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THE LIVING PHILOSOPHY OF TUMPENG: PRESERVING JAVANESE CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE MODERN ERA

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ABSTRACTS

Background: This study explores the living philosophy, cultural significance, and resilience of the tumpeng tradition as part of Javanese cultural identity in the context of modernization and globalization. Framed within the broader discourse of cultural heritage, the research highlights how tumpeng is more than a ceremonial dish; it symbolizes local wisdom and civic values through its conical shape, color, and carefully selected side dishes that together reflect gratitude, balance, humility, and spiritual devotion. **Purpose:** The study aims to examine how these meanings are transmitted across generations and the challenges posed by changing lifestyles, urbanization, and the rise of global consumer culture. **Method:** Using a qualitative descriptive approach grounded in literature review and cultural analysis, the article finds that the practice of preparing and sharing tumpeng functions as an intergenerational educational process that sustains communal bonds and ethical reflections, keeping cultural memory alive as an ongoing practice rather than a fixed inheritance. **Result:** However, the continuity of this tradition is threatened when younger generations perceive it as outdated or when rituals are performed without understanding their deeper philosophical context. **Conclusion:** The study concludes by suggesting adaptive strategies such as integrating cultural education in formal and informal contexts, promoting storytelling and community workshops, and using the creative economy to engage youth while maintaining authenticity. Ultimately, the findings reaffirm that tumpeng endures as a living cultural practice that not only preserves local wisdom but also offers ethical guidance for navigating modern life.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is widely recognized as one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world, encompassing thousands of islands, hundreds of ethnic groups, and an array of languages, traditions, and artistic expressions. This diversity is not merely demographic but deeply reflected in the everyday practices of communities, especially through food traditions that embody layers of cultural philosophy, spiritual beliefs, and local wisdom passed down over generations. Among these rich traditions, the tumpeng holds a particularly significant place within Javanese society. More than a dish, tumpeng represents a living philosophy that conveys harmony between human beings, nature, and the divine, a value system that continues to define cultural identity even as globalization brings rapid cultural change (Nabila Dila Septhia et al., 2024)

Traditional food in Indonesia functions far beyond its nutritional purpose. It serves as a tangible manifestation of a community's worldview, offering insights into how people perceive life, spirituality, and social relationships. In the case of tumpeng, the dish's iconic cone shape, which resembles a sacred mountain, is rooted in the Javanese cosmology that views mountains as spiritual centers and symbols of stability, life, and connection to higher realms. The careful selection of accompanying side dishes, each with its own symbolism, reflects a profound appreciation for balance, gratitude, and the interdependence of all forms of life. According to Pranoto in 2024, tumpeng is not merely assembled for aesthetic appeal; it is prepared and presented with deep respect for philosophical teachings that are intended to guide human behavior and community values (Indah Puspita Sari, 2025)

Food as cultural heritage plays a vital role in shaping and sustaining local wisdom. It is closely connected to what is known as civic culture, a collection of ethical and communal values that bind society together. These include spiritual devotion, a sense of familial responsibility, mutual respect, solidarity, tolerance, and collective care for cultural preservation. These values are not abstract concepts but are lived experiences, often reinforced through the rituals and communal gatherings where tumpeng is shared. Through such practices, communities internalize and reaffirm shared beliefs, transmitting them to younger generations as part of their cultural identity (Pipit Widiatmaka, et al., 2023).

In Javanese society, the preparation and sharing of tumpeng are integral to major life events such as birthdays, weddings, thanksgiving ceremonies, and religious celebrations. The presence of tumpeng in these rituals symbolizes gratitude to God, respect for ancestors, and hope for continued blessings. This practice reinforces social cohesion by bringing family and community members together in a shared act of remembrance and thanksgiving. The continued presence of tumpeng in ceremonies represents not only the endurance of a culinary tradition but also the resilience of cultural values that have shaped the moral and ethical landscape of Javanese society for centuries (I Wayan Pugra et al., 2025).

However, the preservation of tumpeng and its underlying philosophy faces significant challenges in the modern era. The rapid spread of globalization has introduced new cultural norms and lifestyles, particularly among younger generations who often prefer modern foods and celebrations. The influence of global consumer culture has shifted preferences toward convenience, speed, and visual novelty, sometimes at the expense of deeper cultural meanings (I Wayan Pugra et al., 2025). The

risk is not merely the loss of a dish but the gradual erosion of the values and wisdom it embodies.

