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## An Analysis of Cultural, Historical, and Traditional Values Behind Rendang in Indonesia's Gastrodiplomacy

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine cultural, historical, and traditional values behind rendang in gastrodiplomacy in the implementation of Indonesian foreign policy for the development of gastronomic tourism in the country. The Ministry of Tourism named rendang one of the country's national foods in 2018, raising two research questions. First, the purpose behind the government's decision to designate rendang as its national dish is analyzed. The specific cultural, historical, and traditional values that rendang represents are explored. † This study argues that Indonesia selected rendang to become its national dish because the government sought to use the Minangkabau culinary delight as the instrument of gastrodiplomacy to develop gastronomic tourism in the country. For the government, the development of Indonesian gastronomic tourism serves as national interest that the country intends to achieve in its foreign policy. The government saw the potential in rendang in helping the country reach such national interest because of the rich culture, history, and tradition behind the dish. Using qualitative method and Paul S. Rockower's gastrodiplomacy concept, this study examines the cultural, historical, and traditional values of rendang through literature review. The findings reveal that these values are embedded in the symbolic representation of its ingredients and cooking process for the customary ceremonies of Minangkabau people. The government aims to convey these values through values in its gastrodiplomacy to attract foreign audience to travel to the country for the development of Indonesian gastronomic tourism. This descriptive research contributes to enrich literature on Indonesian gastrodiplomacy in Indonesian foreign policy.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

After 73 years of independence, Indonesia officially designated its first national foods in 2018 despite a myriad of gastronomic assets across the archipelago. These dishes included soto (aromatic soup), rendang (meat stewed in coconut milk and spices), nasi goreng (fried rice), and gado-gado (vegetables mixed with peanut sauce). In 2018, the Ministry of Tourism named the five dishes the country's national food. The Minister of Tourism, Arief Yahya, stated that the Indonesian government faced challenges in determining its national foods due to the country's diverse culinary heritage. He explained that the government decided to choose those five dishes because of the international recognitions that they received, among other reasons. American news agency CNN, for example, recognized rendang as one of the most delicious foods in the world in 2017 ([The Jakarta Post, 2018b](#)).

This research seeks to examine rendang as one of Indonesia's first national dishes in the tourism industry. Indonesia lags behind other Asian countries, such as Thailand, Vietnam, and South Korea, in the possession of national dishes. Vietnam and South Korea, respectively, have Pho and kimchi as their national cuisines, while Thailand possess Pat Thai. Pat Thai originated from Chinese dish kway teow. Prime Minister Phibunsongkhram, who ruled Thailand from 1938 to 1944, localized kway teow, turning it into Pat Thai. He then increased its popularity in Thailand's lower class. The prime minister then highlighted Thai characteristics in Pat Thai, naming the dish a national food of Thailand. Pat Thai not only became the country's iconic dish, but also shaped its national identity and constructed its national image ([Yao et al., 2024](#)). Unlike Pat Thai, kimchi originates from South Korea. The Korean government proclaimed kimchi as its national food during the Seoul Olympics in 1988. The government used the world-class sports event to internationally introduce kimchi as national symbol. This dish not only symbolizes Korean in its taste and characters, but more importantly also represents their popular culture because it constitutes the daily dish of farmers, workers, and poor people opposed to elites enjoying varied and refined foreign food ([Cho, 2006](#)).

Similar to kimchi and Pat Thai, rendang and other Indonesian national dishes also represent Indonesian culture, history, and tradition in their taste and characteristics. This article focuses on rendang, exploring the cultural, historical and traditional values behind the slowly-cooked meat dish. Therefore, a research question raised in this article is What cultural and traditional elements shape rendang, and why does the government consider these values significant? This article argues that the Ministry of Tourism considers the importance in the cultural and traditional values of rendang because the values can strengthen gastrodiplomacy carried out by the government to internationally promote the tourism sector of the country. In gastrodiplomacy, the government uses food to communicate its culture and tradition to foreign audiences not only to make them aware of the Indonesian dish but also to attract them to travel to Indonesia. The government practices gastrodiplomacy to increase international arrivals to the country.

