

Authenticity in the Adaptation of Pontianak Traditional Culinary in Yogyakarta

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Abstract

This study examines the dynamics of authenticity and adaptation in Pontianak culinary businesses operating in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The development of cross-regional culinary businesses has created challenges for entrepreneurs in maintaining cultural identity while responding to local consumer preferences. Despite the growing literature on culinary tourism and ethnic cuisine, studies specifically examining how authenticity is maintained while regional traditional cuisine is adapted within a different cultural environment in Indonesia remain limited. Therefore, this research aims to analyze how the authenticity of Pontianak cuisine is preserved and to identify the forms of adaptation implemented within a different cultural environment.

A qualitative case study approach was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving one Pontianak culinary business owner and six customers in Yogyakarta. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns related to authenticity, adaptation, cultural identity, and business sustainability. The findings reveal that authenticity is primarily understood through the preservation of original taste, ingredients, and cultural experiences associated with Pontianak cuisine. Authenticity also functions as an emotional medium that reconnects migrant communities with memories of their hometown and cultural identity. Unlike many cross-cultural culinary businesses that adapt flavors to local preferences, this business maintained the original taste of Pontianak cuisine and positioned authenticity as its main competitive strategy. Adaptation was conducted mainly through marketing strategies and social media utilization rather than flavor modification. Furthermore, Pontianak cuisine served not only as food but also as a cultural space that strengthened social relationships, nostalgia, and customer loyalty. This study concludes that authenticity and adaptation are not always contradictory. In the context of

Pontianak cuisine in Yogyakarta, authenticity itself became a strategic value for preserving cultural identity, attracting consumers, and supporting business sustainability.

Keywords: Authenticity, Culinary Adaptation, Pontianak Cuisine, Gastronomic Tourism, Cultural Identity, Business Sustainability.

INTRODUCTION

The development of the culinary industry in Indonesia demonstrates increasingly complex dynamics, particularly in the context of cultural mobility and the movement of business actors across regions. The presence of regional traditional cuisines in other areas not only enriches gastronomic diversity but also creates challenges for business owners in maintaining product identity amidst local market demands. In this context, culinary products are not merely viewed as commodities for consumption but also as representations of cultural values and regional identity.

Culinary tourists possess diverse characteristics and varying preferences regarding food and beverage experiences. Each culinary destination tends to attract different types of tourists; therefore, appropriate strategies are required to align culinary products and experiences with targeted market segments (Knollenberg et al., 2021). This diversity also indicates that culinary experiences can become a source of competitive advantage for both destinations and culinary businesses.

Cuisine is not merely associated with food consumption but has evolved into an important symbol of a society's cultural richness. Every dish contains stories, history, and collective identity reflected through recipes and cooking techniques passed down through generations. As part of cultural products, cuisine not only offers taste but also represents values, traditions, and local wisdom that form the foundation of community life. Therefore, cuisine is an inseparable part of cultural heritage that reflects regional identity, history, and local richness (Utami, 2018).

Adiasih and Brahmana (2015) found that perceptions of traditional food, such as taste, appearance, and cultural values, influence consumers' willingness to try and consume such food. Similarly, Setiawan (2016) emphasized that culinary socialization, product innovation, and food image play important roles in shaping consumers' purchase intentions toward traditional cuisine.

Yogyakarta, as a city of education and tourism, has heterogeneous consumers, making it a potential space for the growth of cross-regional cuisine, including Pontianak cuisine. Traditional culinary consumption behavior is not merely an economic decision but also a

form of cultural participation influenced by psychological, social, and situational factors (Sugesti et al., 2025).

Traditional food is generally prepared using spices, seasonings, and cultural traditions that differ across regions. According to Marwanti (2006), traditional food refers to folk cuisine consumed daily and inherited from generation to generation. The attractiveness of food, such as taste, color, shape, and texture, also plays an important role in consumers' assessments of ready-to-serve meals (Syarifuddin, 2018).

Pontianak cuisine demonstrates rich culinary diversity, ranging from snacks to main dishes with distinctive tastes and appearances. Foods such as crab noodles, *chai kwe*, *kwecap*, and *pengkang* represent the culinary identity of Pontianak and contribute to its recognition as one of Indonesia's culinary destinations. However, when regional cuisine is introduced into different cultural environments, culinary products often undergo reinterpretation processes to become more acceptable to broader markets.

In this situation, business actors face challenges in maintaining the authentic taste and identity of Pontianak cuisine while simultaneously adapting to local consumer preferences. Therefore, the presence of Pontianak cuisine in Yogyakarta reflects a negotiation process between authenticity and adaptation within different cultural contexts.