This trend is further complicated by urbanization and economic pressures that prioritize efficiency over traditional practices. Younger people growing up in cities may have limited exposure to the rituals surrounding tumpeng, leading to a weakened connection to their cultural roots. In some cases, traditional food practices are viewed as outdated or incompatible with modern lifestyles, contributing to an identity crisis where cultural symbols lose relevance in daily life (Ata Aditya Wardana et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, cultural traditions like tumpeng demonstrate an inherent capacity for adaptation. Historically, tumpeng reflects a synthesis of indigenous beliefs with influences from Hinduism and Islam, illustrating that cultural resilience is not based on static preservation but on dynamic transformation while retaining core meanings. As Sultan Barakat in 2021 argued, cultural heritage can remain relevant by integrating new elements without abandoning the values that define its identity (Sultan Barakat, 2021).

Efforts to preserve tumpeng as a living philosophy therefore require a balance between innovation and fidelity to tradition. Educational initiatives that incorporate local wisdom into school curricula can help instill appreciation among students, ensuring that cultural symbols are not perceived as distant relics but as meaningful aspects of contemporary life (Syahria Anggita Sakti et al., 2024). Community festivals, workshops, and storytelling can further enhance public engagement, allowing younger generations to experience the richness of cultural heritage firsthand.

Moreover, the creative economy offers opportunities to revitalize interest in traditional foods like tumpeng by presenting them in ways that appeal to modern sensibilities without diluting their symbolic essence (I Wayan Pugra et al., 2025). For instance, culinary tourism can highlight the cultural narratives behind tumpeng, attracting visitors who seek authentic cultural experiences. Similarly, digital media can be used to document and share the stories, philosophies, and rituals associated with tumpeng, expanding its reach beyond local communities to global audiences.

In this context, it is crucial to recognize that the philosophy of tumpeng is not confined to its physical form but is embodied in the values it represents. These values emphasize gratitude toward the divine, respect for nature's bounty, harmony within the community, and the importance of balance in life. The cone shape symbolizes the aspiration to connect with higher ideals, while the surrounding dishes reflect the richness and complexity of social and ecological relationships (Setya Ambar Pertiwi et al., 2023).

The continued practice of tumpeng in Javanese society thus serves as a reminder that cultural identity is constructed not merely through artifacts but through shared beliefs and lived practices. By engaging with the philosophical dimensions of tumpeng, individuals and communities reaffirm their connection to ancestral wisdom, even as they navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing world (Damianus Suryo Pranoto, 2024).

The question, then, is not whether traditions like tumpeng can survive modernization but how they can evolve to remain meaningful. This evolution requires conscious efforts by cultural custodians, educators, policymakers, and community members to adapt traditions to contemporary contexts while preserving their core philosophical significance. It also demands critical reflection on what aspects of tradition are essential and which can be modified without losing authenticity.

At its heart, the philosophy of tumpeng is about balance between the material and the spiritual, the individual and the community, the past and the present. This principle remains relevant, offering guidance not only for preserving cultural identity but also for addressing broader societal challenges such as environmental degradation, social fragmentation, and ethical dilemmas arising from technological change (Damianus Suryo Pranoto, 2024).

As a living tradition, tumpeng embodies the dynamic interplay between continuity and change. Its enduring presence in ceremonies and communal life testifies to the resilience of cultural identity rooted in local wisdom. Yet, this resilience cannot be taken for granted. It requires ongoing dialogue, creativity, and a shared commitment to ensure that the values embodied in tumpeng continue to inspire and guide future generations (Heru Arif Pianto et al., 2022)

This study therefore aims to explore in depth the philosophical meanings embedded in the tradition of tumpeng, to analyze its role in shaping and sustaining Javanese cultural identity, and to identify strategies that can help preserve its relevance in the modern era. By doing so, the research seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of how intangible cultural heritage can be safeguarded and revitalized amidst the powerful currents of globalization and social transformation.

Through this exploration, it becomes clear that tumpeng is not merely an object of culinary art but a living symbol of cultural wisdom that has adapted over centuries yet continues to carry timeless messages about gratitude, harmony, and respect for life. Its story offers valuable lessons on how cultural heritage can remain vibrant and meaningful, serving as both a bridge to the past and a guide for navigating the challenges of the present and the future.

B. METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. According to Sugiyono (2019), a qualitative approach is an analytical method grounded in post-positivist philosophy, typically used to examine phenomena in their natural context, where the researcher functions as the primary instrument of data collection. Descriptive qualitative approach to explore and analyze the philosophical meanings, cultural significance, and contemporary relevance of the tumpeng tradition as part of Javanese cultural identity. The choice of qualitative research is grounded in the recognition that cultural practices like tumpeng are deeply embedded in local contexts, containing symbolic dimensions and subjective meanings that are best understood through interpretive methods. This approach allows the research to move beyond mere description of the tradition's external features to explore the complex cultural, philosophical, and spiritual layers that give it enduring significance.

The primary method employed in this research is library research, also known as a literature-based study or desk study. This method involves systematic collection, review, and critical analysis of existing literature relevant to the topic. The data sources include academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and other scholarly publications that discuss the tumpeng tradition, Javanese cultural philosophy, local wisdom, cultural identity, and the impact of modernization and globalization on traditional practices. The selection of sources prioritizes publications

that are indexed in reputable databases such as Scopus, Sinta 2, or other national academic journals to ensure scholarly rigor and credibility.

In addition to academic literature, the study also considers secondary data such as cultural reports, ethnographic studies, and documentation of rituals available from credible cultural institutions and government publications. This triangulation of data sources enhances the depth and reliability of the analysis by incorporating multiple perspectives and contextual nuances.

The data collection process involved several steps. First, the researcher identified relevant keywords and search terms such as "tumpeng philosophy," "Javanese cultural identity," "local wisdom," "traditional food and globalization," and "cultural resilience." These keywords guided searches across academic databases and digital libraries to compile an initial corpus of literature. Second, the researcher applied inclusion and exclusion criteria to select literature that directly addressed the research questions, focused on the philosophical and symbolic meanings of tumpeng, and discussed the challenges and strategies related to its preservation in the modern era.

For the analysis, this study employs a descriptive-analytical technique. Descriptive analysis is used to systematically present the features of the tumpeng tradition, including its physical form, symbolic components, and ritual contexts. Analytical interpretation is then applied to examine the deeper philosophical meanings, how these meanings reflect Javanese cultural values, and how they contribute to cultural identity. Furthermore, the analysis explores the factors that threaten or support the continuity of tumpeng practices in contemporary society, such as modernization, changes in consumption patterns, and educational initiatives aimed at cultural preservation.

To enhance the rigor of the analysis, the collected literature was also examined using a thematic coding approach. Recurring themes such as symbolism, cultural resilience, civic values, and globalization challenges were identified, categorized, and synthesized into broader analytical frameworks. This process ensured that the interpretation was not only descriptive but also systematically grounded in recurring cultural and philosophical patterns found across the sources.

The research process also includes an interpretive reflection based on cultural theory frameworks, especially concepts related to intangible cultural heritage, cultural identity, and the interplay between tradition and modernity. By situating the study within these theoretical perspectives, the analysis aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how a single culinary tradition like tumpeng can embody broader philosophical and cultural narratives.

Throughout the research process, attention is given to maintaining academic integrity by accurately citing all sources and critically evaluating their relevance and credibility. The study acknowledges that while it does not include fieldwork or direct interviews, the use of extensive literature and documented ethnographic insights provides a rich and informed basis for understanding the subject matter.

In conclusion, this methodological design allows the study to address its central objectives: to explore the living philosophy of tumpeng, to analyze its significance in preserving Javanese cultural identity, and to identify strategies for maintaining its relevance in the face of global cultural change. Through careful synthesis of scholarly literature and interpretive analysis, the research aims to contribute meaningfully to the

discourse on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage within the dynamic context of modern society.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Traditional Food as a Reflection of Cultural Identity

In Javanese society, traditional food is far more than a means of daily sustenance. It serves as an embodiment of cultural memory, philosophical thought, and collective identity (Richard Heersmink, 2023). Tumpeng, as highlighted in this study, is not just a dish prepared for special occasions but a symbol that carries spiritual, historical, and social meanings passed down through generations. Its presence in ceremonies affirms a sense of belonging and continuity with ancestral heritage, making it a living marker of cultural identity.

Through repeated practice, the act of preparing and sharing tumpeng reinforces values rooted in local wisdom. It reminds the community of their connection to the land, to each other, and to their spiritual beliefs. In this way, traditional food becomes a cultural text that encodes narratives about who the community is, what they value, and how they relate to the divine and natural worlds.

