

The Taste, Ritual, and Cultural Essence Within a Bowl of Mie Rebus Belitung

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ABSTRACT

One of the provinces in Indonesia famous for its diverse local cuisine is the Bangka Belitung Province, particularly in Belitung Regency. One of the well-known local dishes from Belitung is Mie Rebus Belitung. Mie Rebus Belitung is a preparation of yellow noodles drenched in hot shrimp broth. This dish is even recognized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. Besides being considered a filling meal, Mie Rebus Belitung also reflects the culture, identity, and history that form the local identity of Belitung. This research aims to examine the role of the local dish Mie Rebus Belitung in preserving the cultural identity in Belitung. The theories utilized in this research are the Cultural Heritage Theory and the Cultural Representation & Heritage Theory. The research methodology employed is qualitative research. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with cultural experts from Belitung and literature reviews. The result of this research is that Mie Rebus Belitung contains cultural symbolism with potatoes (Dutch), noodles (Chinese), and seafood (Local Belitung). The use of simpor leaves as the wrapping for Mie Rebus Belitung expresses creativity and local identity in Belitung. Mie Rebus Belitung is also a symbol of communication with values that will be conveyed to future generations, either as a standalone dish or packaged in ritual processes such as "makan bedulang" (ritual feasting). The conclusion of this research is that Mie Rebus Belitung is a culinary dish whose history is connected to the arrival of Chinese and Dutch residents in Belitung. The distinctive feature of this dish is the use of simpor leaves as its wrapper. By combining elements from these three cultures, Mie Rebus Belitung becomes a symbol of identity and the cultural richness of Belitung.

Keywords: *Mie Rebus Belitung, Cultural Identity, Local Specialty Food, Cultural Preservation, Belitung*

INTRODUCTION

Society and culture are two inseparable aspects, where humans as the most perfect creatures created their own culture and preserve it from generation to generation, both in their activities and in everyday events (Mahdayeni, Alhaddad, &

Saleh, 2019). (Utami, 2018) states that every country has its own culinary culture, contributing to the uniqueness and diversity of the country. The variety of local and regional dishes is part of the richness of Indonesia's cultural diversity (Rahman, 2018). Indonesia consists of 38 provinces, each with its own unique regional cuisine, including both main dishes and snacks and beverages, spread throughout the archipelago with unique and special flavors, making Indonesian cuisine recognized internationally (Roza, Razali, Fatmawati, Syamsuddin, & Wibowo, 2023).

Culinary tourism is one of the alternative supports for the potential of natural, cultural, historical, and marine tourism, which has the potential to develop due to the frequent interest of tourists who come to taste local cuisine and learn about the values of history and culture while providing training experiences on topics related to different cultures (Levyta & Hendra, 2022). Culinary tourism can bring various benefits, including opportunities to enhance and promote local culture (Ratnasari, Levyda, & Giyatmi, 2020). (Levyta & Hendra, 2022) also states that in every province in Indonesia, there are many different and interesting places that can be considered by tourists for tourism, and one of them is the Bangka Belitung Province located in the eastern part of Sumatra Island, offering many attractive places for tourists. This province is known as the largest tin production base in Indonesia and has the characteristic charm of beautiful coastal scenery and diverse tourist attractions such as beach, nature, and cultural tourism, providing interesting alternatives for domestic and international tourists.

According to (Levyta & Hendra, 2022), Belitung is one of the districts in the Bangka Belitung Province that plays an important role in the tourism sector. Since the increasing popularity of the novel and film "Laskar Pelangi" which highlights the natural beauty there, Belitung has experienced rapid development in the tourism sector, resulting in an increase in domestic and international tourist visits to Belitung (Arista, 2015). In recent years, tourism in the Belitung region has shown its appeal. Based on data reported by (Dinas Pariwisata Kabupaten Belitung, 2020) in 2018, this destination reached its peak with 467,570 tourist visits. August was the month with the highest number of visits, with a total of 46,607 visits, while February had the lowest number of visits, with a total of 27,935 visits.