Rendang has been the subject of various studies, but none of them examined its potential for gastrodiplomacy in Indonesian foreign policy. [Rahman \(2020\)](#) discussed the origin of rendang, exploring foreign influences behind the Minangkabau culinary delight. He found the Portuguese influence in rendang, explaining that the Portuguese colonialism in Malacca in 1511 led to the adoption of Portuguese food preservation method in the making of rendang in Minangkabau culinary culture ([Rahman, 2020](#)). Similarly, [Nurmufida et al. \(2017\)](#), explored Indian influences in rendang, arguing that rendang originated from India for the similarities in the spices used in the making of rendang and Indian dishes. The trade contacts between

Indian merchants and locals in West Sumatra in the early second millennium led to the similarities. The Indian merchants, who traveled to West Sumatra back then, introduced its foods, such as Indian curry, to the locals. The Indian dishes then inspired the locals to make rendang and other Minangkabau dishes, such as kalio (wet *rendang*) and gulai (curry). Rendang is generally made from beef. However, in some regions, the beef is replaced with other ingredients, such as chicken, fish and oyster. In the west coasts of West Sumatra, for example, locals use oysters or *lokan* in a local language to cook rendang. Therefore, they call it rendang lokan. The cultural identity of rendang lokan was studied by [Fatimah et al. \(2021\)](#). In her research, she found some reasons in the use of oysters in rendang lokan. First, it represented the adaptability of Minangkabau people living in the western coastal areas in the province to their whereabouts. Second, they replace beef with oysters in the making of rendang because oysters have become iconic food seafood source in the west coasts of West Sumatra. Oysters in rendang lokan symbolize the pride of the locals in their culinary culture and tradition ([Fatimah et al., 2021](#)).

The fact that the existing studies have yet to examine the potential use of rendang in Indonesian gastrodiplomacy to help Indonesia reach its national interests abroad motivated me to make this research. This research contributes to enrich existing literature about rendang and the use of food in gastrodiplomacy in the implementation of Indonesian foreign policy. This research article has two parts in the result and discussion section. First, This study explores the cultural and traditional values of rendang, which the Indonesian government considers important in the gastrodiplomacy. Second, This study examines the use of rendang in the implementation of gastrodiplomacy. The literature review will discuss gastrodiplomacy and its relationship with public diplomacy and culinary diplomacy in the implementation of Indonesian foreign policy as they function as the conceptual frameworks used in this research.

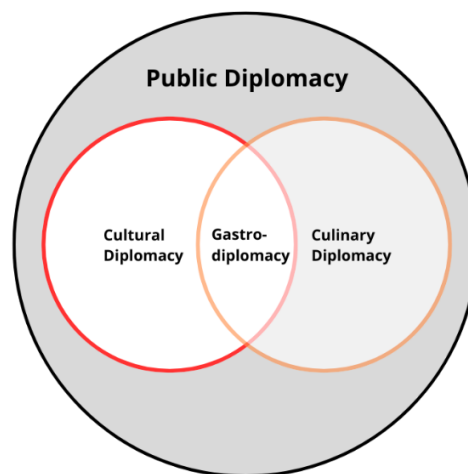
## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the implementation of Indonesian foreign policy, gastrodiplomacy has taken place since the era of Indonesia's first president Sukarno. The president engaged in gastrodiplomacy by presenting Indonesian culinary delights to his state guests, communicating the cultural and historical values behind the dishes to expose the country's rich culture, tradition, and history, particularly in international events, such as Asia-Africa Conference (KAA) in 1955. The cookbook *Mustikarasa*, introduced during Sukarno's administration, exemplifies the president's gastrodiplomacy efforts during his tenure. After Sukarno, Indonesian gastrodiplomacy faded away. It then came up again during the era of president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono when he introduced 30 culinary icons of the country. President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo followed in his footsteps through Indonesia Spice Up the World (ISUTW). This marked Jokowi's gastrodiplomacy to internationally promote Indonesian spices and food.

