

Adaptive Fidelity and the Culinary Continuity of *Brongkos* in Javanese Food Heritage

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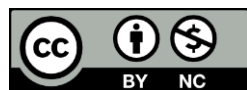
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ABSTRACT

This study examines how *brongkos*, a traditional Javanese stew associated with Yogyakarta and Central Java, maintains its culinary identity while undergoing historical, social, and presentational change. Using a qualitative descriptive design, the research combines textual analysis of *Serat Centhini*, a review of historical, gastronomic, scientific, and heritage sources, and a confirmatory interview with K.P. Budyaningrat, a cultural practitioner knowledgeable about Javanese culinary traditions. The findings show that the identity of *brongkos* does not depend on a completely fixed recipe. Variations may occur in meat cuts, tofu types, vegetables, cooking equipment, portion sizes, and serving formats. Nevertheless, the dish remains recognisable through a stable culinary structure consisting of *kluwak*, coconut milk, prolonged cooking, dark colour, tender ingredients, aromatic spices, and a balanced combination of savoury, mildly sweet, earthy, and spicy flavours. Historical references in *Serat Centhini* demonstrate that *brongkos* was consumed in everyday meals, guest receptions, and communal celebrations in the early nineteenth century. Its later circulation through palace narratives, colonial dining, food stalls, tourism, and contemporary dining further reveals its capacity to move across social contexts. The study proposes adaptive fidelity as a framework for

understanding this continuity. Adaptive fidelity refers to the ability of a traditional dish to accommodate changes in supplementary ingredients, technology, presentation, and service while preserving its constitutive sensory and procedural relationships. The study concludes that the safeguarding of *brongkos* requires not rigid standardisation but the continued transmission of its culinary grammar through households, practitioners, food businesses, cultural experts, and educational institutions.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana *brongkos*, masakan tradisional Jawa berkuah yang diasosiasikan dengan Yogyakarta dan Jawa Tengah, mempertahankan identitas kulinernya sambil mengalami perubahan historis, sosial, dan penyajian. Dengan menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini memadukan analisis tekstual terhadap *Serat Centhini*, telaah terhadap sumber-sumber historis, gastronomis, ilmiah, dan warisan budaya, serta wawancara konfirmatif dengan K.P. Budyaningrat, seorang praktisi budaya yang memiliki pengetahuan tentang tradisi kuliner Jawa. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa identitas *brongkos* tidak bergantung pada resep yang sepenuhnya tetap. Variasi dapat terjadi pada potongan daging, jenis tahu, sayuran, peralatan memasak, ukuran porsi, dan format penyajian. Meskipun demikian, hidangan ini tetap dapat dikenali melalui struktur kuliner yang stabil yang terdiri atas *kluwak*, santan, proses pemasakan yang lama, warna gelap, bahan-bahan yang empuk, rempah-rempah aromatik, serta perpaduan seimbang antara rasa gurih, agak manis, berruasa tanah, dan pedas. Referensi historis dalam *Serat Centhini* menunjukkan bahwa *brongkos* dikonsumsi dalam hidangan sehari-hari, jamuan tamu, dan perayaan komunal pada awal abad kesembilan belas. Peredarannya kemudian melalui narasi keraton, budaya makan kolonial, warung makan, pariwisata, dan praktik bersantap kontemporer semakin menunjukkan kemampuannya untuk bergerak melintasi berbagai konteks sosial. Penelitian ini mengusulkan *adaptive fidelity* sebagai kerangka untuk memahami keberlanjutan tersebut. *Adaptive fidelity* merujuk pada kemampuan suatu hidangan tradisional untuk mengakomodasi perubahan dalam bahan pelengkap, teknologi, penyajian, dan pelayanan sambil mempertahankan hubungan sensoris dan prosedural yang membentuknya. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pelindungan *brongkos* tidak memerlukan standarisasi yang kaku, melainkan keberlanjutan pewarisan tata bahasa kulinernya melalui rumah tangga, praktisi, usaha kuliner, ahli budaya, dan lembaga pendidikan.

1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional food is increasingly recognised as a form of living cultural heritage rather than merely a product prepared from inherited ingredients. It embodies collective memory, local knowledge, sensory conventions, social relationships, and techniques transmitted across generations. A dish becomes traditional not simply because it is old, but because communities continue to associate it with a particular place, history, practice, and identity. Recent scholarship consequently conceptualises traditional food through temporal, territorial, cultural, and social dimensions rather than through age or geographical origin alone (Rocillo-Aquino et al., 2021).

This understanding is especially relevant to Indonesia, whose culinary diversity has developed through interactions among ecological resources, ethnic traditions, migration, trade, religious practices, palace cultures, and colonial encounters. Indonesian dishes often exist in several household and regional versions without losing their recognised identities. The diversity of ingredients and preparation methods therefore represents an inherent feature of Indonesian food culture rather than merely a departure from standard recipes (Prastowo et al., 2023).

One example is *brongkos*, a dark coconut-milk-based stew closely associated with Yogyakarta and neighbouring areas of Central Java. It is generally prepared using *kluwak* seeds, coconut milk, meat, tofu, cowpeas, eggs, palm sugar, and aromatic spices. Its dark broth, earthy aroma, savoury depth, restrained sweetness, and prolonged cooking distinguish it from many other Javanese coconut-milk dishes. The fermented *kluwak* seed, derived from *Pangium edule*, is particularly important because it contributes colour, aroma, bitterness, and savouriness to the dish.

Brongkos also possesses considerable historical depth. Its appearance in *Serat Centhini*, compiled in the early nineteenth century, places it within everyday meals, guest reception, and communal celebration. In later culinary narratives, it became associated with Yogyakarta palace culture, colonial dining, traditional food stalls, and regional tourism. Its designation as Indonesian Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2018 further strengthened its institutional status as a culturally significant dish.

Nevertheless, formal recognition does not automatically explain how a traditional dish remains identifiable while undergoing change. Contemporary *brongkos* is prepared with different cuts of beef, tofu varieties, vegetables, cooking equipment, portion sizes, and serving arrangements. It may be encountered in household kitchens, roadside stalls, restaurants, ceremonial meals, tourism venues, and contemporary formal dining. These variations raise a central question concerning which elements may change and which must remain for the dish to continue being recognised as *brongkos*. Recent scholarship has examined traditional food through the perspectives of cultural identity, authenticity, intergenerational transmission, culinary innovation, tourism, commercialisation, and heritage safeguarding. Table 1 summarises eight recent studies that provide the conceptual and empirical foundation for examining the continuity and transformation of *brongkos*.

