

TASTE OF TRADITION: UNDERSTANDING KADAZANDUSUN CULINARY PRACTICE, FOCUS ON NONSOOM BAMBANGAN

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Abstract. The Kadazandusun people, the largest indigenous bumiputera group in Sabah, are a blend of the Kadazan and Dusun ethnicities, known as “Mamasok” or “Pasok” meaning “original people”. This research study investigates their traditional food, Noonsom Bambangan, focusing on culinary knowledge specific to the west coast of Sabah, particularly in Kota Belud. The research aims to identify traditional food knowledge among the Kadazandusun and explore factors influencing the consumption of Noonsom Bambangan. Qualitative methods, including interviews the local residents of Kota Belud who are 20 years old up to 70 years old will be selected for this interview, four Informant Profile and observations with local residents, were employed for data collection and analysis. The Research Objective to identify the knowledge on traditional food of Kadazandusun, especially Noonsom Bambangan, among residents in Kota Belud, Sabah. To investigate the factors that influence the consumption of traditional Kadazandusun food, which is Noonsom Bambangan.

Keywords: *Noonsom Bambangan, Kadazandusun, traditional food, Sabah*

Introduction

These dishes are popular among several ethnic groups in Sabah, including the Kadazandusun, Bajau, and Rungus." peoples of Sabah but also the broader cultural arras of these ethnic groups (Ag Budin and Wafa, 2015). This dish is crafted by combining the ripe flesh of the Bambangan fruit with its grated seed, salt, and occasionally chilies, allowing the ingredients to ferment in sealed jars for at least a week. Naturally served alongside rice and an assortment of vegetables, poultry, and meats, Noonsom Bambangan is more than just a food item; it is a vital component of communal dining and cultural expression (Fam et al., 2020; Ramli et al., 2020). This study aims to explore the import of Noonsom Bambangan within its cultural setting and observe its role in preserving the culinary traditions of the Sabah ethnics. As highlighted by Ramli et al. (2020), Traditional food serves as an important symbol of cultural identity, embodying the historical and social narratives of an ethnic community. Ethnic cuisine, particularly those dishes that are prepared using traditional methods, stands as a testament to ancient knowledge, cultural rituals, locally sourced ingredients, and shared culinary techniques (García-Barrón et al., 2021; Awang-Kanak et al., 2018). One such dish that shows this culinary heritage is Noonsom Bambangan, a unique pickled creation made from Bambangan, a wild mango indigenous to the jungles of Southeast Asia (Jahurul et al., 2018). In the words of Jahurul et al. (2018), Bambangan possesses a distinct flavor profile that sets it apart from its domesticated counterparts, being less sweet and tangier, with an aromatic presence that states its character, by the people in Peninsular Malaysia

and also the people in Sabah itself especially from the third and above generation (Ramli et al., 2020; Md Sharif et al., 2015).

Based on the findings of García-Barrón et al. (2021), many traditional foods, including both cultivated and semi-domesticated species as well as wild varieties, have been grown and consumed for centuries some even for millennia (Awang-Kanak et al., 2018). However, the importance of these foods has frequently been undervalued and overlooked by researchers, policymakers, and markets (Fusté-Forné, 2022; Md Sharif et al., 2015). This oversight is further compounded by the limited research on individuals' knowledge regarding Kadazandusun traditional foods, particularly Noonsom Bambangan (Md Sharif et al., 2015). If this trend continues, future generations may find it difficult to recognize and appreciate the rich heritage of Kadazandusun cuisine (Md Sharif et al., 2015; Md Nor et al., 2012). Focusing on Noonsom Bambangan can help advocates push for greater recognition and revitalization of traditional foods within broader food systems (Ramli et al., 2020; Omar et al., 2011). Addressing this gap in knowledge is essential, as it underscores the need for further research and documentation, which are pivotal for the preservation and acknowledgment of traditional cuisine (Md Nor et al., 2012). This chapter also includes the research background, problem statement, research questions, objectives, and aims of the study.