According to Paul S. Rockower, gastrodiplomacy means the act of winning hearts and minds through stomachs. The word "stomachs" here refers to culinary experiences that a country offers to increase nation brand awareness. During this process, culture in the culinary experiences is introduced as the power of attraction. Gastrodiplomacy enables a country to use culinary delights to attract foreign public to make them aware of its culture and brand. Gastrodiplomacy, therefore, combines culinary diplomacy with cultural diplomacy in a bid to introduce and promote culture to foreign audiences through taste. Gastrodiplomacy is part of public diplomacy, which aims to communicate policy, culture, and values to foreign publics. In gastrodiplomacy, a country communicates its culture, values, and policy to the foreign audiences through culinary experiences ([Rockower, 2012](#)).

[Rockower \(2012\)](#) defined that gastrodiplomacy is part of public diplomacy. In

gastrodiplomacy, there are cultural diplomacy and culinary diplomacy. Culinary diplomacy means the use of food and cuisine to establish cross-cultural understanding in order to strengthen cooperations and interactions (Chapple-Sokol, 2013). In cultural diplomacy, meanwhile, the mutual understanding among nations and their people is fostered through the exchange of ideas, art, language, information and other aspects of culture. Cultural diplomacy can be more of a one-way street than two-way exchange. For example, a country practices cultural diplomacy to internationally promote its national language, expecting the rest of the world to understand various stories that it tells, from its policies to viewpoints (Clarke, 2020). Gastrodiplomacy exists at the intersection between culinary diplomacy and cultural diplomacy because it communicates cultural values in food and cuisine used to establish and foster mutual understanding among the people of different nations.



**Figure 1.** The Position of Gastrodiplomacy in Public Diplomacy

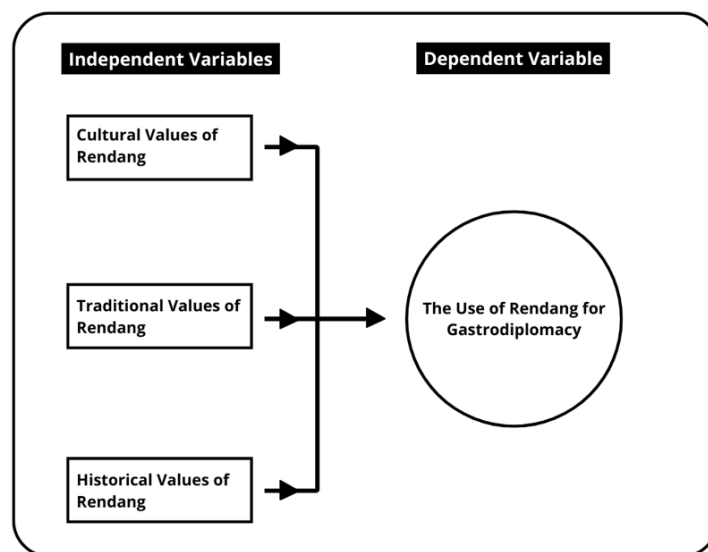
Source: own design, derived from Rockower (2012)

In the implementation of Indonesian foreign policy, gastrodiplomacy was used by President Jokowi to reach various national interests, according to existing research. Muljabar (2024) reported that research about gastrodiplomacy in Indonesia tended to increase from 2017 to 2022, with an increase from 3 publications in 2017 to 29 in 2022. Ulung (2023) examined the use of gastrodiplomacy to influence United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) to name and recognize Ubud in Bali its first prototype for a world-class gastronomic destination. To get UNWTO's recognition, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy teamed up with non-state actors in the tourism industry in communicating culture and tradition behind the island's gastronomic assets, including Balinese culinary delights, to UNWTO in the practice of its gastrodiplomacy. Meanwhile, Yatusman & Mulyasari (2024) studied the implementation of gastrodiplomacy strategy Indonesia Spice Up the World (ISUTW) in Australia and Africa, exploring opportunities and challenges faced by the government in penetrating the Australian and African markets and promoting Indonesian gastronomy in the two continents. In the implementation of ISUTW in Australia, the opportunities lie in the bilateral agreement of Indonesia and Australia, the close geographical distance between the two countries, and Indonesian diaspora in the Australian gastronomic industry. However, the challenges revolve around the lack of financial supports from the Indonesian government to Indonesian culinary players in Australia, among other things (Yatusman & Mulyasari, 2024). In the implementation of ISUTW in Africa, the government met with challenges in dealing with the uneven distribution of Indonesian culinary products, the small number of Indonesian diasporas, and the unfamiliarity of locals with Indonesian food in Africa (Yatusman & Mulyasari, 2024). Despite such challenges, the similarity of consumption patterns in Africa and Indonesia and

