



The Journal Gastronomy Tourism

Journal homepage:

<https://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/gastur/index>



Traditional Pastry as a Cultural Artefact: A Scoping Review on Symbolism in a Global Context

Oda Ignatius Besar Hariyanto, Muhamad Zhabiyan Dwi Putra, Fahmi Muhamad Rizky, Ellysia Augris, Renza Fahlevi*

Universitas Internasional Batam, Indonesia

*Correspondence: E-mail: 2246002.muhamad@uib.edu

ABSTRACT

The traditional pastry represents a significant element of global food culture, functioning not only as a culinary product but also as a carrier of cultural meaning and social values. Across societies, traditional pastries embody ritual symbolism, cultural identity, collective memory, and social cohesion, expressed through diverse forms, ingredients, and consumption contexts. Despite their cultural importance, existing studies on traditional pastries remain fragmented, often focusing separately on nutrition, economics, or product innovation, while their historical and symbolic dimensions have received limited scholarly attention. This article synthesizes findings from 20 internationally reputable scholarly studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the cultural roles and meanings of traditional pastries. The review reveals that the traditional pastries are dynamic cultural artifacts capable of adapting to modernization and globalization without fully losing their symbolic significance. By synthesizing perspectives from gastronomy, cultural studies, and social sciences, this study positions traditional pastries as a form of intangible cultural heritage that warrants interdisciplinary attention. The article contributes a unified theoretical perspective for understanding the continuity and transformation of traditional pastries within a global cultural framework.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Submitted/Received January 2026

First Revised April 2026

Accepted June 2026

First Available online June 2026

Publication Date June 2026

Keyword:

Traditional Pastry; Cultural Artefact; Symbolic Study; Scoping Review

1. INTRODUCTION

Every human being has biological needs that depend on food, making food consumption a fundamental element for sustaining life (Max-Neef, 2017). One discipline that has evolved extensively in relation to food is the field of gastronomy (Neill et al., 2017). Gastronomy not only examines food from the perspective of consumption and sensory pleasure, but also reflects the historical, social, and cultural processes surrounding food production and consumption (Richards, 2021). At the same time, studies in gastronomy have documented a growing consumer interest in traditional foods (Guerrero et al., 2016), contributing to the emergence of approximately 20,000 new food products worldwide each year (Oliveira et al., 2019). Food can be categorized on the basis of its course, namely appetizers, soups, salads, main courses, and desserts (Henderson, 2004). Among the dessert categories, pastry is one of the most popular worldwide (Tebben, 2015).

In the contemporary era, traditional pastries form part of global culinary heritage and offer valuable insight into the evolution of cooking techniques, cultural exchange, and social dynamics across historical periods (Hariyanto, 2023; Săcara-Onița et al., 2019). Pastries are generally defined as doughs used to produce baked goods, typically made from flour, water, and fat, and are characterized by sweet, savory, or other desirable flavors that increase their sensory quality (Tulip Chocolate, 2025). The selection of ingredients plays a crucial role in shaping the aroma and taste of pastries, creating distinctive characteristics among different varieties (Kolanjian, 2025). Fat is a particularly essential component, as it influences texture, flavor, and dough expansion, and is commonly derived from butter, margarine, animal fat, or vegetable fat (Tulip Chocolate, 2025).

Examining traditional pastry through historical and gastronomic perspectives allows for a deeper understanding of how culinary practices evolve in response to changes in social, economic, and technological environments (Săcara-Onița et al., 2019). In the late nineteenth century, approximately 1880, pastry was initially regarded as a luxury food desired by the upper class before it gradually evolved into a working-class food because of advertising campaigns, organized sales systems, and shifting consumer preferences (Oliveira et al., 2019). This transformation is supported by historical records, such as the statement documented by the Ligue sociale d'acheteurs, "Everyone wants to eat fresh pastry on Sunday" (Williams, 1991) as well as observations from Parisian workers cited by Halbwachs, who noted that "pastry and cake is trivial, only good for rich people" (Halbwachs, 1913). Similarly, the prominent French economist Charles Gide stated, "In all countries, the working classes adore sweets and little fresh cakes" (Gide, 1906).

As food studies and gastronomy have expanded, academic attention to traditional foods has increased significantly (Koerich & Müller, 2022). Numerous studies have positioned food as part of intangible cultural heritage, which requires documentation and preservation (Qiu et al., 2022). However, much of the existing research continues to emphasize nutritional aspects (Olamiti & Ramashia, 2024), food safety (Evans & Redmond, 2019), ingredient innovation (Oliveira et al., 2019), and economic potential (Santoso et al., 2023). Consequently, the historical and cultural meanings of pastries are often discussed separately and remain insufficiently structured within a comprehensive analytical framework. Furthermore, compared with other sectors, the food and beverage industry has relatively low levels of investment in research and development, as reflected in the limited volume of scientific publications (Moskowitz & Hartmann, 2008). Moreover, consumers also tend to prefer foods that are familiar to their daily lives (Oliveira et al., 2019) and are generally reluctant to try unfamiliar products (Guerrero et al., 2016; Vanhonacker et al., 2013). In light of these

challenges, the study of traditional pastries becomes increasingly relevant for ensuring the long-term sustainability of pastry products in the future (Green & Dougherty, 2008).

