



## From Plate to Peace: Indonesia's Gastrodiplomacy Strategies Revisited

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the strategic use of food as a diplomatic tool by Indonesia, highlighting the nation's gastrodiplomacy efforts aimed at fostering international relations and cultural exchange. It delves into the historical and cultural significance of Indonesian cuisine and how it has been leveraged to build bridges between nations, promote mutual understanding, and enhance Indonesia's global image. By incorporating a comparative analysis with Thailand and South Korea, the study identifies unique aspects of Indonesia's approach. Additionally, it examines the impact on local communities, the integration of technology, and the balance between cultural preservation and innovation. Through case studies and policy recommendations, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of Indonesia's gastrodiplomacy and its potential to contribute to peace and global harmony, setting it apart from existing literature.

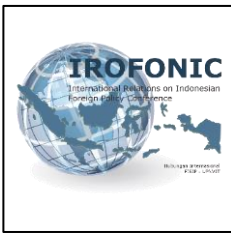
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### INTRODUCTION

Gastrodiplomacy is a form of cultural diplomacy that has gained increasing popularity in the era of globalization. In this concept, food not only serves as a basic necessity but also as a strategic tool to build and strengthen a country's image on the international stage. As a cultural artifact, food reflects a nation's heritage, traditions, and identity, which can be easily appreciated by global audiences (Nirwandy & Awang, 2014). This strategy allows nations to introduce themselves through their national dishes while also fostering a broader understanding with other countries.

As part of public diplomacy, gastrodiplomacy aims not only to increase appreciation for a country's culture but also to improve its global image. For example, under the leadership of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the United States established a special corps of chefs to serve meals that aligned with the cultural backgrounds of visiting foreign dignitaries. This is a subtle yet effective form of respect, where guests feel honored, and bilateral discussions can proceed more smoothly. Through this approach, the United States successfully utilized gastrodiplomacy as a form of "smart power," blending soft and hard power in diplomacy (The Huffington Post, 2017).

Beyond government-to-government relations, gastrodiplomacy also plays a role in people-to-people relations, known as second-track diplomacy (Pujayanti, 2017).



Traditional diplomacy, which involves only government actors, is often seen as less effective in conveying messages to the international community. Gastrodiplomacy fills this gap by directly engaging the public in the diplomatic process. By using food as a medium, countries can attract the interest and sympathy of foreign audiences, thereby building a deeper and more positive image (Pujayanti, 2017). This strategy introduces a nation to the international community in a more enjoyable and personal way, ultimately contributing to better diplomatic relations.

Gastrodiplomacy is a part of public diplomacy that serves as a communication tool between governments and the international public (Pujayanti, 2017). Through the use of food, gastrodiplomacy aims to enhance a nation’s brand awareness while simultaneously introducing its cultural values. Culinary traditions effectively convey a nation’s heritage and cultural identity to the global community (Pujayanti, 2017). While not a new approach in international relations, gastrodiplomacy has experienced rapid development over the past decade as a long-term strategy. Developing countries are increasingly utilizing it to strengthen their position on the global stage, build a positive image, and capture the attention of the international public (Nye, 2004).

Gastrodiplomacy has become one of the key strategies in public diplomacy, leveraging food to improve a nation’s image and cultural influence globally. Indonesia, with its rich culinary heritage, has immense potential to use food as an effective diplomatic tool. However, this effort faces several challenges, including inadequate culinary documentation, the limited presence of Indonesian restaurants abroad, and difficulties in meeting international standards by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This research highlights innovations in Indonesia’s gastrodiplomacy, particularly through the introduction of strategies centered on culinary diversity and the pivotal role of diaspora restaurants as crucial non-governmental actors.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of cross-sector synergy, both between central and local governments, as well as the significant role of digital documentation in promoting Indonesian cuisine more widely. Other innovations examined include the use of media as a strategic promotional tool and the contribution of the creative economy in enhancing Indonesia’s competitiveness in the international market. With a more modern and integrated approach, this research aims to offer strategic solutions to advance Indonesia’s gastrodiplomacy as an effective and sustainable diplomatic tool.

