



## **HISTORIOGRAPHY OF INDONESIAN CULINARY: TRACING TRAILS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY THROUGH THE HISTORY OF FOOD**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Indonesia's cultural heritage, especially its food traditions, needs more thorough documentation, making it hard to learn about the culture and national identity through cuisine. This often leads to cuisine being seen as just food, ignoring its deeper cultural and philosophical meanings. This study uses a historical approach to address this gap in understanding Indonesian culinary history. Various sources like photos, videos, documents, newspapers, and magazines are used as primary sources in this research. The research finds many historical cookbooks from colonial times to after Indonesia gained independence, each with unique features. These cookbooks reflect the cultural context of their time. Recognizing cuisine as a dynamic part of national identity, evolving over time and across regions, is crucial in establishing a national cuisine. This requires a deep dive into culinary history and an understanding of the role of Indonesian culinary historiography in shaping the nation's food culture.*

**Keywords:** *culinary, food, historiography, identity, Indonesia*

## INTRODUCTION

Cultural identity is demonstrated as a condition in which everyone can accept and appreciate differences and local wisdom and acknowledge the right to diversity. Those with a strong cultural identity can embrace cultural diversity and are willing to engage with other cultures without forsaking their own.<sup>1</sup> Indonesian nations with diverse cultures can embrace and engage with external cultures without eradicating their cultural characteristics.

Cultural contact between Indonesia and foreign nations has occurred for centuries, for instance, acculturation with India, China, and Europe, which has been ongoing since the early centuries AD.<sup>2</sup> This process of cultural contact or acculturation takes place without abandoning the local genius elements of each nation. Cuisine becomes one of the products of this cultural contact process.<sup>3</sup> In sociocultural studies, cuisine is not only 'food.' Food choices and eating habits are now conceived as related to sociability and social bonding, the construction of collective identities beneath which lie logics of social distinction and the organization of life in society.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, food has become recognized as an expression of identity and culture and has emerged as one of the popular aspects of cultural tourism.

Indonesian spices have played a vital role in shaping the culture and identity of the nation. Indonesia's society interacted with people from the West, East Asia, and the Middle East, who voyaged in pursuit of spice trade.<sup>5</sup> These foreign traders sought aromatic spices such as cloves, nutmeg, mace, and sandalwood, creating what became known as the "spice route." Spices were essential not only for food but for a variety of uses, solidifying these trade routes. Exploring Indonesian communities through the ethnographic and demographic study of the archipelago, combined with knowledge of traditional recipes handed down over generations, offers valuable insights into societal evolution and cultural heritage.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, the introduction of religions during the era of trade and navigation influenced the diversity of culinary traditions in Indonesia. For instance, the ceremonial yellow rice cone known as "nasi tumpeng"—steamed rice shaped into a large cone, colored yellow with turmeric, and lavishly decorated—originated from ancient Hindu beliefs. The cone represents the mythical Hindu mountain, Mount Meru, while the

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<sup>1</sup> M. Gearon Miller, J., A. Kostogriz, *Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classroom* (Toronto: Multilingual Matters, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Briery, J. H, *Spices: The Story of Indonesia's Spice Trade*. (Oxford UP, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Donkin, R. A., *Between East and West: The Moluccas and the Traffic in Spices Up to the Arrival of Europeans*. (American Philosophical Society, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Ronda L. Brulotte and Michael A. Di Givione, *Edible Identities: Food as Cultural Heritage*, Ashgate, [Burlington, VT] 237 P. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Keay, J., *The Spice Route: A History*. (University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Hokky Situngkir, Ardian Maulana, and M. Dahlan, 'A Portrait of Diversity In Indonesian Traditional Cuisine'. *Munich Personal RePEc Archive*, (2015), 1-11.

yellow color, one of the four sacred Hindu colors, symbolizes glory and reverence.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the arrival of the Dutch had a lasting impact on Indonesian society in many ways, including in culinary culture, affecting both the presentation and naming of local dishes. The "rijsttafel" became an important symbol of colonial dining culture in Indonesia.<sup>8</sup>

As historiographical research on food production, consumption, and distribution, cuisines, and gastronomy have enlightened, local, regional, or national cuisines are symbolic representations of the nation and the identity of a people. Indeed, historiographical studies on food have been prolific contributors to the history of material cultures and biological behaviors through their documented accounts of food security, eating habits, table manners, and taste and gastronomic sensibilities.<sup>9</sup>

