

Cultural Identity and Halal Tourism: The Case of Rujak Juhi in Jakarta

Ikrar Genidal Riadil^{1*}

¹ School of Languages and General Education (Solgen, Wailak University, Thailand

*Corresponding author email: ikrargenidal21@gmail.com

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: This study explores Rujak Juhi as a unique culinary expression of Betawi–Chinese cultural fusion and examines its potential as a halal gastronomic asset to support Jakarta’s culinary tourism.

Design/methodology: Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research collected data through in-depth interviews with traditional food vendors, culinary artisans, cultural figures, and tourism practitioners, complemented by field observations to capture cultural meanings, preparation methods, and public perceptions.

Findings: The findings reveal that Rujak Juhi functions not only as a traditional dish but also as a symbol of acculturation and historical continuity between Betawi and Chinese communities. Its ingredients, preparation, and presentation embody both culinary traditions while largely adhering to halal dietary principles. However, the study identifies a lack of strategic efforts to include Rujak Juhi in halal tourism promotion and branding, which limits its potential as an economic and cultural resource.

Research limitations/Implications: This limitation underscores the need for coordinated initiatives involving local government, culinary communities, and tourism stakeholders to enhance its visibility and market positioning. Although the study is based on qualitative insights from selected stakeholders in Jakarta, future research could broaden its scope through consumer-based or comparative analyses to strengthen understanding of halal culinary tourism.

Novelty/Originality of the study: The originality of this research lies in positioning Rujak Juhi as a culturally rich yet underrecognized halal-friendly dish and proposing its integration into sustainable halal tourism development through certification, awareness campaigns, and cross-sector collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

Gastronomic tourism has emerged as a strategic dimension of destination development, emphasizing not only visual and recreational appeal but also the sensory and cultural engagement derived from food-based experiences. Globally, gastronomy is increasingly recognized as a medium through which destinations construct identity, authenticity, and cultural narratives (Richards, 2012). Within this expanding framework, halal tourism has become one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry, particularly in Muslim-majority countries. Halal tourism extends beyond accommodation and worship facilities, encompassing culinary practices that adhere to Islamic dietary laws and offer culturally attuned experiences for Muslim travelers (Battour & Ismail, 2016).

In Indonesia, a nation distinguished by its ethnic diversity and Muslim-majority demographic, the integration of halal principles into tourism development carries both economic and sociocultural significance. Jakarta, as the capital city, represents a dynamic culinary landscape shaped by centuries of intercultural contact, notably between Betawi and Chinese communities. Among the city’s traditional foods, Rujak Juhi exemplifies a distinctive product of this acculturation, combining Chinese-style dried squid with Betawi-style rujak sauce and indigenous ingredients. This hybridization reflects not only historical coexistence but also a fusion of symbolic meanings, preparation techniques, and local tastes that together form part of Jakarta’s intangible cultural heritage (Anderson, 2005; Long, 2004).

Despite its historical and cultural richness, Rujak Juhi has yet to be systematically developed as a halal gastronomic asset. Current scholarship on halal culinary tourism in Indonesia predominantly addresses modernized or mainstream halal products, while traditional and acculturated cuisines remain underexplored. This indicates a conceptual and practical gap in linking heritage-based culinary identities with the contemporary discourse of halal tourism.

Accordingly, the present study investigates Rujak Juhi within the context of Jakarta's halal gastronomy by examining its cultural and historical values as an acculturated dish, assessing its compliance with halal principles, and exploring the perceptions of culinary practitioners and tourists regarding its potential as a halal gastronomic attraction. The study further identifies the challenges and opportunities associated with positioning Rujak Juhi as part of Jakarta's halal culinary identity.

The novelty of this research lies in its integration of three underexplored analytical dimensions: (1) the examination of traditional culinary heritage resulting from Betawi–Chinese cultural acculturation; (2) the conceptual linkage between gastronomic tourism and halal tourism development; and (3) an in-depth qualitative analysis of cultural perceptions and halal values embedded in a hybrid local cuisine. By addressing these dimensions, the study extends existing discourse on halal gastronomy and contributes to a more inclusive understanding of how culturally hybrid dishes can serve as strategic assets in halal tourism frameworks.

