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Lunpia Semarang: History, Distribution, Ingredients, and Production Process as a Culinary Heritage of Chinese-Javanese Acculturation on the North Coast of Java

Wasino Wasino

wasino@mail.unnes.ac.id

State University of Semarang

Endah Sri Hartatik

Diponegoro University

Ema Kartika

State University of Semarang

Nina Witasari

State University of Semarang

Xiao Jing

Fujian Polytechnic Normal University (FPNU)

Fitri Amalia Shintasiwi

The University of Sydney

Article

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Abstract

Semarang lunpia is an iconic culinary heritage resulting from the long-term acculturation of Peranakan Chinese and Javanese culinary traditions on the north coast of Java. This study examines its historical development, the ethnic, geographical, and generational distribution of its producers, consumer profiles and marketing strategies, and its ingredients and production process. A qualitative approach combining historical methods and culinary ethnography was employed through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis in five major lunpia production and distribution areas in Semarang. The findings show that Semarang lunpia originated from the inter-ethnic marriage of Tjoa Thay Joe and Mbok Wasi in the late nineteenth century and subsequently developed into three major production traditions with more than twenty businesses ranging from street vendors to modern souvenir stores. Its distinctive identity is reflected in the use of bamboo shoots from Mranggen, pastry wrappers from Kranggan, and a traditional filling dominated by bamboo shoots, eggs, and shrimp, while later innovations accommodate changing consumer preferences. The replacement of pork with halal ingredients during the New Order broadened its acceptance among the wider population. These findings demonstrate that Semarang lunpia represents a dynamic culinary heritage that reinforces historical continuity, cultural identity, and local economic sustainability.

Introduction

Culinary arts are among the most tangible expressions of a society's cultural memory, reflecting migration, ethnic interaction, and environmental adaptation through ingredients, preparation techniques, and flavors transmitted across generations (1–3). Beyond fulfilling nutritional needs, food also functions as a marker of cultural identity preserved through everyday practices (4). In Indonesia, these processes are particularly visible in coastal cities that developed within Asian maritime trade networks. Semarang, located on Java's northern coast, became an important meeting point for Chinese, Arab, Indian, European, and Javanese communities from the fifteenth century onward, creating a rich tradition of culinary acculturation (5, 6).

One of the city's most distinctive culinary products is lunpia (also spelled loenpia, lumpia, or lunpiah), a thin wheat-flour roll filled primarily with bamboo shoots, egg, shrimp, and/or chicken (7). Unlike spring rolls in mainland China or popiah in Singapore and Malaysia, Semarang lunpia is characterized by its larger size, sweet soy-based bamboo shoot filling, and accompaniment of thick sauce, pickled cucumber, spring onions, and green chilies (8). These features demonstrate how a migrant food tradition was reshaped through local ingredients and Javanese culinary preferences. Comparable processes of cultural adaptation can also be observed in other Indonesian foods, including Palembang's pempek and Minangkabau's rendang lokan, both of which integrate external influences with local resources (9)(10).

Semarang Lunpia is more than just a snack; it is a marker of the city's identity. In 2014, the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia officially designated Semarang Lunpia as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Indonesia (11). Nevertheless, the lunpia industry faces increasing challenges,

including competition from global fast-food chains, shifting consumer preferences, constraints in raw material supply, and the need to adapt to digital marketing and tourism ecosystems (7, 12). These pressures reflect broader issues affecting Indonesian culinary heritage, where inadequate documentation and changing lifestyles threaten the continuity of traditional foods despite their cultural and economic significance (13). At the same time, gastronomic tourism has emerged as an important strategy for preserving ethnic cuisines while strengthening regional identity and local economic development (14).

Although lunpia has received considerable public attention, scholarly research remains fragmented. Previous studies have examined its role as a marker of Peranakan Chinese identity during the New Order (8) explored its use as inspiration for graphic art (15) and analyzed the business strategy of Lunpia Gang Lombok through SWOT analysis (12).