The cultural products of the Indonesian nation, especially cuisine, tend to be less well-documented, making it sometimes difficult to find cultural learning sources and self-identity of the Indonesian nation. Consequently, the existence of cuisine is only seen as 'food' without understanding its philosophical values, cultural values, and history. This situation will lead to the extinction of Indonesian culinary traditions, along with the development of time and the influence of international culture.<sup>10</sup> A review of the literature has shown that most references to Indonesian cuisines are dominated by popular cooking articles or books containing recipes on how to prepare and serve dishes.<sup>11</sup>

Previous research on the history of food includes studies like the article *Indonesian Culinary History and Values: Exploration Study in Solo City, Indonesia*. This study, authored by Djono, Fatma Sukmawati, and Moh Salimi, found that Solo City, Indonesia, has a variety of culinary traditions with historical significance and distinct cultural values underlying the existence of these foods. Additionally, there is specific research on food history as a form of cultural heritage, as seen in the study titled *A Systematic Literature Review: Exploring the Rich Heritage of Indonesian Cuisine through the Versatile Peanut Ingredient*. This research found that peanuts have played an essential role in shaping Indonesian culinary traditions for centuries, not only as a staple ingredient but also as a symbol of cultural fusion that has shaped

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<sup>7</sup> Lothar Arsana. *The Food of Indonesia: Authentic Recipes from the Spice Islands*. (Singapore: Periplus Editions Ltd, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Prince R. *The Real Tastes of Indonesia: A Culinary Journey Through 100 Unique Family Recipes*. (Melbourne: Hardie Grant Books, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Anda Georgiana Becut and Kàtia Lurbe i Puerto, 'Introduction. Food History and Identity: Food and Eating Practices as Elements of Cultural Heritage, Identity and Social Creativity', *International Review of Social Research*, 7.1 (2017), 1–4 <<https://doi.org/10.1515/irsr-2017-0001>>.

<sup>10</sup> N Nitisuari and others, 'Museum Sejarah Kuliner Tradisional Indonesia', *Jurnal Tingkat Sarjana Bidang Seni Rupa Dan Desain*, 3.1 (2013), 2–7 <<https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/485/1/012008>>.

<sup>11</sup> Jachinte Bessiere, 'Local Development and Heritage: Traditional Food and Cuisine as Tourist Attractions in Rural Areas', *Eur Soc Rural Sociol*, 38.1 (1998), 21–34.

the nation's diverse culinary landscape. Another relevant study by Fadly Rahman, titled *Kuliner sebagai Identitas Keindonesiaan*, discusses the formation of Indonesian national cuisine from early independence up to the publication of the first Indonesian national cookbook, *Mustika Rasa*, in 1967.

These prior studies reveal a gap, as a comprehensive historiography of Indonesian cuisine is still lacking. Such a structured culinary historiography would help to capture the identity and culture of the Indonesian nation. Culinary traditions serve not only as food but also as reflections of culture, local wisdom, and societal values. Therefore, this paper is one of the few scholarly attempts to introduce Indonesian food culture to broader academic audiences. This paper also attempts to trace the history and development of cuisine as a product of the cultural identity of the Indonesian nation through culinary historiography from the colonial era to the contemporary era.

## METHOD

This research using a historical method encompassing five stages: topic selection, heuristic, criticism, interpretation, and historiography.<sup>12</sup> The sources utilized in this study comprise both primary and secondary sources such as photographs, videos, documents, newspapers, and magazines. Primary sources are obtained through photographs from internet media such as KITLV (Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal –, Land – en Volkenkunde), Delpher, WikiSource, and others. Additionally, this research is grounded on supporting sources such as books on food and culinary history, both produced by the government and independent parties; previous research compiled in history, culinary, gastronomy, cultural journals, and digital news portals.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Culinary Historiography of Indonesia from the Colonial Era to Japan

With the arrival of Western nations bringing advancements in science and technology, there were developments in the study and writing of culinary history in Indonesia. The cultural interaction between the Dutch and the natives at that time also significantly influenced in many aspects.<sup>13</sup> One example of cultural blending can be seen in mixed marriages between Westerners and indigenous Indonesians. In 1925, nearly a third of Europeans in the Dutch East Indies married native Indonesians or individuals of mixed descent.