This study holds both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to the interdisciplinary scholarship of halal tourism, culinary hybridity, and heritage-based gastronomic studies. Practically, it offers insights for policymakers, tourism authorities, and culinary entrepreneurs regarding the integration of traditional foods into halal tourism branding and destination development. The findings are expected to support efforts in preserving intangible culinary heritage, strengthening Jakarta's identity as a multicultural and halal-friendly destination, and promoting sustainable, locally grounded tourism innovation. Ultimately, this research positions Rujak Juhi as a culturally significant yet underutilized culinary heritage that embodies both the historical plurality and contemporary opportunities of Indonesia's halal gastronomic landscape.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism Gastronomy

In recent decades, gastronomy has evolved from being a supplementary component of tourism to becoming a central driver of destination appeal. Kivela and Crotts (2005) argue that culinary experiences now serve as primary motivators for travel, transforming food into a critical marker of place identity. Beyond consumption, gastronomy operates as a medium for cultural expression and an instrument for constructing authentic tourist experiences (Ellis et al., 2018). Everett et al. (2008) further conceptualize the notion of edible identity, whereby local cuisines reflect deeper cultural narratives that can be strategically leveraged to differentiate destinations.

Within this discourse, Jakarta presents a compelling case due to its multicultural heritage and gastronomic diversity. However, despite a growing body of research on Indonesian culinary tourism, the integration of local dishes such as Rujak Juhi into destination branding remains underexplored. This gap reveals the need to investigate how traditional hybrid dishes can function not only as symbols of authenticity but also as strategic assets for food-based tourism promotion.

Halal Tourism and Food

Halal tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing sectors in the global travel industry. The Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) 2023 reports that Muslim travelers increasingly seek destinations offering halal-compliant services and culturally resonant experiences (Crescentrating, 2023). El-Gohary (2016) conceptualizes halal tourism as encompassing three fundamental dimensions: halal food, prayer facilities, and adherence to Sharia principles. Within this framework, culinary authenticity becomes not only a matter of taste but also one of faith and ethical assurance.

Faisal et al. (2024) argue that perceptions of halal credibility are shaped by visual cues, certification systems, and embedded cultural narratives, traditional dishes must be reinterpreted within convincing halal contexts to appeal to muslim travelers. Yet, existing literature largely overlooks how culturally hybrid foods such as Rujak Juhi can be positioned within halal tourism branding. This oversight limits understanding of how hybrid cuisines can simultaneously embody cultural pluralism and meet halal assurance expectations.

Cultural Hybridity in Food Context

Cultural hybridity in gastronomy refers to the synthesis of culinary elements from different cultural traditions, resulting in novel food identities. Kihlgren-Grandi (2023) describe hybrid cuisine as a reflection of globalization and migration, offering a culinary metaphor for cultural negotiation. In tourism, hybrid foods serve as tangible narratives of cultural exchange, resonating with travelers seeking authentic yet cosmopolitan experiences (Richards, 2021).

Chang et al. (2010) note that food hybridity enriches a destination's gastronomic portfolio by diversifying its culinary offerings and deepening its cultural storytelling potential. However, despite increasing scholarly interest, few studies have examined how hybrid dishes are integrated into halal tourism narratives. Rujak Juhi, which blends Betawi and Chinese culinary influences, exemplifies how hybridity can generate both cultural meaning

and market value. Yet, its potential role in representing Jakarta's multicultural and halal tourism identity remains largely unexamined in current scholarship.

Chinese Acculturation in Jakarta, Indonesia

Cultural acculturation describes the dynamic interaction between different cultural groups, leading to reciprocal adaptation and transformation (Berry & Sam, 1997). In Indonesia a nation historically shaped by diverse ethnic and colonial encounters culinary acculturation manifests vividly in everyday cuisine. Nugroho et al. (2023) highlight that many Indonesian dishes exhibit layered influences, reflecting centuries of trade, migration, and intermarriage.