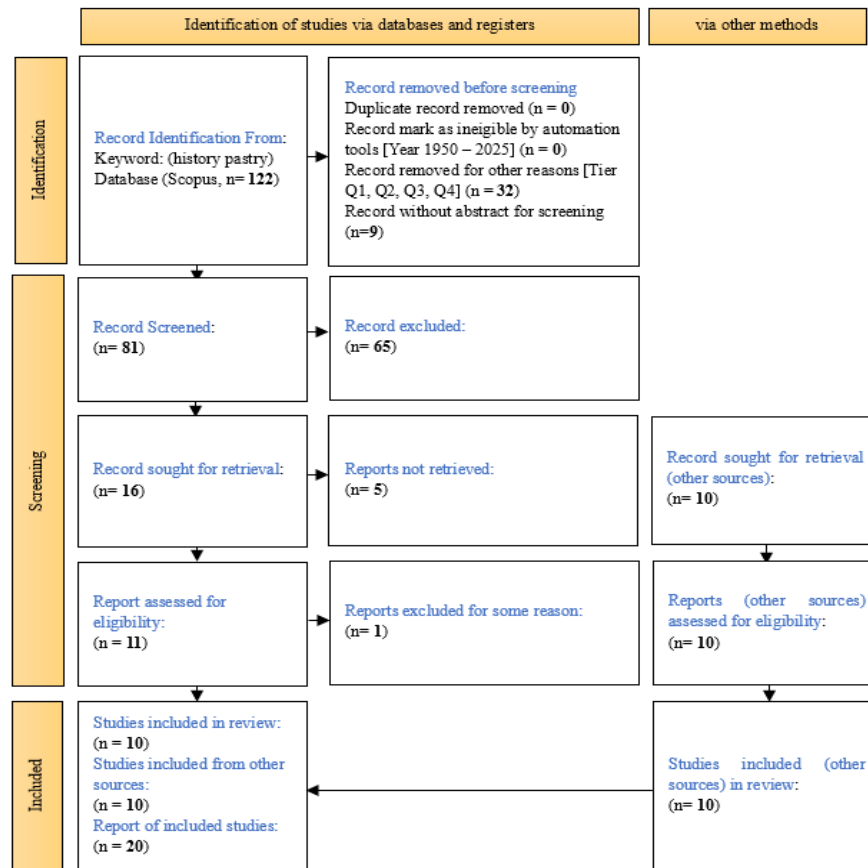
To date, the history of traditional pastry has been examined in 67 international studies. Chung et al., for example, analyzed Sanchanbalgi (royal banquets) during the Joseon Dynasty and documented the associated foods, including rice cakes and traditional sweets (Chung et al., 2019). Keramaris et al. explored ancient Greek traditional foods via four folklore books, two culinary magazines, and six cookbooks, discussing items such as Siron, Pisia, Diamesia, Psathyria, Tzirichta, Perek, Varenika, and Piroshki (Keramaris et al., 2022). Boukid examined traditional pastries in North Africa, including Khobz Eddar, Eish Shamsi, Mlewi, and Msemen (Boukid, 2025). In Indonesia, Cataluna and Wardana studied traditional pastries such as Klepon, Dodol, and Cucur, although their primary focus was nutritional evaluation (Cataluna & Wardana, 2025). Similarly, Olamiti and Ramashia investigated pastries from a nutritional perspective, concentrating on common products such as croissants, pies, and cookies (Olamiti & Ramashia, 2024). Despite these contributions, none of the existing studies have conducted a scoping review of traditional pastry from a historical perspective.

This study aims to theoretically connect findings from the literature concerning the meanings and functions of traditional pastries within a global cultural framework. A scoping review approach is employed to develop a conceptual understanding of traditional pastries as cultural artifacts situated within diverse social and historical contexts across regions. The focus is placed on identifying key theoretical constructs, recurring patterns of symbolic meaning, and the dynamic relationship between tradition and social change as discussed in the literature. Rather than concentrating on a specific type or regional tradition of pastry, this study emphasizes cross-cultural patterns that are both universal and context-dependent. Through a scoping synthesis of the literature, this research seeks to address the academic gap created by the absence of a unified global theoretical framework in traditional pastry studies. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to gastronomy, cultural tourism, and intangible cultural heritage studies, while underscoring the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in achieving a holistic understanding of cultural phenomena.

2. METHODS

2.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on a scoping review to theoretically examine the meanings and functions of traditional pastries from a global cultural perspective. This design was selected because the primary objective of the study is not to test empirical hypotheses, but to synthesize, map, and interpret theoretical concepts developed within the existing academic literature (Page et al., 2021). The approach enables a scoping examination of previous studies addressing the history, symbolic meanings, social functions, and cultural dynamics of traditional cakes (Bal et al., 2021). This study was conducted over a period of 6 months (semi-longitudinal) and was assisted by generative AI (ChatGPT) in extracting references. The primary data consist of 20 peer-reviewed scholarly articles selected through a scoping review of relevant qualitative research. All selected references comprise journal articles indexed in Scopus, which are considered to demonstrate high levels of academic rigor and scholarly validity (Harzing & Alakangas, 2016; Zhu & Liu, 2020). The literature collected in the analysis was analyzed using NVIVO12 software. The analyzed literature spans multiple disciplines, including anthropology, culinary studies, sociology, cultural studies, and gastronomy. This study strictly follows the PRISMA 2020 guidelines and is therefore categorized as a scoping review. A more detailed explanation of the review process is provided in accordance with these guidelines (see Fig 1).