## **METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative methodology to examine the strategies of gastrodiplomacy that have been put into practice through a case study of Indonesia. This case study can focus on Indonesia’s participation in global food-related events, culinary displays, or cultural diplomacy initiatives. In addition, it examines news articles or publications about the culinary arts, diplomacy, or remarks made by public servants engaged in gastrodiplomacy initiatives. This will make it easier to understand the planning and execution of gastrodiplomacy strategies. Along with official government documents and



diplomatic policy, reports on Indonesian culinary diplomacy from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Tourism were gathered and examined by researchers. Additionally, this study highlights distinctive features of Indonesia's strategy by combining comparative analysis with Thailand and South Korea and its influence on local communities, technology integration, and finding a balance between innovation and cultural preservation. Finally, the analysis's overall findings will demonstrate how Indonesia uses gastrodiploamacy to strengthen bilateral relations, boost mutual understanding, and improve Indonesia's reputation on the global level.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Comparison With Other Countries' Gastrodiploamacy Efforts

According to Zhang (2015), several strategies can be implemented in gastrodiploamacy efforts: First, Product Marketing Strategy: Promoting a country’s culinary brands and food through international restaurants, franchises, and culinary product and service promotions. Second, Gastrodiploamacy Campaign (Slogan, Logo): Utilizing slogans and logos as distinctive elements of campaigns to enhance national branding. Third, Food Event Strategy: Organizing or participating in international events to showcase a nation’s cuisine. Fourth, Coalition Building Strategy: Establishing partnerships with organizations that share similar interests to strengthen relations. Finally, Media Relations Strategy: Using media to promote culinary products and build long-term relationships with the international public.

In general, several developed and developing countries have begun incorporating gastrodiploamacy into their public diplomacy initiatives. These nations employ the above programs as part of their gastrodiploamacy campaigns.

No	Country’s Name	Program Initiative
1	Thailand	Global Thailand Program (2002) - Thailand launched this initiative to increase the number of Thai restaurants worldwide, aiming to boost the country’s image and tourism. The program includes chef training, recipe standardization, and financial support for Thai restaurant owners abroad (Trihartono et al., 2020).
2	South Korea	Kimchi Diplomacy dan Korean Cuisine to the World (Hansik Globalization) - The South Korean government initiated this program to promote Korean food globally. It involves culinary training, international food festivals, and partnerships with global food networks to introduce Korean dishes.
3	Japan	Shoku bunka kenkyu suishin kondankai (Global Sushi Campaign) - Japan uses its traditional cuisine, washoku, as a cultural diplomacy

		tool to promote national interests, enhance its global image, and meet export goals. Japan hosts cultural festivals like Ennichisai and Jak-Japan Matsuri in Indonesia to showcase traditional and contemporary Japanese culture, including food, arts, and performances (Khasanah et al., 2023).
4	Malaysia	Kitchen for the World - This is a Malaysian initiative aimed at promoting its national cuisine globally. The gastrodiploamacy effort seeks to enhance Malaysia's cultural influence and national identity through its culinary heritage. The project supports Malaysian culinary entrepreneurs to advance and popularize Malaysian cuisine in various countries, thereby fostering a positive image of Malaysia and its rich culinary traditions (Trihartono, Santoso, et al., 2020).

Table 1. Program Initiative (made by the researchers)

From the above countries, the researchers focus on comparing Thailand and South Korea. Based on available literature, the researchers find that both Thailand and South Korea have successfully optimized their gastrodiploamacy potential.

a. Thailand

Thailand has effectively built its soft power through gastrodiploamacy by transforming its image from a sex tourism hub into a global culinary destination (Pujayanti, 2017). The "Global Thai" program promotes Thai cuisine and culture by establishing numerous restaurants abroad. Dishes like Tom Yum and Pad Thai have gained international popularity, helping to improve the country’s image. Thailand’s gastrodiploamacy also supports culinary tourism and strengthens relationships with global communities, making it a model for successful cultural diplomacy.