2. The Philosophical Meaning Behind the Shape and Elements of Tumpeng

The symbolic form of tumpeng is central to its cultural and philosophical significance within Javanese society. At first glance, it appears as a simple cone of rice, yet this shape embodies a profound worldview that has shaped generations. The cone resembles a mountain, which in Javanese cosmology holds special meaning as the sacred meeting point between the earthly realm and the divine. Mountains are revered as places where humans can approach the Creator, symbolizing strength, stability, and spiritual elevation.

This upward pointing shape of the tumpeng is not arbitrary but deliberately chosen to express human aspiration toward higher values and closeness to God. It serves as a visual reminder that life is a journey aiming for spiritual refinement, gratitude, and humility. The peak of the rice cone becomes the symbolic ‘summit’ that represents the ultimate goal of achieving harmony with the divine.

The color of the rice, traditionally dyed yellow with turmeric, further enriches this symbolism. In Javanese cultural philosophy, yellow represents prosperity, hope, and joy. It is associated with light, warmth, and positive energy, reflecting the community’s collective wish for blessings, happiness, and a fruitful life. Serving yellow rice during important ceremonies becomes an act of gratitude to the Creator for past blessings and a prayer for continued prosperity (Fardan Mahmudatul Imamah, 2025).

Equally meaningful are the side dishes that surround the rice, each selected for its symbolic role. Eggs, often served whole and unpeeled, symbolize the beginning of life, purity, and potential for growth. They remind participants of the importance of starting new endeavors with sincerity and integrity (Reggie Surya et al., 2025).. Vegetables, typically cooked simply, stand for modesty, naturalness, and humility, encouraging people to remain grounded and mindful of their origins.

Fried foods and meats such as chicken or tempeh add further layers of meaning. These richer, more complex dishes are associated with strength, resilience, and the capacity to overcome challenges. The variety of textures and flavors among the dishes

symbolizes the diversity of life's experiences and the need to embrace them all with balance and gratitude.

This carefully curated composition is not random; it reflects a deliberate philosophical statement about the need for harmony between opposing but complementary forces: wealth and modesty, joy and restraint, individual aspiration and communal responsibility. The circle of dishes around the cone signifies wholeness and inclusiveness, suggesting that prosperity is not an individual achievement alone but is meaningful only when shared within the community (Moh. Faiz Maulana, 2025).

The act of preparing and presenting tumpeng itself is part of its philosophical depth. It requires time, patience, cooperation, and mindfulness. Elders often teach the meanings behind each element to younger family members, turning cooking into a moment of storytelling and moral reflection. This transforms tumpeng from being just a meal into a living narrative that links generations and keeps cultural wisdom alive.

Moreover, the peak of the tumpeng carries a unique ritual significance. During ceremonies, the top portion of the rice cone is traditionally cut and offered first, symbolizing humility before God and recognition that human life depends on divine grace. This gesture also acknowledges ancestors and spiritual protectors, reinforcing the idea that gratitude should come before personal enjoyment.

Through all these layers, tumpeng transcends its role as food and becomes a vessel of cultural memory and ethical guidance. It communicates messages about gratitude, the importance of balance in life, respect for nature's abundance, and the need to live with humility and generosity. In this way, tumpeng stands as a living philosophy, one that is not static or abstract but practiced and renewed each time it is prepared and shared.

In contemporary reflection, the meanings embedded in tumpeng remain deeply relevant. As society faces rapid change and cultural shifts, the symbolism of tumpeng offers reminders about staying connected to spiritual values, honoring community ties, and living life with mindful appreciation for balance and harmony. Its enduring presence in ceremonies shows that even as forms evolve, the core philosophical insights continue to guide and inspire.

Color, and carefully chosen elements of tumpeng together create more than an aesthetically pleasing dish; they articulate a worldview that celebrates life's complexity, aspires toward spiritual fulfillment, and honors the bonds between humans, nature, and the divine.

3. Civic Culture and the Transmission of Local Wisdom

Beyond its aesthetic and symbolic dimensions, the tradition of tumpeng serves as a living expression of civic culture and local wisdom that has been cultivated over centuries within Javanese society. Civic culture in this context refers to the network of shared values, norms, and practices that foster social harmony, strengthen communal ties, and shape ethical behavior within the community (Kevin Russel Magil, 2024). Through the practice of preparing and sharing tumpeng, these values are not only preserved but actively transmitted from one generation to the next.