Applying Berry's (2017) acculturation model comprising integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization provides a useful framework for understanding how Chinese elements were selectively integrated into local Betawi food culture. This theoretical lens clarifies how culinary adaptation can occur without cultural dilution, producing foods that are locally meaningful yet globally relatable. However, empirical studies rarely link such acculturative processes to contemporary tourism or halal consumption contexts leaving a conceptual gap this study aims to address.

Jakarta (formerly Batavia) has long been a site of Chinese cultural influence, evident in its architecture, language, and gastronomy (Oktarina & Kurniawan, 2021). Situmeang et al., (2024) explained that the ethnic Chinese community has been instrumental in shaping Jakarta's urban economy and food scene. Sulistiyo et al., (2024) further observe that several iconic Betawi dishes incorporate Chinese culinary techniques and ingredients such as noodles, tofu, and dried seafood.

Wenzel, (2016) interpret acculturated foods as symbols of intercultural diplomacy, facilitating coexistence and dialogue within multiethnic urban settings. Nevertheless, despite the rich documentation of Chinese influence in Jakarta's cuisine, there is limited discussion of how such foods can be reframed within halal tourism narratives. Addressing this gap is essential to reconciling cultural hybridity with religious authenticity in Jakarta's evolving culinary identity.

Rujak Juhi as Betawinese-Chinese Culinary

Rujak Juhi is a traditional Jakarta dish made from yellow noodles, cabbage, cucumber, and dried squid served with peanut sauce embodies the city's hybrid culinary identity, the dish represents the synthesis of Betawi traditions (through its use of peanut sauce and fresh vegetables) and Chinese elements (through noodles and dried seafood) (Habsari, 2007). Moreover, Wiratri, (2017) argue that beyond its ingredients, Rujak Juhi encapsulates local narratives of coexistence and adaptation, symbolizing Jakarta's multicultural heritage.

While Rujak Juhi is generally halal by composition, it has not yet been framed explicitly within the halal tourism discourse. This gap highlights the dish's untapped potential as both a cultural and halal tourism asset. Critically engaging with this underrepresentation, the present study positions Rujak Juhi as a focal case to explore how hybrid culinary heritage can be reframed to meet halal expectations while preserving authenticity. By situating Rujak Juhi at the intersection of gastronomy, hybridity, and religious tourism, this research aims to advance understanding of how culturally hybrid foods can strengthen Jakarta's positioning as a multicultural and halal-friendly destination.

Figure 1: Rujak Juhi



Source: Mamijekz, (2020)

Rujak Juhi represents one of Jakarta's most emblematic culinary traditions, embodying the city's complex history of cultural interaction. The dish serves as a tangible manifestation of the acculturation between the indigenous Betawi community and the ethnic Chinese population who have long been integral to the social and economic landscape of Batavia, now Jakarta. Historical records indicate that Chinese settlers began arriving in Batavia as early as the seventeenth century, bringing with them distinct culinary techniques such as the use of dried seafood including juhi (dried salted squid) and preservation methods based on fermentation (Sulistiyo et al, 2024). These practices were gradually assimilated into the local food culture, resulting in enduring culinary exchanges.

Betawi cuisine itself has evolved through continuous processes of cultural synthesis, reflecting the influence of Malay, Arab, Chinese, and Dutch traditions. This dynamic formation aligns with the concept of culinary hybridity proposed by Kihlgren-Grandi (2023), which describes the creation of new culinary forms through the convergence of multiple cultural systems. Hybrid foods, in this sense, function as cultural artifacts that retain traces of their diverse origins while being recontextualized within a new local identity. Within this framework, Rujak Juhi exemplifies hybridity through the integration of Betawi-style peanut sauce and fresh vegetables with Chinese-style yellow noodles and dried squid, resulting in a distinctive gastronomic profile that reflects Jakarta's multicultural identity.

From a gastronomic and anthropological perspective, Rujak Juhi transcends its role as a mere culinary product; it constitutes an edible heritage a consumable form of cultural memory transmitted across generations. Long (2018) suggests, traditional foods serve as interpretive entry points to understanding the historical and social fabric of a community. In the context of culinary tourism, such foods not only provide sensory enjoyment but also communicate authenticity, identity, and place through embodied cultural narratives.