Thai cuisine holds a strong position internationally, with the government launching the "Global Thailand" program in 2002. Thai restaurants abroad act as "cultural ambassadors," and the government provides incentives while maintaining food standardization. The Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs is directly involved in the development of gastrodiploamacy, including targeting an increase in the number of restaurants abroad. Through the Tourism Authority of Thailand and the Division of Thai Export Promotion, the government sets culinary standards and provides a special logo for restaurants that meet these criteria (Pujayanti, 2017).

In 2002, The Economist Asia reported on Thailand's systematic policy framework through the "Global Thai" program, which aimed to increase the number of Thai restaurants in the United States. This program was successful and later evolved into "Thai Cuisine to the World," focusing on increasing the number of authentic Thai restaurants globally, thereby gaining more international recognition for Thai flavors (The Economist, 2002).



## b. South Korea

Kimchi Diplomacy began during the leadership of President Moo Hyun Roh from 2003 to 2008, with the establishment of the Korea Foundation for Cultural Industries Exchange (KOFICE). This foundation was created to promote the Korean Wave (Hallyu) and aimed to transform South Korean cuisine into a global brand. South Korea has utilized gastrodiploamacy, particularly through "Kimchi Diplomacy," as a form of soft power to promote its culinary culture and enhance its national image. This strategy has significantly contributed to the global recognition and export of kimchi (Nihayati et al., 2022). In 2020, South Korean kimchi exports saw a substantial increase, reaching USD 144.51 million, a 37.6% rise from the previous year (Nihayati et al., 2022). The top three destinations for kimchi exports were Japan, the United States, and Hong Kong. The South Korean government has implemented various strategies to promote kimchi, including the Bus Kimchi project, collaborations with K-pop artists, and even introducing kimchi into space through astronaut Yi Soyeon. These efforts have contributed to the global popularity of kimchi (Nihayati et al., 2022).

South Korea has successfully made gastrodiploamacy a key element of its soft power by implementing the following strategies:

- a) Collaborating with K-pop artists to popularize Korean cuisine through music and entertainment. This includes creating English-language K-pop albums specifically dedicated to discussing food.
- b) Launching the Bus Kimchi project in 2011, where chef Si-Hyeon Ryu traveled to 32 countries with a truck supported by the South Korean government, cooking and introducing traditional Korean food, especially kimchi, to people around the world (Nihayati et al., 2022).
- c) The Hansik Global Program, initiated by President Lee Myung Bak, aimed to increase the number of South Korean restaurants worldwide, invest in South Korea's food industry, and globally promote Korean cuisine (Nihayati et al., 2022).
- d) Reaching out to Muslim communities through conscious efforts in gastrodiploamacy.

The South Korean government has taken several steps to support halal tourism, including establishing institutions such as the Korea Muslim Federation (KMF) and the Korea Halal Authority (KHA) for halal certification. They also launched a digital application called "Halal Korea," which provides information on halal restaurants, mosque locations, and related services (Tamara & Marlinda, 2023).

The growing number of Muslim tourists, particularly from countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Turkey, has led to increased awareness and acceptance of Islam and halal food in South Korea. This has resulted in the rise of halal restaurants and worship spaces, contributing positively to the local economy and cultural diversity (Tamara & Marlinda, 2023). By catering to Muslim tourists with halal food options, South Korea has attracted more visitors from predominantly Muslim countries, boosting tourism revenue. The demand for halal food has also created new business opportunities for local



entrepreneurs and restaurants, leading to the establishment of more halal-certified eateries and food products (Tamara & Marlinda, 2023).