However, no study has comprehensively examined the historical evolution of Semarang lunpia alongside the geographical and generational distribution of its producers, the uniqueness of its local ingredients, consumer characteristics, marketing strategies, and the complete production process. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to: (1) reconstruct the historical development of Semarang lunpia from the nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century; (2) map the ethnic, geographical, and generational distribution of lunpia producers; (3) analyze consumer profiles and contemporary marketing strategies; and (4) document the production process, including raw materials, equipment, and cooking techniques.

Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative design combining historical and culinary ethnographic methods to reconstruct the historical development of lunpia and examine its production, distribution, and consumption practices (16, 17).

The study followed the classical historical method, consisting of four stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (18, 19). Historical sources included newspaper archives (Dutch newspapers, *Suara Merdeka*, *Jawa Pos*, *Kompas*, *Pos Kota*, and *Rakyat Jateng*), books on Semarang history (6, 20), colonial ethnographic reports, and documents from lunpia producer families. Source criticism was conducted through external and internal evaluation, while interpretation was guided by the framework of culinary acculturation and cultural identity (21). The findings were then synthesized through chronological-thematic historiography (19).

Fieldwork was conducted on January 16 and February 10, 2026, in four principal lunpia production and distribution areas of Semarang: Gang Lombok, Kauman, Primary data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and visual documentation, while secondary data consisted of archives, journals, reports, and business documents (22, 23).

Data were analyzed thematically according to the four research objectives: historical development, ethnic-geographical-generational distribution, consumer profiles and marketing strategies, and the

production process. Source triangulation was employed by comparing interview data, documentary sources, and field observations. The analysis was guided by Mintz and Du Bois's culinary acculturation framework, which examines food through material, symbolic, political-economic, and experiential dimensions (17). Appadurai's and Noerhadi's perspectives were used to interpret culinary identity and historical development (24, 25).

Results and Discussion

The Historical Development of Lunpia Semarang

The word lunpia comes from the Hokkien dialect 潤餅 (lūn-piáⁿ), which literally means "soft cake" or "spring cake". In standard Mandarin, it is known as chunjuan (春卷, "spring roll"), which the Anglo-Saxon world translated as spring roll [3]. During the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317–420 AD) in southern China, chunjuan was a vegetarian dish served cold at spring festivals. The Tang Dynasty (618–906 AD) revolutionized the filling by adding cooked meat. This version was later brought to Hokkien and spread with the southern Chinese diaspora to Southeast Asia, including the northern coast of Java. (8, 26). According to Purnomo Usodo, the third-generation owner of Lunpia Gang Lombok, the word "lun" in Semarang's lunpia is often understood as a hybrid: "lun" is a dialectal form of the Javanese word "gulung." At the same time, "pia" remains Hokkien for "cake" (8). This etymological hybridization itself has become a marker of Chinese-Javanese culinary acculturation in this food.

Lunpia Semarang was born from an inter-ethnic marriage in the second half of the 19th century. Tjoa Thay Joe was a single immigrant from Fujian Province, China, who migrated to Java in search of a livelihood. He settled in Semarang's Chinatown, which at the time had become the most densely populated Chinese settlement on Java's north coast after Batavia. In Semarang, Tjoa married Mbok Wasi (also spelled Wasih or Warsih), a native Javanese woman (8, 27).

This couple initially sold snacks by going around using a shoulder pole. The unique combination of the thin skin technique of Hokkien spring rolls mastered by Tjoa and the Javanese cooking habits maintained by Mbok Wasi. Especially the use of local bamboo shoots and sweet soy sauce resulted in a new culinary dish that differed from authentic Chinese spring rolls and Javanese food in general. This was the origin of Semarang lunpia. Around the 1950s, the second generation of this family, Siem Gwan Sing and Tjoa Po Nio, established a permanent stall at Gang Lombok No. 11, right next to the Tay Kak Sie Temple, which to this day is known as Loenpia Gang Lombok (Fig. 1) (27).