Literature review

The traditional food of Kadazandusun

Traditional foods are those that have been consumed for many generations or passed down through families (García-Barrón et al., 2021; Kwik, 2008a; 2008b). These meals and dishes often have historical ties to national, regional, or local cuisines, making them inherently traditional. Referring to García-Barrón et al. (2021), traditional food is often referred to as ethnic food and is closely associated with local and artisan food. This association highlights the importance of specific ingredients, culinary expertise, and the unique geographical context of the products (García-Barrón et al., 2021). Ethnic cuisine is not only a culinary tradition but also a vital expression of cultural heritage (Ramli et al., 2020; Kwik, 2008a; 2008b). It embodies ancient knowledge and practices, utilizing locally sourced ingredients to create dishes rich in essential nutrients (Awang-Kanak et al., 2018; Kwik, 2008a; 2008b). Beyond nourishment, traditional foods connect individuals to their community and identity (Kwik, 2008a; 2008b). Food also acts as a medium for cultural exchange, bridging diverse communities and fostering understanding (Rachão et al., 2019).

Traditional foods, passed down through generations, embody the cultural and historical essence of a community, often being rooted in national, regional, or local cuisines. These dishes, commonly referred to as ethnic foods, highlight the connection to local and artisan practices, encompassing the ingredients, expertise, and geography associated with them (García-Barrón et al., 2021; Kwik, 2008a; 2008b). Traditional ethnic cuisine serves as a legacy of ancient knowledge and cultural practices, utilizing locally available resources and common preparation methods (Ramli et al., 2020; Awang-Kanak et al., 2018). Typically made from plants, animals, or fungi, traditional foods provide essential nutrients while also being deeply intertwined with community traditions and cultural identities (Awang-Kanak et al., 2018; Kwik, 2008a; 2008b). Moreover, food is recognized as a powerful medium for cultural exchange (Rachão et al., 2019).

An example of traditional cuisine is Noonsom Bambangan, a rare dish from the Kadazandusun people of Sabah, which is increasingly hard to find due to its seasonal fruit base and changing cultural practices among younger generations (Fusté-Forné, 2022; Md Sharif et al., 2015; Md Nor et al., 2012). This dish's rarity, and its associated rising costs, reflects broader trends in cultural disconnection and the risk of extinction for traditional foods (Fusté-Forné, 2022; Md Sharif et al., 2015). Academic perspectives emphasize the importance of linking food production and consumption to cultural identity and customs (Ramli et al., 2020). The preservation and transmission of culinary knowledge and skills to future generations is crucial for sustaining cultural heritage, as recognized by Hiromitsu et al. (2021) and Md Nor et al. (2012).

Fermented traditional food of Kadazandusun nativ

The process of fermentation breaks down complex molecules, enriching the nutritional quality of foods. Explanation how fermentation involves microorganisms that break down complex organic molecules, ultimately altering the nutritional and biochemical properties of food. This process creates complex ecosystems within fermented foods, reflecting a community's heritage through culinary practices. The Kadazan-Dusun people have a deep cultural connection to mangifera pajang, or bambangan, which they regard as an iconic fruit with significant ethno-cultural value (Fam et al., 2020; Ramli et al., 2020). The fruit is traditionally prepared as Nonsoom Bambangan, a pickle made from half-ripe bambangan mixed with grated dried seed and salt, fermented for weeks (Jahurul et al., 2018). This dish, along with jeruk bambanga, which involves fermenting cubed fruits, showcases the community's culinary expertise and is typically enjoyed with rice, available in local markets for several weeks.

The process of making Noonsom Bambangan

Olis' Family (Informant): Melalui cara membuat jeruk bambangan/sabahan foo, tips & petua dari ibu saya.