Given its historical depth and socio-cultural resonance, Rujak Juhi should be positioned not only as a local delicacy but also as a cultural heritage asset with economic, social, and symbolic significance. Integrating halal values into its contemporary narrative, while preserving its historical hybridity, would enhance its relevance within the growing framework of halal tourism. Consequently, Rujak Juhi can be recognized as an authentic representation of Jakarta's pluralistic food heritage demonstrating how hybrid culinary traditions can coexist with religious sensibilities and contribute to the city's identity as a diverse, halal-friendly gastronomic destination.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Epistemological Orientation

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, which seeks to explore and interpret social and cultural phenomena from the perspectives and experiences of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The qualitative paradigm was selected because the research aims to understand the symbolic meanings, perceptions, and cultural narratives associated with Rujak Juhi a culinary product resulting from Betawi–Chinese acculturation and to examine its potential as an asset within Jakarta's halal gastronomic tourism framework.

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection and interpretation. As the central instrument, the researcher plays an active role in engaging with participants, interpreting meanings, and ensuring that findings accurately reflect lived experiences within their natural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To strengthen the reliability and transparency of data interpretation, supplementary research instruments were also employed, including semi-structured interview guide, developed based on literature concerning gastronomic tourism, cultural acculturation, and halal certification; an observation sheet, designed to record cultural practices, food preparation processes, and representations of halal values in context; and documentation tools, such as a camera, audio recorder, and transcription software, to capture and verify empirical evidence from the field. This methodological foundation aligns with Miles et al., (2013), who emphasize that qualitative research is appropriate for investigating complex social realities that cannot be meaningfully reduced to quantitative variables.

Research Setting and Participants

This research employs a qualitative ethnographic approach to explore the cultural significance and halal tourism potential of Rujak Juhi. Ethnography allows for an in-depth understanding of how culinary practices operate as expressions of identity, belief, and local knowledge systems (Dewantara et al., 2023).

The research participants were divided into four key groups first culinary practitioners including vendors, artisans, and producers of Rujak Juhi; second, cultural experts and historians particularly those specializing in Betawi–Chinese heritage; third, tourism and gastronomy stakeholders such as representatives from local tourism boards and halal certification bodies; and muslim consumers as the primary target group for halal gastronomic tourism.

The research objects encompass Betawi–Chinese cultural acculturation products; traditional culinary commodities within Jakarta; and potential assets that contribute to the city's halal gastronomic tourism strategy.

This selection enables a comprehensive examination of Rujak Juhi as both a cultural artifact and a marketable tourism product within the city's broader socio-cultural ecosystem.

Sampling Technique and Data Collection

Data were collected using purposive sampling, a non-probability technique that intentionally selects participants based on their relevance, expertise, and knowledge of the research subject (Palinkas et al., 2015). The sampling criteria emphasized informants capable of articulating the historical background, preparation methods, and community perceptions surrounding Rujak Juhi.

Three main data collection methods were applied to ensure triangulation and data richness by using in-depth interviews conducted with Rujak Juhi vendors, Betawi culinary experts, Chinese cultural figures, and halal tourism practitioners. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility while maintaining thematic focus and ensuring consistency across sessions (Adams, 2015). Participant observation, conducted at traditional markets, culinary centers, and cultural festivals in Jakarta, where the researcher observed first-hand the preparation, serving, and consumption of Rujak Juhi. This approach captured tacit cultural knowledge and embodied practices that might not emerge in interviews (Spradley, 2016). Documentation review included analysis of photographs, media publications, policy reports, and archival materials related to Betawi–Chinese culinary heritage and halal tourism development. This process complemented primary data by situating Rujak Juhi within broader institutional and historical contexts.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed through thematic analysis, following the six-step procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2019). The process began with familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts and field notes, followed by the generation of initial codes to identify significant keywords and recurring ideas. These codes were then organized into overarching thematic categories such as cultural acculturation, halal narratives, tourist perception, and branding potential.