Image 1.1: Number of Tourists Statistics in Belitung 2018
(Source: data.belitung.go.id)

Furthermore, based on data reported by (Dinas Pariwisata Kabupaten Belitung, 2020) in 2019, the number of tourist visits reached 348,154 people per year. December recorded the highest number of visits ever with a total of 39,679, while February and May recorded the lowest number of visits with a total of 20,003 and 18,799 visits respectively.



Image 1.2: Number of Tourists Statistics in Belitung 2019
(Source: data.belitung.go.id)

In 2020, Belitung experienced an extraordinary situation where there were no statistics on tourist arrivals due to the global pandemic, Covid-19. Then, based on data from (Dinas Pariwisata Kabupaten Belitung, 2022) in 2021, Belitung recorded 158,391 tourist visits throughout the year. Monthly data shows the highest number of visits recorded in November with 29,085 people, while the lowest number of visits occurred in August with 7,819 guests.



Picture 1.3: Number of Tourists Statistics in Belitung 2021
(Source: data.belitung.go.id)

One of the interesting things that attracts tourists to Belitung is the region's abundance of unique and legendary local dishes. According to information on the Ministry of Education and Culture's website (Kementrian Pendidikan dan Budaya, 2012), Mie Rebus Belitung is one of the signature seafood dishes of Belitung. Mie Rebus Belitung is a dish of shrimp broth served with yellow noodles, fried tofu, boiled potatoes, shrimp, meatballs, sliced cucumber, and garnished with fried potatoes. The website explains that Mie Rebus Belitung is not only legendary but also included in the

List of Intangible Cultural Heritage by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology on January 1, 2012, as a recognition of its uniqueness and as a form of preserving this culinary product to ensure its special qualities are not lost and future generations can continue to enjoy Mie Rebus Belitung.

One of the most legendary mie rebus stalls in Belitung is Mie Atep Belitung, located at Jl. Sriwijaya No.27 Tanjungpandan, Belitung (Angriyana, 2019). This place is not only popular among tourists but also among VIPs such as officials and celebrities who visit Belitung, and it has expanded with three branches outside of Belitung, including Gading-Serpong, Mangga Besar, and Petak Enam (Simangunsong & Agmasari, 2022). In addition to its legendary taste, the way the Belitung noodles are served at this stall is also unique, as they are placed on simpur leaves to give a distinctive flavor to the noodles (Wijayanti, 2023).

Quoting from (LSU Pariwisata, 2023), regional signature dishes reflect the culture and identity of the region. This is closely tied to traditional recipes and the potential of local natural resources. Each region in Indonesia has its own distinctive characteristics, and this is one effective way to get to know the life and traditions of that particular region. Regional signature dishes not only have gastronomic significance but also reflect the history of the region. When we try regional dishes, we can also experience the identity of the region. Moreover, regional signature dishes play an important role in shaping the social identity of the local community.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research utilizes a qualitative approach and employ in-depth interview as a mean to gather primary data; as it can provide a deeper understanding of the cultural values, traditional practices, and social significance of the local cuisine. By employing a qualitative approach, the researcher analyzes social interactions, symbolism, and individual experiences related to the consumption and production of the specific local food. This method allows the researcher to examine non-material aspects associated with the particular food in order to understand how it is an integral part of the local cultural identity in Belitung and to provide a more comprehensive picture.

In this research we gather two types of data, primary data and secondary data. Primary data consist of in-depth interview with 3 Belitung cultural expert. The first is Mr. Achmad Hamzah, Chairman of the Belitung Malay Traditional Institute (2023-2026) who is responsible for fostering and preserving customs in the community as well as maintaining local wisdom. Second, Mr. Iqbal H. Saputra, Chairman of the Belitung Arts Council (2023-2027) who is responsible for carrying out an inventory of objects of cultural progress and appreciating local culture. Third, Mr. Fithtrorozi, Head of the Department of Culture Belitung Education and Culture is responsible for the protection, utilization, development and guidance related to objects of cultural progress. The research focuses on Tanjungpandan, Belitung, involving three different locations for interviews. Interviewee 1 was interviewed at Mr. Achmad Hamzah's house in Gg. Rukun, while Interviewee 2 was interviewed at the researcher's home on Jl. Mayjend Bambang Utoyo. Interviewee 3 was interviewed at the Office of Education and Culture. The selection of these locations was based on the interviewees' requests, which

were deemed to facilitate the researcher in conducting the interviews. The research period lasted for four months, starting from September to December 2023. The secondary data, were literature about Belitung Culture and Mie Belitung.