the popularity of Indonesian food products in Africa, particularly instant noodle Indomie, serve the Indonesian government the opportunities to reach the goals of ISUTW in Africa (Yayusman & Mulyasari, 2024).

### 3. METHODS

This research employs a qualitative method to examine the cultural, historical, and traditional values of rendang and the potential use of the Minangkabau dish in the gastrodiplomacy of the Indonesian government through the analysis of literature sources. The study involves a review of journal articles, books, and news reports to gather data about the culture and tradition behind rendang and the position of food in gastrodiplomacy carried out by the government to reach its national interest in the implementation of foreign policy. Qualitative method suits this research as it facilitates an understanding of how people live up to the culture and tradition in preparing, making, and serving rendang and how the government perceives it as potential soft power to reach the country's national interests through gastrodiplomacy. According to Hennink et al. (2020), qualitative research not only seeks to understand people's experiences, but also aims to explain their beliefs and behavior. As such, qualitative method will help me explain the beliefs and behavior of the people and the government in the cultural, historical, and traditional experiences that they have with rendang in order to understand why they consider the culture, tradition, and history of the dish important and why the government perceives them powerful in gastrodiplomacy in the implementation of its foreign policy.



Figures 2. Research Model

Source: own design

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Culture, Tradition, and History in Rendang

Ministry of Tourism designated rendang as a national food for the purpose of gastrodiplomacy. The government recognized the potential of the Minangkabau dish to enhance Indonesia's international image, owing to its rich cultural, traditional and historical values. The ministry, therefore, sought to communicate the values to foreign public through gastrodiplomacy. The government intended to practice gastrodiplomacy not only to make the foreign audiences more aware of rendang as the Indonesian national culinary delight but also to win their hearts and minds in the hopes of building people-to-people understanding and

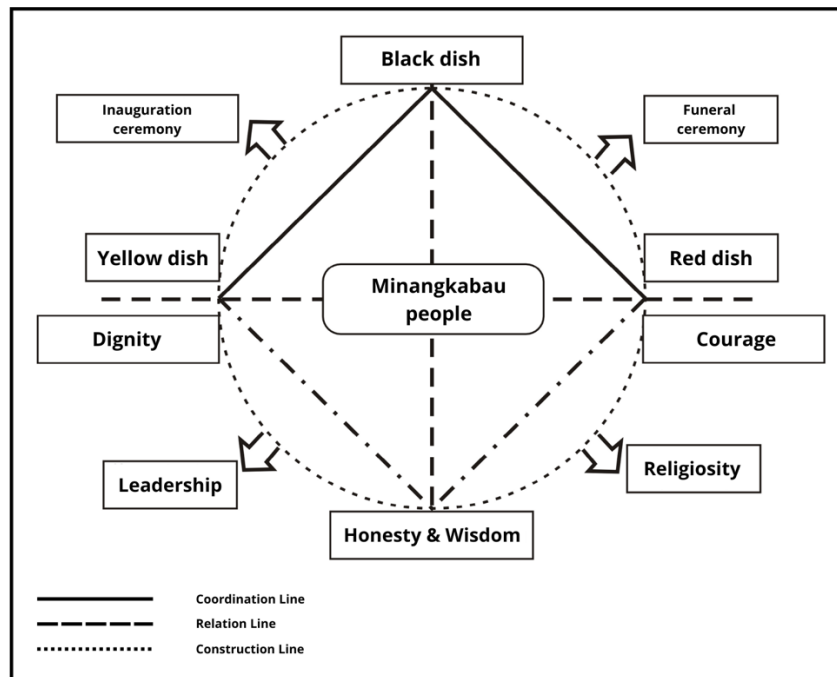
interactions.