[Source: Author's field documentation, January 2026]

The choice of location next to the Tay Kak Sie Temple is inseparable from the spatial logic of Semarang's 19th-century Chinatown. Founded in 1746, the Tay Kak Sie Temple was the ritual center of Semarang's Peranakan Chinese community. Like many traditional food stalls in Southeast Asia that developed around places of worship, this location offered two advantages: a steady stream of customers from the temple's congregation and the social assurance that the food served was suited to the tastes of its

supporting community. This choice of location, historically, confirms the early character of lunpia as a "community food" before its transformation into a "city food" in later periods (26). Evidence of lunpia's growing popularity beyond its original neighborhood survives in Dutch-language newspaper advertisements for Loempia Semarang from the late colonial period, as shown in Fig. 2.

Lunpia during the Old Order Era (1945–1965)

The Old Order period was a time of consolidation for the Gang Lombok lunpia business. Its location on the banks of the Semarang River and near the Tay Kak Sie Temple made it a meeting place for the city's Peranakan Chinese community (30). It was during this period that the third generation, Siem Swie Hie, who later opened a branch on Jalan Pemuda, and Siem Swie Kiem, also known as Purnomo Usodo, who continued Gang Lombok, began to play a role. At the same time, the couple Tan Hok Tjwan and Siem Hwa Nio pioneered a branch that would later be known as Lunpia Mataram. Thus, before the New Order, lunpia already had three main styles that would become the backbone of its distribution in the following decades.

Lunpia during the New Order Era (1966–1998): Adaptation Under Pressure

The New Order created a paradox for Semarang's Peranakan Chinese community. While Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967 restricted public expressions of Chinese culture, ethnic Chinese remained active in commerce (8, 31). This situation enabled lunpia to continue developing as a commercial commodity despite broader cultural assimilation policies (32). A major adaptation during this period was the replacement of pork with bamboo shoots, eggs, and shrimp under Purnomo Usodo's management of Gang Lombok beginning in 1965 (8). Besides accommodating political circumstances, this change expanded the market by making lunpia acceptable to Semarang's Muslim-majority population. As a result, lunpia evolved from a Peranakan specialty into a citywide culinary icon.

The New Order also marked the geographical expansion of lunpia. New branches were established on Jalan Pemuda and Jalan Mataram, while former Gang Lombok employees opened businesses on Jalan Pandanaran, which gradually became Semarang's principal souvenir district (8). By the 1990s, three distinctive schools of lunpia Gang Lombok, Pemuda, and Mataram had emerged, each characterized by differences in sweetness, filling texture, pastry, and accompanying sauces. Another important development was the transmission of recipes and production skills beyond family lineage. Former employees established independent businesses, creating a broad network of producers without formal franchising or significant intellectual property disputes. This mechanism accelerated the spread of Semarang lunpia while maintaining recognition of Gang Lombok as its historical point of origin.

Lunpia from the Reformation Era to the Contemporary Era (1998–2026)

The revocation of Presidential Instruction No. 14/1967, through Presidential Decree No. 6/2000, by President Abdurrahman Wahid marked a new era of freedom of expression for Chinese culture in Indonesia. Lunpia, which during the New Order had developed into a city's culinary scene, could now

openly acknowledge its Chinese roots. The real impact is visible in the packaging, signage, and marketing strategies that proudly display the dynasty of the Chinese family founders. As seen at Lunpia Cik Me Me, which displays the "Lunpia Dynasty" of five generations with photos of ancestors Tjoa Thay Joe (1870), Siem Gwan Sing (1930), Siem Swie Hie/Siem Swie Kiem (1960), Tan Yok Tjay (1980), and Cik Me Me herself (2014) (33).