Subsequent stages involved reviewing, refining, and defining the themes to ensure internal coherence and conceptual clarity. The final phase entailed constructing an analytical narrative that interprets the empirical findings within relevant theoretical frameworks. Thematic analysis was chosen because it is well-suited to socio-cultural inquiries that aim to uncover subjective meanings embedded in contextualized environments (Nowell et al., 2017).

Research Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed methodological triangulation across interviews, observations, and documentation, enhancing the credibility and confirmability of findings (Meydan & Akkaş, 2024). Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process to minimize researcher bias, and an audit trail was developed to document methodological decisions and data interpretations. All research activities adhered to ethical research standards, including obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality, and providing participants with the option to withdraw at any stage. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to data collection.

FINDINGS

Rujak Juhi as a Representation of Betawi–Chinese Cultural Acculturation

Data from both culinary practitioners and cultural experts reveal that Rujak Juhi embodies a long process of cultural fusion between Betawi and Chinese communities in Jakarta. Vendor A, a third-generation Rujak Juhi seller in North Jakarta, explained:

"My grandmother learned to make Rujak Juhi from her Chinese neighbor. The noodles and dried squid came from Chinese recipes, but the peanut sauce and vegetables were Betawi-style. Over time, people no longer saw it as Chinese or Betawi—it just became Jakarta's food."

Similarly, Cultural Expert 1, a historian specializing in Jakarta's urban heritage, noted:

"The dish reflects everyday coexistence. Food like Rujak Juhi tells us that integration in Jakarta happened not through big political movements, but through kitchens and dining tables."

These narratives support the theoretical framework of culinary hybridity Kihlgren-Grandi (2023), which posits that hybrid foods function as media of cultural negotiation and identity formation. Rujak Juhi thus operates as both a quotidian culinary product and a symbolic representation of multicultural harmony in Jakarta, making it a potential medium for intercultural understanding and tourism promotion.

The Halal Value of Rujak Juhi from the Perspective of Muslim Tourists

Observations at culinary centers such as Pasar Mayestik and Mangga Besar, combined with interviews with Muslim consumers, indicate that Rujak Juhi is widely perceived as halal in principle but lacking in formal assurance. Consumer 1, a Muslim traveler from Bandung, commented:

"I believe it's halal since the ingredients are seafood and vegetables. But I still hesitate if I don't see a halal label or if the seller cooks near non-halal stalls."

Consumer 3, a Jakarta-based Muslim millennial, echoed this sentiment:

"The food is fine, but nowadays people want certainty. Even traditional dishes should have some kind of halal explanation or signage."

Meanwhile, Vendor C admitted challenges in maintaining strict halal separation:

"We use the same stove for other seafood, but all ingredients are clean. Still, some Muslim buyers ask if we have halal certificates, which we don't yet."

These responses align with Bukhari et al. (2021), who argue that halal perception is influenced not only by the intrinsic halalness of ingredients but also by the cultural and communicative context in which the food is presented. Hence, a community-based halal assurance framework supported by education, certification, and storytelling is crucial to enhancing Rujak Juhi's halal credibility among Muslim tourists.

Rujak Juhi's Potential as a Halal Gastronomy Tourism Asset

Interviews with tourism practitioners reveal strong optimism regarding Rujak Juhi's potential as part of Jakarta's halal gastronomy portfolio. Tourism Official A from the Jakarta Tourism Office observed:

"Rujak Juhi has a story—Chinese roots, Betawi adaptation, and a halal-friendly profile. It could easily become a culinary signature if we package it properly."

Similarly, Halal Tourism Practitioner 1, a member of a local halal tourism association, added:

"Global Muslim tourists are not just looking for halal food—they want heritage. If Rujak Juhi is promoted as 'halal with heritage,' it can compete with other Southeast Asian destinations."

These insights echo Richards (2021), who highlights that foods with strong cultural narratives are key to building authentic gastronomic experiences. Positioning Rujak Juhi as a "heritage halal dish" can therefore reinforce Jakarta's image as a destination that integrates multicultural authenticity with halal assurance.