Figures 1. PRISMA-ScR Procedure

2.2. Input Data

High-quality articles are those that demonstrate methodological clarity and adhere to established scientific standards (Van Calster et al., 2021). The methodological rigor of each study should be assessed to complement the evaluation of bias risk and to consider the appropriateness of the research design, sample, measurement instruments, and statistical analysis (Mendes et al., 2026). Because the analyzed studies span multiple sectors and disciplines, an appropriate appraisal tool such as the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Checklist was used (Joanna Briggs Institute, 2017). This checklist consists of 10 updated questions, each with four possible responses: “Yes,” “No,” “Unclear,” and “Not Applicable” (Munn et al., 2019). As further noted by Munn et al., this assessment is particularly relevant because it evaluates not only the study design but also the statistical robustness and validity (Munn et al., 2019). The scoring system of this tool is divided into three categories: scores of 0–4 indicate low quality, scores of 5–6 indicate moderate quality (reflecting some methodological concerns that require clarification), and scores of 7–8 indicate high quality (valid studies with only minor limitations) (Bouqoufi et al., 2024). Following this assessment, 15 articles were classified as high quality, 5 as moderate quality, and none were categorized as low quality. A more detailed breakdown of these results is presented in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. JBI Assessment

JBI Category	Articles	Sources	Status
High Quality	15	(Boukid, 2025; Chairy & Syahrivar, 2019; Chung et al., 2019; Gage & Gage, 2012; Grevtsova, 2019; Herbert & Walkden, 2023; Hopkin, 2016; Kornilov, 2024; Poulain et al., 2023; Ravasio, 2018; Silva & Elo, 2017; Stummerer & Hablesreiter, 2016; Supski, 2006; Wilson, 2005)	Accepted
Middle Quality	5	(Allen, 2009; Baños & Fernández-Roca, 2017; Biasi, 2016; Hariyanto, 2022; Oliveira et al., 2019)	Accepted (with notes)
Low Quality	0	-	Rejected

Source: Data Analyzed, 2025

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Overview of the Review Findings

Research on traditional pastries is not evenly distributed, with most research conducted in Europe and Asia and very little research on other continents (see Fig 2). In Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, Chairy and Syahrivar examined Bika Ambon as a traditional Indonesian pastry understood both as a culinary product and as a representation of history, culture, and local identity in Medan (Chairy & Syahrivar, 2019). The study analyzed how production processes, distinctive textures, and original narratives shape the cultural meanings attached to Bika Ambon. Although the name contains the geographic reference “Ambon,” the pastry historically developed and became recognized as a culinary icon of Medan. The study also revealed that Bika Ambon has adapted in flavor and appearance in response to market development without fully losing its traditional characteristics. These findings highlight the role of traditional pastry as a bridge between cultural heritage and modern economic demands. However, the article is methodologically limited, as it does not clearly explain the qualitative data analysis procedures used. Hariyanto examined *kue apem* as a traditional Javanese pastry that functions as a spiritual and social symbol in customary rituals (Hariyanto, 2022). This study emphasizes the role of *apem* in maintaining local cultural identity while addressing the challenges posed by modernization and the need for cultural revitalization. This study contributes valuable non-Western perspectives to global studies of traditional pastries.

In Malaysia, Poulain et al. investigated *roti canai* within Malaysian breakfast culture as a cross-cultural social practice reflecting ethnic dynamics, historical processes, and modernity (Poulain et al., 2023). Using a sociology-of-food approach, the study demonstrates that *roti canai* functions as a culinary symbol fostering social interaction and a fluid national identity. Although broadly focused on breakfast culture, this study is relevant for understanding traditional pastry within multicultural and modern contexts. Ismail et al. examined *dodol* as a traditional Malay pastry with origins in the Betawi community of Indonesia, representing cultural heritage, social identity, and collective cooperation, particularly in religious celebrations (Ismail et al., 2021). This review highlights the history, regional variations, traditional-to-modern production techniques, and preservation challenges of *dodol*, positioning it as a living culinary heritage that requires intergenerational cultural transmission.

In East Asia, Chung et al. analyzed Joseon Dynasty palace cuisine through the *Sachanbalgi*

archives, and demonstrated that traditional pastries held symbolic meanings related to ritual, social hierarchy, and political legitimacy (Chung et al., 2019). The study affirms the role of pastries as historical cultural artifact influencing Korean culinary traditions, although their context is limited to royal settings. At the intersection of Asia and Europe, particularly in Russia, Kornilov examined *Check-Cegey* as a ritual food of the Udmurt people, revealing deep symbolic and cosmological meanings (Kornilov, 2024). Through ethnographic and folkloric approaches, *Check-Cegey* is positioned not merely as a pastry but also as an integral element of ritual and belief systems, symbolizing life cycles, human–nature relationships, and spiritual worlds, while serving as a marker of cultural identity amid modernization challenges. Additionally, from Russia, Grevtsova studied kalach in East Slavic wedding traditions as a ritual rich in social and spiritual meaning (Grevtsova, 2019). This ethnolinguistic study shows that the form, presentation, and consumption of kalach function as symbols of rites of passage, fertility, and community continuity, framing pastry as a medium of intergenerational cultural communication.

