



## Indonesian Cuisine in the Netherlands and France: A Gastrodiplomacy Strategy

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### [ *Abstract* ]

Indonesia launched its first gastrodiplomacy initiative, Indonesia Spice Up the World (ISUTW) in 2021, aiming to establish 4,000 Indonesian restaurants overseas and increase spice trade revenue to \$2 billion by 2024. However, as the initial phase approaches its conclusion in 2024, the tangible impact of ISUTW in certain countries, especially in Europe, remains less apparent and somewhat puzzling. This study aims to examine the current impact of ISUTW in Europe, with a particular focus on the Netherlands and France. A qualitative research approach was employed, drawing on a combination of interviews, literature review, discussions with

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state and non-state actors in Indonesia, and fieldwork conducted in the Netherlands and France. This study suggests prioritizing specific European countries, namely the Netherlands and France, for the second cycle of ISUTW due to their historical ties with Indonesia, including colonial pasts, the romanticism of Indonesian exiles, the presence of Indonesian restaurants, and the societal familiarity with Indonesian cuisine. These crucial features are expected to facilitate the promotion of Indonesian culinary heritage through ISUTW. The study suggests that a more targeted and well-calibrated strategy is required to improve the effectiveness of ISUTW initiatives in Europe, with pilot implementations proposed in the Netherlands and France.

**Keywords:** Food, Gastrodiplomacy, Indonesian Spice Up the World, Mobilities, Diaspora

## I . Introduction

In today's global context, cuisine serves as more than an expression of cultural identity—it has become a dynamic tool of diplomacy, fostering international connections and economic growth. Acknowledging this potential, Indonesia took a major step in November 2021 by launching its first comprehensive gastrodiplomacy initiative, Indonesia Spice Up the World (ISUTW), aimed at expanding the nation's cultural reach and economic influence worldwide. ISUTW represents a novel approach to global engagement, integrating traditional culinary heritage with modern diplomatic strategies. The initiative aims to introduce the rich flavors of Indonesian cuisine to a broader audience, leveraging food to promote mutual understanding and cooperation among nations, thereby contributing to Indonesia's global stature in cultural and economic domains (Indonesia's Coordinating Ministry of Maritime and Investment Affairs 2022).

Unfolding ambitiously under the ISUTW banner, this policy extends beyond expanding the spice trade or promoting Indonesian restaurants abroad. It underscores the role of culinary arts as a

medium for cultural integration, connecting diverse societies through the universal language of food. As the program continues to evolve, assessing its effectiveness—particularly in European contexts such as the Netherlands and France—remains essential for strategic refinement and policy advancement.

The longstanding historical and cultural ties between Indonesia and these nations present untapped potential, calling for a more refined approach to advancing ISUTW. This study urges stronger efforts to reinforce ISUTW in Europe, particularly through key hubs in the Netherlands and France during the post-2024 phase. Leveraging these shared histories and cultural linkages, the initiative seeks to deepen cultural exchange and economic collaboration, thereby strengthening Indonesia's global narrative of culinary heritage. A targeted and systematic implementation across specific countries is therefore essential.

A deeper understanding of target countries is important to develop strategies adapted to local contexts. This article assesses ISUTW's current impact in Europe—particularly in the Netherlands and France—identifies opportunities for improvement, proposes actionable recommendations, evaluates socio-economic benefits, and outlines a sustainable model for public and cultural diplomacy. Focusing on these two nations, which have longstanding historical and cultural ties to Indonesia, the study aims to strengthen ISUTW's role in Indonesia's gastrodiploacy, while emphasizing the power of cuisine to bridge cultures and enhance economic relations globally. The initiative envisions a dynamic and sustainable framework for advancing Indonesia's foreign policy through gastrodiploacy.

Building on the works of Kuipers (2017) and Ariwibowo (2024), this study examines the historical development and contemporary relevance of Indonesian culinary practices in Europe, tracing their roots to the colonial period. These studies shed light on how Indonesian cuisine was accepted and adapted abroad, with the *Rijsttafel* (rice table) serving as a symbolic expression of Indonesia's culinary influence in the Netherlands and France. The *Rijsttafel* embodies the fusion of Indonesian flavors and European dining traditions, pointing to the cultural exchanges of the colonial era that shaped the introduction and appropriation of Indonesian cuisine in

these settings.

Expanding this discussion, Anneke van Otterloo (1990, 2002, & 2009) offers a comprehensive analysis of culinary developments in the Netherlands, particularly between the 1950s and 1990s. Her studies trace migration patterns of various ethnic groups, including those from the Dutch East Indies, which helped shape a new culinary identity within Dutch society. The Netherlands' gastronomic diversity—enriched by influences from Indonesia, Suriname, Morocco, Turkey, and the Indo-Chinese community—illustrates the broad acceptance and integration of diverse food traditions into Dutch cuisine. This diversification fostered the growth of Indonesian restaurants across the country, serving a range of dishes from authentic Indonesian cuisine to Indo-Chinese hybrids and the traditional *Rijsttafel*, reflecting the multiethnic and cultural complexity of Dutch gastronomy.