Initially, Westerners, mainly the Dutch who came to Indonesia, struggled to adapt their palates to Indonesian cuisine. Consequently, they married *nyai*, indigenous women, to provide them with food. The cultural assimilation that occurred not only improved culinary culture, but it also served as a manifestation of Dutch dominance

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<sup>12</sup> Kuntowijoyo, *Pengantar Ilmu Sejarah* (Yogyakarta: Bentang Pustaka, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Chrisfella Cokro Handoyo, and others, 'Klappertaart: an Indonesian–Dutch influenced traditional food', *Journal of Ethnic Foods*, 5.2 (2018), 147-152.

over the indigenous population.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, colonial policies promoted the creation of a ruling class with European affiliations, emphasizing white, bourgeois status, even though its lineage was historically mixed. The movement and transformation of food involves power relations that take place at various levels, across different dimensions of space and time.<sup>15</sup> Ideas of class and race played a significant role in shaping these social performances, with varying levels of proficiency marking distinctions among diners. Consuming "European" cuisine frequently involved the deliberate public avoidance of Indonesian dishes, even if such foods were privately enjoyed, alongside the cultivation of a taste for foods associated with the colonial homeland. At the colonial dining table, class and cultural identity were intricately intertwined with racial constructs.<sup>16</sup>

Over time, these *nyai* were taught how to prepare food with European flavors. Similarly, in the households of high-ranking officials, kitchen matters were usually delegated to native cooks, although they arrived with wives. In their development, cooks were taught some European menu recipes for presentation at *Rijsttafel* banquets.<sup>17</sup> Through *rijsttafel*, indigenous dining practices and their associated narratives were reshaped through a Western lens, infused with moral, ethical, aesthetic values, and indicators of social status within colonial society.<sup>18</sup> This newly formed culture reflects a symbiotic relationship wherein the Indische culture developed as a mutual dependency, interdependence, and reciprocal enrichment between the two groups.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Wijaya, I. Z. and Rahma, A, 'Rijsttafel di Batavia: Kelas Sosial dan Pengaruh Eropa di Meja Makan pada Awal Abad ke-20', *Socio Historica*, 1.1 (2022).

<sup>15</sup> Michael Goodman and others, *Geographies of Food: An Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2021).

<sup>16</sup> Susie Protschky, 'The Colonial Table: Food, Culture and Dutch Identity in Colonial Indonesia', *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, 54 (2008), 346 - 357.

<sup>17</sup> Andri Setyo Nugroho and Dita Reista Nurfaizah, 'Kehidupan Pembantu Rumah Tangga Di Hindia Belanda Pada Pertengahan Abad Ke-19 Sampai Abad Ke-20', *Mukadimah: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sejarah, Dan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial*, 4.2 (2020), 136–45 <<https://doi.org/10.30743/mkd.v4i2.2617>>>.

<sup>18</sup> Fadly Rahman, *Jejak Rasa Nusantara: Sejarah Makanan Indonesia* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> Rahman, Fadly, *Rijsttafel: Budaya Kuliner Di Indonesia Masa Kolonial 1870-1942* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2011)



Figure 1. *Rijsttafel* at the Hotel der Nederlanden in Batavia Circa 1931  
(Source: KITLV)



Figure 2. The Meyer family at the rice table during a Christmas vacation in Lawang near Malang Between 1930 and 1940  
(Source: KITLV)

Figure 1. and Figure 2. are both pictures of *rijsttafel* in Nederlands Indie. Those pictures show that the Dutch people were together at a table enjoying the food. Both figure 1. and figure 2. Shows that indigenous people might be the servants of the food for the Dutch people. *Rijsttafel* adopted indigenous and European cultures from those pictures in the culinary service.

While teaching Western recipes to the cooks, the wives of Dutch officials also learned native cuisine, and some succeeded in publishing recipe books. One of the book is *Kokki Bitja, Kitab Masak-Masakan India yang Bahroe dan Sempurna* which was published in 1857. Cornelia, the book's author, introduced various dishes and their ingredients in Dutch, featuring traditional recipes like *Saroendeng*, *Smoor*, and *Sesate*, alongside Chinese-inspired dishes such as Bakmi (bami). The influence of Chinese culinary culture then took root and transformed into a completely new identity called *Peranakan* culinary.<sup>20</sup> The recipes utilized ingredients predominantly available in the Dutch East Indies during that era.

Shortly after the publication of *Kokkie Bitja*, a cookbook considered superior by the publisher was released. This book, titled *Oost-Indisch Kookboek*, was first published in 1866. Written anonymously, it contained 570 recipes, categorizing dishes into two main types: Dutch (*hollandsch eten*) and indigenous (*inlandsch eten*) foods. The indigenous dishes listed were diverse and originated from various islands, not limited to Java alone.

In the early 20th century, another cookbook emerged, titled *Nieuw Volledig Oost-Indisch Kookboek* or *New Complete East Indies Cookbook*, written by Mrs. JM J. Catenius - van der Meijden and published by GCT VAN DORP & Co. This book offered a variety of indigenous recipes, including sambals, cakes, and various types of beverages. It also featured dishes influenced by other cultures, such as Indian and

<sup>20</sup> Arya Gutomo, 'Peranakan Chinese Culinary Culture in the City of Surakarta at the Beginning of the 20th Century', *Siginjai: Jurnal Sejarah*, 3(2), 119-132.