Weak Promotion and Branding Strategies

Despite its cultural richness, findings reveal that Rujak Juhi has not been systematically promoted as part of Jakarta's culinary or halal tourism identity. Tourism Official B acknowledged:

"Our culinary branding still revolves around dishes like kerak telur and soto Betawi. We haven't highlighted Rujak Juhi because it's seen as niche and not yet popular with younger audiences."

Documentation from the Tourism Office confirms the absence of specific promotional programs or branding campaigns related to Rujak Juhi. Vendor D also expressed concern about declining visibility:

"Only older people still look for Rujak Juhi. Young tourists don't know it, unless we sell it at festivals."

According to Nurwitasari et al. (2024), destination branding should incorporate an edible narrative a cohesive storytelling framework that connects flavor, history, and cultural values such as halal. Therefore, revitalizing Rujak Juhi's visibility requires collaboration among local government agencies, culinary practitioners, and cultural communities to integrate it into official promotional strategies for halal tourism.

Opportunities for Intangible Heritage Preservation through Halal Gastronomy

A recurring theme among cultural experts and tourism practitioners is the potential for Rujak Juhi to serve as a medium for preserving Jakarta's intangible cultural heritage. Cultural Expert 2 emphasized:

"When traditional food becomes part of tourism, it doesn't just survive—it evolves. The key is maintaining authenticity while adapting to new contexts, like halal certification."

This perspective aligns with UNESCO (2020) emphasis on revitalizing intangible heritage through active participation in contemporary social and economic systems. Embedding Rujak Juhi within Jakarta's halal tourism initiatives through food festivals, cultural storytelling, and community-based certification that can thus ensure its sustainability while empowering local vendors. Halal Tourism Practitioner 3 summarized this synergy succinctly:

"Heritage food like Rujak Juhi should not be left behind. If we integrate it into halal tourism events, we preserve culture and support livelihoods at the same time."

Consequently, the integration of Rujak Juhi into Jakarta's halal gastronomy strategy represents not merely an economic opportunity, but a form of culinary heritage preservation that strengthens local identity and fosters cultural resilience. The analysis demonstrates that Rujak Juhi operates as a culinary symbol of Betawi–Chinese cultural acculturation, embodying both social harmony and historical hybridity. While inherently halal, its market potential remains constrained by the absence of formal certification and targeted promotion. Strengthening its halal narrative and embedding it within heritage-based tourism programs could enhance both its visibility and sustainability. Overall, Rujak Juhi exemplifies how hybrid traditional foods can bridge cultural understanding and contribute to the growth of urban halal gastronomy in multicultural contexts such as Jakarta.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research reveal that Rujak Juhi represents more than a traditional Betawi dish it embodies a living manifestation of Betawi–Chinese cultural hybridity and functions as a symbolic expression of Jakarta's pluralistic identity. The convergence of Chinese culinary techniques (e.g., the use of dried squid and yellow noodles) with Betawi elements such as peanut sauce and fresh vegetables aligns with Kihlgren-Grandi (2023) concept of culinary hybridity, where the integration of distinct cultural practices produces new food identities recognized and accepted by the broader community.

However, while this interpretation is consistent with existing theoretical perspectives on hybrid cuisine, the empirical data also reveal subtle tensions and differing perceptions regarding how this hybridity is understood at the community level. For example, several vendors emphasized cultural coexistence and shared culinary heritage "*This is Jakarta's food it belongs to everyone*", whereas some Muslim consumers still perceived the dish as having "Chinese roots" and therefore sought further halal assurance before consumption. These nuances suggest that cultural fusion in food does not automatically translate into universal acceptance but requires contextual framing that aligns with both cultural pride and religious sensitivity.

This finding partially challenges earlier literature (e.g., Ellis et al., 2018; Everett, 2008), which tends to portray hybridized foods as inherently inclusive cultural assets. In Jakarta's context, inclusion appears to be contingent upon narrative framing on how food producers and promoters communicate the dish's cultural story and halal status. Thus, hybridity alone is insufficient as a driver of culinary tourism unless it is complemented by interpretive narratives that reconcile cultural diversity with the expectations of Muslim travelers.