Table 1. Recent Studies on Traditional Food, Culinary Authenticity, and Food Heritage

Study	Object and context	Main finding	Relevance and remaining gap
Rocillo-Aquino et al. (2021)	Conceptual development of traditional food	Traditional food is constituted through temporal, territorial, cultural, and social dimensions.	Provides a broad definition but does not explain how the sensory core of a particular dish is negotiated.
Ting et al. (2021)	Chetti culinary heritage among younger generations in Melaka	Family participation and intergenerational transmission are essential to sustaining minority culinary knowledge.	Emphasises transmission but gives less attention to ingredient hierarchy and sensory recognition.
Jordana et al. (2021)	Innovation and traditional food development	Traditional food survives through a balance among authenticity, adaptation, innovation, and consumer acceptance.	Identifies the general tension but does not establish the limits of acceptable change in a specific dish.
Almansouri et al. (2022)	Heritage-food professionals in Italy and Saudi Arabia	Heritage food is structured by legacy, people, and place, while adaptation, costs, and non-local cooks may create authenticity risks.	Offers an authenticity-risk framework but does not closely examine a historically documented Indonesian dish.
Ab-Latif et al. (2024)	Consumer perceptions of authentic food	Perceived authenticity comprises uniqueness, originality, locality, and traditionality.	Focuses on consumer measurement rather than relationships among ingredients, techniques, and sensory expectations.

Study	Object and context	Main finding	Relevance and remaining gap
Prastowo et al. (2023)	Diversity of Indonesian offal-based dishes	Indonesian culinary identity develops through regional variation, local resources, and culturally specific uses of animal ingredients.	Demonstrates diversity but does not examine how one dish retains identity across multiple variants.
Wargadalem et al. (2023)	History and ethnic identity of <i>pempek</i>	A traditional dish can embody migration history, production knowledge, and regional ethnic identity while developing multiple forms.	Offers a strong Indonesian comparison but focuses on historical identity rather than boundaries of adaptation.
Zhu and Yasuda (2023)	Food heritage promotion through social media in China	Digital visibility can assist safeguarding while simultaneously accelerating commodification and simplification.	Reveals the risks of commercialisation but does not identify the sensory features that should be protected.

The literature shows that culinary heritage is neither completely static nor infinitely adaptable. Almansouri et al. (2022) found that culinary professionals regarded inheritance, recipe authenticity, ingredient locality, and knowledgeable cooks as central to heritage food. They also observed that authenticity evolves under cultural and societal influence, while changes driven by customer preference, ingredient costs, and the background of cooks may create risks.

Similarly, Jordana et al. (2021) argue that the future of traditional food depends on a balanced relationship among authenticity, innovation, and adaptation. Innovation may maintain commercial and social relevance, but consumer acceptance depends on whether change remains compatible with the perceived value of tradition. Studies of specific Indonesian foods support this balance. Research on *gudeg*, *pempek*, and *tempoyak* demonstrates that traditional foods can develop new forms, packaging, markets, and preparation practices while remaining associated with particular histories and regions.

However, three gaps remain evident. First, few studies examine *brongkos* as a historically documented culinary tradition despite its appearance in *Serat Centhini* and its contemporary heritage status. Second, existing research commonly discusses authenticity through broad dimensions such as locality, originality, tradition, and cultural representation, but rarely identifies the hierarchy among ingredients, techniques, textures, colours, and flavours within one dish. Third, the relationship between historical evidence, modern culinary practice, and confirmation by a knowledgeable cultural practitioner has not been sufficiently explored.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the identity, historical continuity, composition, cooking process, and contemporary adaptation of *brongkos*. It combines textual evidence, published gastronomic and scientific sources, and a confirmatory interview with K.P. Budayaningrat. The study asks how *brongkos* maintains its culinary identity despite variations in ingredients, equipment, presentation, and social context.

The article argues that the continuity of *brongkos* is governed by adaptive fidelity. This concept describes the capacity of a traditional dish to accommodate changes in supplementary ingredients, technology, portioning, and presentation while preserving its constitutive sensory and procedural relationships. By identifying the elements that are flexible and those that carry the greatest identity-bearing weight, the study contributes a dish-centred framework for evaluating authenticity and innovation in living culinary heritage.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine the culinary identity, historical continuity, preparation techniques, and contemporary adaptation of *brongkos*. The research combined textual analysis, document review, culinary interpretation, and a confirmatory expert interview. This design was selected because *brongkos* cannot be adequately understood solely as a recipe or food product. Its identity is also constructed through historical references, sensory characteristics, cooking practices, social contexts, and community recognition.

The unit of analysis consisted of information concerning the ingredients, flavour structure, cooking process, historical presence, modes of presentation, and cultural significance of *brongkos*. Particular attention was given to elements that remained stable across different sources and to elements that varied among historical, domestic, commercial, and contemporary culinary contexts.

2.2. Data Sources

The study used three categories of data. The first consisted of historical textual data drawn from *Serat Centhini*, particularly passages in which *brongkos* appears as part of daily meals, guest reception, and communal or wedding-related dining. The edition used in this study was *Centhini Tambangraras-Amongraga*, edited and rendered into Indonesian by Marsono and the textual adaptation team.

The second category comprised published sources concerning Javanese and Indonesian culinary traditions, *kluwak*, food heritage, authenticity, culinary innovation, and the contemporary development of *brongkos*. These sources included books, journal articles, institutional heritage records, theses, and relevant cultural documentation. Scientific publications concerning the fermentation and biochemical transformation of *Pangium edule* seeds were used to explain the culinary function of *kluwak*. Recent studies on traditional food and culinary heritage were also reviewed to position *brongkos* within broader discussions of authenticity, adaptation, and cultural continuity.