Chinese cuisines. This Dutch-language cookbook provided precise ingredient measurements, likely targeting Western readers who had returned to Europe and missed the flavors of indigenous cuisine. For instance, the book included information on ingredient substitutions, listing vegetables specific to the Dutch East Indies and their equivalents available in the Netherlands.

Over time, as European and indigenous cultures became increasingly integrated, cookbooks featuring a fusion of European and local dishes began to emerge. One notable example is the rise of *rijsttafel* culture, which inspired the publication of *Onze Rijsttafel* by E.W.K. Steinmetz. Figure 3. below is a book cover of *Onze Rijsttafel* which the publication date has yet to be discovered. The cover design depicts a waiter or servant with a darker skin color, which can be seen as a portrayal of natives. This depiction indicates the lower status of natives due to their occupation of serving the Dutch. The presence of servants at that time could measure the dignity or social class of the families they served.<sup>21</sup>



Figure 3. The Cover of *Onze Rijsttafel* Book  
(Source: Fadly Rahman)

The books published during the colonial period are inseparable from the influence of the *Mooi Indië* art movement and *rijsttafel* dining culture, such as *Onze Rijsttafel*. Moreover, there are a lot of cookbooks published then include *Ons Huis in Indie* (1908) and *Makanlah Nasi! (Eet Rijst!) De Indische Rijsttafel (voor Holland)* (1922), *Groot Nieuw Volledig Indisch Kookboek* (1925), and *Het Geheim van de Rijsttafel* (1934).<sup>22</sup>

Cookbooks in the colonial era were not only written by Dutch ladies and writers. The establishment of Home Economics Schools, where the teachers were European women, encouraged many middle-class indigenous women to learn and adopt

<sup>21</sup> Viki Restina Bela, 'Pengaruh Budaya Mooi Indië Dan Rijsttafel Pada Desain Sampul Buku Resep Masakan', 1.1 (2021), 1–9.

<sup>22</sup> Bela.

European culinary practices.<sup>23</sup> Huishoud School or Home Economics School portrayed at the figure 4. aimed to empower women to learn household skills, including cooking. The first school was opened in Yogyakarta in 1927 under Juliana van Stolbergschool. In this school, reading and writing skills were not the main focus; instead, the focus was on skills for managing household tasks, including cooking.<sup>24</sup>



Figure 4. Housekeeping and Horticulture School in Ambarawa, Central Java Circa 1923  
(Source: KITLV)

The emergence of cookbooks compiled by natives not only rivaled but surpassed European works of pride. In 1936, Raden Ajoë Adipati Arija Reksa-Nagara, also known as R.A. Kardinah (sister of R.A. Kartini), a European-educated gastronome, published a cookbook entitled *Lajang Panoentoen Bab Olah-Olah Kanggo para Wanita*. Furthermore, Balai Pustaka also published cookbooks in local languages, one example being the Sundanese-language book *76 Rupi Masakan Sareng Amis-Amis*, published in 1934.



<sup>23</sup> Pipit Anggraeni, 'Menu Populer Hindia Belanda (1901-1942): Kajian Pengaruh Budaya Eropa Terhadap Kuliner Indonesia', *Jurnal Sejarah Dan Budaya*, 9.1 (2015), 90–94.

<sup>24</sup> Nugroho and Nurfaizah.



Figure 5. Book entitled *Lajang Panoentoen Bab Olah-Olah Kanggo para Wanita* by R. A. Kardinah  
(Source: Mata Jendela, 2017)

Kardinah and other indigenous women from various cultural backgrounds since the early 20th century also wrote culinary books in their mother tongues. For example, there was Nyai Djamäh, who even wrote a cooking book in Sundanese titled *Boekoe Batjaan Roepa2 Kaolahan Aoseun Maroerangkalih Istri* (1916); R.A. Soewarsi wrote a cooking book in Javanese titled *Boekoe Olah-Olah: Isi Pitedah Pangolahipen; Lelawoehan* et al. (1937) and *Boekoe Olah-Olah: Olah-Olahan Daharan Tjara Walandi* (1938); and in Malay, there was S. Noer Zainoe'ddin Moro who wrote *Lingkoengan Dapoer: Boekoe Masak bagi Meisjes-Vervolgscholen jang Berbahasa Melajoe* (1941).<sup>25</sup>

From the publication of cookbooks from the mid-19th to the early 20th century, a concept of regional cuisine emerged, which was referred to by contemporary gastronomes as *Indische keuken* (Indies cuisine). In *Indische keuken*, some authors categorized recipes into "Dutch Food" (Hollandsch eten) and "Native Food" (Inlandsch eten). This categorization implicitly attempted to purify European-flavored recipes so they would not mix with native recipes. In other words, the circulation of cookbooks was undoubtedly related to their reader communities.