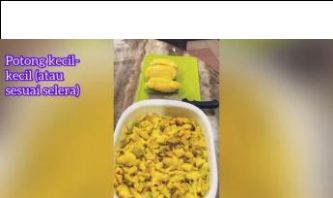
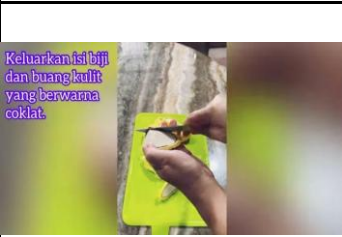
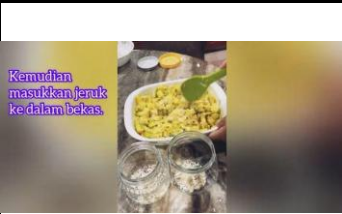
Wash clean and open the bambangan skin.	 Cucuk bersih dan buka kulit bambangan
Cut into small pieces or as desired.	 Potong kecil-kecil atau sesuai selera
Remove the seeds and discard the brown skin.	 Keluarkan isi biji dan buang kulit yang berwarna coklat.
Mix the ground bambangan seeds and salt until well mixed.	 Gaulkan biji bambangan yang telah dikisar dan garam sehingga sebatik.
Put bambangan in a glass container and let it ferment.	 Kemudian masukkan jeruk ke dalam bekas

Figure 1. The process of making Noonsom Bambangan.

Local ingredients

The dish often incorporates local ingredients such as lime juice, chilies, and spices, highlighting the use of natural resources in Kadazandusun cuisine.

Variations

Regional differences

Noonsom Bambangan can vary in flavor and texture, with regional communities having their own unique variations of the

Consumption of traditional food

The decline in traditional food consumption is mainly due to reduced commercialization and the loss of knowledge among younger generations (Daily Express Online, 2022; Md Sharif et al., 2015; Md Nor et al., 2012). The taste, nutrition,

affordability, convenience, and weight control significantly shape American eating habits. These findings illustrate that the study context influences predictor selection; thus, this investigation focuses on how convenience, familiarity, health, mood, price, and sensory appeal impact the intention to consume native KadazanDusun food (Fam et al., 2020). The concept of traditional cuisine, particularly focusing on the Kadazandusun people of Sabah, Malaysia, highlights that traditional food is dynamic and influenced by various factors such as time, place, know-how, and cultural significance (García-Barrón et al., 2021). Despite the rich diversity of races in Sabah, the Kadazandusun are emphasized as the largest ethnic group, making their food a significant aspect of the region's identity (DOSM, 2022). The commercial potential of Kadazandusun traditional foods is noted, as they involve unique ingredients that are not commonly found elsewhere (Fam et al., 2020; Awang-Kanak et al., 2018). However, Daily Express Online (2022) highlighted the declining consumption of native foods due to modernization. This shift results in a loss of traditional knowledge and practices, as younger generations gravitate towards newer cultural influences, potentially neglecting the wisdom and culinary skills passed down by their elders (Daily Express Online, 2022; Md Sharif et al., 2015; Md Nor et al., 2012). The overall sentiment reflects a struggle between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to contemporary societal changes.

Materials and Methods

The methodology for this study utilized semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method, offering a balanced approach between flexibility and structure. Interviews were conducted with Kota Belud residents aged between 20 and 70 years, selected to provide a diverse range of insights and experiences. This format allowed participants to share their thoughts and experiences while ensuring that essential topics related to Noonsom Bambangan and traditional Kadazan-Dusun cuisine were systematically addressed. By engaging a diverse group, the research aimed to capture a comprehensive understanding of the cultural significance and knowledge surrounding Noonsom Bambangan, which is deeply rooted in Sabahan heritage.

Results and Discussion

The study on Noonsom Bambangan, utilizing both observational methods and interviews, focused on the Tamu Kota Belud market, revealing several key insights about Bambangan fruit and its culinary significance:

Market observations

(1) The Tamu Kota Belud showcased a variety of goods, including desserts, fruits, vegetables, fish, clothes, and handicrafts. (2) Bambangan fruit was notably scarce, with only two vendors selling it alongside Noonsom Bambangan. This limited availability may be linked to the timing of the observation, as it was conducted at the end of September, possibly before the Bambangan season began. (3) High prices were noted for the fruit, indicating its rarity in the market.

Elderly expertise

Elderly respondents, having grown up with Bambangan fruit, possessed extensive knowledge of its characteristics and uses. They highlighted the fruit's health benefits, including its high fiber and carotenoid content, antioxidant properties, and potential medicinal uses for disease prevention and overall health.

General awareness and experiences

(1) All interviewees, representing a diverse demographic from Kota Belud, were aware of Bambangan fruit and recognized its seasonal nature and distinct aroma. (2) While consumption varied, all participants had positive experiences with the fruit, noting its sweet-sour taste and role in stimulating appetite.