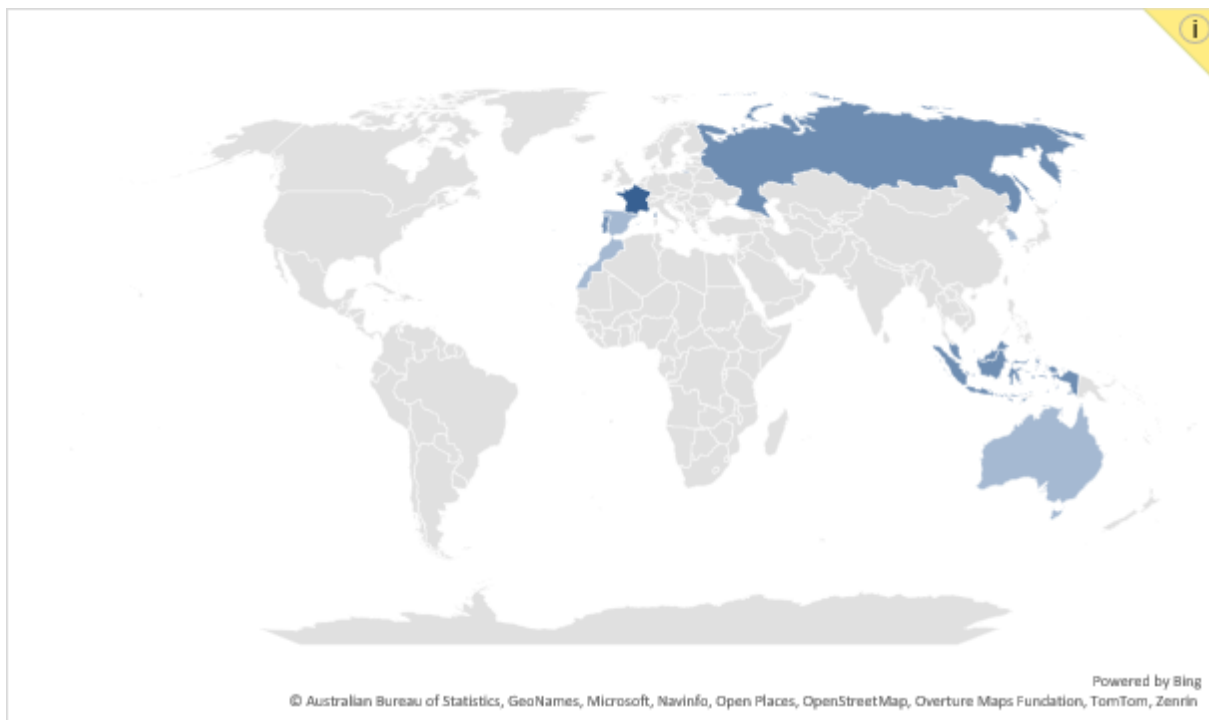
In England, Allen reflected on Eccles cake as a traditional pastry representing memory, religious identity, and community experience (Allen, 2009). Through a narrative approach, the study highlights pastry as a medium for transmitting cultural values and affective meanings across generations, despite the absence of a formal methodological framework. Ravasio examined Cornish pasty through aesthetic and food landscape perspectives, emphasizing the importance of the historical context, social function, and cultural environment in understanding traditional pastry value (Ravasio, 2018). The study positions the Cornish pasty as a symbol of regional identity reflecting historical adaptation to local conditions. Wilson explored the history of wedding cakes in Western traditions, demonstrating their symbolic roles related to luck, fertility, and social values from Roman times to modern practices (Wilson, 2005). Herbert and Walkden examined pies in early England and America as material cultural artifacts imbued with social, emotional, and political meanings (Herbert & Walkden, 2023). Their study revealed that pies function as preservation tools, symbols of colonial global status, and memento mori, reflecting luxury, mortality, and power relations through historical culinary practices.

In France, which is often regarded as the birthplace of pastry, Hopkin examined the croissant as a living culinary tradition through a folkloric lens, demonstrating that its meaning is shaped by social practices, history, and consumption experiences (Hopkin, 2016). The study shows that traditional pastries are dynamic and capable of globalization without losing cultural identity. De Biasi analyzed the growing urban interest in local pastries and bakery products in France as part of the manger local movement, positioning traditional pastry as a symbol of regional identity, sustainability, and cultural attachment within modern food systems, although the study did not focus on a single pastry type (Biasi, 2016). Stummerer and Hablesreiter examined pastries such as croissants from design and semiotic perspectives, emphasizing that pastry form and appearance convey symbolic and historical meanings (Stummerer & Hablesreiter, 2016). Their work frames pastry as a cultural text reflecting myths, identity, and meaning transformation within European traditions.

In other parts of Europe, Baños and Fernández-Roca studied Inés Rosales as a producer of *torta de aceite* that successfully globalized without losing cultural identity (Baños & Fernández-Roca, 2017). The study demonstrates how traditional pastries can integrate culinary heritage, production innovation, and internationalization strategies within the global economy, although it focuses more on business aspects than cultural meaning. Silva and Elo examined the internationalization of pastel de nata as a traditional Portuguese pastry that entered global markets while retaining cultural identity (Silva & Elo, 2017). The study

highlights historical narratives and authenticity as strategic assets, positioning traditional pastry as both a representation of national identity and a medium of cultural communication globally. Oliveira et al. further showed that pastel de nata can be innovated in form and texture without losing its cultural identity (Oliveira et al., 2019). Through the development of Pastel de Nata Bonbon, the study emphasized that culinary traditions are dynamic, with innovation maintaining historical and cultural perceptions.

In the Americas, Gage and Gage examined the history of birthday cakes as symbolic pastries in Western culture, tracing their ritual origins in Germany to their widespread cross-cultural adoption (Gage & Gage, 2012). The study affirms the role of birthday cakes as symbolic media representing life celebration, age, and hope, although it is narrative in nature and not peer-reviewed. In Africa, Boukid reviewed the role of wheat in North African traditional cuisine, positioning cereal-based pastries as cultural heritage with social, ritual, and symbolic functions (Boukid, 2025). The study highlights globalization challenges to traditional practices and preservation efforts through documentation and revitalization, contributing to an understanding of pastries as a representation of regional identity and history. Finally, in Australia, Supski examined Anzac biscuits as traditional Australian pastries that function as culinary memorials and symbols of national memory (Supski, 2006). The study demonstrated that pastries can represent history, national identity, and collective emotion through commemorative ritual.