Transitioning to the Japanese Occupation period, the popularity of *Indische Keuken* began to decline. Through Hodoka (an institution overseeing media publishing), the Japanese in Indonesia tightly controlled the circulation of recipe books. Even cookbooks containing European palate images were not exempt from censorship. Moreover, indigenous-authored recipe books were also subject to censorship.<sup>26</sup>

### **Post-Independence Culinary Historiography of Indonesia**

Following the end of the Japanese occupation, there were efforts towards decolonization or eliminating colonial influence in various aspects. In national history and culinary matters, there were endeavors to achieve nationalization, which involves making colonial culinary traditions a part of the identity of a nation that has broken free from colonial shackles. Additionally, there were efforts to establish a national cuisine. Rangkojo Chailan Sjamsu Datuk Toemenggoeng, a prominent figure in the women's movement from West Sumatra, is a figure worth considering when discussing the concept of "Indonesian food." In her work *Boekoe Masak-Masakan*, initially published in 1940 and republished in 1948, there is an underlying emphasis on nationalism rather than the "colonial taste" of *Indische keuken*.

Chailan Sjamsu encouraged her readers to utilize local ingredients in various culinary preparations. In her book, she also presents variations of Indonesian dishes

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<sup>25</sup> Fadly Rahman, *Rijsttafel: Budaya Kuliner Di Indonesia Masa Kolonial 1870-1942* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> Fadly Rahman, *Jejak Rasa Nusantara: Sejarah Makanan Indonesia* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2016).

and cakes. Naturally, this representation indirectly or directly conveyed a sense of nationalism. In addition to promoting national cuisine, Chailan Sjamsu also aimed to showcase regional recipes, especially from Sumatra, Java, Madura, Sunda, Borneo, and South Sulawesi. Overall, the total number of Indonesian recipes compiled was 204, significantly outnumbering the European, Chinese, Arab, and Indian recipes, which amounted to only 76.<sup>27</sup> The composition of culinary recipes represented a new undertaking by an Indonesian gastronome in the early days of independence.

In 1951, a Chinese-Peranakan named Julie Sutardjana became responsible for the "Rahasia Dapur" (Kitchen Secrets) column in the weekly magazine *Star Weekly* under the pseudonym Nyonya Rumah. She wrote various food recipes compiled into a cookbook called *Pandai Masak*, published in 1957 upon readers' request. Despite experiencing hardship during the Japanese occupation, Julie was later entrusted by the *Star Weekly* editorial team to lead the "Rahasia Dapur" column as a replacement for the "Roeangan Wanita" column. Her role in managing the "Rahasia Dapur" column from 1951 to 1961 is significant because she promoted a shared culinary aspiration through the recipes she collected. Subsequently, in 1957, the publisher Kinta (Jakarta) released two volumes of the *Pandai Masak* book by Nyonya Rumah, which were reprinted until the 1960s.

In the same period, during the 1950s, President Sukarno vigorously promoted the "People's Food Revolution" program. This program ultimately led to creating an Indonesian cookbook titled *Mustika Rasa*. To realize this program, on December 12, 1960, Brigadier General Dr. Azis Saleh, the Minister of Agriculture, instructed the Food Technology Institute (LTM) to compile a comprehensive cookbook for the entire country. As an initial step, he proposed that LTM collaborate with other institutions, such as the Ministry of Health, Daswati I and II (Local Government), central and regional offices, Indonesian cookbook authors, and women's organizations.<sup>28</sup>

Besides the nationalist aim, President Sukarno and the government also had another motive due to media reports on the unstable food situation in Indonesia. Nevertheless, regardless of these speculations, the national cookbook project continued and officially began in 1961. Initially, the compilation of the book involved distributing questionnaires to various regions with the assistance of regional officials and various women's organizations and schools. Through this questionnaire method, the committee hoped to obtain records of dish names and select which dishes were known and which were not.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Affairs, Sadjarwo, realized that the national cookbook project undertaken by his ministry could only be achieved with food security.<sup>29</sup> Embracing the motto "Standing on Our Own Feet," he explained the

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<sup>27</sup> Rahman, *Jejak Rasa Nusantara: Sejarah Makanan Indonesia*.