Health benefits

Respondents noted that Bambangan fruit is rich in vitamins and antioxidants, with many referencing its potential anticancer properties, reinforcing its nutritional significance in the diet.

Culinary versatility

Interviewees demonstrated knowledge of preparing Noonsom Bambangan, emphasizing the simplicity of traditional methods. They mentioned a variety of culinary uses for Bambangan fruit, beyond pickling, such as in soups, sambal, and desserts, showcasing its adaptability within Sabahan cuisine.

Commercial potential

Participants expressed optimism regarding the commercial opportunities for Bambangan fruit, citing its nutritional value, unique aroma, and minimal competition as conducive factors for broader commercialization. Overall, the findings illustrate that Noonsom Bambangan and Bambangan fruit are integral to the cultural and culinary landscape of the Kadazan-Dusun community in Sabah. While the fruit's limited market presence currently poses challenges, its recognized health benefits and culinary versatility indicate significant potential for future growth and appreciation both locally and commercially.

Categories of interviewees

The categories of interviewees are include in *Table 1*, which consists of gender, age, ethnic, occupation as well as level of education.

Table 1. The interviewees information.

No.	Respondent	Gender	Age	Ethnic	Occupation	Level of Education
1	Siti Aloyah Binti Salleh	Female	62	Bisaya	Retired teacher	Bachelor Degree of Teaching (Hons.)
2	Rusmi @ Rosmi binti A. Rahman	Female	56	Dusun	Retired teacher at SK Tempasuk 1, Kota Belud	Bachelor of Information Technology (Hons.)
3	Intan Baidura Mohd J. Oboi	Female	30	Dusun	Nurse at Hospital Queen Elizabeth I	Bachelor of Nursing (Hons.)
4	Jenny Alfred	Female	27	Dusun	Factory worker	Diploma in Housekeeping Management

Interview transcript analysis

In addition to conducting interviews, the researcher employed the observation method at Tamu Kota Belud. This market features a diverse array of goods sold by the local residents, including desserts, fruits, vegetables, fish, clothing, and handicrafts. Through careful observation, the researcher found it particularly challenging to locate Bambangan fruit. Despite exploring the Tamu Kota Belud area thoroughly, only two vendors offered Bambangan fruit and Noonsom Bambangan. The limited availability and relatively high prices of the fruit were notable. Given that this observation took place at the end of September, it is likely that the Bambangan season had not yet commenced, further complicating efforts to find it. If this is indeed the case, locating the fruit would be even more difficult.

Table 2. Interview transcript analysis.

No	Questions	Answer
Q1	What do you know about Bambangan fruit?	All respondents were aware of the existence of Bambangan fruit and had knowledge about it.
Q2	Have you ever tried to eat Bambangan fruit before?	All respondents had tried or consumed Bambangan fruit.
Q3	How often do you eat Bambangan fruit?	Most respondents rarely ate Bambangan fruit because it is only available during certain times of the year. However, when Bambangan fruit is in season, they pickle it to make Noonsom Bambangan so that it can last longer.
Q4	Can you share your experience of eating traditional food, especially Bambangan fruit?	All respondents had knowledge about Bambangan fruit based on their personal experiences. Most of them liked the fruit because its sweet and sour taste stimulated their appetite.
Q5	What is another term for Noonsom Bambangan that you know? Name it.	Most respondents knew other terms for Bambangan fruit. The terms mentioned included <i>Mangifera pajang</i> , "wild mango," "ambangan," "mambangan," and "mawang."
Q6	Based on your experience, what are the benefits of Bambangan fruit that you know?	Most respondents had some knowledge about the benefits of consuming Bambangan fruit based on their reading and personal experiences.
Q7	Do you know the ingredients and methods used to prepare Noonsom Bambangan?	Most respondents had prepared Noonsom Bambangan. However, some respondents had never prepared it themselves but knew the preparation methods through their parents.
Q8	What kind of menu have you made with Bambangan fruit apart from using it as a pickle?	All respondents had used Bambangan to prepare fish soup or sambal cooked with anchovies, salted fish, or belacan. Some respondents also used Bambangan to prepare Pinarasakan or consumed it as a dessert.
Q9	What are the uses of Bambangan fruit that you know?	Most respondents stated that Bambangan fruit contains a high level of vitamin C, which is beneficial for health. Some respondents also stated that, apart from being prepared as Noonsom Bambangan, the fruit can be used to make juice and as a flavour enhancer in cooking.
Q10	Is it easy to find Bambangan fruit in Kota Belud?	All respondents stated that the availability of Bambangan fruit in Kota Belud depends on the season. Outside the fruiting season, Bambangan fruit is very difficult to find.
Q11	What is your opinion about Bambangan fruit products sold in Kota Belud?	Most respondents believed that Bambangan products sold in Kota Belud were limited in variety. However, some respondents had encountered products such as Serunding Bambangan and Bambangan juice, although these products were not widely commercialised.
Q12	In your opinion, what types of products can be made from Bambangan fruit other than Noonsom Bambangan?	All respondents provided their opinions about products that could be made from Bambangan fruit other than Noonsom Bambangan. The proposed products included seasoning, ice cream, Bambangan-flavoured sauce, nutritious drinks, and cosmetic ingredients.