Rendang symbolizes social and political orders of Minangkabau people in West Sumatra. The ingredients of rendang reflect the social orders, while the cooking method of the dish symbolizes the political orders. Rendang has four major ingredients, namely beef, chili, coconut, and spices. Each ingredient represents a different social layer, such as beef that symbolizes leaders or *niniak mamak* in a local language, chili for Islamic clerics or *alim ulama*, coconut for intellectuals or *cadiak pandai*, and spices for locals (Martion & Hidajat, 2014). Minangkabau people cook rendang by using an iron pan placed on a triangle-shaped furnace. This triangle symbolizes Minangkabau customary institution *Limbago Tungku Tigo Sajarangan*, which comprises *niniak mamak*, *alim ulama*, and *cadiak pandai*. These three figures manage and organize the locals. Firewood used to cook rendang on the furnace symbolizes idea. Meanwhile, the fire represents dialogue among the three figures and rendang symbolizes their decision (Alimin & Kusnomo, 2018).

*Niniak mamak* leads the ethnic group of Minangkabau. People usually call the tribal leader *datuk* in daily life. He has the responsibility to solve problems in the tribe. To find the solutions, he sets up meetings attended by *alim ulama* and *cadiak pandai*. It requires maternal lineage to become *niniak mamak*. This leadership position is obtained only from maternal bloodline because Minangkabau people adhere to a matrilineal system. *Niniak mamak* needs to have leadership qualities and certain personalities, such as firm, authoritative, and knowledgeable. Those characteristics make *niniak mamak* a role model and respected figure in the group (Alimin & Kusnomo, 2018).

Similar to *niniak mamak*, Islamic clerics or *ulama* are also respected in the ethnic group of Minangkabau. They are deeply admired for deeply understanding Islamic teachings. They generally graduate from Islamic boarding schools or have completed higher education in Islamic universities. They team up with *cadiak pandai* in helping *niniak mamak* guide the people in the group. *Cadiak pandai* are the intellectuals working for local communities, universities, and the government offices. *Cadiak pandai* needs to have expertise in certain fields. *Cadiak pandai* and *alim ulama* help *niniak mamak* make any decisions in the tribe (Alimin & Kusnomo, 2018).

In Minangkabau culture and tradition, rendang holds a special place in the hearts of Minangkabau people. For them, its major ingredients are meaningful. Beef symbolizes not only *niniak mamak*, but also mother or *bundo kanduang* in local language, which they believe will give her children prosperity. Coconut symbolizes *cadiak pandai*, which they believe will drive force of change in society. Chili symbolizes *alim ulama*, which they believe will firmly enforce the Islamic law and keep the morality of the Minangkabau people. Those three major ingredients are cooked in spices, which symbolize society connecting *niniak mamak*, *cadiak pandai*, and *alim ulama* (Fajarsari, 2017). The special position of rendang causes this dish to be served in any occasion, from *bajamba gadang* to *pesta ratok*. The one selected to become *niniak mamak* will be inaugurated in a cultural ceremony called *bajamba gadang*. During this ceremony, three dishes of different colors, -- yellow, red, and black, will be cooked. The yellow and red dishes respectively belong to *gulai* (curry) and fried fish or eggs cooked in red chilies. The black dish, meanwhile, refers to rendang. For Minangkabau people, black symbolizes strength. Red and yellow represent courage and happiness, respectively (Fajarsari, 2017). In *bajamba gadang*, rendang is served to show the existence and prestige of the event. Rendang is also cooked in a funeral ceremony called *pesta ratok*. In this ceremony, rendang is cooked as a symbol of respect and hope for the spirit of the deceased (Martion & Hidajat, 2014).



**Figures 3.** The Cultural and Traditional Values of Rendang

Source: Martion & Hidajat (2014).