State recognition through the 2014 designation of Intangible Cultural Heritage further strengthened the position of lunpia. In the contemporary period (2010s and beyond), three important developments occurred. First, product diversification: the emergence of crab lunpia variants (Mbak Lien, Cik Me Me, Lunpia Express), mozzarella lunpia (Mbak Lien), mushroom lunpia, smoked beef lunpia, even young male goat lunpia and snapper lunpia at Cik Me Me. Second, modernization of packaging and distribution: vacuum packaging with a shelf life of up to 1 month in the freezer opened markets outside Semarang and abroad (delivery to all cities in Indonesia and exposure to international tourists). Third, professionalization of the space's appearance: Lunpia Cik Me Me and Lunpia Express developed modern concept stores with air conditioning, dining tables, and walls displaying press clippings. This memory strategy visualizes historical authority (33, 34).

HISTORICAL PERIODIZATION OF SEMARANG LUNPIA

Period	Generations & Main Characters	Key Developments
1870	**Generation 1** **Tjoa Thay Joe × Mbok Wasi**	A traveling shoulder pole in Semarang's Chinatown; the birth of a Chinese-Javanese recipe acculturation: Hokkien skin + local bamboo shoots + Javanese sweet soy sauce
1930	**Generation 2** **Siem Gwan Sing × Tjoa Po Nio**	Consolidation of permanent stalls at Gang Lombok No. 11 (next to Tay Kak Sie Temple); first expansion into an open market
1960	**Generation 3** **Siem Swie Hie | Siem Swie Kiem (Purnomo Usodo) | Siem Hwa Nio × Tan Hok Tjwan**	Formation of 3 taste streams: Pemuda | Gang Lombok | Mataram; halalization of recipes (removal of pork)
1980	**Generation 4** **Tan Yok Tjay (Lumpia Maestro)**	Taste innovation; business professionalization; expansion to Jl. Pandanaran as a souvenir center
2014	**Generation 5** **Cik Me Me & Mbak Lien (parallel)**	Product diversification (crab, mozzarella, goat, etc.); vacuum packaging; national distribution; designation of Indonesian Intangible Cultural Heritage (2014)

Chart 1. Periodization of the history of Lunpia Semarang based on the founding family's dynasties. Reorganized from [3] and the Lunpia Cik Me Me dynasty board [15].

Ethnic Supporters and Geographic-Generational Distribution

The main ethnic group supporting Semarang's lunpia is the Peranakan Chinese community, the descendants of Chinese migrants who have married or integrated into the local Javanese community. This Peranakan character is crucial to understand: they are neither pure Chinese with a strong mainland orientation nor entirely native Javanese. They are a hybrid community that has developed its own cultural identity, with Malay-Chinese languages, a mixed kinship system, and culinary practices that blend both traditions (21, 35).

In the early period (Generations 1–3), all lunpia producers were either direct descendants of Tjoa Thay Joe and Mbok Wasi, or former employees of theirs, who were also generally from the Peranakan community. However, since the New Order era, business actors have diversified. Field observations in 2026 revealed that the lunpia cart sellers, Pak Sastro, Pak Suyat, Pak Ngadi, Pak Dhi, and Pak Dhoel, were ethnic Javanese who were former employees or had inherited the skills of Peranakan Chinese producers. The Kranggan area, the center of lunpia skin production, is also dominated by Javanese producers. Thus, ethnically, Semarang's lumpia production network is now cross-ethnic: Peranakan Chinese remain the primary recipe and brand owners, Javanese as producers (especially of skins and bamboo shoots), and some as small-to-medium business owners.