Figures 2. Articles Distribution

Source: Data Analyzed, 2025

3.2. Conceptualizing Traditional Pastries as a Cultural Artifact

According to Table 2, the academic literature consistently positions traditional pastries not merely as a food product, but also as a cultural artifact imbued with symbolic, historical, and social meanings (Allen, 2009; Hopkin, 2016; Stummerer & Hablesreiter, 2016; Supski, 2006). Within the frameworks of food studies, gastronomy, and cultural anthropology, pastry is understood as a material object that represents collective values, social memory, and relational structures within society (Herbert & Walkden, 2023; Poulain et al., 2023; Ravasio,

2018). This conceptualization reflects a paradigmatic shift from functional and nutritional approaches toward interpretative perspectives that view food as a cultural text that can be socially and historically read and interpreted (Hopkin, 2016; Stummerer & Hablesreiter, 2016).

As cultural artifacts, traditional pastries are produced, consumed, and transmitted within specific social contexts that shape their meaning. The literature indicates that the meaning of pastry is not inherently embedded in its ingredients or recipes, but is constructed through ritual practices, historical narratives, and collective experiences across generations (Chung et al., 2019; Grevtsova, 2019; Kornilov, 2024). Accordingly, pastries can be understood as the outcome of interactions between culinary traditions, symbolic systems, and continuously evolving social dynamics (Boukid, 2025; Hopkin, 2016). Many studies position traditional pastries as part of material culture, referring to physical objects that serve as media of cultural expression despite their ephemeral and consumable nature (Herbert & Walkden, 2023; Ravasio, 2018). The form, texture, flavor, and presentation of pastries often represent cosmological beliefs, social hierarchies, and moral values within a community, as evident in ritual pastries such as Check-Cegey, kalach, wedding cakes, and palace pastries of the Joseon Dynasty (Chung et al., 2019; Grevtsova, 2019; Kornilov, 2024; Wilson, 2005). Therefore, pastries are examined not only as food, but also as artifacts that store and communicate cultural messages. This finding aligns Chao and Hu (2014), cited in Lee and Lee (2018), who argue that pastry often holds heightened cultural and ceremonial value.

The literature also widely associates traditional pastry with collective memory and cultural identity. Certain pastries are understood as mnemonic devices that trigger collective remembrance and connect individuals to past experiences, historical events, and communal identities (Allen, 2009; Ravasio, 2018; Supski, 2006). In this context, pastry consumption becomes a symbolic act that reproduces cultural identity at local, national, and diasporic levels, as demonstrated in cases such as *Bika Ambon*, *Anzac biscuits*, *Cornish pasty*, and *pastel de nata* (Chairy & Syahrivar, 2019; Ravasio, 2018; Silva & Elo, 2017; Supski, 2006). Furthermore, academic studies situate traditional pastry within the framework of intangible cultural heritage. Pastries are understood as a product of traditional knowledge encompassing production techniques, ingredient selection, and social norms governing when and how it is consumed (Boukid, 2025; Hariyanto, 2022; Ismail et al., 2021). These findings are consistent with those of Anderson, who emphasized that consumption patterns are closely linked to collective memory (Anderson, 2017).

Conceptually, the literature also demonstrates that traditional pastries are multivalent, meaning that they carry multiple meanings and functions simultaneously. Pastries may serve as everyday food, ritual symbols, triggers of memory, economic commodities, and representations of cultural identity within global contexts (Baños & Fernández-Roca, 2017; Oliveira et al., 2019; Silva & Elo, 2017). This multivalence helps explain why traditional pastries are able to endure and adapt amid modernization, globalization, and changing consumer preferences without fully losing their symbolic significance. Thus, the conceptualization of traditional pastries as a cultural artifact underscores their complexity as a cultural entity situated at the intersection of materiality and symbolism, tradition and change, and locality and globality (Boukid, 2025; Hopkin, 2016; Ravasio, 2018). This conceptual framework provides an essential foundation for understanding patterns of symbolic meaning, social function, and the dynamics of transformation in traditional pastries.

3.3. Patterns of Symbolic Meaning and Social Function of Traditional Pastries

The synthesis of literature reveals that, across cultures, traditional pastries present relatively consistent patterns of symbolic meaning, although these meanings are expressed through different forms, ingredients, and social contexts (Boukid, 2025; Hopkin, 2016; Ravasio, 2018). One prominent pattern is the positioning of pastry as a symbol of ritual and life transition. In many cultures, pastries are not merely consumed as food but are central to significant moments such as birth, marriage, death, and religious celebrations (Chung et al., 2019; Grevtsova, 2019; Wilson, 2005). Studies of Check-Cegey among the Udmurt people, kalach in East Slavic wedding rituals, wedding cakes in Europe, and rice cakes in the Joseon Dynasty rituals demonstrate that pastries function as a symbolic medium representing prayer, hopes, fertility, and life continuity (Chung et al., 2019; Grevtsova, 2019; Kornilov, 2024; Wilson, 2005). This pattern confirms that traditional pastries are frequently positioned within rites of passage, where their meaning transcends consumption and enters the spiritual and cosmological domains (Chung et al., 2019; Kornilov, 2024).