<sup>28</sup> Harsono Hardjohutomo, *Buku Masakan Indonesia Mustika Rasa: Resep-Resep Masakan Indonesia dari Sabang sampai Merauke* (Jakarta: Departemen Pertanian Republik Indonesia, 1967).

<sup>29</sup> Harsono Hardjohutomo, *Buku Masakan Indonesia Mustika Rasa: Resep-Resep Masakan Indonesia dari Sabang sampai Merauke*.

government's efforts in intensifying and extending agricultural programs for several years to increase food production. To support the compilation of the national cookbook, the government, through the Ministry of Health, published the Food Revolution of the People book in 1964 as a follow-up to Sukarno's mandate to raise public awareness of the self-sufficiency and food diversification program.<sup>30</sup>

Another exciting aspect of *Mustika Rasa* is the emphasis on recipes based on their regional origin, including the city's name. The detailed presentation of food recipes in *Mustika Rasa* includes main dishes, soupy side dishes, non-soupy side dishes, fried side dishes, grilled side dishes, sambals, snacks, and drinks. There are about 1600 recipes, with approximately 900 emphasizing their regional origins. However, the *Mustika Rasa* book tends to focus on recipes from Java. Various European-influenced recipes (Portuguese, French, Dutch, English, and even Italian) are also included in *Mustika Rasa*. Ultimately, the desire to create a national cookbook began to materialize towards the end of the compilation process, around 1964-1966.

### **Patterns of Culinary Historiography in Indonesia from the Colonial Era to the Contemporary Period**

In each period, there are differences in the patterns of culinary historiography in Indonesia. For example, during the colonial era, writings about culinary matters were significantly influenced by colonial elements. Recipe books that emerged during this period mainly focused on cooking methods, serving techniques, and food presentation, often aligning with colonial culture.

Perspectives and stigmas regarding the distinction between natives and Europeans in Indonesia at that time also influenced the writing of culinary books. This can be identified from the publication of recipe books from the mid-19th to the early 20th century, which coincided with the development of the concept of "Indische keuken" (Indies cuisine). A characteristic feature of Indische keuken books at that time was that some authors categorized recipes based on social groups in the colonial territory, such as the author of the *Oost-Indisch kookboek* (1870), who classified recipes into "Dutch food" or *Hollandsch eten* and "Native food" or *Inlandsch eten*.

The style of writing Indonesian culinary history experienced a shift around the 1940s with the emergence of figures like Chailan Sjamsu, who wrote Indonesian food recipes with a more nationalist approach. In her work *Boekoe Masak-Masakan*, initially published in 1940 and republished in 1948, there was an implicit sense of nationalism rather than colonial taste (Indische keuken) in the mentioned foods. Chailan Sjamsu aimed to encourage her readers, who were Indonesian citizens, to pay more attention to local ingredients in cooking. This more nationalist style further evolved rapidly with the independence and the emergence of nationalist elites. President Sukarno aimed to nationalize Indonesian cuisine by planning a national cookbook writing program. Moreover, the concept of "Our Food" emerged at that time, essentially aimed to showcase Indonesian flavors or differentiate them from perceived foreign tastes.

Cookbooks have been recognized as a significant medium within nationalist

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<sup>30</sup> Rahman, *Jejak Rasa Nusantara: Sejarah Makanan Indonesia*.

discourse.<sup>31</sup> The influence of nationalism tends to be particularly pronounced in the culinary traditions of ethnic minorities or diasporic communities, where unique cooking practices serve as key arenas for engagement and negotiation with surrounding cultures. For some, cookbooks function as tools to assert an increasing process of assimilation<sup>32</sup>, while for others, they act as instruments to resist full integration into new political systems.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, cookbooks play a critical role in transmitting heritage practices to future generations, often leveraging the power of carefully crafted collective nostalgia. Much like nationalism, which emphasizes a sense of continuity despite its relatively recent historical emergence, cookbooks frequently obscure their modernity in their endeavor to present stable culinary traditions, fostering images of cultural identity that are timeless or, at the very least, venerable.<sup>34</sup>

If cuisine has been perceived as a genuine (and often necessary) contribution to nationalist discourse, cooking and eating have often been considered trivial or compromised forms of cosmopolitan practice.<sup>35</sup> The desire to nationalize Indonesian food was realized with the publication of the Indonesian Cookbook *Mustika Rasa: Indonesian Recipes from Sabang to Merauke* in 1967. Many unknown recipes became known in taste and appearance to readers from various regions across Indonesia. *Mustika Rasa* provided a depiction of the character of Indonesian people's tastes in each region in selecting, consuming, and preparing food. This was shaped by natural factors and influenced by the accumulation of cultural, historical, economic, and food politics of each region. Additionally, as an ambitious government project, some politically propagandistic recipes emerged in *Mustika Rasa*, such as "Ganefo Ketela," "Sajur Manipol Usdek," and "Linggardjati."