Authenticity has become one of the central concepts in gastronomic tourism because it shapes tourists' perceptions of culinary experiences and strengthens their emotional connection with local culture. Recent studies have demonstrated that perceived authenticity positively contributes to tourists' hedonic well-being by fostering stronger emotional connections during gastronomic experiences. Authentic culinary experiences enable tourists to perceive local food as a genuine representation of cultural identity, thereby enhancing satisfaction and the overall gastronomic experience. Furthermore, tourists with a higher level of food neophilia tend to perceive authentic culinary experiences more positively and develop stronger emotional attachments to local cuisine (Khan et al., 2025).

Authenticity in cuisine refers to the originality of taste, ingredients, cooking techniques, and cultural values attached to the food. On the other hand, adaptation becomes an important strategy to ensure products are accepted by markets with different preferences (Kim & Lee, 2022). Although studies on cuisine and tourism have developed rapidly, research specifically examining the dynamics of authenticity and adaptation in cross-regional culinary businesses in Indonesia remains limited. Despite these findings, previous studies have mainly examined authenticity from the perspective of tourists' experiences in gastronomic destinations. Comparatively less attention has been given to how authenticity is maintained

by ethnic culinary businesses operating outside their region of origin while simultaneously responding to different cultural and market environments. Moreover, limited studies have explored authenticity as a business strategy for preserving cultural identity while maintaining competitiveness in cross-regional culinary businesses. This gap provides the foundation for the present study, which investigates the authenticity and adaptation of Pontianak traditional cuisine in Yogyakarta.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how the authenticity of Pontianak cuisine is maintained in Yogyakarta and to identify forms of adaptation undertaken to meet local consumer preferences. This study also seeks to understand how cuisine functions as a medium of cultural representation, nostalgia, and business sustainability in a cross-cultural environment.

METHOD

The research subject was a Pontianak culinary business owner who has operated in Yogyakarta for approximately eight years. Informants were selected purposively based on their relevance to the research objectives. The participants consisted of one business owner as the main informant and six customers as supporting informants, all of whom had experience consuming Pontianak culinary products at Kopi Plat KB. Data collection techniques consisted of in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted to obtain information regarding efforts to maintain authenticity, forms of adaptation, and business sustainability strategies. Observation was conducted to directly examine production processes and interactions with consumers. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis by identifying patterns of meaning emerging from the data. The stages included data reduction, categorization, and conclusion drawing. To ensure data validity, this study employed source and method triangulation techniques.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Summary of Thematic Coding

Theme	Sub-theme	Evidence Source
Culinary authenticity	Original taste preservation	Owner interview
Culinary authenticity	Use of Pontianak ingredients	Owner interview & observation
Emotional attachment	Homesickness and nostalgia	Customer interviews
Adaptation strategy	Digital marketing and promotion	Owner interview

Business sustainability	Customer loyalty	Customer interviews
Cultural identity	Regional language and social interaction	Observation & interviews

1. Culinary Authenticity as a Representation of Homesickness

Authenticity in cuisine is not only related to originality of taste but also connected to emotional experiences and cultural identity. In the context of Pontianak cuisine in Yogyakarta, authenticity emerged through the experiences of migrants attempting to recreate the flavors of their hometown in a different cultural environment.

Interview results revealed that the Pontianak culinary business in Yogyakarta originated from the owner's personal longing for West Kalimantan food while living away from home in Yogyakarta. This longing became the primary motivation for introducing Pontianak cuisine in the city. Initially, the food was prepared for fellow migrants from West Kalimantan, and it received positive responses because the taste was considered similar to the original dishes from their hometown.

These findings indicate that cuisine is not merely understood as a consumable product but also as an emotional medium that reconnects individuals with cultural identity and memories of their homeland. Food becomes a symbol of nostalgia and social closeness among migrant communities. This finding aligns with Utami (2018), who stated that cuisine represents cultural identity containing values, history, and collective experiences.

Furthermore, the presence of Pontianak cuisine in Yogyakarta demonstrates how regional food can function as a bridge connecting original culture with a new environment. Consumers seek not only food taste but also emotional experiences that remind them of home. Some customers stated that the food tasted "exactly the same as in their hometown," causing them to stop searching for other Pontianak culinary places in Yogyakarta.

This sense of nostalgia also demonstrates that traditional culinary consumption is influenced not only by consumption needs but also by psychological and social aspects. This finding supports Sugesti et al. (2025), who argued that traditional food consumption is a form of cultural participation influenced by emotional, social, and situational factors.

2. The Meaning of Authenticity in Pontianak Cuisine

Based on interview results, authenticity was interpreted as the ability to maintain original taste through the use of ingredients similar to those used in Pontianak. The business

owner emphasized that preserving the original flavor was the most important aspect in maintaining the identity of Pontianak cuisine outside its place of origin.

Efforts to maintain authenticity included importing several ingredients directly from West Kalimantan and preserving original recipes without modification. Interestingly, although cooking techniques were no longer entirely traditional, the food was still considered authentic as long as the taste and main ingredients remained consistent.