Based on field observations, the spatial distribution of lunpia in Semarang can be mapped into four main zones. Chart 2 illustrates this geographic spread of production sites across the city together with the raw material supply chain, while Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 provide a more detailed map of the individual stall locations within each zone. The first zone is Chinatown, with Loenpia Gang Lombok No. 11 in Purwodinatan, Central Semarang District, as its historical center. This zone holds the highest "authenticity of origin" value because it is the birthplace of lunpia. The second zone is Kauman/Pemuda, with Loenpia Mbak Lien on Jalan Pemuda Gang Grajen No. 1 as its main representative. This location is in the modern government office area of Semarang and is a daily visiting point. The third zone is Pandanaran, a road corridor approximately 1.5 km long that, since the end of the New Order, has developed as a center for typical Semarang souvenirs. In this area, there are three subcategories: lunpia carts (Pak Sastro, Pak Suyat, Pak Ngadi, Pak Dhi, Pak Dhoel), lunpia in small shops (Lunpia Prima, Olinda MTR, Koh Hoo, Kampung Kali, Mataram), and lunpia in souvenir shops (Omah Loenpia Djoe, Bandeng Juwana Elrina). The fourth zone is Gajahmada, the main road connecting the Simpang Lima commercial area with Chinatown. Here are two large-scale players: Lunpia Cik Me Me (Jl. Gajahmada 107) and Lunpia Express (Jl. Gajahmada 142AA).

Table 1
summarizes the generational distribution of lunpia entrepreneurs based on founding dynasty and business category. From a single point of origin in Gang Lombok, there are now at least 20 active entrepreneurs who can be grouped into three scales: the high-end scale with air-conditioned shops and professional packaging (Cik Me Me, Lunpia Express, Omah Loenpia Djoe, Bandeng Juwana Elrina, Mbak Lien); the mid-scale scale consisting of small shops along Pandanaran; and the micro-scale scale consisting of roadside carts.

Generation	The main character	Location/Branch	Business Character
G1 (~ 1870)	Tjoa Thay Joe × Mbok Wasi	Carrying a pole around, then Gang Lombok	Pioneer: Chinese-Javanese acculturation
G2 (~ 1930)	Siem Gwan Sing × Tjoa Po Nio	Gang Lombok No. 11 (permanent stall)	Consolidation of permanent stalls
G3 (~ 1960)	Siem Swie Hie; Siem Swie Kiem (Purnomo Usodo); Siem Hwa Nio × Tan Hok Tjwan	Jl. Pemuda; Alley Lombok; Jl. Mataram	Formation of 3 streams of taste
G4 (~ 1980)	Tan Yok Tjay (Lumpia Maestro)	Jl. Mataram (continued)	Professionalization & national branding
G5 (2014)	Cik Me Me; Ms. Lien (parallel)	Jl. Gajahmada 107; Jl. Pemuda	Product diversification; modernization
Other (Pandanaran)	Mr. Sastro, Mr. Suyat, Mr. Ngadi, Mr. Dhi, Mr. Dhoel; Lunpia Prima, Olinda MTR, Koh Hoo (G3 Gg Lombok), Kampung Kali, Mataram	Along Jl. Pandanaran	From cart to small shop scale; former employee, processor & recipe successor
Other (Souvenir Center)	Loenpia Djoe's House; Elrina's Juwana Milkfish	Jl. Pandanaran 51 etc.	Large scale; vacuum-pack; national distribution
Other (Elephant)	Lunpia Express	Jl. Gajahmada 142AA	Since 2004, the mall concept, free delivery

Table 1. Generational and categorical distribution of Semarang lunpia producers

Source: Data processing from [3, 13, 15] and field observations, January–February 2026.

Semarang Lunpia Ingredients

The distinctive character of Semarang lunpia is determined by three main components: the pastry, filling, and accompanying sauce, each supported by a well-established local supply chain. Most producers do not make the pastry themselves but obtain it from the Kranggan area, Semarang's long-standing center for lunpia pastry production. The wrappers are made from wheat flour using a traditional smear-and-peel technique, producing thin sheets approximately 18–22 cm in diameter. In 2026, each wrapper cost

around IDR 800. Small-scale vendors typically purchased about 100 sheets per day, whereas medium- and large-scale producers required several thousand.

The principal filling ingredient is bamboo shoots sourced from Mranggen, Demak, approximately 15 km east of Semarang. Local producers value these bamboo shoots because they lack the strong odor commonly associated with bamboo shoots from other regions. Field observations showed that a typical production batch yielded around 16 kg of filling, consisting of approximately 4.5 kg of bamboo shoots, 6 kg of eggs, 0.5 kg of shrimp, together with shallots, garlic, sugar, sweet soy sauce, seasoning, and tapioca flour. The relatively high proportion of sugar contributes to the characteristic sweet-savory flavor that distinguishes Semarang lunpia.