As of now, Noonsom Bambangan holds significant cultural value and is gaining attention in various circles, including culinary tourism. Efforts to market Noonsom Bambangan have also been bolstered by growing trends in sustainability and health-conscious eating, as its natural ingredients align well with modern dietary preferences. To foster greater awareness and appreciation, it is crucial to promote a wider variety of products based on Bambangan fruit within the market. Such efforts could enhance the popularity of this traditional dish, encouraging not only the Kadazan-Dusun community but also other communities to engage with traditional foods.

Current initiatives to promote local cuisine, including Noonsom Bambangan, aim to foster appreciation among both locals and tourists. This includes events, cooking demonstrations, and food festivals that celebrate traditional dishes. Such activities not only help preserve these culinary practices but also provide platforms for younger generations to learn about and engage with their culinary heritage. By broadening interest in Noonsom Bambangan, we can create opportunities for cross-cultural exchange, allowing diverse communities to learn about the unique culinary practices of different ethnic groups in Sabah. This increased interest may, in turn, encourage a revival of traditional gastronomic practices, ensuring that they are preserved and passed down to future generations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, revitalizing interest in Noonsom Bambangan can serve as an important pathway for cultural preservation, community engagement, and the sustainable promotion of Sabah's traditional food heritage. Noonsom Bambangan is more than a fermented food product; it represents the knowledge, skills, values, and everyday practices that have been passed from one generation to another within local communities. The findings indicate that respondents were generally familiar with Bambangan fruit, its seasonal availability, preparation methods, culinary uses, and potential health benefits. However, the limited commercialization of Bambangan-based products and the declining involvement of younger generations may threaten the continuity of this traditional knowledge. Greater efforts are therefore needed to encourage young people to learn the preparation of Noonsom Bambangan from parents, elders, and experienced community members. Educational programmes, cultural festivals, cooking demonstrations, and community-based workshops could provide practical opportunities for knowledge transmission. At the same time, collaboration among local communities, entrepreneurs, tourism agencies, educational institutions, and government bodies could strengthen the visibility and marketability of Bambangan products. Product innovation, including Bambangan juice, seasoning, sauces, ice cream, nutritious beverages, serunding, and cosmetic ingredients, may also expand its commercial potential without diminishing its cultural meaning. Promoting Noonsom Bambangan through food tourism and local branding could create new economic opportunities for rural producers and small-scale entrepreneurs in Kota Belud and other parts of Sabah. Nevertheless, commercialization should be carefully managed to ensure that traditional preparation methods, local ownership, and cultural authenticity are respected. By combining cultural preservation with responsible innovation, Noonsom Bambangan can remain relevant in contemporary society. Such initiatives may increase awareness of indigenous ingredients and their contribution to local cultural identity. Ultimately, renewed appreciation of this traditional food can strengthen cultural identity, support intergenerational learning, generate community income, and ensure that Sabah's rich gastronomic traditions remain vibrant, meaningful, and sustainable for future generations.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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