The research subjects in this study are Belitung cultural experts who have in-depth knowledge and expertise in the local culture, including the regional specialty food, to provide insights into how Mie Rebus Belitung is related to the traditions, values, and cultural practices in Belitung. The research object in this study is the Belitung culture embodied in Mie Rebus Belitung, as it holds rich and unique cultural values that reflect the local cultural identity and heritage in Belitung.

This research employs in-depth interviews as the primary method to deepen the understanding of Mie Rebus Belitung. This technique allows the researcher to gather detailed information about individuals' experiences, perceptions, and knowledge related to Mie Rebus Belitung. Through direct interviews with the interviewees, the researcher can obtain individual perspectives, such as the symbolic meanings associated with Mie Rebus Belitung. The research also utilizes literature review techniques to obtain comprehensive information about Mie Rebus Belitung, including its history and cultural values based on previous research, which can be used to understand the role of the local specialty food in preserving the local cultural identity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Mie Rebus Belitung, a culinary heritage that shows the cultural journey from China to Belitung, depicts a unique adaptation in cooking methods. Even though it is called "Mie Rebus" the way it is served is different from conventional boiled noodles. The hot soup is poured directly into the noodles, which are eaten separately as a main dish. Belitung's rich and diverse culture is reflected in these noodles, with Kalimantan and Bugis influences evident in the taste, thanks to the presence of shrimp, cucumber, palm sugar and other ingredients in the soup.

The history of Mie Rebus Belitung is related to the arrival of Chinese people who brought the noodle tradition, and special spices such as shrimp and palm sugar give this dish a special touch. Even though instant noodles are an instant alternative, Mie Rebus is still special with its unique spices and sauce. In an effort to preserve the authenticity of Mie Rebus Belitung, manufacturing standardization is an important step through special training for MSMEs, to create consistent standards and prevent modification of variants.

Simpur leaves, which are used to wrap food, are a culinary specialty of Belitung, creating a nostalgic atmosphere amidst the development of tourism. Through efforts to standardize and disseminate knowledge, the authenticity of Belitung Boiled Noodles and other culinary characteristics can be maintained. Gule kirik, with its combination of sweet, spicy, sour and salty flavors, is symbolic in Mie Rebus Belitung, reflecting intercultural harmony.

In boiled noodles, cultural symbolism emerges, such as potatoes representing the Netherlands, noodles representing China, and seafood reflecting the diversity of the people of Belitung Island. Through metaphor, boiled noodles become a home for

various cultures, combining these elements in one complete plate. Belitung, as a unique third space, is a haven for various tribes, cultural elements and countries.

From a cultural perspective, the use of leaves as wrappers for boiled noodles is an expression of creativity and identity. The knowledge system about simpur leaves as a heat retainer reflects positive creativity in maintaining tradition. Mie Rebus Belitung with its complexity of flavors and philosophical values, is not only a delicious dish but also a symbol of harmony and creativity in a diverse cultural heritage.

Mie Rebus Belitung is a reflection of the harmony of three different cultures, where Belitung culture itself is reflected in the rich noodle soup and strong local identity. The use of shrimp as the main ingredient, caught by local fishermen, strengthens sustainability and integration in the daily lives of the Belitung people. With the branding process as "Belitung Noodles," this dish has become not just a culinary product, but a symbol of the culinary richness and identity of the Belitung people.

In its presentation, Mie Rebus Belitung has certain standards to ensure the best culinary experience. The thick sauce and the presence of shrimp are the main characteristics that differentiate Mie Belitung from other noodles. In an effort to preserve original recipes, proposing Intangible Cultural Heritage (WBTH) and workshops in schools is an integral step to enrich education and maintain Belitung's identity as an inseparable part of Indonesian identity.

Mie Rebus Belitung combines elements from three different cultures, creating a unique dish. Originally originating from China, these noodles are then processed by adding local elements such as shrimp from the Belitung sea and wrapped in leaves imported from the island. Belitung Island, which is famous as a tin mining island, also influences culinary delights with the addition of potatoes which is a characteristic of Dutch culture.