Negotiating Halal Assurance within Cultural Hybridity

The study also reveals that Rujak Juhi, though largely halal by composition, suffers from a lack of explicit halal branding and consumer confidence. Muslim informants frequently expressed uncertainty regarding ingredient sources and preparation practices, highlighting a gap between perceived and certified halal. Halal perception is deeply influenced by the cultural and communicative dimensions of food presentation rather than its material content alone.

However, the data also show variation among stakeholders. While halal tourism practitioners insisted on formal certification as a prerequisite for market expansion, local vendors often viewed such procedures as unnecessary or financially burdensome. Vendor C, for instance, described halal certification as "*too complicated for small sellers*," reflecting a tension between regulatory frameworks and everyday business realities. This divergence suggests a structural limitation in implementing halal standards for informal culinary actors.

These findings underscore the need for context-sensitive halal assurance mechanisms, possibly through community-based or collective certification models. Such approaches could bridge the gap between cultural authenticity and religious compliance, ensuring that the halal narrative does not alienate traditional vendors but instead empowers them as custodians of edible heritage.

The Role of Edible Storytelling and Destination Branding

The empirical data also illuminate the underutilized potential of Rujak Juhi in Jakarta's gastronomic branding. While tourism officials recognize its unique historical narrative, promotional efforts remain sporadic and lack cohesive storytelling strategies. This corroborates Nurwitasari et al., (2024) notion of edible storytelling, which emphasizes that a dish's cultural and emotional resonance must be actively constructed through narratives that intertwine taste, history, and value.

Interviews reveal that most consumers encounter Rujak Juhi as a street food item rather than as a heritage product. Without contextual storytelling either through tourism media, signage, or cultural events. The dish risks being perceived as ordinary rather than iconic. This finding challenges the assumption that authenticity naturally translates into market appeal. Instead, the symbolic potential of Rujak Juhi depends on deliberate narrative mediation that situates it within Jakarta's broader halal and multicultural tourism identity.

An integrated branding model that combines culinary heritage preservation, halal assurance, and participatory storytelling could therefore transform Rujak Juhi into an effective vehicle for cultural diplomacy and destination

differentiation. Such a model would require collaboration between tourism authorities, local communities, and cultural organizations to co-produce meaning and value around the dish.

Cultural Preservation through Market Integration

From a heritage perspective, Rujak Juhi exemplifies how culinary traditions can persist by adapting to new economic and cultural frameworks. Echoing UNESCO (2020) emphasis on revitalizing intangible heritage through modern contexts, integrating Rujak Juhi into halal tourism could create a sustainable preservation model that links local livelihoods with cultural continuity.

Nonetheless, this process involves inherent trade-offs. Commercializing traditional foods risks commodifying culture and diluting authenticity a concern voiced by cultural expert 2, who warned that “*heritage food should not be changed just to please tourists.*” Yet, other informants viewed adaptation as necessary for survival. This duality reflects a broader theoretical debate between preservation and innovation in heritage-based gastronomy (Richards, 2021).

The present study suggests that balancing these forces requires participatory frameworks that allow communities to retain agency over how their culinary traditions are represented and marketed. Thus, rather than treating Rujak Juhi solely as a tourism product, it should be viewed as a dynamic cultural practice, one capable of evolving through interaction with modern market forces while preserving its symbolic core as a representation of multicultural Jakarta.

Methodological Reflections and Limitations

While this study provides a nuanced understanding of Rujak Juhi’s cultural and halal dimensions, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the relatively small number of informants (18) limits the generalizability of the findings; perspectives from younger consumers, non-Muslim tourists, or policymakers beyond Jakarta were not extensively represented. Second, as interviews were conducted primarily within urban contexts, rural interpretations of Betawi–Chinese food hybridity remain unexplored. Finally, although triangulation through interviews, observation, and documentation enhanced validity, researcher subjectivity an inherent feature of qualitative inquiry may have influenced thematic emphasis.