In daily life, rendang is cooked by women (Martion & Hidajat, 2014). Minangkabau society has a popular myth that Minangkabau women who cannot cook rendang are not considered true Minangkabau (Fatimah et al., 2021). However, during major cultural ceremonies, rendang is made by men in groups (Martion & Hidajat, 2014). The cooking process begins with beef mixed with coconut milk and spices until it produces thick brown sauce. It requires to stir around all the ingredients for hours to get the thick sauce. *Rendang* requires thick gravy. The long duration in the making of the thick gravy in rendang philosophically symbolizes patience (Prastowo et al., 2023). Despite its lengthy cooking process, rendang do not lose its nutrients (The Jakarta Post, 2018a). If the gravy remains light, the dish is called *kalio*. The texture of the sauce makes *rendang* different from *kalio*. Although *rendang* and *kalio* are Minangkabau dishes, they do not originate from Minangkabau tribe, according to Fadly Rahman, lecturer of food history from Padjajaran University. He said that the cooking method used in *rendang* was introduced by Portuguese people during the colonization period in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Portuguese cooking method is called *bafado*. *Bafado* is the technique of slowly cooking ingredients, such as meat and coconut milk, in a pot or frying pan over a low heat until all of the liquids evaporate in order to preserve the meat for weeks. The Portuguese people used the *bafado* method to make packable meals for their colonial ventures. They brought the stored meals during their travel to West Sumatra through the Malacca Strait and Pahang in Malaysia. As such, according to Fadly, the word *balado*, which describes the Minangkabau style of sautéing chili in oil with other spices, derives from *bafado* (Ulung, 2017). *Balado* and *bafado* have the same purpose: food preservation (Rahman, 2020).

The arrival of Portuguese apothecary Tomé Pires and Portuguese historian João de Barros in West Sumatra in the 16<sup>th</sup> century marked the first contact of Portuguese people with locals in the area. At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Portuguese apothecary explorer Thomas Dias visited the Minangkabau Kingdom. The contact between the Portuguese and the locals in West Sumatra gradually led to the adoption of Portuguese culture in many aspects on the island, from fashion to food. The Portuguese influence in the culinary sphere can be seen in the word *balado* and other loanwords, such as *acar* (pickles) from *achar*, *bolu* (spongecake) from *bolo*,



*kaldu* (broth) from *caldo*, and *mentega* (butter) from *mentega*. *Bafado*, however, is not the only Portuguese legacy in food preservation technique left in West Sumatra because they also introduced other techniques, such as *assado* (grilling), *buisado* (boiling), and *recheado* (mixing meat with spices). Cooking methods used in the Minangkabau dishes reflect the Portuguese legacy (Rahman, 2020).

Like Portugal, India also has influences in *rendang*. The Indian influences in the dish came from the use of spices. Spices established the connection between Indian people and locals in Sumatra in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Spices led to political activities and spice trade between the two nations. On the one hand, Indians travelled to this archipelago to seek spices, such as cloves and nutmeg. On the other, they introduced its spices to people in Sumatra during their visit, such as pepper, ginger, and cumin. The spice trade between the Indians and Minangkabau people then triggered cultural exchanges in many aspects, including the culinary. That's why the influence of Indian cuisine is embedded in the food culture in West Sumatra (Rahman, 2020). The use of Indian spices, such as ginger, onion, and turmeric, in *rendang* describes the Indian influence in the food culture of Minangkabau (Mardatillah, 2020).

People around the world know the word *rendang* as a food name. However, the Minangkabau culinary culture historically recognizes it as the technique of food preservation. Malay people call the technique '*merandang*', defining to cooking meat in coconut milk and spices until the dish dries and the sauce turns black. In Dictionary of the Malayan Language published by William Marsden in 1812, the word *rendang* means 'to fry (in a vessel over the fire)'. According to the Englishman, who travelled to Sumatra in the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, *rendang* is a cooking technique with a purpose of preserving food (Rahman, 2020). People in Sumatra adopted the technique of *bafado* to do *merandang*. The tradition of *merandang* then started to transcend boundaries when Minangkabau people wandered. They travelled to many locations outside West Sumatra, including Negeri Sembilan in Malaysia. This Malaysian state has become the destination of Minangkabau people to migrate since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, causing *rendang* to exist in Malaysia. Minangkabau people, who want to leave their hometown of West Sumatra, usually bring *rendang* for wandering because this dish can last for months (Rahman, 2020). Wandering has become part of culture for Minangkabau people, particularly for young men. They have a social awareness that they have to wander in order to have better social positions in society, such as intellectuals and clerics (Martion & Hidajat, 2014). In the Minangkabau custom, the practice of bringing *rendang* for wandering reportedly has been practiced by Minangkabau people since the arrival of Islam in West Sumatra (Fatimah et al., 2021).