Ingredient diversification has become a defining feature of contemporary production. While the traditional filling consists of bamboo shoots, eggs, and shrimp, producers such as Lunpia Mbak Lien have expanded their menus with chicken, crab, mushrooms, smoked beef, mozzarella, and accompanying vegetables and sauces. Lunpia Cik Me Me additionally offers snapper, young goat, and mushroom variants, whereas Lunpia Express provides vegetarian, original, and crab options. This diversification reflects producers' efforts to accommodate changing consumer preferences while maintaining the culinary identity and authenticity of Semarang lunpia. Table 2 presents the composition of the main ingredients used in a typical production batch based on field observations conducted in February 2026 on Jalan Pandanaran.

Table 2
Composition of the main ingredients of Semarang spring rolls (Pandaran cart scale, for one cooking 16 kg of filling)

Component	Dose	Source/Notes
Young bamboo shoots (chopped)	4.5 kg	Mranggen (Demak); minimal unpleasant odor
Chicken eggs	6 kg	Semarang local market
Shrimp	0.5 kg	Semarang coastal fish supply
Lumpia skin (wheat flour)	~ 100 sheets/day	Kranggan; ~Rp 800/sheet
Sugar	5 kg	Gives a distinctive sweet-savory character
Salt, sweet soy sauce, MSG	enough	Basic spices
Onion and garlic	enough	Aromatic, sauteed before filling
Tapioca flour	enough	Sauce ingredients + glue for leather edges
Vinegar	enough	For cucumber pickles
Toppings: cucumber, spring onions, green chilies	enough	Served separately/fresh when serving
Cooking oil	for frying	For the fried spring roll variant

Source: Results of field observations in February 2026 on Jl. Pandanaran.

Production Process

The production process of Semarang lunpia has remained fundamentally unchanged for more than a century, relying on simple household-scale equipment while selectively adopting modern technology for packaging and storage. Basic equipment includes large woks, sauce pans, boiling pots, gas stoves, basins, spatulas, ladles, strainers, knives, cutting boards, and bowls. Medium- and large-scale producers such as Loenpia Mbak Lien and Lunpia Cik Me Me complement these traditional tools with teppan grills, vacuum sealers, and freezers to support product diversification and long-distance distribution. Chart 3 provides an overview of this workflow, tracing each step from raw ingredients to the finished, plated product.

Filling Preparation Stage (Stir-Fried Bamboo Shoots)

The filling is generally prepared every morning before business hours. Based on field observations at Pandanaran vendors, approximately 4.5 kg of bamboo shoots are washed, boiled to reduce their natural odor, and drained before being stir-fried with shallots and garlic. Around 6 kg of eggs and 0.5 kg of

shrimp are then added, followed by sugar, salt, seasoning, sweet soy sauce, and other ingredients according to each producer's recipe. The mixture is continuously stir-fried until it reaches a relatively dry consistency (*tanak*), ensuring better shelf life while producing the characteristic sweet-savory flavor of Semarang lunpia. The cooked filling is then transferred to another container and cooled before wrapping to maintain product quality.

Although the production principle remains similar across producers, variations appear in ingredient composition. Loenpia Mbak Lien uses chicken in addition to shrimp and seals the pastry with a mixture of tapioca flour, brown sugar, and water, while producers such as Cik Me Me and Lunpia Express offer premium fillings including crab, snapper, and young goat. These variations illustrate product innovation without fundamentally changing the traditional production process.

Sauce and Pickle Making Stages

The accompanying sauce is prepared separately from water, sugar, salt, sweet soy sauce, seasoning, and tapioca flour, which are cooked over low heat until thickened. After cooling, the sauce is packed in small containers for serving. While most producers retain the traditional sweet soy-based sauce, Loenpia Mbak Lien has developed additional variants, including pickled onion sauce and mustard sauce, reflecting innovation within the Pemuda tradition.