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<sup>31</sup> Igor Cusack, 'African Cuisines: Recipes for Nation-Building?', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 13.2 (2000), 208.

<sup>32</sup> Anne L. Bower, 'Our Sisters Recipes: Exploring Community in a Community Cookbook', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 31.3 (1997), 14.

<sup>33</sup> Carol Bardenstein, 'Transmissions Interrupted: Reconfiguring Food, Memory, and Gender in the Cookbook', *Memoirs of Middle Eastern Exiles*, 28.1 (2002), 353–387.

<sup>34</sup> Shameem Black, 'Recipes for Cosmopolitanism', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 31.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Farb and George Armelagos, *Consuming Passions: The Anthropology of Eating* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 190

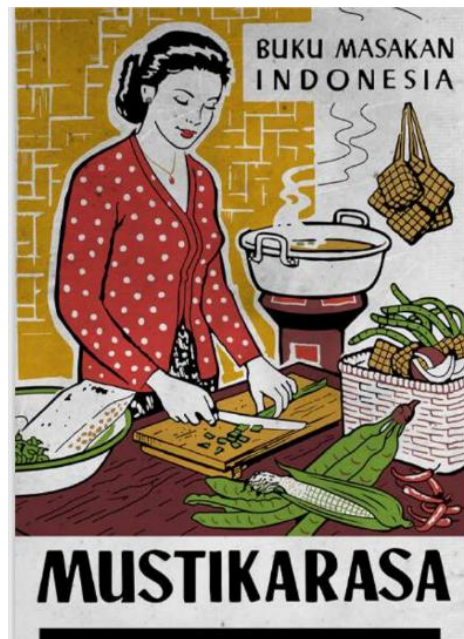


Figure 6. Indonesia Cook Book *Mustika Rasa*  
(Source: <https://www.thejakartapost.com/life/2016/08/15/sukarnos-mustika-rasa-recipe-book-re-printed.html>)

Despite its shortcomings and merits, the *Mustika Rasa* book has provided a new pattern and paradigm in Indonesian culinary historiography. Interestingly, in this writing project, the government took over the role of gastronomy to achieve culinary nationalism. However, competent parties in related fields were still involved in the book's compilation. The compilation of the *Mustika Rasa* book builds the idea that the essence of creating distinctive Indonesian cuisine lies in establishing a strategic and comprehensive relationship between food chain strategy and engineering. This relationship is determined primarily by the quality of food cultivation before it is processed in the kitchen and served on the table, especially when it is to be part of the nation's culture.

### **The Role of Culinary Historiography in Indonesian Cultural Identity**

Cuisine is not only about cooking and eating; it also embodies various social, cultural, religious, and nationalistic values.<sup>36</sup> The construction of a national food concept is an attempt to reverse the colonial dominance of *Indische keuken* into Indonesian food because colonial tastes are still present today and even blend with local food. To solidify the national food identity, Indonesian food images are presented more dominantly than European foods, which are portrayed as foreign.

Concerning culinary historiography and its role in national identity, books about cuisine from the colonial era to the contemporary period can be analyzed. According to Ajun Appadurai, cookbooks also reflect shifts in the boundaries of edibility, culinary process propriety, eating logic, and ideology. The existence of cookbooks not only indicates the level of literacy but also signifies an effort to transfer knowledge about

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<sup>36</sup> Linda Civitello, *Cuisine and Culture: A History of Food and People*. (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008).

cuisine and to publish certain traditions that guide the journey of cooking food from the market to the kitchen to the table. As Jack Goody noted, cookbooks also reflect technical and cultural elaboration types, becoming representations not only of production and distribution structures and social and cosmological schemes but also of class.<sup>37</sup>

There are quite a few studies on the formation of national cuisines in various parts of the world. For example, Arjun Appadurai's study of national cuisine in India is titled *How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India* (1988). Language and literacy, urban and ethnic differences, and women and households are all issues underlying these cookbooks. In the context of India, as Appadurai's study suggests, starting from these aspects, one can sharpen a comparative instinct about how a cookbook is structured and its implications.