The third category consisted of interview data obtained from K.P. Budayaningrat, a cultural practitioner with knowledge of Javanese culinary traditions. The interview was conducted on May 11th, 2026. He was selected purposively because of his familiarity with Javanese food practices, court-related cultural knowledge, and the sensory standards through which traditional dishes are recognised.

2.3. Data Collection

Historical data were collected by identifying every occurrence of *brongkos* in the selected edition of *Serat Centhini*. Each occurrence was recorded together with its immediate narrative context, including the time of consumption, social setting, and function of the meal. The passages were then compared to determine whether the dish appeared only in ceremonial contexts or also in everyday dining.

Documentary data were collected through a focused review of sources dealing with the composition, processing, history, cultural designation, consumer acceptance, and modern development of *brongkos*. Sources discussing broader concepts of food heritage and culinary authenticity were included when they contributed directly to the interpretation of the empirical findings.

The interview with K.P. Budayaningrat was semi-structured. Questions focused on the defining characteristics of *brongkos*, acceptable variations in ingredients, the role of *kluwak*, the importance of slow cooking, the use of traditional and modern cooking equipment, the balance of flavours, palace associations, and the limits of contemporary adaptation. The interview was designed primarily to confirm, clarify, or qualify information derived from textual and documentary sources.

The informant was also asked to distinguish between elements that could be modified and elements that should be retained for a dish to remain recognisable as *brongkos*. This distinction was important for analysing culinary authenticity and for developing the concept of adaptive fidelity.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data were analysed through thematic coding and interpretive comparison. The initial coding process identified six major themes, namely culinary identity, historical presence, ingredient structure, flavour profile, cooking technique, and contemporary adaptation.

Within each theme, the data were classified according to their source and function. Historical texts were used to establish temporal presence and social context. Culinary and scientific publications were used to explain ingredients, preparation, and flavour formation. Institutional documents were used to verify heritage recognition. Interview data were used to confirm culturally recognised standards and to clarify the boundaries between acceptable variation and identity loss.

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, descriptive information from the sources was organised into categories concerning ingredients, sensory qualities, techniques, and social functions. Second, similarities and differences among the sources were compared. Third, the findings were interpreted through the concepts of culinary heritage, authenticity, adaptation, and continuity.

Particular attention was paid to the hierarchy of culinary elements. Ingredients and techniques were not treated as having equal importance. Components such as *kluwak*, coconut milk, dark colour, slow cooking, and savoury-sweet balance were examined as potential

identity-bearing elements. Other components, including meat cuts, tofu varieties, serving vessels, and portion sizes, were examined as potentially flexible elements.

This analytical distinction enabled the study to formulate adaptive fidelity as an interpretive concept. Adaptive fidelity refers to the capacity of a traditional dish to undergo controlled changes in presentation, equipment, supplementary ingredients, and service while preserving its constitutive sensory and procedural relationships.

2.5. Data Validation

Data validity was strengthened through source triangulation. Historical references in *Serat Centhini* were compared with published culinary studies, scientific research, heritage documentation, and interview testimony. Claims concerning chemical composition and food safety were based on scientific publications rather than on interview data. Historical dates and heritage status were verified through textual and institutional records.

The interview functioned as expert confirmation rather than as a substitute for documentary evidence. When oral testimony supported information found in written sources, it strengthened the cultural interpretation of the data. When an explanation could not be established through linguistic, historical, or scientific evidence, it was presented cautiously as oral knowledge or culinary memory.

Analytical validity was also maintained by separating empirical findings from theoretical interpretation. Descriptions of ingredients, historical references, preparation stages, and interview statements were presented in the *Results* section. Their implications for authenticity, culinary identity, adaptation, and heritage continuity were developed in the *Discussion* section.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

K.P. Budayaningrat was informed about the purpose of the study and the intended use of the interview material. His participation was voluntary, and permission was obtained to identify him by name in the article. The interview data were used only for academic purposes and were represented in accordance with the meaning of his statements.

Because the interview was not publicly retrievable, it was cited in the text as *personal communication* in accordance with APA 7 guidelines and was not included in the reference list.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Culinary Identity and Sensory Characteristics of Brongkos

The findings identify *brongkos* as a traditional Javanese dish strongly associated with the Special Region of Yogyakarta and neighbouring areas of Central Java. Within the structure of an Indonesian meal, *brongkos* functions primarily as a substantial accompaniment to rice. It may contain meat, eggs, tofu, tempeh, cowpeas, and several other plant-based ingredients cooked in a coconut milk broth. This combination places the dish within the category of thick, coconut-milk-based stews rather than clear soups or dry meat dishes (Gardjito et al., 2017).

The most immediately recognisable feature of *brongkos* is its dark brown or nearly black broth. This colour is produced chiefly by *kluwak*, the fermented seed of *Pangium edule*. The seed also gives the dish an earthy aroma, a mild bitterness, and a pronounced savoury quality. Fermentation causes significant changes in the texture, colour, flavour, and biochemical composition of the seed, transforming it into a culinary spice suitable for consumption (Andarwulan et al., 1999).

The sensory profile of *brongkos* combines savoury, sweet, earthy, fatty, and spicy elements. Coconut milk provides richness, palm sugar supplies restrained sweetness, and whole bird's eye chillies create intermittent bursts of heat. Unlike a uniformly spicy dish in which ground chilli is distributed throughout the broth, *brongkos* often allows diners to regulate the intensity of the heat by deciding whether to eat the whole chillies.

K.P. Budayaningrat confirmed that the defining qualities of *brongkos* include its dark broth, rich but balanced flavour, soft ingredients, and the integration of savoury and mildly sweet tastes. He explained that the sweetness should not dominate the dish. Rather, it should soften the bitterness of *kluwak* and the heat of the chillies while maintaining the savoury character of the meat broth and coconut milk (K.P. Budayaningrat, personal communication, May 11th, 2026).

The findings further indicate that texture is central to the recognition of the dish. Beef and cowpeas are cooked until tender, while tofu and eggs absorb the seasoned broth. The final consistency is thicker than that of an ordinary vegetable soup but remains sufficiently fluid to be poured over rice. According to K.P. Budayaningrat, a serving with a thin, pale broth would generally not be recognised as representative of traditional *brongkos* because it would lack the concentration of colour, aroma, and flavour associated with the dish (personal communication, May 11th, 2026).