#### 4.2. Rendang in Indonesian Gastrodiplomacy

*Rendang* was designated as an Indonesian national food by the Ministry of Tourism in 2018 because the government sought to use the Minangkabau dish as the instrument for gastrodiplomacy in the hopes of improving the image of the country and developing its gastronomic destinations, due to its rich cultural, historical, and traditional values. The ministry saw that those values could help the government win "the hearts and minds of the foreign public." Therefore, the government intended to communicate those values through gastrodiplomacy. Naming *rendang* the country's national food was the first action the Ministry of Tourism took before it launched gastrodiplomacy in the implementation of its foreign policy.

Foreign policy means actions formulated by a state to respond to its external environment, according to Added Dawisha. George Modelsky also highlights the influence of the external environment in the making of foreign policy, saying that states make foreign policy to adjust

their activities to the international environment and change the behaviour of other states (Setiawati, 2023). Based on Dawisha and Modelsky's definition, government's decision of naming rendang its national food for the practice of gastrodiplomacy was a response to two external environments. The first factor was the proven effectiveness of food as a gastrodiplomacy instrument of other countries. The second was the global recognition that rendang already received from the foreign public for its rich flavour and delicacy. Those environments motivated the Indonesian government to name rendang its national food. By doing so, the Ministry of Tourism sought to communicate the rich culture, tradition, and history behind rendang to foreign audiences, which the government set as the target of its gastrodiplomacy.

In Asia, Thailand, Japan, and South Korea have shown the effectiveness of gastrodiplomacy in the implementation of their foreign policy in elevating their nation brand worldwide. They respectively named Pat Thai, curry rice, and kimchi their national dishes and then used the dishes as the instrument of gastrodiplomacy. Indonesia lags behind those Asian countries. However, according to Trihartono et al. (2023), the Indonesian government already practiced gastrodiplomacy in the era of president Sukarno. He practiced gastrodiplomacy, by showcasing the wealth of Indonesian culinary delights to impress his state guests, particularly in international events, such as Asia Africa Conference. However, after Sukarno's tenure, the practice of gastrodiplomacy declined. Gastrodiplomacy resurged in 2011 under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY). At that time, president SBY launched Wonderful Indonesia program to revive the country's culinary industry. In the program, Mari Elka Pangestu, the Minister of Tourism, chose rendang as one of 30 culinary icons in Indonesia, meaning that the government already perceived rendang as a potential gastrodiplomacy instrument before president Jokowi led the country. However, president SBY had yet to name rendang Indonesian national food.

By naming rendang as one of the country's culinary icons, Indonesia intended to follow in the footsteps of other Asian countries in the practice of gastrodiplomacy. The success of gastrodiplomacy carried out by Thailand, Japan, and South Korea has been studied by many. In Thailand, for example, gastrodiplomacy manages to increase supply and demand for Thai food and increase the number of inbound visitors to Thailand, according to Muangasame & Park (2019). They found that gastrodiplomacy had helped the Thai government promote Thai food around the globe, boost the economic contribution of food exports to Thailand, and rebrand the country as a food-centric destination and make it globally known as "the kitchen of the world". Like Thailand, South Korea also garnered major success in its gastrodiplomacy, thanks to kimchi. Nihayati et al. (2022) discovered that the use of kimchi in the practice of gastrodiplomacy carried out by the South Korean government contributed to improve the national economy of South Korea. The improvement came from the increase in Kimchi exports from 104.58 million dollars in 2011 to 144.51 million dollars 2020 (Nihayati et al., 2022).