Pickled cucumber is another essential accompaniment. Fresh cucumbers are peeled, cut into small pieces, and soaked in vinegar to create a refreshing sour flavor that balances the sweetness of the filling and sauce. Together with fresh spring onions and green chilies, these accompaniments form the characteristic presentation of Semarang lunpia.

The frying stage determines the final texture of the product. A sheet of pastry is filled, folded, tightly rolled, and sealed with tapioca paste before being fried in hot oil until golden brown. After frying, the lunpia are drained to remove excess oil, and some vendors continue to wrap them in absorbent paper before packaging to maintain crispness. Figure 5 illustrates this rolling and frying sequence, from the filled pastry sheet to the finished, golden-fried spring roll.

Presentation and Durability

Semarang lunpia is served either for immediate consumption or take-away. Freshly fried lunpia are typically cut into portions and served with sweet sauce, fried garlic, pickled cucumber, spring onions, and green chilies, creating the characteristic balance of sweet, savory, sour, and spicy flavors. Traditional take-away packaging uses woven bamboo baskets (*besek*), usually containing five to ten lunpia, reinforcing the product's cultural identity. Responding to increasing demand from outside Semarang, many producers have adopted vacuum-sealed cardboard packaging suitable for long-distance distribution. This packaging extends shelf life to approximately five days at room temperature and up to one month under frozen storage. These three presentation methods are shown in Fig. 6: the first slide displays dine-in, the second shows traditional takeaway, and the third shows vacuum-sealed packaging.

These adaptations demonstrate that while packaging and distribution systems have modernized, the core production techniques and culinary identity of Semarang lunpia remain largely unchanged.

[Source: Author's field documentation, January–February 2026]

Semarang Lunpia's Position in the Asian Spring Roll Constellation

Semarang lunpia is one of several spring roll variants that evolved from Chinese culinary traditions and spread across Asia. Table 3 compares Semarang lunpia with similar products based on their names, origins, principal ingredients, and serving styles (36). The comparison shows that Semarang lunpia possesses distinctive characteristics, particularly the predominance of bamboo shoots as the main filling, the use of sweet soy-based seasoning, and its serving style with thick sauce, pickled cucumber, spring onions, and green chilies. Although sharing common historical roots with Chinese spring rolls and Southeast Asian *popiah*, each regional variant has developed through adaptation to local cultural practices, ingredients, and consumer preferences (37–40). These findings confirm that Semarang lunpia represents a unique local expression of a broader Chinese culinary tradition.

Table 3
Comparison of the Semarang spring roll with other Asian spring roll variants

Variants	Origin / Ethnicity	Main Content	Flavor Profile & Serving
Chunjuan (□ □)	mainland China	Vegetables, bean sprouts, minced meat	Salty and savory; soy sauce
Popiah	Singapore, Malaysia, Penang	Jicama, bean sprouts, eggs, dried shrimp	Wet, sweet-spicy peanut sauce
Shanghai Lumpiang	Philippines (Manila)	Ground pork/chicken, carrots, onions	Salty and savory; sweet vinegar sauce (sweet chili)
Chả giò	Vietnamese	Minced pork, ear mushrooms, vermicelli	Savory and sour; nuoc cham sauce + fresh vegetables
Por pia thot	Thailand	Vermicelli, vegetables, minced meat	Savory; sweet plum sauce
Semarang Lumpia	Indonesian (Chinese × Javanese)	Young bamboo shoots + egg + shrimp/chicken; Javanese sweet soy sauce	Sweet and savory dominant; thick sauce + cucumber pickle + spring onions + bird's eye chili

Source: Synthesis of secondary data with field data for Semarang lunpia.