3.2. Oral Etymology and Historical Presence

An oral explanation documented in this study associates the word *brongkos* with a foreign culinary expression that was gradually adapted to Javanese pronunciation. K.P. Budayaningrat confirmed that an account of foreign linguistic influence circulates in discussions of the dish's history (personal communication, May 11th, 2026). Nevertheless, the available linguistic evidence does not establish a definitive foreign source for the name. The explanation is therefore treated in this study as oral culinary memory rather than as a conclusive etymology.

The textual investigation found that *brongkos* was already present in Javanese culinary life during the early nineteenth century. The term occurs ten times in the selected edition of *Serat Centhini*. These occurrences situate *brongkos* in different contexts, including morning, midday, and evening meals, the reception of guests, and a communal meal connected with a wedding celebration (Marsono et al., 2010).

The diversity of these contexts suggests that *brongkos* was not confined to a single ceremonial function. It could be served as an everyday food, a dish of hospitality, and part of a festive or ritual meal. Its repeated appearance in *Serat Centhini* also indicates that the dish was sufficiently familiar to be named without an extended explanation for contemporary Javanese readers or listeners.

The historical findings consequently place *brongkos* within a long continuum of Javanese food culture. Its presence in an early nineteenth-century literary work shows that the dish predates its modern identification as a restaurant speciality or culinary tourism product. This textual evidence was supported by K.P. Budayaningrat, who confirmed that *brongkos* has long circulated across domestic, communal, and court-related dining environments in Yogyakarta and Surakarta (personal communication, May 11th, 2026).

The data also associate *brongkos* with colonial-period dining practices. Indonesian dishes were incorporated into the elaborate structure of the *rijsttafel*, in which multiple dishes were presented sequentially or simultaneously through a European-influenced system of table service. Within this setting, a local stew such as *brongkos* could be repositioned from an everyday accompaniment to rice as part of an extensive formal meal.

In Yogyakarta, *brongkos* is also remembered as a dish appreciated within the palace environment. Oral narratives frequently connect it with Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX and Sultan Hamengkubuwono X. K.P. Budayaningrat confirmed the continued association between *brongkos*, royal taste, hospitality, and the refinement of Javanese food service. However, the interview evidence indicates that the dish should not be understood as exclusively royal. It also belongs to household kitchens, markets, food stalls, communal celebrations, and other non-palatial settings (personal communication, May 11th, 2026).

The institutional recognition of the dish reinforces its cultural significance. In 2018, *Sayur Brongkos* was registered as Indonesian Intangible Cultural Heritage under registration number 20182010007321. The registration identifies Yogyakarta as the cultural area associated with the dish and acknowledges its continuing presence in the region's food tradition (Dinas Kebudayaan Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, 2018).

3.3. Ingredients and the Construction of Local Flavour

The findings reveal that *brongkos* does not depend on one completely fixed set of ingredients. Instead, it is organised around a stable flavour structure that permits variation in its animal and plant-based components. This structure consists of *kluwak*, coconut milk, meat or another source of savoury stock, palm sugar, aromatic spices, and a selection of ingredients that absorb the broth.

Beef is the animal ingredient most frequently associated with the dish. Brisket may be used because its fat and connective tissue soften during prolonged cooking. Other locally recognised ingredients include *koyor*, referring to fatty or connective tissue, *congkor*, referring to beef lips, and young bones that enrich the stock. Boiled chicken eggs are also frequently added as a source of protein and as an ingredient capable of absorbing the seasoning.

The principal plant-based components include tofu, tempeh, red cowpeas, melinjo seed skins, and green beans. Several varieties of tofu may be used, including white tofu, *tahu magel*, and *tahu plempung*. The selection varies according to household tradition, ingredient availability, commercial practice, and local preference. Such variability is consistent with the broader structure of Indonesian culinary traditions, in which dishes may retain a recognisable identity despite differences in supplementary ingredients (Gardjito et al., 2017).

K.P. Budayaningrat confirmed that the use of different cuts of beef or different tofu varieties does not necessarily change the identity of the dish. In his account, authenticity resides less in the presence of every possible ingredient than in the relationship among the broth, seasoning, cooking time, and principal flavour components. A version may therefore omit one supplementary ingredient while remaining recognisable as *brongkos*, provided that its central flavour structure is maintained (personal communication, May 11th, 2026).

The seasoning mixture commonly contains *kluwak*, shallots, garlic, coriander, candlenuts, aromatic ginger, ginger, galangal, lemongrass, Indonesian bay leaves, kaffir lime leaves, salt, and palm sugar. The exact composition and proportions differ among cooks, but the spices collectively produce a layered flavour rather than a single dominant note.

Among these ingredients, *kluwak* has the most distinctive role. It provides colour, aroma, bitterness, and savouriness. Research on naturally fermented *Pangium edule* seeds shows that fermentation mobilises proteins, carbohydrates, lipids, and phenolic compounds. Glutamic acid is among the important amino acids present in the fermented seed and contributes to its potential as a savoury culinary ingredient (Andarwulan et al., 1999).

The processing of *kluwak* is crucial because unprocessed *Pangium edule* seeds contain cyanogenic compounds and are unsuitable for direct consumption. Traditional processing generally involves boiling, soaking, and prolonged fermentation or burial in ash. These stages reduce toxicity while changing the seed's colour, texture, and flavour. The mature fermented seed has a dark, soft interior and a characteristic aroma suitable for use as a spice (Andarwulan et al., 1999).

The findings show that *kluwak* performs several functions simultaneously. It is not merely a colouring agent. Removing it would alter the visual appearance, aroma, bitterness, savouriness, and historical recognisability of the dish. K.P. Budayaningrat likewise identified *kluwak* as the ingredient that most clearly distinguishes *brongkos* from other coconut-milk-based Javanese stews (personal communication, May 11th, 2026).

3.4. Cooking Techniques and the Gradual Development of Flavour

The preparation of *brongkos* involves a sequence of boiling, sautéing, combining, and slow simmering. The process begins with ingredients that require the longest cooking time. Beef and cowpeas are generally boiled first until they begin to soften. This initial boiling also produces a stock that forms the savoury base of the dish.