### Indonesia’s Strategies Over Time in Gastrodiplomacy

Indonesia, known for its rich and diverse culinary heritage, has gradually embraced gastrodiplomacy as part of its broader cultural diplomacy efforts. Here is a look at how Indonesia's gastrodiplomacy strategies have evolved:

<p>Soekarno Era</p>	<p>During the Soekarno era, Indonesia faced challenges in documenting its culinary heritage, largely due to the dominance of oral traditions over written culture. Much of Indonesian cuisine, particularly street food and dishes served in small food stalls (warung), developed among the lower classes, making it less likely to be formally recorded or recognized.</p> <p>President Soekarno, however, initiated efforts to address this gap through the publication of the "Mustika Rasa" cookbook. This book not only aimed to document traditional Indonesian dishes but also served as a vehicle for his food politics. Soekarno advocated for reducing the country's reliance on rice as the staple food and promoted the diversification of food sources.</p>
<p>SBY Era (2009 – 2014 Period)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● During President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s administration, gastrodiplomacy in Indonesia took a more structured approach with the formation of the Indonesia Culinary Task Force. This task force worked closely with the Indonesian diaspora network to promote Indonesian cuisine globally through various activities such as culinary events, cooking classes, and live demonstrations. These efforts aimed to increase international awareness of Indonesian food and culture. However, after Yudhoyono's presidency ended, the initiative lost momentum and the task force’s activities weakened (Pujayanti, 2017).</li> <li>● Indonesia's gastrodiplomacy strategy was often integrated with other cultural events, such as banquets at Indonesian embassies and Indonesian food festivals abroad. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs acted as a facilitator in these initiatives, though they hoped to see greater involvement from non-state actors, such as private businesses and the Indonesian diaspora, in driving these efforts forward (Pujayanti, 2017).</li> <li>● In 2012, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy identified 30 iconic Indonesian dishes to promote on the global stage. This initiative was supported with standardized recipes and videographic content showing the process of preparing each dish. This strategy was designed to help establish Indonesian cuisine as globally recognized and to provide consistent quality and authenticity in its promotion abroad.</li> </ul>
<p>Joko Widodo</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In 2015, the Ministry of Tourism designated Bali, Yogyakarta, Solo, Semarang, and Bandung as Culinary Tourism Cities (Trihartono et al., 2020). This initiative</li> </ul>

<p>Era (2014 - 2019 Periods)</p>	<p>aimed to highlight these cities as key destinations for experiencing Indonesian cuisine and culture.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● By 2018, the Ministry of Tourism launched a co-branding initiative with Indonesian diaspora restaurants in Europe, Australia, and the United States, focusing on promoting Indonesian culinary culture (Trihartono et al., 2020).</li> <li>● This initiative marked the beginning of a partnership with 100 restaurants established by the Indonesian diaspora, previously known as the Wonderful Indonesia Co-Branding Program. This step was crucial for building Indonesia's branding through its international restaurants (Yayusman et al., 2023).</li> </ul>
<p>Joko Widodo Era (2019 - 2024 Periods)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Indonesia Spice Up The World program is a cross-ministerial effort aimed at enhancing the marketing of Indonesian spices and processed foods, particularly in Africa, Australia, and other potential markets. The program seeks to strengthen Indonesian restaurants abroad as part of its gastrodiploamacy efforts, to boost exports of processed foods, especially spices (Kemenparekraf, 2021). The program aims to increase spice exports to USD 2 billion by 2024 and establish 4,000 Indonesian restaurants overseas, with Australia being a strategic target due to its proximity and significant Indonesian diaspora (Yayusman et al., 2023).</li> <li>● Since 2020, the Indonesian government has implemented the Indonesia Spice Up the World (ISUTW) action plan to promote the export of food and spices. This initiative is led by the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs and Investment and includes several national objectives focused on strengthening Indonesia's food and spice strategies (Yayusman et al., 2023).</li> </ul>

Table 2. Indonesia’s Strategies (made by the researchers)

### Challenges and Limitations

The diverse traditional cuisine of Indonesia is a hallmark of the nation's cultural identity, showcasing a variety of delicious dishes from different regions across the archipelago. This diversity is rooted in Indonesia's extensive geography, which comprises thousands of islands, each with its unique culinary traditions. As a result, Indonesia's culinary heritage reflects a blend of indigenous flavors, local spices, and historical influences from trade and colonization.

