

Book Review

Indonesian Gastronomy (Volumes 1 and 2)

Yogyakarta: Global Pustaka Utama. 2019. 314 pp.

Yogyakarta: Global Pustaka Utama. 2019. 266 pp.

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Introduction

The books “Indonesian Gastronomy Volumes 1 and 2,” written by Professor Murdijati-Gardjito and colleagues, are interesting because they are among the first gastronomic books authored by experts in Food Science and Technology. While representing a coherent work, the two volumes focus on different aspects. The first one explains aspects of Indonesian culinary history at the national and global levels, including the changes that have taken place in the contemporary era. The second volume pays attention to the technical aspects of physical changes and chemical reactions in the food-making process. Volume 2 also describes Indonesian cuisine based on geographical location and ethnic affiliation.

Body

Until recently, few works on Indonesian gastronomy existed. The publication of these two books, therefore, has provided detailed knowledge of how cuisine developed in Indonesia. More importantly, these two books widen the horizon of Indonesian culinary culture with its rich diversity and history.

The first volume consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 (“Introduction”) defines Indonesian gastronomy. Chapter 2 (“Indigenous Knowledge to Global Related to Food Production and Consumption”) discusses changes in food use and eating patterns from traditional to modern times. This chapter also explains the relationship between food and people’s health and well-being. Chapter 3 (“Historical Aspects, Food Legends and Food Ingredients) recounts Indonesian culinary history. Chapter 4 (“Characteristics of Indonesian Gastronomy”) describes the main features of Indonesian cuisine, including its contents,

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processing methods and functions. The last chapter (“The Main Foods of the Indonesian People”) describes a variety of daily foods eaten by Indonesians. An interesting topic covered in this chapter is the development of rice’s hegemony in Indonesian cuisine and the disappearance of local food varieties and their related customary knowledge.

The second volume deals with Indonesian culinary tastes and profiles and consists of eight chapters. Chapter 1 (“Introduction”) provides a summary of the volume’s chapters. Chapter 2 (“Physiological Aspects and Taste Stimulation of Enjoying Food”) discusses the characteristics of taste in Indonesian cuisines; it also describes the factors that influence the appearance of taste. Chapter 3 (“Spices and Other Ingredients with Typical Indonesian Flavours”) discusses spices, seasonings and complements used in local cuisines. Chapter 4 (“Physical Aspects of Cooking Food”) examines the physical changes that take place during various cooking processes, while Chapter 5 (“Molecular Gastronomy”) describes the chemical reactions. Chapter 6 (“Physicochemical Aspects of Gastronomy”) provides knowledge about chemical reactions and physical changes in cooking food. Chapter 7 (“A Portrait of Indonesian Cuisine: The Art of a Thousand Ethnic Kitchens”) describes the diversity of Indonesian cuisine in terms of main dishes, side dishes, snacks and beverages. Finally, Chapter 8 (“Indonesian Cuisine and Global Community Tastes”) discusses the advantages of Indonesian cuisine in terms of health, global popularity, functional value and traditions.

Through the two volumes, the authors wanted to contribute to the issue of food security. The second volume, for example, highlights the importance of food diversification and biodiversity protection. The books also show the significance of preserving local wisdom concerning Indonesian food. Food security can be achieved by returning to traditional farming systems and gradually eating more traditional diets. This book also shows how diverse Indonesian food is from Aceh to Kalimantan (see pages 35–82) to Papua (page 198). The second volume highlights the variety of spices used locally. Spices consist of seasonings and herbs. Furthermore, considerable space is dedicated to discussing the diversity of main courses, side dishes, desserts and beverages. The authors reveal the variety and richness of Indonesia’s kitchen culture, which represents a unique pearl of local wisdom. More than that, this book reminds us again that Indonesia has an alternative to the domination of rice. By appreciating and using existing cultural heritage, the solutions for sustainable food security can get closer.

One of the book’s shortcomings is the long explanation of agrobiodiversity. Moreover, the discussion of certain foods is neither well explained nor proportionate, including coconut, tempeh and complementary main dishes (five triads of people: vegetable [Lalap], sambal sauce, soy sauce [Kecap], crackers [Kerupuk] and salted fish [Ikan Asin], as well as curd [Dadiah], fermented cassava [Tape] and fermented white and black glutinous rice [Brem]). For example, the discussion of coconut milk is excessively long (37 pages), while the investigation of crackers and salted fish is very short.

From the perspective of gastrodiploacy, gastronomy, as explained in the books, has significant implications for how the diversity of Indonesian cuisine shapes the nation’s identity and its branding. As an aspect of national identity, cuisine can be a distinguishing feature among countries. Moreover, as a brand, culinary culture can shape the perception of a nation in the minds of the international public (Fischler, 1988; Kimura, 2016; Polese et al., 2020; Reddy & van Dam, 2020). The two books argue that Indonesia’s appetisers, main menus, side dishes and snacks show the identity and brand of an agrarian country. However, the books do not describe Indonesia as a maritime country even though it has thousands of islands and the second-longest coastline in the world.

Conclusions

Overall, the books provide a good overview of the culinary richness and local wisdom of Indonesian kitchen culture. The books also offer alternative local solutions to problems stemming from globalisation, such as sustainable food and food security. Therefore, this work will undoubtedly become an essential reference for sustainable Indonesian gastronomy. However, if the goal is to project Indonesian gastronomy as a brand linked to a maritime nation, it should be noted that this work reinforces the identity of an agrarian country.

The Example Cover book



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