The ground spices are prepared separately and sautéed in oil. This stage reduces their raw aroma and releases volatile compounds from shallots, garlic, coriander, candlenuts, and the other seasonings. Lemongrass, Indonesian bay leaves, galangal, and kaffir lime leaves are then added to strengthen the aromatic profile.

The sautéed seasoning is combined with the meat and stock. Tofu, boiled eggs, melinjo seed skins, green beans, and whole bird's eye chillies may subsequently be added. The sequence is adjusted according to the texture of each ingredient so that softer components do not disintegrate before the meat and cowpeas have become tender.

Coconut milk is introduced gradually. Diluted coconut milk may be added during the earlier stage, while thicker coconut milk is incorporated later. The mixture is simmered over low heat and stirred carefully to prevent the coconut emulsion from separating. Prolonged simmering allows the broth to penetrate the meat, tofu, eggs, and cowpeas while gradually concentrating the seasoning.

K.P. Budayaningrat emphasised that slow cooking is not simply a technical preference but a defining principle in the preparation of *brongkos*. The dish should not be cooked hurriedly because its flavour emerges from the gradual integration of meat stock, coconut milk, *kluwak*, palm sugar, and aromatic spices. The final broth should be concentrated, smooth, and balanced, with no single seasoning overwhelming the others (personal communication, May 11th, 2026).

Some traditional cooks continue to use a clay stove known as an *anglo*, fuelled by firewood or charcoal. This cooking method exposes the pot to slower and less uniform heat than a modern gas or electric stove. It may also introduce a subtle smoky quality into the dish.

K.P. Budayaningrat confirmed that the aroma produced by wood or charcoal remains highly valued because it evokes older household and food-stall cooking practices. Nevertheless, he did not regard the use of a modern stove as an automatic loss of authenticity. In his view, the more decisive factors are the quality of the ingredients, the correct preparation of *kluwak*, the sequence of cooking, and sufficient simmering time (personal communication, May 11th, 2026).

This finding indicates that culinary authenticity is not attached exclusively to one cooking appliance. Traditional flavour may be reproduced through modern equipment when the underlying culinary logic is preserved. The distinction lies between technological adaptation and alteration of the dish's core sensory structure.

3.5. Contemporary Consumption and Culinary Continuity

The findings show that *brongkos* continues to operate across domestic, commercial, ceremonial, and tourism-related contexts. It may be prepared as a family meal, sold in traditional food stalls, served to guests, included in communal celebrations, or reformulated as part of a formal dining menu.

The continued visibility of the dish is supported by establishments that have maintained a specialised association with *brongkos*. One prominent example is Warung Ijo Bu Padmo in Tempel, Sleman. The establishment has been associated with the sale of *brongkos* since approximately 1950 and has become an important reference point in public narratives concerning the dish's continuity.

Its longevity demonstrates the role of small food businesses in preserving culinary knowledge. Such establishments maintain recipes, ingredient combinations, cooking techniques, serving practices, and consumer familiarity across generations. They also transform a dish rooted in household and regional food culture into a recognisable destination within culinary tourism.

Research on the development of *brongkos* as a culinary tourism product in Sleman identifies several possible forms of adaptation. These include classical cooking, *nouvelle cuisine*, fusion food, adjustments in presentation, and improvements in taste, texture, temperature, colour, and overall food character (Witara, 2022).

K.P. Budayaningrat confirmed that *brongkos* can be presented in more than one dining format. It may appear as a generous rice accompaniment in a traditional food stall or as a more carefully portioned component of a formal meal. Changes in portion, tableware, plating, and service style do not necessarily erase the dish's identity (personal communication, May 11th, 2026).

The interview nevertheless revealed limits to adaptation. According to K.P. Budayaningrat, the dish must retain its dark *kluwak*-based broth, coconut milk, savoury and mildly sweet balance, aromatic spices, and slow-cooked character. If these elements are substantially removed, the resulting preparation may use the name *brongkos* but no longer reproduce the sensory identity recognised by Javanese consumers (personal communication, May 11th, 2026).

The results therefore distinguish between presentational flexibility and structural continuity. Presentation may change considerably, but the principal ingredients, cooking relationships, and flavour architecture must remain legible. This flexibility helps explain why *brongkos* has survived across historical periods and moved among household meals, communal feasts, palace-related narratives, traditional stalls, tourism businesses, and contemporary dining experiments.

Overall, the findings identify *brongkos* as a historically established and structurally adaptable Javanese dish. Its continuity depends not on a completely immutable recipe but on the preservation of a recognisable culinary core. That core consists of *kluwak*, coconut milk, slow cooking, dark colour, a savoury and mildly sweet balance, and ingredients capable of absorbing the concentrated broth. Historical texts, institutional recognition, contemporary food businesses, and the testimony of K.P. Budayaningrat collectively demonstrate that *brongkos* remains both a culinary inheritance and a living food practice.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Culinary Identity Beyond a Fixed Recipe

The findings demonstrate that the culinary identity of *brongkos* does not depend on the reproduction of a single standardised recipe. Its animal and plant-based ingredients may vary among households, food stalls, and localities. Beef brisket may be replaced or combined with *koyor*, *congor*, or young bones, while tofu, tempeh, eggs, cowpeas, melinjo seed skins, and green beans may be included in different proportions. Such variation is consistent with the broader structure of Indonesian cuisine, in which the identity of a dish is often maintained despite changes in supplementary ingredients and local preparation practices (Gardjito et al., 2017).

The persistence of *brongkos* amid this variability indicates that its identity is relational rather than entirely ingredient-specific. It emerges from the interaction of *kluwak*, coconut milk, meat stock, palm sugar, aromatic spices, prolonged cooking, dark colour, and a characteristic balance of savoury, mildly sweet, earthy, and spicy flavours. These relationships produce a recognisable sensory structure even when individual ingredients vary.

K.P. Budayaningrat's testimony supports this interpretation. He did not define authentic *brongkos* by requiring every possible ingredient to be present. Instead, he emphasised its dark broth, the integration of *kluwak* and coconut milk, the tenderness of the ingredients, and the balance between savouriness and restrained sweetness. According to him, variations in meat cuts, tofu types, and supplementary vegetables remain acceptable as long as the fundamental sensory character of the dish is preserved (K.P. Budayaningrat, personal communication, [insert date]).

