Chinese chilli paste), green onions, garlic, and chilli powder. It can also be prepared with minced meat according to personal preference. Additionally, there's the famous Chongqing-style hotpot. This hotpot is known for its unique broth with a highly spicy flavour, achieved using doubanjiang and Sichuan pepper as crucial ingredients. There's also "sui zhu," a cooking method involving briefly boiling seasoned meat with doubanjiang, chilli, star anise, and Sichuan pepper. Despite the boiling, the meat remains tender as the process takes only 20-30 seconds. Lastly, a rather unique dish called "liang fen" translates to "broken-hearted noodles." It's named so because it can leave someone feeling as if their heart is broken due to its extreme spiciness (Putri, 2020).

***Javanese and Bashu Cuisine: A Comparison***

Javanese and Bashu cuisines share similarities, primarily influenced by their unique local cultures and ingredients. For example, lumpia, a distinctive dish from Semarang, Central Java, was influenced by Chinese culture. Initially introduced by Chinese immigrants, the word evolved as a fusion of Chinese and Javanese culinary traditions, with unique characteristics from each culture. This highlights how cultures can blend and unite, combining their distinct features.

Although there isn't direct evidence of Javanese cuisine being influenced by Sichuan and Chongqing, both Javanese and Bashu cuisines are shaped by local culture and regional ingredients. Javanese cuisine tends to lean towards sweetness, while Bashu cuisine is known for using Sichuan pepper (López-Alt, 2016).

However, there are significant differences between the two cuisines. Ingredients, cooking methods, and flavours differ. Javanese cuisine primarily uses palm sugar, tempeh, ginger, lemongrass, turmeric, galangal, bay leaves, and chicken. In contrast, Bashu cuisine often includes pork, mushrooms, sesame oil, soy sauce, doubanjiang, and Sichuan pepper.

Javanese cuisine is prepared using techniques such as boiling, simmering, deep-frying, grilling, and wrapping in banana leaves (pepes). Fermentation processes are also standard, as seen in the production of tempeh and tofu. Bashu cuisine is characterized by high-temperature cooking methods, commonly using a wok for stir-frying, deep-frying, and steaming. It's known for quick and efficient cooking processes.

Regarding flavour profiles, Javanese cuisine tends to be sweet, savoury, and sometimes slightly salty. Ingredients like palm sugar, coconut milk, sweet soy sauce, and shrimp paste contribute to these flavours. In contrast, Bashu cuisine is renowned for its "mala" flavour, which combines spiciness with numbing sensations, achieved through Sichuan pepper and various Sichuan spices (Sinha, 2023).

Javanese and Bashu cuisines have made their marks on the global culinary stage. Javanese cuisine has influenced countries, particularly those with a Dutch and Japanese colonialism history. Meanwhile, Bashu cuisine has achieved worldwide recognition, becoming a daily staple for many non-Chinese people.

In today's rapidly changing world, Javanese and Bashu cuisines face challenges maintaining their presence amidst the prevalence of fast food from the West. Modern society often favours fast and convenient culinary styles. Therefore, both cuisines need to adapt and blend their unique characteristics with the preferences of contemporary consumers (McDougall, 2021).

***Gastronomy and the Nomination of Salatiga as a Creative City of Gastronomy***

In essence, gastronomy originates from two Greek words: "gastros," meaning stomach, and "gnomos," meaning knowledge. This implies that gastronomy generally understands consuming food and beverages by appreciating them as beautiful works of art (Putra, 2021). Gastronomy also relates to local culture and how geographical location influences the local wisdom of communities in preparing their cuisine.

Beyond appreciating food as an art form, gastronomy evaluates how dishes are integrated into society, cultivated, and used as part of a lifestyle or in traditional ceremonies, such as offerings. Therefore, gastronomy is essential to study as it delves into the intricacies of culinary arts.

Recently, Salatiga City was nominated as a Creative City of Gastronomy by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy and was proposed for UNESCO recognition. Although "gastronomy" may sound foreign, it is not significantly different from the title "Culinary City." Not only Salatiga but also several cities boast a high-quality culinary scene. For instance, Medan is renowned for its durian, Yogyakarta offers a rich culinary heritage, and Padang features countless roadside eateries (Setyorini, 2021).

Salatiga is considered a strong contender for the title of a gastronomy city in Indonesia due to its strategic location, situated between three major cities: Surakarta, Semarang, and Yogyakarta. Salatiga has long been a melting pot for various ethnic groups, often showcasing culinary creations influenced by diverse cultures. This cultural diversity reinforces the potential for the development of existing recipes. Unsurprisingly, during the Dutch colonial era, Salatiga was dubbed "Salatiga Dea Schoonnste Staad Van Midden Jawa," the most beautiful city in Central Java (Rohman, 2020).

To realize its potential as a gastronomy city, Salatiga must make careful preparations, including improving the quality of education, infrastructure, healthcare services, and ecosystem readiness. These preparations have been progressing rapidly because, from the beginning, Salatiga has had creative entrepreneurs. This initial foundation paved the way for Salatiga to become a globally recognized gastronomy city (Setyorini, 2021).

**CONCLUSION**

This research shows that Chinese culture has had a significant influence, yet Javanese cuisine has retained its unique identity. Each region has distinctive characteristics, such as the numbing sensation in Bashu cuisine and the sweet-savoury profile of Javanese cuisine. There are notable differences in preparation, flavours, and ingredient usage. However, some similarities can be found in Javanese cuisine, such as lumpia, a fusion of Chinese-Javanese culinary traditions.

In gastronomy, efforts are needed to promote Javanese cuisine to enhance interest in Indonesian cuisine as a creative tourism industry. This can be achieved by providing training for culinary professionals, supported by government initiatives. Exploring remote regions to uncover lesser-known culinary delights is also crucial, potentially through culinary festivals in local villages or tourism initiatives. International collaboration is essential for accessing global markets and introducing Indonesian culture through its culinary heritage.

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