Inspired by the success of gastrodiplomacy of other Asian countries, the Indonesian government speeded up the promotion of its 30 culinary icons, including rendang, in international events, such as Asian Food Fair in 2013. The fair allowed the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy not only to introduce the icons, but also communicate the cultural stories behind them to its visitors. The ministry also invited non-state actors, from diasporas to tourism industry players, such as hoteliers, restaurateurs and associations, to collaborate in the gastrodiplomacy initiatives it created. For example, they teamed up in exhibiting Food, Hotel, and Tourism Bali (FHTB), attracting 7,500 domestic and international visitors in 2013 (Trihartono et al., 2023). The government also launched a cookbook about the 30 culinary icons and intended to serve them in international events that Indonesia hosted in order to

introduce and promote the dishes in the practice of its gastrodiplomacy (Sofia, 2013).

The fact that rendang has globally made a name for itself as one of the most delicious foods in the world also played part in motivating Indonesia to name the Minangkabau dish its national food in the purpose of implementing gastrodiplomacy. The global recognition obtained by rendang was its achievement in securing a spot in the list of World's 50 Best Foods by CNN in 2011, 2017, 2018, and 2021. Rendang managed to top the list in 2017 and 2018, thanks to its tender and flavourful bovine goodness (Cheung, 2017). The global popularity of rendang delicacy will benefit Indonesia because it helps the government introduce and promote the dish in the practice of gastrodiplomacy. Aware of such benefit, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy then declared rendang as one of its national foods in 2018.

The global popularity of rendang also triggered Riza Falepi, the mayor of Payakumbuh in West Sumatra, to rebrand his town as the City of Rendang in 2018. The rebranding attempt aims to develop local economy because it is home to rendang-selling micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). The mayor expected the rebranding to help the MSMEs attract more customers and get bigger income. To that end, his administration not only established a rendang industrial centre and a rendang cooking school to empower the locals, but also expanded partnerships to help more MSMEs in Payakumbuh go digital in order to develop their business and penetrate international markets (Musthafa & Tan, 2023). In West Sumatra, some MSMEs already digitalize their culinary service, using social media platforms to market their rendang products. The use of social media help them have a better brand awareness, get bigger sales, and communicate more effectively with customers (Dwita et al., 2020). Digitalization implemented by MSMEs will help the government attract foreign audiences in the practice of gastrodiplomacy it carries out to attract them to travel to Indonesia. The government needs a non-state actor like MSMEs to help develop gastronomic tourism across Indonesia.

Indonesia has more gastronomic assets than its neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia, such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. Compared to those three Asian countries, Indonesia has wider geographical landscape, more ethnicities and tribes, more traditional dishes, and richer cultures and traditions. As Indonesia has 247 tribes, Indonesian gastronomic tourism can excel if each tribe manages to develop its gastronomic assets. According to research by Sukenti (2014), Indonesia has bigger opportunities than the three countries in the development of gastronomic tourism because Indonesia excels in six factors, namely natural resources, human resources, cultural resources, geographical position, tourism destination, and culinary diversity. Though Indonesia has more gastronomic resources than Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, they have more developed gastronomic tourism than that Indonesia. The three countries manage to explore and develop their gastronomic assets in order to develop its gastronomic tourism. Indonesia has more cultural resources and tourism destinations than Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, but these three countries outshine Indonesia in terms of research and development, government support, and public involvement (Sukenti, 2014).

## 5. CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the Ministry of Tourism designated rendang as an Indonesian national dish due to its rich cultural, traditional, and historical significance for gastrodiplomacy. The cultural and traditional values of rendang are reflected in the symbolization of its ingredients and cooking method. Minangkabau people believe and celebrate those values in customary ceremonies, such as *bajamba gadang* inauguration party and *pesta ratok* farewell ceremony. For the ministry, these symbolic values serve as key

attractions for gastrodiploamacy. The government sought to use rendang to communicate its cultural, traditional, and historical values in the practice of gastrodiploamacy in order to attract more foreign travelers to visit Indonesia and develop gastronomic tourism in the country.

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