This finding challenges essentialist understandings of traditional food as a culinary object governed by a fixed and original formula. Food traditions generally circulate through oral transmission, embodied practice, domestic adaptation, commercial production, and regional preference. During this process, recipes are continually interpreted by different cooks. Variation is consequently not always evidence of cultural erosion. It can instead constitute a mechanism through which culinary knowledge remains applicable within changing material and social circumstances.

Bessière (1998) argues that culinary heritage is not merely inherited from the past but is continuously selected, reinterpreted, and reconstructed in the present. The identity of traditional food therefore emerges through negotiation between conservation and innovation. In the case of *brongkos*, this negotiation can be seen in the distinction between flexible ingredients and constitutive elements.

Some components may change without destroying the identity of the dish. One beef cut may be substituted for another because both contribute stock, fat, protein, and texture. Different tofu varieties may similarly absorb the broth without altering its fundamental flavour structure. By contrast, the removal of *kluwak* would change several sensory dimensions simultaneously.

Kluwak functions as more than a colouring agent. It provides the broth with its dark appearance, earthy aroma, restrained bitterness, and part of its savoury depth. Research on the natural fermentation of *Pangium edule* seeds

demonstrates that fermentation transforms their colour, texture, chemical composition, and flavouring properties (Andarwulan et al., 1999). These transformations enable the processed seed to become a defining culinary ingredient.

The removal or substantial reduction of *kluwak* would therefore alter not only the colour of *brongkos* but also its aroma, taste, visual recognition, and historical association. In this sense, *kluwak* can be understood as an identity-bearing ingredient. It has greater constitutive weight than many supplementary components because it connects sensory experience with cultural recognition.

The findings consequently suggest that the culinary identity of *brongkos* is organised hierarchically. Some ingredients are adaptable, while others carry a larger share of its cultural and sensory identity. Authenticity does not require complete uniformity, but it does require the preservation of relationships that enable consumers and practitioners to recognise the dish.

4.2. Historical Continuity Across Social Contexts

The occurrence of *brongkos* in *Serat Centhini* establishes that the dish had entered Javanese culinary life by the early nineteenth century. The textual data are particularly significant because they place *brongkos* in several dining situations, including everyday meals, guest reception, and a communal celebration connected with marriage (Marsono et al., 2010).

These different contexts indicate that *brongkos* was not limited to either ordinary consumption or ritual use. It was sufficiently familiar to appear in daily meals, yet sufficiently valued to be served to guests and included in celebratory dining. Its social function therefore extended from nourishment to hospitality and communal expression.

The historical importance of *brongkos* lies partly in this mobility. A dish that moves between domestic meals and special occasions occupies a broader cultural space than one confined to a single ceremony. It becomes connected simultaneously with everyday familiarity and social prestige.

The findings also complicate the tendency to identify *brongkos* exclusively with Yogyakarta palace culture. Oral narratives connecting the dish with Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX and Sultan Hamengkubuwono X have contributed greatly to its prestige. These narratives position *brongkos* as a dish associated with royal taste, hospitality, and cultural refinement.

K.P. Budayaningrat confirmed the strong association between *brongkos* and the culinary environment of the Yogyakarta Palace. However, he also emphasised that the dish was never exclusively owned by the palace. It has long circulated through household kitchens, traditional markets, food stalls, guest receptions, and communal celebrations in Yogyakarta and neighbouring Javanese regions (K.P. Budayaningrat, personal communication, [insert date]).

This dual association with royal culture and everyday consumption helps explain the durability of *brongkos*. Its palace connection gives it symbolic prestige, while its continued domestic and commercial preparation provides social continuity. A dish preserved only within palace memory might eventually become detached from daily life. Conversely, a dish without historical or symbolic narratives might remain popular but possess less public authority as cultural heritage.

The movement of *brongkos* across different social environments reveals that culinary prestige does not necessarily originate from a single centre. Palace culture, domestic practice, commercial food production, and communal consumption may interact in constructing the identity of a traditional dish. The palace may refine and symbolically elevate a food that already circulates in society, while popular consumption keeps that food socially alive.

The reported inclusion of *brongkos* in colonial-period *rijsttafel* dining further illustrates its ability to enter new systems of presentation. The *rijsttafel* reorganised Indonesian dishes within a European-influenced form of table service, abundance, hierarchy, and hospitality. Indonesian foods were selected and displayed through colonial conventions that changed the manner in which they were served and perceived.

Such incorporation should not be interpreted as a culturally neutral process. Colonial dining appropriated local culinary diversity and reorganised it according to colonial relations of status and spectacle. Nevertheless, the inclusion of a dish such as *brongkos* indicates that it was considered sufficiently distinctive and desirable to participate in formal dining beyond its original household or regional setting.

The movement from domestic kitchens to communal celebrations, palace narratives, colonial tables, food stalls, and tourism demonstrates the historical adaptability of *brongkos*. Its continuity was not achieved by remaining isolated from cultural change. Instead, the dish survived because it could enter new settings without entirely losing its recognisable sensory structure.

4.3. Authenticity as Process and Sensory Coherence

The findings suggest that culinary authenticity should not be reduced to the use of old equipment or the literal reproduction of one historical recipe. Traditional equipment such as the clay stove or *anglo*, together with firewood or charcoal, remains culturally important because it evokes older cooking environments and may contribute a subtle smoky aroma.

However, K.P. Budayaningrat did not regard the use of a modern gas or electric stove as an automatic loss of authenticity. He maintained that recognisable *brongkos* can still be produced with modern equipment when the cook preserves the appropriate ingredients, sequence of preparation, flavour balance, and sufficient cooking time (K.P. Budayaningrat, personal communication, [insert date]).

This testimony indicates that authenticity resides partly in process knowledge. The equipment contributes to sensory variation, but it is not the sole determinant of cultural legitimacy. More important is the cook's knowledge of how ingredients must be treated and combined.

Slow cooking is central to this process. Prolonged simmering allows meat and cowpeas to soften, enables tofu and eggs to absorb the broth, reduces the liquid, and integrates coconut milk, *kluwak*, palm sugar, stock, and aromatic spices. Time does not merely complete the cooking process. It creates sensory coherence.