In a geographical context, Belitung gives a sweet touch to its culinary delights with the use of gula kirik or palm sugar, creating a distinctive aroma that enriches the eating experience. It is important to preserve this culinary delight by showing that boiled noodles are not just a commodity for trading, but have deep social values and are an integral part of the social activities of the Belitung people.

The history of mining in Belitung brings various tribes and ethnicities, which is reflected in the way Belitung noodles are served using simpur leaves as a wrapper. Even though the imported leaves do not affect the taste, the strong aroma they produce is a characteristic feature of this noodle dish. By creating a calm atmosphere and paying attention to all these elements, the experience of enjoying Belitung Boiled Noodles becomes more enjoyable.

The uniqueness of Mie Rebus Belitung also lies in its health value, with many elements originating from China, and simpur leaves which have the ability to soften the body's organ channels. Therefore, boiled noodles not only satisfy the stomach, but also provide health benefits. It should be remembered that the processing of imported leaves requires special attention, and correct processing is necessary to get maximum benefits from this ingredient.

Mie Rebus Belitung, as a culinary product resulting from acculturation, is not only a delicious food but also holds human and health values. Maintaining the

preservation of the original recipe and manufacturing process is a shared responsibility, so that future generations can continue to enjoy the unique and delicious Mie Rebus Belitung.

Simpor leaves, known as *Dillenia suffruticosa*, play a central role in the uniqueness of Belitung Boiled Noodles. The combination of imported leaves with sea ingredients, especially shrimp, creates a special taste with a touch of spiciness from pepper. This unique experience is not only felt through the taste, but also through the appearance and aroma of this dish. Mie Rebus Belitung, as a culinary specialty, is a symbol of identity and culture on this island.

Not only the appearance and taste, but the deliciousness of Belitung Boiled Noodles also comes from the influence of pepper, which is Belitung's superior product. The marine elements of the islands add complexity and deliciousness to every dish of boiled noodles. The tradition of eating boiled noodles in Belitung reflects togetherness, especially at celebrations and celebrations. Enjoying it together illustrates that in the customs of the Belitung people, boiled noodles are not just a dish, but also a context for togetherness.

The knowledge of how to make boiled noodles is passed from older generations to younger generations, strengthening family ties. Boiled noodles are not only part of traditional knowledge objects, but also support social and economic sectors. In a social context, boiled noodles complement community activities, while from an economic perspective, they become a typical commodity that supports the service sector, especially tourism. By telling identity through storynomics, boiled noodles create a narrative that has positive implications for economic activities.

Mie Rebus Belitung are carefully packaged so they can be enjoyed at various places and times without losing their taste. The careful packaging process, including adjusting toppings according to taste, reflects creativity in the culinary world. In this era of globalization, efforts to maintain the Belitung Rebus Noodle tradition face various challenges. However, the role of the community, especially mothers, is key in supporting the sustainability and preservation of this culinary delight.

Mie Rebus Belitung is not only a dish, but also a point of connection with other elements of cultural progress. By preserving local heritage, such as the use of simpor leaves, Mie Rebus Belitung not only arouses the senses with its taste, but also becomes a medium for understanding the endemic plants of this island. In society, boiled noodles are a tool for recognizing traditional traditions and social interactions, such as typical eating etiquette. Mie Rebus Belitung are not just a culinary dish, but also a reflection of rich culture and local wisdom.

The use of Simpor leaves in Belitung is not only limited to the culinary aspect, but also permeates various activities in the region. Apart from being a packaging and cooking material, Simpor leaves also play a role in bird hunting activities, forming a mutualistic symbiosis between living creatures. The ecological paradigm of the Belitung people is reflected in the use of Simpor leaves, which are not only a batik motif, but also a strong identity in the island's typical culinary delights.

The use of Simpor leaves, in line with the logic of survival and sustainability, creates harmony between practicality in food packaging and environmental

sustainability. The tradition of packaging food with Simpor leaves not only enriches cultural heritage, but also provides deep symbolic meaning. Daun Simpor, which was originally just a packaging material, has now gone beyond that limit to become a symbol of Belitung batik and identity in local food offerings.