One of the earliest comprehensive documentations of this culinary wealth can be found in "Mustika Rasa," a significant work published in the 1960s at the request of President Sukarno. This publication cataloged approximately 1,600 traditional Indonesian dishes, highlighting the vast array of recipes from across the country. The book not only preserved these recipes but also served as a cultural record, emphasizing the importance of food as a component of Indonesia's national identity. To further expand this culinary archive, researcher Murdijati Gardjito conducted extensive research, identifying 3,259 types of Indonesian culinary dishes. This comprehensive study underscores the depth of culinary traditions throughout Indonesia, reflecting centuries



of cultural evolution, regional variations, and the influence of local ingredients and cooking techniques (Yayusman et al., 2023).

This rich culinary heritage is not only a testament to the diversity of Indonesian food traditions but also plays a crucial role in shaping the country's gastrodiploacy efforts. As Indonesia seeks to promote its culture on the global stage, its extensive and varied cuisine becomes a powerful tool for communicating the nation's identity, history, and values. However, documenting Indonesian cuisine faces challenges, as oral traditions often overshadow written ones. Additionally, many Indonesian dishes develop within lower socioeconomic groups, such as street vendors and small eateries, leading to insufficient documentation.

In 2012, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf) selected 30 iconic Indonesian dishes for promotion, complete with standardized recipes and video demonstrations of their preparation. However, this selection sparked controversy, as it was seen as not fully representing the regional origins of these dishes. Ideally, the choice of culinary icons should consider taste, appearance, and status as regional flagship products. This situation highlights that while Indonesia's culinary diversity is a unique asset, it also presents several challenges, such as: First, with so many types of dishes, maintaining consistent flavors and quality becomes a challenge, especially for restaurants wanting to promote traditional cuisine abroad. Second, ensuring that diverse recipes and cooking techniques are not lost or forgotten requires significant and systematic documentation efforts. Third, promoting such a wide variety of dishes to international audiences can be difficult, as not all dishes may have the same appeal in the global market. Finally, many traditional ingredients are not widely available overseas, making it hard to replicate the authentic flavors of Indonesian cuisine.

Furthermore, another challenge in introducing Indonesian cuisine abroad is the limited number of Indonesian restaurants. In 2016, the Minister of Tourism noted that there were only about 100 Indonesian restaurants abroad, significantly fewer compared to countries like Japan, which boasts tens of thousands of international restaurants (Yustiana, 2016). Additional regional gastrodiploacy challenges include inadequate infrastructure, the absence of culinary marketing coordinators abroad, lack of a clear roadmap and follow-up plans for regional development, and insufficient policy coherence between central and regional authorities. Additionally, local food SMEs have yet to meet international food standards (Pujayanti, 2017). Indonesia has not developed a clear and systematic roadmap for gastrodiploacy, leading to uncoordinated efforts and limited impact (Trihartono et al., 2020).

### **Future Prospects and Recommendations**

#### **A. Potential improvements in Indonesia's gastro diploacy**

To address the lack of documentation in Indonesian cuisine, several strategies can be implemented:





- 1) The government and private sector can create digital platforms containing recipes, origins, and the history of Indonesian cuisine. This could take the form of an app, website, or accessible social media channels. Engage academics, historians, and culinary experts to document traditional recipes and culinary histories while verifying their authenticity. This ensures that the information is reliable and well-researched.
- 2) Utilize local and international culinary festivals as opportunities to document and promote Indonesian cuisine. These events could include cooking demonstrations and related publications to highlight the culinary heritage.
- 3) Local governments can collaborate with culinary experts to publish cookbooks featuring regional specialties, emphasizing the history and uniqueness of local ingredients.