In addition to ritual symbolism, traditional pastries also play a significant role as a marker of cultural identity and collective memory. The literature shows that certain pastries become cultural icons representing local, national, or diasporic identities (Allen, 2009; Ravasio, 2018; Supski, 2006). For example, Bika Ambon in Indonesia, Anzac biscuits in Australia, Cornish pasty in England, and pastel de nata in Portugal are understood as representations of the history and identity of their supporting communities (Chairy & Syahrivar, 2019; Ravasio, 2018; Silva & Elo, 2017; Supski, 2006). In this sense, pastry serves as a mnemonic device that connects individuals to historical narratives, collective experiences, and cultural values transmitted across generations (Allen, 2009; Supski, 2006). Consuming traditional pastry is therefore not merely a gastronomic act, but also a symbolic practice that reproduces feelings of belonging, nostalgia, and social attachment (Hopkin, 2016; Ravasio, 2018).

Another recurring pattern concerns the social function of pastries as media of cohesion and social integration. In multicultural societies such as Malaysia, roti canai functions as a unifying symbol across ethnic groups and social classes (Poulain et al., 2023). In this context, pastries become an inclusive social space in which boundaries of ethnicity, religion, and social status become more fluid (Poulain et al., 2023). Similar findings have emerged from studies of everyday consumption practices, local markets, and breakfast cultures in various regions, showing that traditional pastries have the social capacity to build relationships, strengthen solidarity, and create spaces for interpersonal interaction in daily life (Biasi, 2016; Ravasio, 2018).

From a cross-cultural perspective, the literature also reveals symbolic meanings of pastries related to power, status, and social hierarchy. In the context of the Joseon royal court and early modern European elite culinary practices, pastries were positioned as a symbol of luxury, authority, and access to scarce resources (Chung et al., 2019; Herbert & Walkden, 2023). Pies and pastries containing expensive imported ingredients during the colonial era reflected global trade relations, long-distance commerce, and economic dominance, while simultaneously functioning as markers of social status (Herbert & Walkden, 2023). However, these symbolic meanings are not static. As social structures evolved, pastries associated with elite consumption underwent a process of democratization and became part of everyday food culture without entirely losing their symbolic value (Hopkin, 2016; Oliveira et al., 2019).

The literature further emphasizes the multivalent nature of traditional pastry, highlighting its ability to embody multiple meanings simultaneously. Pastries may function at once as a daily sustenance, ritual symbols, memory triggers, economic commodity, and representation of cultural identity (Baños & Fernández-Roca, 2017; Oliveira et al., 2019; Silva

& Elo, 2017). This multivalence enables traditional pastries to remain resilient in the face of modernization and globalization. Innovations in form, flavor, and production techniques do not necessarily eliminate symbolic meaning, as long as historical narratives and cultural identity are preserved (Oliveira et al., 2019; Silva & Elo, 2017). Overall, cross-cultural patterns of symbolic meaning and social function affirm that traditional pastries are complex and dynamic cultural artifact that represents value systems, social structures, and the collective histories of societies (Boukid, 2025; Hopkin, 2016; Ravasio, 2018).

3.4. Dynamics of Tradition, Social Change, and Globalization

The literature indicates that traditional pastries represent a dynamic culinary tradition that continuously adapts to social, economic, and cultural change (Boukid, 2025; Hopkin, 2016; Ravasio, 2018). Pastry traditions are not understood as static practices, but as processes that are constantly reinterpreted by their supporting communities through production, consumption, and accompanying cultural narratives (Hariyanto, 2022; Hopkin, 2016). Changes in lifestyle, urbanization, and shifting consumption patterns have driven the transformation of pastries from ritual or locally bounded foods into elements of everyday consumption and symbols of modern identity (Biasi, 2016; Poulain et al., 2023). In this context, the sustainability of traditional pastries depends on the ability of communities to negotiate traditional values with contemporary demands without eroding their core cultural meanings (Boukid, 2025; Ismail et al., 2021).

Globalization plays an ambivalent role in the development of traditional pastries. On the one hand, it creates opportunities for local pastries to gain international recognition and evolve into symbols of global culture, as seen in the cases of the pastel de nata and the croissant (Hopkin, 2016; Silva & Elo, 2017). On the other hand, globalization also carries the risk of diminishing cultural meaning when mass production and standardization neglect the historical, social, and symbolic contexts surrounding the pastry (Baños & Fernández-Roca, 2017; Boukid, 2025). The literature emphasizes that successful internationalization processes tend to preserve narratives of authenticity and origin as core values, ensuring that pastries do not lose its symbolic significance even when operating within global markets (Baños & Fernández-Roca, 2017; Silva & Elo, 2017).

Beyond globalization, social change also influences how pastries are interpreted and consumed. Product innovation, recipe adaptation, and the reinterpretation of pastry forms have become important strategies for maintaining the relevance of tradition among younger generations and within modern markets (Biasi, 2016; Oliveira et al., 2019). Studies show that innovation does not necessarily contradict tradition, provided that symbolic elements, historical narratives, and core cultural values are preserved (Hopkin, 2016; Oliveira et al., 2019). Consequently, the interaction between tradition, social change, and globalization positions traditional pastries as living form of cultural heritage that is adaptive and continuously reconstructs its meaning in both local and global contexts (Boukid, 2025; Ravasio, 2018).