One of the most significant aspects of this transmission is its intergenerational nature. The preparation of tumpeng is rarely an individual task; rather, it is typically a communal activity involving family members of different ages. Elders guide the younger members, not merely in the technical aspects of cooking and arranging the dish, but

more importantly in explaining the cultural narratives and philosophical meanings behind each element. This informal yet profound form of education ensures that cultural knowledge is embodied and internalized, rather than being limited to abstract teachings.

Through this process, core values deeply embedded in local wisdom come alive. Devotion to God is reflected in the rituals and prayers offered before serving tumpeng, emphasizing gratitude for life's blessings and a reminder of human humility before the divine. Respect for family emerges naturally as older and younger generations collaborate, with younger members learning to value patience, attentiveness, and deference to elders' knowledge and experience.

Tolerance and solidarity are cultivated through the collective nature of the preparation. Different perspectives, preferences, and roles are negotiated and harmonized, mirroring the broader social lesson that diversity and unity can coexist. Care for the community and environment is also evident in the mindful selection of local ingredients, often sourced from surrounding areas, which supports sustainable practices and reinforces a sense of connection to place.

These values are not transmitted through formal instruction alone, but rather through lived experience. By actively participating in the ritual, younger generations absorb lessons about cooperation, responsibility, and gratitude in ways that are deeply personal and practical. This mode of cultural transmission learning by doing makes the ethical dimensions of tumpeng both accessible and enduring.

Moreover, the communal preparation of tumpeng fosters empathy and mutual respect. Each participant, regardless of age or role, contributes to the collective goal of creating something meaningful for the family or community. This shared effort reinforces the understanding that cultural heritage is a collective responsibility, not the domain of a single individual or generation.

In a broader sense, tumpeng functions not only as a cultural artifact a static object to be observed but as a dynamic cultural process. Its continued practice requires active participation and reflection, making it a living tradition that evolves while maintaining its core values. Through this process, local wisdom becomes a guiding force that shapes social behavior, ethical choices, and cultural identity.

This civic culture embedded in tumpeng also helps build social resilience. In times of change or crisis, shared traditions can provide a sense of stability and continuity, reminding individuals and communities of their shared roots and values. The ritual becomes a moment to pause, reflect, and reaffirm commitments to family, community, and spiritual beliefs.

Importantly, the value of this tradition extends beyond the Javanese context. It illustrates a universal lesson about the role of everyday cultural practices in shaping moral character and communal bonds. By transforming ethical ideals into tangible actions such as preparing food, sharing meals, and honoring elders traditions like tumpeng demonstrate how local wisdom can remain relevant and vital even in rapidly changing social landscapes.

In summary, the civic culture and transmission of local wisdom through tumpeng highlight the power of tradition as both an educational tool and a source of social cohesion. Through shared practice, storytelling, and ritual, communities not only preserve cultural knowledge but also nurture the values that define their collective identity. This living transmission ensures that the philosophical and ethical meanings

of tumpeng continue to guide and inspire future generations, making it an enduring symbol of cultural continuity and communal strength.

4. The Role of Ritual and Ceremony in Strengthening Identity

The findings of this study highlight the essential role of ritual and ceremony in sustaining the cultural relevance and deeper meanings of the tumpeng tradition. Far beyond being a festive dish, tumpeng becomes truly meaningful when it is prepared and shared within ritual contexts that connect individuals to their communal identity, ethical values, and spiritual beliefs.

In the Javanese cultural context, tumpeng is traditionally present at various significant moments such as birthdays, thanksgiving ceremonies, religious festivals, harvest celebrations, and other communal gatherings (Muhammad Zamhari, 2023). Each of these occasions becomes an opportunity for collective reflection, gratitude, and reaffirmation of shared values. By centering these rituals around tumpeng, communities create moments that transcend the ordinary and transform them into cultural acts of remembrance and hope.

The process of preparing tumpeng itself contributes to this collective experience. Family members from different generations work together, engaging in discussions about the event, sharing stories, and explaining the meanings behind each element of the dish. This collaborative effort becomes a living classroom where cultural knowledge and philosophical reflections are passed down informally yet powerfully. Younger participants learn not only the technical aspects of preparing tumpeng but also the cultural narratives that give the practice its depth and purpose.