A hurriedly prepared version may contain all the ingredients listed in a recipe but still fail to achieve the integrated flavour associated with *brongkos*. The distinction between merely assembling ingredients and producing a culturally recognisable dish lies in the transformation created by technique, duration, temperature, and sensory judgement.

This understanding is compatible with Strohl's (2019) argument that culinary authenticity cannot be determined solely by historical origin or rigid replication. Authenticity depends on how a culinary work relates to the practices, categories, expectations, and traditions through which it is recognised. A dish may undergo controlled changes while remaining authentic when it continues to function intelligibly within its culinary tradition.

In the preparation of *brongkos*, this cultural intelligibility is produced through several forms of practical knowledge. The cook must judge when the spice paste has lost its raw aroma, when coconut milk can be added, how strongly the mixture may be heated, when the meat has softened, and when the broth has reached the desired thickness.

Such decisions are difficult to communicate through a written recipe alone. Measurements and cooking times may provide guidance, but sensory experience remains indispensable. The cook must observe colour, aroma, consistency, and flavour throughout the process.

K.P. Budayaningrat's testimony therefore contributes more than factual confirmation. It articulates culturally embedded standards through which *brongkos* is evaluated. His comments concerning darkness, thickness, tenderness, aroma, and flavour balance provide criteria for distinguishing between a technically complete dish and one that is culturally convincing.

Authenticity in *brongkos* can consequently be understood as sensory coherence produced through culturally recognised practice. It is not an absolute opposition between traditional and modern technology. Traditional equipment may strengthen particular aromas and historical associations, but modern equipment can remain compatible with authenticity when the culinary process is respected.

4.4. Adaptation Without Culinary Erasure

The contemporary development of *brongkos* includes changes in portion size, plating, tableware, service style, and menu structure. In a traditional food stall, it may be served generously over rice or accompanied by several side dishes. In a formal dining context, it may appear in a smaller vessel, as part of a composed plate, or within a multi-course menu.

Witara (2022) identifies opportunities to develop *brongkos* as a culinary tourism product through modifications inspired by classical cooking, *nouvelle cuisine*, and fusion food. Such development may involve adjustments in presentation, texture, portioning, temperature, and service.

These modifications can expand the cultural and commercial reach of the dish. Contemporary presentation may attract younger diners, culinary tourists, or consumers unfamiliar with traditional Javanese food. It may also make *brongkos* compatible with new forms of hospitality, including formal banquets and fine dining.

Bessière (1998) argues that culinary heritage can support local development precisely because traditional food can be reactivated and reinterpreted for contemporary consumers. Heritage construction involves neither the total preservation of the past nor unrestricted innovation. It requires a continuing negotiation between historical recognition and present usefulness.

The findings indicate that presentational elements of *brongkos* are comparatively flexible. Portion size, serving vessel, arrangement, table setting, and dining sequence can be modified without necessarily destroying its identity. These elements affect the encounter with the food but do not automatically alter its central flavour structure.

K.P. Budayaningrat similarly accepted changes in plating and service. According to him, *brongkos* may be served in a food stall, household meal, banquet, or formal dining sequence. The format may change, but the dish

should retain its dark *kluwak*-based broth, coconut milk, aromatic complexity, slow-cooked texture, and balance of savoury and mildly sweet flavours (K.P. Budyaningrat, personal communication, [insert date]).

This distinction establishes a practical boundary between adaptation and culinary erasure. Adaptation occurs when a dish is translated into a new dining format while preserving the relationships that make it culturally and sensorially recognisable. Erasure occurs when modification removes those relationships but continues to use the traditional name as a decorative label.

For example, placing *brongkos* in modern tableware does not fundamentally alter its identity. Reducing the quantity of *kluwak* until the broth becomes pale and loses its earthy depth, however, weakens a constitutive feature. Similarly, smaller portions may suit a multi-course meal, but shortening the cooking process until the ingredients no longer absorb the broth changes its expected texture and sensory integration.

The negotiation of authenticity in contemporary food markets is shaped by producers, consumers, practitioners, institutions, and tourism industries. Heritage food is not validated through only one authority. Its authenticity is continually discussed and performed through consumption, presentation, memory, and community recognition (Shahrin & Hussin, 2023).

The adaptive potential of *brongkos* should therefore not be treated as the opposite of authenticity. Controlled adaptation can become a strategy of continuity. The critical issue is whether innovation makes the tradition accessible in a new setting or merely extracts selected visual symbols while abandoning the dish's culinary logic.

4.5. Culinary Heritage as Living Practice

The designation of *Sayur Brongkos* as Indonesian Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2018 gives the dish formal public recognition. This status strengthens its visibility as part of Yogyakarta's cultural inheritance and may support documentation, promotion, education, and culinary tourism.

However, heritage designation alone cannot ensure cultural continuity. Intangible heritage is not preserved in the same way as a static monument or museum object. It depends on knowledge, practices, skills, meanings, and forms of transmission that continue to be enacted by communities.

UNESCO emphasises that culinary heritage concerns practices related to cultivation, preparation, serving, and consumption rather than merely the finished food product (UNESCO, 2025). This principle is relevant to *brongkos* because its heritage value lies not only in the final bowl of stew but also in the knowledge of selecting *kluwak*, preparing spices, regulating coconut milk, simmering the broth, judging flavour, and serving the dish.

The continuity of *brongkos* therefore depends on the people and institutions that reproduce these practices. Household cooks transmit recipes and sensory knowledge. Traditional food stalls maintain commercial visibility. Ingredient sellers support access to local materials. Cultural practitioners explain historical meanings. Consumers preserve demand and familiarity.

The longevity of establishments such as Warung Ijo Bu Padmo illustrates the importance of small culinary businesses. Traditional food stalls do not merely sell completed meals. They maintain ingredient networks, cooking routines, sensory standards, customer expectations, and public memory.

Through repeated daily production, culinary knowledge becomes habitual rather than merely commemorative. The dish remains something that can be purchased, smelled, tasted, compared, and discussed. Its heritage status is therefore sustained through ordinary economic and social activity.

This observation reinforces Bessière's (1998) view that food heritage may function as a resource for local identity and development. Traditional dishes can contribute to tourism and regional branding, but their value derives from cultural narratives and practical knowledge rather than from commercial packaging alone.