Beyond its gastronomic value, Semarang lunpia embodies historical, social, economic, and cultural significance. Historically, it reflects the long-term acculturation of Chinese and Javanese communities initiated through inter-ethnic marriage in the nineteenth century. Socially, the halal adaptation of its recipe broadened acceptance across ethnic and religious groups. Economically, its production supports

an interconnected local supply chain involving bamboo shoot farmers in Mranggen, pastry producers in Kranggan, and numerous small and large-scale vendors. The designation of Semarang lunpia as an Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2014 further strengthened its role as a cultural symbol of the city.

Despite its continued development, several challenges remain. The sustainability of bamboo shoot supplies is increasingly affected by land-use change and climate variability, while knowledge transmission to younger generations faces pressures from changing lifestyles and the popularity of fast food. At the same time, producers must balance product innovation with the preservation of traditional recipes and processing techniques. Strengthening geographical indication protection for "Semarang Lunpia" is therefore essential to safeguard its authenticity, reinforce regional identity, and prevent misuse of its name.

Conclusion

This study suggests that Semarang lunpia is more than a traditional food; it can be understood as a living cultural heritage shaped by the long-term acculturation of Chinese and Javanese traditions since the late nineteenth century. Its historical development, intergenerational continuity, geographic expansion, and adaptation of recipes and marketing strategies illustrate how culinary heritage can preserve elements of cultural identity while responding to changing social, economic, and political contexts. The findings indicate that the distinctive use of local ingredients, the integration of diverse ethnic actors within its production network, and ongoing product innovation appear to have enabled lunpia to remain relevant while retaining strong ties to its historical origins. These findings point to Semarang lunpia as a notable example of dynamic culinary heritage, in which cultural continuity, economic activity, and local identity appear closely interconnected. This study, however, has several limitations. The analysis is based on a single culinary case within one urban context (Semarang), and findings may not be generalizable to other forms of culinary acculturation along the northern coast of Java. Data collection relied primarily on archival and documentary sources supplemented by limited interviews and field observation; a broader range of primary sources or a larger number of informants could yield additional insights. Further research involving comparative cases and more extensive fieldwork would help to strengthen and extend the conclusions drawn here.

Declarations

Declarations

Ethical approval

was not required for this study, as it consists of qualitative historical and ethnographic research based on archival documents, publicly available records, and photographic documentation, which do not involve personal or sensitive data. The interviews conducted as part of this study were limited to non-personal, non-sensitive information and did not involve the collection of private, identifiable, or sensitive

personal data. This exemption is confirmed in an official letter issued by the Institute for Research and Community Service (see supplementary file). All research was performed in accordance with relevant guidelines and regulations. Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the interviews prior to data collection.

Consent for publication

Not applicable. Field photographs used in this article were taken with the knowledge and permission of the relevant parties.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Author Contribution

Wasino conceived and designed the study, led the historical method and culinary ethnographic fieldwork, and wrote the manuscript. Endah Sri Hartatik contributed to historical source analysis and manuscript revision. Nina Witasari conducted field observations and data collection in Semarang. Ema Kartika assisted in data analysis and documentation. Xiao Jing provided comparative perspectives on Chinese culinary traditions and Hokkien spring roll history. Fitri Amalia Shintasiwi contributed to theoretical framing and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Data Availability

Observation data, supporting documents, and photographic documentation are openly available at https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/19vgbXLJw1Lc-TWNoYJlA3iKsZkJsRxmN. Interview data are not shared in order to protect informant confidentiality, in accordance with the consent obtained."

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Figures



Figure 1

Loenpia Gang Lombok No. 11 in the Semarang Chinatown area, the historical zero point of lunpia since ~1870.

[Source: Author's field documentation, January 2026]



Figure 2

Loempia Semarang advertisement in Dutch-language newspapers: (left) Nieuwe courant, October 29, 1947, (right) Soerabajasch handelsblad, August 21, 1931 (28,29)



Figure 3

Geographical distribution of spring rolls in Semarang City



Figure 4

Map of the distribution of lunpia stall locations in Semarang City.



Figure 5

The process of making spring rolls



Figure 6

Serving Semarang spring rolls

[Source: Author's field documentation, January–February 2026]

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