In a broader sense, the use of natural resources, such as Simpor leaves, reflects the ecological thinking of society to maintain sustainability. Cultural expressions in the use of eating utensils, such as chopsticks in China Food restaurants, or spoons and forks in star hotels, reflect the changing dynamics of modern culture. Belitung's culinary identity, which combines the flavors of pepper and shrimp, also reflects the meeting of land and sea, like the meeting point on Simpor leaves.

The moment of togetherness in the tradition of makan bedulang shows unity and harmony, both through etiquette and cultural symbols. The importance of maintaining modesty in sitting, respecting traditional values, and involving children in makan bedulang forms a parenting pattern that reflects Malay cultural values. For example, tudong lambak as a symbol of food communication in Malay culture shows that gastronomy is more than just food, involving a presentation process that is valued in the culture.

The tradition of makan bedulang also represents a variety of foods that reflect local food resources. Involving the collective experience of enjoying nature's products, makan bedulang creates a strong bond in understanding and appreciating the abundant natural resources around them. Thus, through culinary and gastronomy, the Belitung people perpetuate traditions, inspire culture and create deep shared experiences.

From a communication studies perspective, Mie Rebus Belitung serves as a powerful medium for conveying cultural narratives and fostering intercultural dialogue. The dish embodies a rich tapestry of historical and cultural exchanges, making it a symbol of the community's identity and heritage. As a culinary artifact, Mie Rebus Belitung transcends mere sustenance, offering insights into the socio-cultural dynamics and the blending of traditions from Chinese, Kalimantan, and Bugis influences. The unique method of serving, with the hot soup poured over the noodles, communicates a distinctive local adaptation that highlights the ingenuity and creativity within Belitung's culinary practices.

Furthermore, the ritualistic aspects associated with the preparation and consumption of Mie Rebus Belitung provide fertile ground for exploring themes of community cohesion and cultural continuity. The use of simpor leaves in food wrapping, for instance, is not just a practical choice but a symbolic act that reinforces a sense of place and belonging. This practice is a form of non-verbal communication that conveys respect for local customs and ecological knowledge. In the broader context of communication studies, such rituals are essential in understanding how food practices can serve as a conduit for cultural transmission and social bonding.

The role of Mie Rebus Belitung in educational and economic sectors also underscores its significance in communication studies. Standardizing the preparation process and conducting workshops in schools are strategic efforts to preserve and propagate this culinary heritage. These initiatives can be seen as educational communication strategies that ensure the longevity of traditional knowledge and

culinary skills. Additionally, branding Mie Rebus Belitung as an integral part of the local identity enhances its visibility and marketability, thereby contributing to the tourism industry and local economy. This intersection of culture, economy, and education highlights the multifaceted role of food in communication and its potential to create narratives that resonate both locally and globally.

CONCLUSION

Mie Rebus Belitung, a culinary heritage that blends Chinese and Belitung cultures, reflects the diversity on the island. Its history is intertwined with the arrival of Chinese immigrants and the influences of the Kalimantan and Bugis ethnic groups. Standardization of its preparation, through training for small and medium-sized enterprises (UMKM), is crucial in preserving the authenticity of this dish.

Simpur leaves create a nostalgic ambiance in the development of tourism. Mie Rebus Belitung is not only delicious but also carries cultural symbolism and reflects harmony between different cultures. The presentation standards, with a thick broth and the presence of shrimp, maintain the uniqueness of this culinary delight.

Mie Rebus Belitung combines elements from three different cultures, becoming a symbol of the island's identity and cultural wealth. The utilization of simpor leaves, shrimp, palm sugar, potatoes, and other ingredients expresses creativity and identity in this dish. The uniqueness of this culinary delight also lies in its health benefits, with elements from China and the health benefits of simpor leaves.

Efforts to preserve Mie Rebus Belitung, such as proposals for Intangible Cultural Heritage and workshops in schools, are expected to maintain its authenticity. This dish is not only a delicious food but also embodies values of humanity, health, and togetherness. The key role of the community, especially women, is vital in supporting the sustainability and preservation of this culinary delight as an integral part of Belitung's identity.

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