Food and its cooking, and the taste choices of individuals as well as nations, seem to play an important role in the construction of the identity because, in common words, "we are what we eat" and therefore "we make ourselves". Food then is very much ascribed different meanings for different societies and communities, along with differences among individuals in those groups.<sup>38</sup> This connection, facilitated by culinary exploration, not only enriches the dining experience but also fosters a deeper appreciation and respect for the diversity of Indonesia's cultural heritage among people from various backgrounds.<sup>39</sup> This can be seen in the various types of Indonesian cuisine, both genuinely original and influenced by foreign cultures. Since its inception, Indonesian cuisine has been shaped by the intersection of various regional and foreign cultures (Chinese, Arab, Indian, and European). Even today, ordinary people still cannot distinguish between authentic Indonesian food and food that foreign cultures have influenced. With such a background, it is understood that Indonesia cannot avoid the influence of foreign civilizations. Indonesia's civilization today is colored by and colors the world's civilization. This includes the social construction of Indonesian cuisine as the nation's cultural identity.

Given these facts, it is increasingly evident that rapid mixing processes are occurring, propelled by the openness of mass media driven by information technology advancements and the presence of power within it. Therefore, there is a need for a new awareness of "reading" cuisine as a national identity, which will continuously undergo a process of "becoming" in space and time. The process of "reading" cuisine as a national identity can be done through historical studies. In this regard, Indonesian culinary historiography is essential as a literacy material to recognize Indonesian

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<sup>37</sup> Jack Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology*, (Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>38</sup> Nikolaos Partarakis and others, 'Representation and Presentation of Culinary Tradition as Cultural Heritage', *Heritage*, 4 (2021), 612–640.

<sup>39</sup> Listiyono Santoso and others, 'Exploring Indonesian Cuisine Ethnographically: A Fusion of

Heritage and Innovation Through the Lens of Local Wisdom', *Asian Journal of Dairy and Food Research*, (2024).



cuisine as a national identity.

## **CONCLUSION**

During the colonial period, European cultural elements significantly impacted Indonesia's culinary historiography. Books on recipes and culinary practices from this time, like *Ons Huis in Indie* (1908) and *Makanlah Nasi! (Eet Rijst!) De Indische Rijsttafel (voor Holland)* (1922), *Groot Nieuw Volledig Indisch Kookboek* (1925), and *Het Geheim van de Rijsttafel* (1934), were predominantly authored by Europeans.

Native authors emerged as pioneers, publishing books featuring traditional Indonesian recipes. Examples include Nyai Djamäh, who authored a cookbook in Sundanese titled *Boekoe Batjaan Roepa2 Kaolahan Aoseun Maroerangkalih Istri* (1916); R.A. Soewarsi who wrote cookbooks in Javanese, such as *Boekoe Olah-Olah: Isi Pitedah Pangolahipen; Lelawoehan lan Dedaharan Kawewahan* (1937) and *Boekoe Olah-Olah: Olah-Olahan Daharan Tjara Walandi* (1938); and S. Noer Zainoe'ddin Moro, who penned *Lingkoengan Dapoer: Boekoe Masak bagi Meisjes-Vervolgscholen jang Berbahasa Melajoe* (1941) in Malay.

Following Indonesia's independence, the culinary historiography underwent significant transformations. Sukarno's proclamation on August 17 marked the beginning of a brutal and tragic four-year conflict, commonly referred to as the Indonesian Revolution or the War of Independence. This war arose from the Dutch refusal to accept the collapse of their colonial empire and the emergence of the fragile Republic of Indonesia. The conflict profoundly influenced the development of Indonesia's post-revolutionary government and became a pivotal moment in the nation's history, deeply shaping its national identity.<sup>40</sup> The government, led by Sukarno, sought to nationalize various aspects, leading to the publication of national recipe books like *Mustika Rasa*. This compilation featured recipes named after significant historical events in Indonesia, such as sayur mani pol used, Ganefo kettle, and Linggardjati. Despite its strengths and weaknesses, *Mustika Rasa* introduced a fresh pattern and perspective to Indonesian culinary historiography. Notably, the government took on the role of gastronomy to promote culinary nationalism in this writing project. Furthermore, the writing of Indonesian culinary history did not stop with *Mustika Rasa*; instead, more studies have emerged, dissecting the nation's culinary past and making it accessible to the public.

In the quest to establish a national cuisine in Indonesia, the diverse nature of Indonesian culinary traditions reflects the country's multiculturalism. This diversity is evident in both authentically Indonesian dishes and those influenced by foreign cultures. Hence, there is a growing need to interpret cuisine as a national identity that is continually evolving and in space. This process involves studying culinary history, highlighting the importance of Indonesian culinary historiography for understanding the nation's culinary identity.

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<sup>40</sup> William Redfern, "Sukarno's Guided Democracy and the Takeovers of Foreign Companies in Indonesia in the 1960s Acknowledgements", *Disertation*, The University of Michigan, 2010.

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