4. CONCLUSION

The traditional pastries are consistently positioned in the academic literature as a complex and multivalent cultural artifacts, rich in symbolic meaning across time and space. The main findings indicate that traditional pastries cannot be understood merely as a food product or dessert, but rather as media for representing cultural identity, collective memory, social values, and ritual practices. Recurrent patterns of meaning—such as ritual functions, symbols of life transitions, social cohesion, and markers of local and national identity—emerge

consistently across diverse cultural contexts, although they are expressed through different forms, ingredients, and narratives. Moreover, the literature emphasizes the dynamic nature of traditional pastries, which continues to adapt to modernization, globalization, and innovation without fully losing their cultural significance. The integration of interdisciplinary findings demonstrates that traditional pastries operate at the intersection of materiality, symbolism, and social relations. The primary contribution of this study lies in the development of a theoretical framework that unifies previously fragmented research, thereby enriching gastronomy studies, cultural anthropology, cultural tourism, and intangible cultural heritage scholarship with a more holistic and global conceptual perspective.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings and implications. First, the use of a review method means that the results are highly dependent on the availability, quality, and scope of the analyzed literature, which predominantly consists of internationally indexed publications and may therefore exclude local sources and undocumented forms of traditional knowledge. Second, the study is conceptual and interpretative in nature and does not involve empirical field data collection; consequently, understanding actual practices and contemporary meaning-making processes of traditional pastry relies on the authors' interpretations of previous studies. Third, the diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches across the reviewed literature presents challenges for uniform integration and comparison of findings. Accordingly, the results of this study are best understood as a theoretical synthesis and initial conceptual mapping, rather than as a comprehensive empirical representation of traditional pastry practices across cultures.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to express their sincere gratitude to Universitas Internasional Batam for its financial support under budget code [xxx]. In addition, the author would also like to thank previous researchers who have conducted in-depth studies, enabling this review article to be written in a structured manner.

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Appendix

Table 1. Reviewed articles

No	Title	Location	Continent	Source	Theory	Method	Result	Conclusion	Limitation
1	<i>Bika Ambon of Indonesia: History, Culture, and Its Contribution to Tourism Sector</i>	Indonesia	Asia	(Chairy & Syahrivar, 2019)	Food culture, heritage food, gastronomic tourism	Descriptive qualitative, literature review & informal interviews	<i>Bika Ambon</i> is a symbol of cultural identity and tourist attraction.	<i>Bika Ambon</i> contributes to the image of cultural destinations and tourism	The methodology is not described in detail.
2	<i>Vjatka-Taguste Udmurtide Rituaalne Roog Check-Cegey</i>	Russia	Europe	(Kornilov, 2024)	Food anthropology, ritual food, cultural symbolism	Ethnography, folklore analysis, and cultural texts	<i>Check-Cegey</i> is a pastry ritual that represents cosmology and the cycle of life.	Pastries serve as a spiritual medium, not merely for consumption.	Language and local context limit global generalizations
3	<i>Much More Than Food: The Malaysian Breakfast, a Socio-Cultural Perspective</i>	Malaysia	Asia	(Poulain et al., 2023)	Sociology of food, food modernization, cultural identity	Mixed-method (MFB survey + qualitative observation)	<i>Roti canai</i> is a cross-ethnic breakfast icon and a symbol of national identity.	Pastry/savory flatbread becomes a unifying element of a multi-ethnic culture	Does not focus on a single pastry
4	<i>On Biting into an Eccles Cake</i>	England	Europe	(Allen, 2009)	Cultural memory, food & religion	Qualitative reflective essay	Eccles cake triggers collective memories of religion, community, and the past.	Pastries serve as triggers for nostalgia and social identity.	Not methodologically systematic
5	<i>A Born-Again Global Firm: Inés Rosales SAU in the Traditional</i>	Spain	Europe	(Baños & Fernández-Roca, 2017)	Heritage food, internationalization theory, family business	Historical-economic case studies	Traditional pastries can endure and become global	Tradition and modernization can go hand in hand	The economic focus is more dominant than the cultural

No	Title	Location	Continent	Source	Theory	Method	Result	Conclusion	Limitation
	<i>Sector of Pastry Production</i>						without losing their cultural identity.		meaning
6	How to Internationalize a Traditional Portuguese-Style Food – Liability or Asset of Portugueseness?	Portugal	Europe	(Silva & Elo, 2017)	Liability of Foreignness, Distance Theory, Brand Crossover	Qualitative case studies (interviews, observations, documents)	Traditional pastries can become a global cultural asset if their identity of origin is packaged strategically.	Pastel de nata serves as a symbol of national identity as well as a global product.	Focus on a single company case; no in-depth historical discussion
7	Food Design: Symbols of Our Daily Nutrition	France	Europe	(Stummerer & Hablesreiter, 2016)	Semiotics, Cultural Symbolism, Food Design	Qualitative-conceptual analysis	The shape of pastries (croissants, pretzels) holds mythological symbols and cultural values.	Traditional foods endure because of their symbolic meaning, not just their taste.	Not based on specific field studies
8	Anzac Biscuits — A Culinary Memorial	Australia	Australia	(Supski, 2006)	Cultural Memory, Invented Tradition, Food & Identity	Historical-qualitative studies (archives, cultural narratives)	Pastries can serve as memorials to history and national identity.	Anzac biscuits represent memories of war and the role of women	Focus on one type of national pastry
9	Food Landscapes: An Object-Centered Model of Food Appreciation	England	Europe	(Ravasio, 2018)	Object-Centered Aesthetic Theory, Authenticity, Food Landscape	Philosophical-qualitative analysis	Appreciating traditional pastries requires an understanding of history, function, and local context.	Cornish pasty is understood as a product of the cultural landscape	Does not discuss the empirical consumer perspective