Figure 1. Authentic Pontianak Culinary Products Served at Kopi Plat KB

These findings indicate that culinary authenticity does not always depend on all aspects of traditionality but rather focuses on elements that most strongly represent food identity, particularly taste. This finding supports Kim and Lee (2022), who explained that culinary authenticity is related to perceptions of originality formed through taste, ingredients, and consumption experiences.

Authenticity was also strengthened through cultural elements and social communication. The use of West Kalimantan regional language while serving customers created an emotional atmosphere that reinforced authenticity. Thus, authenticity in this study was reflected not only in food products but also in the cultural experiences perceived by consumers.

3. Authenticity as the Main Strategy Rather than Adaptation

The findings revealed that the business owner did not adjust flavors to suit local Yogyakarta consumers. Levels of spiciness, sweetness, and seasoning composition were maintained according to the original Pontianak version. The informant even stated that there was never any dilemma between preserving authentic taste and following local market preferences.

This finding differs from previous studies showing that cross-cultural culinary businesses generally adapt their products to local market preferences to gain wider acceptance. Culinary adaptation is understood as a process of adjusting culinary forms and characteristics when introduced into different cultural regions (Pokrud, 2023). Wibowo (2024) also explained that adaptation strategies are often conducted through adjustments in taste, presentation, and local consumption habits.

However, in this study, authenticity became the primary strategy for attracting consumers. Original taste was viewed as a unique value differentiating the business from other culinary products in Yogyakarta. This finding indicates that authenticity can become a competitive advantage in ethnic culinary businesses.

Consumers did not always desire localized food but instead sought unique and distinctive taste experiences. This finding aligns with Jin and Hwang (2024), who argued that traditional ethnic foods tend to be perceived as more authentic and attractive, especially for consumers familiar with the related culture.

Adaptation in this business was conducted not through flavor modification but rather through marketing strategies and social media utilization to expand consumer reach. Thus, adaptation occurred more in operational and promotional aspects than in the culinary identity itself.

4. Cuisine as Cultural Identity and Social Experience

The study also found that Pontianak cuisine was not merely understood as food but also as part of West Kalimantan cultural identity. One informant explained that bubur pedas symbolized family togetherness because it was commonly served during family gatherings.



Figure 2. Traditional Pontianak Bubur Pedas Served at Kopi Plat KB

These findings demonstrate that food possesses strong symbolic and social dimensions. Cuisine becomes a medium for preserving cultural memory, family values, and migrant community identity in Yogyakarta. This finding is supported by Hariyatmi (2019), who explained that food functions as an emotional bridge connecting migrants with their homeland through taste, aroma, and cultural experiences attached to traditional dishes.

Consistency in taste and cultural experiences successfully created emotional bonds with customers. This was reflected in customers who regularly visited every week and recommended certain menu items to others. Therefore, business success was determined not only by food quality but also by the ability to create meaningful authentic experiences.

In addition, social interactions established through the use of regional language strengthened emotional closeness between business owners and customers. Thus, Pontianak cuisine in Yogyakarta functioned as a cultural space connecting regional identity with the social experiences of migrant communities.

5. Sustainability Challenges of Pontianak Culinary Businesses in Yogyakarta

Although the business successfully maintained product authenticity, major challenges emerged in the provision of ingredients that had to be imported directly from West Kalimantan. Dependence on original regional ingredients demonstrated that maintaining authenticity required greater costs and effort compared to using local ingredients.



Figure 3. Interior Atmosphere of Kopi Plat KB, Yogyakarta

Nevertheless, the business owner continued using original ingredients because they were considered essential for preserving quality and culinary identity. This strategy

reflected the owner's commitment to maintaining consumer trust regarding product authenticity.

Social media also became an important strategy for introducing Pontianak cuisine to broader communities in Yogyakarta. The use of social media helped the business reach new consumers while strengthening its image as an authentic West Kalimantan culinary business.

Business sustainability was also supported by customer loyalty formed through consistency in taste and cultural experiences. In this context, authenticity functioned not only as cultural identity but also as social capital and a sustainability strategy.

CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that authenticity became the primary value in the development of Pontianak cuisine in Yogyakarta. Authenticity was understood not only as originality of taste but also as a representation of cultural identity, emotional experience, and a strategy for building customer loyalty. Meanwhile, adaptation was not conducted through flavor modification but rather through marketing strategies and cultural promotion to wider consumers.

This study also revealed that authenticity and adaptation are not always contradictory. In the context of Pontianak culinary businesses in Yogyakarta, authenticity itself became the main strategy for preserving cultural identity while simultaneously attracting consumers. Thus, regional cuisine functions not only as a consumable product but also as a medium of cultural representation, nostalgia for migrant communities, and a strategy for cross-regional culinary business development.

Future studies are expected to examine authenticity and adaptation in regional culinary businesses by involving more cross-regional culinary entrepreneurs in order to obtain more diverse strategic comparisons. Further research may also employ quantitative approaches to measure the influence of authenticity on customer loyalty, consumer satisfaction, and purchase intention in gastronomic tourism.

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