During the ceremonial moments, tumpeng takes on a central role that goes beyond its physical presence. Prayers are recited to express gratitude to the Creator for past blessings and to ask for continued guidance and prosperity. The ritual of cutting the top of the rice cone, often performed by a respected elder or the host, symbolizes humility and the acknowledgment that all achievements and blessings ultimately come from divine grace. This act is both personal and communal, as it invites all present to share in a moment of reflection and spiritual awareness.

Sharing the tumpeng further reinforces these values. Each participant, regardless of age or social status, receives a portion, illustrating the principles of equality and inclusiveness. The meal thus becomes more than nourishment; it becomes a symbolic act of distributing blessings and maintaining social balance. The communal nature of the meal encourages conversation, storytelling, and expressions of gratitude, all of which help reinforce cultural bonds and shared identity.

These rituals serve an important function in keeping cultural memory alive. By participating in them, individuals do not merely observe cultural practices from a distance but actively live and renew them. Identity in this sense is not a static inheritance from the past but an ongoing practice continually shaped through shared experiences. Rituals centered around tumpeng create opportunities to reflect on what it means to belong to a community, to honor ancestors, and to live in accordance with ethical and spiritual values.

Moreover, the repetition of these ceremonies across different life events creates a rhythm in communal life that grounds individuals in a shared cultural framework. Whether during joyful occasions like birthdays and weddings or in moments of

collective thanksgiving, tumpeng serves as a familiar yet profound reminder of continuity, unity, and the responsibilities that come with belonging to a community.

In contemporary society, where lifestyles are increasingly fragmented and individualistic, such rituals offer a counterbalance by emphasizing togetherness, reflection, and gratitude. They invite participants to slow down, reconnect with family and community, and consider the broader philosophical meanings behind everyday actions. Through these moments, the deeper messages embedded in tumpeng are kept relevant and alive.

In conclusion, the role of ritual and ceremony in the tumpeng tradition illustrates how cultural identity is sustained not simply by preserving external symbols but by engaging in meaningful practices that weave together memory, values, and communal participation. By transforming meals into moments of reflection and gratitude, these rituals ensure that cultural heritage remains a living and dynamic part of community life, inspiring present and future generations to uphold and reinterpret its meanings in changing times.

5. Challenges of Globalization and Changing Lifestyles

Despite the deep cultural meanings and rich symbolism embedded in the tumpeng tradition, this study finds that its continuity faces significant challenges in the context of modern globalization and rapid societal change. One of the most prominent challenges arises from the spread of global consumer culture, which has profoundly influenced lifestyle choices, tastes, and perceptions among younger generations (Sisitha Jayasinghe et al., 2025). As exposure to global trends increases, traditional practices such as tumpeng may appear less attractive or even irrelevant when compared to modern foods and more visually appealing celebrations widely promoted through social media and popular culture.

Urbanization and economic pressures have added further complexity to this shift. In urban environments, families often experience faster-paced lives, busier work schedules, and limited living space. These factors make it increasingly difficult to dedicate the time, resources, and communal effort traditionally required to prepare tumpeng. What was once a regular and meaningful family or community activity risks becoming an occasional practice reserved for major formal events. This reduction in frequency can undermine the cultural depth and shared understanding that regular practice helps maintain.

An equally important risk is that tumpeng may gradually transform from a living cultural expression into a symbol that lacks its original substance. When cultural transmission from older to younger generations becomes fragmented or weak, the profound philosophical and ethical messages that give the tradition its richness can fade. In such cases, the ritual might still be performed outwardly, yet its deeper meanings related to gratitude, balance, respect for nature, and communal responsibility may no longer be fully understood or valued by those who participate.

This risk is heightened by the broader cultural emphasis on convenience, speed, and individualism that characterizes much of contemporary life. Traditional practices like tumpeng, which rely on collective participation, reflection, and patience, may feel at odds with modern lifestyles that prioritize efficiency and instant gratification. As a result, younger generations may perceive tumpeng rituals as time-consuming, old-fashioned, or incompatible with their daily routines.

Additionally, the aesthetic and symbolic simplicity of modern celebrations can overshadow the layered meanings of traditional foods. Celebrations that focus mainly on appearances or commercial trends might miss the opportunity to engage with the philosophical reflections and communal values that tumpeng embodies. In this context, the richness of cultural heritage risks being reduced to decorative or ceremonial elements lacking real connection to everyday life.