Future research could employ comparative studies across other Indonesian hybrid cuisines or integrate quantitative surveys to assess consumer perceptions of halal authenticity and cultural value at a broader scale. These extensions would complement the present study’s qualitative insights by offering a more holistic understanding of how hybrid traditional foods function within the halal tourism ecosystem.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to the intersection of culinary hybridity theory and halal tourism by demonstrating that hybridized foods can simultaneously embody cultural pluralism and religious identity, provided that narrative mediation aligns them with consumer expectations. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration in developing halal gastronomy tourism bridging the gap between informal culinary actors and formal certification systems, and fostering storytelling-based branding that preserves cultural authenticity while enhancing economic viability.

In summary, Rujak Juhi should not be understood merely as a hybrid food but as a symbolic mediator between Jakarta’s multicultural past and its halal tourism future. Its success as a gastronomic asset depends on how effectively cultural authenticity, religious assurance, and strategic storytelling are woven together to construct an inclusive, marketable, and sustainable culinary identity for the city.

CONCLUSION

This study critically examined Rujak Juhi as a culinary expression of Betawi–Chinese cultural acculturation and its potential role in Jakarta’s halal gastronomic tourism. Through a qualitative ethnographic approach involving vendors, consumers, cultural experts, and tourism practitioners, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how hybrid foods embody cultural identity, negotiate religious values, and interact with tourism development agendas.

Empirically, the study demonstrates that Rujak Juhi serves as both a tangible and symbolic product of Jakarta’s multicultural heritage. It reflects the historical synthesis of Chinese culinary practices such as the use of dried seafood and noodles with Betawi traditions rooted in local ingredients and communal dining culture. This hybridity, however, is not uniformly interpreted across stakeholders. While cultural actors view Rujak Juhi as a shared heritage symbolizing interethnic harmony, Muslim consumers often perceive ambiguity regarding its halal assurance. This divergence underscores that the integration of hybrid culinary products into the halal tourism framework requires more than ingredient compliance; it depends on the articulation of a clear and credible halal narrative supported by community trust.

Theoretically, the study extends the discourse on culinary hybridity and halal gastronomy by revealing the complexity of negotiating authenticity, identity, and religious conformity within urban multicultural contexts. It challenges the notion that hybrid foods naturally serve as inclusive cultural assets, suggesting instead that their acceptance is mediated by narrative construction and local socio-religious norms. In doing so, the research bridges a gap in the literature by linking hybrid gastronomy to the emerging field of halal tourism branding—an area previously dominated by discussions of certification and consumer behavior rather than cultural storytelling.

From a practical standpoint, the findings highlight three strategic imperatives for policymakers and tourism stakeholders as community-based halal assurance has establish localized certification mechanisms or cooperative schemes that empower small-scale vendors to participate in halal tourism initiatives without excessive bureaucratic burden. Develop storytelling frameworks through culinary festivals, digital media, or museum exhibitions that position Rujak Juhi as a symbol of “halal with heritage,” integrating both its intercultural roots and halal compliance. Collaborative governance by fostering synergy among local governments, cultural institutions, and culinary associations to design inclusive halal tourism policies that safeguard traditional food authenticity while enhancing market competitiveness.

Nevertheless, the study acknowledges several limitations. The sample size was modest and concentrated in urban Jakarta, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or food traditions. The qualitative focus also prioritizes depth over representativeness, meaning further research using mixed methods could assess consumer perceptions of halal authenticity on a larger scale. Additionally, economic feasibility and long-term sustainability of integrating Rujak Juhi into formal tourism circuits remain areas for future exploration.

In conclusion, Rujak Juhi exemplifies how cultural hybridity can be transformed into an asset for halal tourism, but its success depends on deliberate social construction rather than spontaneous cultural appreciation. The dish's significance lies not merely in its flavor or history, but in its ability to mediate between heritage and modernity, authenticity and adaptation, and faith and diversity. By recognizing and addressing these intersecting dimensions, Jakarta can position Rujak Juhi as both a preserved cultural legacy and a living, market-relevant representation of the city's plural identity within the global halal tourism landscape.

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