#### B. Potential involvement of non-state actors and Indonesian diaspora

The implementation of gastrodiplomacy involves not only the Indonesian government but also non-state actors such as the Indonesian diaspora and the culinary industry. These stakeholders play a crucial role in promoting Indonesian cuisine on the international stage. Major events like the Indonesian Night Market and the Taste of Amsterdam Culinary Festival are vital in introducing Indonesian cuisine. These events attract numerous visitors and effectively promote Indonesia's culinary arts. The Indonesian Embassy in The Hague collaborates with various stakeholders, including the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, to enhance the impact of gastronomic diplomacy. Initiatives like the Satu Indonesia organization and partnerships with young chefs exemplify these collaborative efforts (Huwaidaa, 2022).

Yayusman et al. (2023: 10) note that Indonesian business owners and students in Australia significantly promote ethnic Indonesian food, with approximately 151 Indonesian restaurants identified in the country. Many members of the Indonesian diaspora in Australia have established restaurants and home catering services, serving as primary venues to introduce and promote Indonesian dishes to both local Australians and fellow Indonesians. This coordinated approach aims to increase the visibility of Indonesian cuisine globally and ensure it is marketed effectively to international audiences. The engagement of non-state actors and the diaspora serves several functions:

- a) By working together, Indonesian restaurants can host joint promotional activities such as food festivals, culinary events, and cooking demonstrations. These events not only showcase traditional Indonesian dishes but also create engaging platforms to introduce Indonesia's rich culinary heritage to international audiences.
- b) Beyond food, these networks help incorporate elements of Indonesian culture—such as music, art, and traditional attire—into the dining experience, offering a holistic representation of Indonesia. This enhances the overall gastrodiplomacy strategy by connecting culinary experiences with broader cultural engagement.
- c) Embassies, consulates, and the broader Indonesian diaspora play vital roles in supporting these efforts. The government facilitates connections between restaurant



owners and the broader hospitality industry, while Indonesian communities in various countries promote these restaurants and events to locals and expatriates.

By encouraging coordination among all stakeholders, particularly the government and the Indonesian diaspora, the realization of Indonesia's gastrodiploacy can be maximized. By learning from the success stories of countries with established Indonesian diasporas, the government can replicate these successes and ensure optimal support for similar initiatives in the future.

## CONCLUSION

Gastrodiploacy has become a crucial strategic tool for introducing a country's culture and image on the international stage. Countries like Thailand have demonstrated significant success in leveraging culinary arts as a means of diplomacy through programs like "Global Thai." This initiative not only transformed the country's image but also strengthened its influence by increasing the number of Thai restaurants worldwide. This approach has effectively raised international awareness of Thai cuisine and positioned the country as an attractive culinary destination.

In contrast, Indonesia possesses an immense culinary potential that has yet to be fully explored. The "Indonesia Spice Up The World" program, launched by the government, aims to enhance the marketing of Indonesia's spices, processed foods, and herbs, particularly in Africa, Australia, and other potential markets. Through this initiative, the government hopes to strengthen the presence of Indonesian restaurants abroad and boost exports of culinary products, especially spices, which are Indonesia's natural wealth.

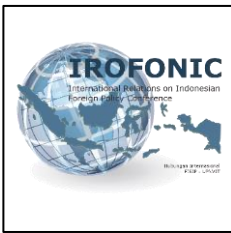
However, Indonesia still faces several challenges. The lack of culinary documentation, limited infrastructure, and the absence of responsible parties for culinary marketing abroad are major obstacles. Additionally, inconsistencies in policy between central and regional governments, along with the inability of MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) to meet international standards, also need to be addressed. Therefore, collaboration among the government, private sector, diaspora, and local communities is essential to overcome these challenges.

Success in introducing Indonesian cuisine to the international stage requires a cohesive and systematic approach. Steps such as digitizing culinary documentation, training for business actors, organizing culinary festivals, and partnering with academia and media can help strengthen Indonesia's position in the global market. With the right strategies, Indonesian cuisine can serve as an effective cultural ambassador, attracting international interest and significantly contributing to the national economy.



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