Another challenge comes from the global homogenization of culture. As people are increasingly exposed to similar media, products, and ideas worldwide, unique local traditions face the risk of being overlooked or marginalized. The subtle lessons and ethical reflections inherent in tumpeng may be less visible or harder to communicate in environments that value novelty and uniformity over historical depth and cultural specificity. This concern resonates with current UNESCO initiatives, such as the International Food Atlas and Digital Platform (2023–2026), which was launched to safeguard, promote, and transmit foodways as cultural heritage to future generations. The initiative emphasizes that food traditions are not only nutritional practices but also key components of sustainable development and cultural identity (UNESCO, 2023).

Moreover, economic considerations play a role in shaping these challenges. Preparing tumpeng can require specific ingredients and time that not all families feel they can afford, especially in urban settings where processed or fast foods are often cheaper and quicker to prepare. The convenience offered by modern food options may unintentionally contribute to the gradual decline of more labor-intensive traditions.

The collective nature of tumpeng preparation and sharing has historically helped nurture shared values, such as mutual respect, empathy, and responsibility toward the community. When modern lifestyles encourage individual choices and solitary consumption over communal participation, this sense of shared identity and responsibility can erode. As a result, the ethical and spiritual dimensions of the tradition may weaken, leaving behind only the outward ritual without its inner essence.

In reflecting on these challenges, it becomes clear that they are not simply about food preferences but about broader shifts in values, social structures, and cultural priorities. The tension between modernity and tradition is not new, but its impact on practices like tumpeng is particularly significant because these traditions depend on active participation and shared understanding to remain meaningful.

Recognizing these challenges also highlights the importance of deliberate cultural preservation efforts. Without intentional strategies to adapt and transmit the deeper meanings of tumpeng, the tradition risks losing its role as a living philosophy that guides ethical reflection and community cohesion. Understanding these challenges is therefore a crucial step in identifying ways to sustain and renew the relevance of tumpeng in contemporary society.

6. Strategies for Revitalization and Sustainable Preservation

Despite these challenges, the study points to several strategies that can help preserve tumpeng as a living tradition. One key approach is integrating its cultural and philosophical meanings into education, ensuring that younger generations understand not only how to prepare tumpeng but also why it matters. Schools, cultural centers, and community groups can collaborate to teach the symbolism and ethical reflections associated with tumpeng, making them relevant to modern life.

Community initiatives such as workshops, storytelling events, and cultural festivals can also create spaces for shared learning and dialogue. These settings allow for reinterpretation and creative adaptation while maintaining respect for core values.

The creative economy offers additional opportunities. Culinary tourism, digital storytelling, and cultural media can introduce tumpeng to wider audiences, blending preservation with innovation. This aligns with UNESCO's 2025 reflections on food and intangible heritage, which emphasize that culinary traditions strengthen social cohesion, sustain biodiversity, and foster respect for cultural diversity. Positioning tumpeng within this global framework highlights its potential not only as a local identity marker but also as part of broader sustainable heritage practices (UNESCO, 2025). However, these efforts should involve the local community to avoid reducing the tradition to a commercial product alone.

Ultimately, sustaining tumpeng as a living philosophy requires understanding it as a dynamic process rather than a static artifact. Its continued relevance depends on the active participation of families, educators, cultural practitioners, and communities in redefining its meaning in changing contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that tumpeng is not merely a ceremonial dish but a living representation of Javanese cultural identity, deeply rooted in local wisdom and civic values. Its distinctive conical shape and carefully arranged side dishes express philosophical reflections on gratitude, balance, and spiritual devotion, while the communal process of preparing and sharing tumpeng functions as an intergenerational practice that reinforces family bonds and transmits ethical teachings. Despite challenges from globalization, urbanization, and shifting lifestyles that risk reducing tumpeng to a superficial symbol, its cultural significance can be sustained through conscious adaptation, integration into cultural education, and creative storytelling that resonates with younger generations. Future research is encouraged to conduct field studies engaging directly with local practitioners and communities to explore contemporary reinterpretations of tumpeng, as well as to examine the role of digital media and creative industries in revitalizing cultural transmission without compromising core values. Placed within the wider global discourse on food heritage and cultural sustainability, this study affirms that local culinary traditions such as tumpeng not only safeguard communal identity but also provide universal insights into resilience, adaptation, and ethical living in the modern era.

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