No	Title	Location	Continent	Source	Theory	Method	Result	Conclusion	Limitation
10	Revitalization and Signification of Kue Apem as an Indonesian Traditional Hors <i>d'Oeuvre</i>	Indonesia	Asia	(Hariyanto, 2022)	Cultural Signification, Revitalization of Traditional Food	Qualitative-descriptive study	Apem cakes have ritual, spiritual, and social significance in Javanese culture.	Revitalization is important to preserve the existence of traditional pastries.	Context limited to local culture
11	The cultural term “kalach” in the East Slavic wedding ceremony	Russia, Ukraine, Belarus	Europe	(Grevtsova, 2019)	Ethnolinguistics, ritual symbolism, material culture	Qualitative-descriptive; analysis of folklore texts, ethnographic archives, lexicography	Ritual pastries/bread have symbolic meanings related to the cycle of life, marriage, and social transitions.	Kalach is not just food, but a symbol of separation, fertility, and social bonds in marriage.	Regional focus limited to Eastern Slavic
12	Exploring Innovation in a Traditional Sweet Pastry: Pastel de Nata	Portugal	Europe	(Oliveira et al., 2019)	Food innovation, heritage food, sensory perception	Mixed-method; product experimentation + sensory testing + qualitative analysis of perceptions	Traditions can be preserved through innovation without losing cultural identity.	Pastel de Nata Bonbon remains culturally recognizable even though its shape and texture have changed.	Focus more on technical innovation than cultural history
13	Wedding Cake: A Slice of History	England	Europe	(Wilson, 2005)	Culinary history, ritual symbolism	Qualitative-historical; historical and cultural literature studies	Wedding cakes have evolved from symbols of fertility and good fortune to ceremonial icons.	Wedding cakes serve as a symbolic representation of status, hopes, and social values.	Not based on modern field studies
14	The Malay’s	Malaysia	Asia	(Ismail et al.,	Type of <i>dodol</i> ,	Literature study	Dodol is a	<i>Dodol</i> , a	Limited to

No	Title	Location	Continent	Source	Theory	Method	Result	Conclusion	Limitation
	traditional sweet, <i>dodol</i> : a review of the Malaysia's heritage delicacy alongside with the rendition of neighbouring countries			2021)	basic recipe, and the origin		culturally adapted Malay food symbolizing social identity and togetherness, yet it faces threats from modernization and the decline of traditional practices.	cultural heritage, threatened by modernization	secondary literature studies
15	The Way of the Croissant	France	Europe	(Hopkin, 2016)	Theories of tradition (folklore), heritage, transmission	Qualitative-folkloristic; autoethnography + literature review	Croissants are a traditional product that continues to be reinterpreted.	The meaning of croissants is shaped by history, consumption, and cultural context.	Reflective and subjective
16	A growing appetite for "local food" in Île-de-France	France	Europe	(Biasi, 2016)	Local food systems, urban-rural relations, food consumption culture	Descriptive qualitative based on policy analysis and secondary data	Urban communities are increasingly interested in local traditional baked goods, driven by environmental and food identity concerns.	Pastries and local bread products serve as symbols of cultural identity and food sustainability in urban areas.	No specific focus on one type of pastry; researcher reflexivity is not explicitly discussed

No	Title	Location	Continent	Source	Theory	Method	Result	Conclusion	Limitation
17	Traditional cereals-based foods in North African cuisine: Wheat as the cornerstone	Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya	Africa	(Boukid, 2025)	Culinary heritage, food globalization, food heritage, sustainability	Systematic qualitative review (scientific literature, historical documents, gray literature)	Wheat forms the foundation of North African culinary and traditional pastry culture (bread, flatbread, sweet pastries), which is rich in social and ritual significance.	Modernization and industrialization are eroding traditional techniques such as natural fermentation and artisan production.	No direct field ethnographic data
18	A Study on Joseon Royal Cuisine through Sachanbalgi of the Jangseogak Archives	Korea Republic	Asia	(Chung et al., 2019)	Food culture, royal cuisine, food symbolism, culinary history	Qualitative historical analysis (<i>Sachanbalgi</i> archives & palace documents)	Pastries, rice cakes, and sweet foods have symbolic meanings in royal rituals (birthdays, weddings, births, deaths).	Traditional pastries serve as symbols of status, prayer, and social order in palace culture.	Focus on the royal context, not the general public
19	Birthday Cakes: History & Recipes	United States	America	(Gage & Gage, 2012)	Culinary traditions, ritual symbolism, food history	Historical narrative studies based on archival sources and literature	Birthday cakes have evolved from symbolic rituals into a global tradition with the meaning of celebrating life and age.	Birthday cakes have become a modern cross-cultural symbolic pastry.	Not a peer-reviewed journal article; no explicit academic methodology

No	Title	Location	Continent	Source	Theory	Method	Result	Conclusion	Limitation
20	Hearse Pies and Pastry Coffins: Material Cultures of Food, Preservation, and Death in the Early Modern British World	England	Europe	(Herbert & Walkden, 2023)	The emotions evoked by pie, as well as the function of pie crust in food preservation.	Qualitative analysis	Pie is a symbol of global luxury and also serves as an edible memento mori (reminder of death).	The thick pie crust is called a “coffin” that preserves the filling and also covers it. The pie is filled with expensive ingredients.	The analysis focuses on elite consumers worldwide, so it does not fully represent the experiences of lower social classes.

Source: Data Analyzed, 2025