Commercialisation can support continuity by creating income, visibility, and consumer demand. It can also create risks when producers simplify flavours, shorten cooking times, substitute constitutive ingredients, or present invented historical narratives solely for marketing purposes.

The future of *brongkos* consequently requires a balance among cultural transmission, commercial viability, and culinary integrity. Historical documentation alone would preserve knowledge about the dish but would not keep the practice alive. Commercial expansion without cultural knowledge might preserve the name while reducing sensory and historical depth.

The testimony of K.P. Budyaningrat performs an important role within this system of transmission. It links written sources with living culinary memory. His confirmation clarifies which elements are considered central by a knowledgeable cultural practitioner and which variations remain permissible.

His account also demonstrates that expert knowledge does not necessarily seek to freeze a tradition. Rather than rejecting all modernisation, he distinguished between changes that affect peripheral presentation and changes that undermine the sensory structure of the dish. This distinction offers a practical model for safeguarding living culinary heritage.

4.6. Adaptive Fidelity as a Model of Culinary Continuity

The findings support the concept of adaptive fidelity as a way of understanding the continuity of *brongkos*. Adaptive fidelity refers to the capacity of a culinary tradition to enter new contexts and adopt new forms while remaining faithful to its constitutive sensory and procedural relationships.

The concept combines two principles that may initially appear contradictory. Adaptation permits modifications in ingredients, equipment, presentation, portioning, and service. Fidelity protects the elements through which the dish remains culturally recognisable.

In the case of *brongkos*, fidelity does not require every cook to use precisely the same meat cut, tofu variety, vessel, or stove. It requires the preservation of its darker *kluwak*-based appearance, coconut milk foundation, savoury and restrained sweet balance, aromatic seasoning, tender ingredients, and gradual flavour integration.

Adaptive fidelity avoids two problematic extremes. The first is rigid preservation, in which any alteration is treated as cultural loss. Such an approach ignores the historical variability through which food traditions have survived. The second is unlimited reinvention, in which any dish may retain the name *brongkos* regardless of its ingredients, technique, or sensory profile.

Bessière (1998) shows that culinary heritage develops through the interaction of conservation, reinterpretation, and local innovation. Strohl (2019) likewise demonstrates that culinary authenticity does not require an ahistorical purity but must be assessed in relation to relevant culinary categories and practices. The findings concerning *brongkos* give these theoretical arguments a concrete sensory and cultural form.

Adaptive fidelity also clarifies why the dish has moved successfully across domestic, communal, palace, colonial, commercial, tourism, and contemporary dining contexts. Each context modifies the meaning and presentation of the dish, but its recognisable culinary grammar enables continuity.

The domestic context associates *brongkos* with familiarity and household skill. Communal feasts connect it with hospitality. Palace narratives add prestige. Colonial dining transformed its presentation. Food stalls made it commercially accessible. Culinary tourism converted it into a regional attraction. Contemporary dining may reposition it within formal plating and multi-course service.

These transformations do not produce one timeless and unchanged version of *brongkos*. They produce a historical series of related culinary performances. Their continuity lies in the preservation of a sufficiently stable sensory and procedural core.

The concept of adaptive fidelity also has practical implications for culinary innovation. Chefs seeking to modernise *brongkos* should first identify which elements carry its identity and which elements can change. Innovation can then proceed through portioning, tableware, accompaniment, presentation, or dining sequence without eliminating the core flavour structure.

Such an approach respects traditional knowledge without turning it into an untouchable relic. It also gives culinary practitioners space to respond to contemporary needs, including changing dining habits, tourism, nutritional concerns, ingredient availability, and professional food service.

Overall, *brongkos* should be understood not as a static artefact preserved unchanged from the nineteenth century, but as a living culinary system. Its historical durability has emerged from the interaction of continuity and transformation.

The dish survives because it is neither completely rigid nor endlessly flexible. Its constitutive ingredients, sensory expectations, and cooking logic provide stability. Its variable components and service formats provide adaptability.

The contribution of this study therefore lies in identifying the structure through which culinary continuity operates. *Brongkos* remains meaningful not because every version is identical, but because practitioners and consumers continue to recognise a shared culinary grammar. This grammar allows the dish to change without becoming culturally illegible.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *brongkos* is not merely a traditional Javanese dish defined by a fixed recipe. Its culinary identity is produced through a stable relationship among *kluwak*, coconut milk, aromatic spices, prolonged cooking, dark colour, tender ingredients, and a balanced combination of savoury, mildly sweet, earthy, and spicy flavours. Variations in meat cuts, tofu types, supplementary vegetables, serving vessels, and portion sizes do not necessarily weaken its authenticity. The decisive factor is whether the dish preserves the sensory and procedural structure through which it remains recognisable to Javanese practitioners and consumers.

Historical references in *Serat Centhini*, contemporary heritage recognition, commercial continuity, and the testimony of K.P. Budayaningrat collectively show that *brongkos* has moved across domestic, communal, palace-related, colonial, commercial, and tourism contexts. Its endurance has not depended on isolation from change. Instead, the dish has survived because it can enter new social and dining environments while retaining its central culinary grammar. The

findings therefore support an understanding of authenticity as sensory coherence and process knowledge rather than rigid historical replication.

The study proposes adaptive fidelity as a framework for understanding the continuity of *brongkos*. Adaptive fidelity allows changes in presentation, technology, service style, and supplementary ingredients while protecting the constitutive elements of the dish. This framework may also be useful for examining other traditional foods undergoing modernisation, tourism development, or fine-dining reinterpretation. Culinary innovation remains culturally meaningful when it expands access to a traditional dish without erasing the sensory relationships, practical knowledge, and community recognition that sustain its identity.

The safeguarding of *brongkos* consequently requires more than official heritage designation. Its continuity depends on household cooks, culinary practitioners, traditional food stalls, consumers, cultural experts, and educational institutions that continue to transmit its ingredients, techniques, meanings, and standards of taste. Future development should therefore combine documentation, intergenerational transmission, responsible commercialisation, and controlled innovation. Through such efforts, *brongkos* can remain both a historical inheritance and a living culinary practice within contemporary Javanese society.

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