Van Otterloo (1990, 2002, 2009) further classified post-1950s Indonesian restaurants in the Netherlands into three categories: ethnic Indonesian, Chinese-Indonesian, and Indo-Dutch (those serving *Rijsttafel*). This framework provides valuable insight into the segmentation and specialization of the Indonesian culinary industry abroad. The tripartite classification underscores the versatility and adaptability of Indonesian cuisine, reflecting its ongoing evolution within the diasporic and multicultural landscape of the Netherlands.

Paul Rockower's work on gastrodiplomacy indicates the transformative role of culinary arts in international relations, framing food as a key diplomatic instrument that bridges cultures and fosters global engagement. Rockower (2012 & 2020) defines gastrodiplomacy as government-led public diplomacy campaigns—often supported by non-state actors—aimed at enhancing national branding and diplomatic influence through the use of cuisine. His framework features the capacity of food to shape international perceptions, strengthen national branding, build global networks, and ultimately win the hearts and minds of the public (Rockower 2012 & 2020; Zhang 2015).

In contrast to Rockower, Prud'homme (2023) defines gastrodiplomacy as advancing state diplomacy through *commensality*

–the act of sharing a meal. This approach emphasizes using food to foster goodwill and support during negotiations among state officials. Similarly, Spence (2016) argues that food facilitates political participation, noting that shared meals often encourage cooperation. In this context, Yayusman et al. (2023a; 2023b) highlight the role of the culinary diaspora as non-state actors in gastrodiploamacy. Despite differing objectives, scholars agree that food serves as a crucial diplomatic tool for fostering connections and securing mutual interests.

Defined by its focus on emotional connection rather than direct advocacy, gastrodiploamacy represents a *tender-minded* form of public diplomacy that resonates across cultural and political contexts. Rockower (2012 & 2020) notes that many nations have launched gastrodiploamacy campaigns in the past decade to expand their cultural influence abroad. These initiatives extend beyond promoting food products economically; they utilize culinary experiences to advance diplomatic objectives. Thus, food functions not only as a tool for nations lacking hard power but also as a complementary resource for global powers and a source of legitimacy for subnational actors, demonstrating gastrodiploamacy's broad applicability across the diplomatic sphere.

## II . Method

This study employs a qualitative research design with an exploratory case study approach, aiming to understand the role and effectiveness of Indonesian gastrodiploamacy in promoting national culinary heritage in the Netherlands and France. In the diplomatic division of tasks of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, the Netherlands and France fall under the jurisdiction of Directorate of Europe I, as stipulated in Minister of Foreign Affairs Regulation No. 2 of 2016. This directorate is responsible for formulating and implementing foreign policy with 16 countries in Western and Southern Europe (Direktorat Jenderal Amerika dan Eropa 2020). A 2021 survey conducted by the Directorate of Public Diplomacy found that Indonesian processed spices have spread to

nearly all countries in this geographical area. In the Western and Southern European region, there are 392 Indonesian restaurants, with the highest concentration found in the Netherlands, which hosts 295 establishments (Ambari 2021). Although smaller in number, the Indonesian culinary presence in France, particularly in Paris, is also significant. There are at least eight Indonesian restaurants currently operating in Paris: Le Borobudur, Djakarta Bali, Makan-Makan, Mama Bali, Le Nusa, Restaurant Indonesia, Rempah, and Sate Bali (KBRI Paris 2025).

Additionally, this research examines the collaborative efforts across between government ministries, state agencies, government-owned banks, culinary entrepreneurs, and chefs in the formulation and execution of the ISUTW. The case study method was chosen to provide a detailed examination of the unique dynamics within these regions and to understand the multisectoral collaboration that underpins the ISUTW strategy.

Our primary data were collected over a three-year period (2020-2023) through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals and groups directly involved in or affected by Indonesian gastrodiploamacy. In Indonesia, participants included representatives from the Directorate of Public Diplomacy of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Coordinating Ministry of Maritime and Investment Affairs, and the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy. Additionally, key stakeholders, including government-owned banks, culinary entrepreneurs, and chefs who played significant roles in the ISUTW initiative, were interviewed. These interviews sought to understand their roles in developing a unified narrative for ISUTW and their collaboration efforts from 2021 to 2023.

In the Netherlands and France, interviews were conducted with Indonesian restaurant owners, including those from Prabomoelih (The Hague), De Vegetarische Toko (The Hague), Bali Brunch 82 (Amsterdam), Iboe Tjilik (Leiden), Restoran Indonesia (Paris), and La Maison de l'Indonésie (Paris). Interviews with representatives of the Indonesian Embassy in the Netherlands were also included. Observations for this research involved field visits to Indonesian

restaurants in both countries to experience the atmosphere and taste the flavors of Indonesian cuisine abroad. The observations in these places, along with insights from the multisectoral collaboration, are instrumental in strengthening the analysis and providing a robust rationale for the importance of the two countries in the implementation of Indonesian gastrodiplomacy. Additionally, insights from field visits to Indonesian-related cultural festivals in the Netherlands, namely the *Tong-Tong Fair* and *Pasar Malam Indonesia*, conducted between 2010 and 2013, were also consulted. These visits aimed to document the presence of Indonesian gastronomy in Dutch public arenas that promote Indonesian culture, including cuisine.

The collected data were analyzed through thematic exploration to identify recurring themes and patterns relevant to the study's objectives. This approach allowed for a detailed understanding of the various factors influencing the effectiveness of the ISUTW initiative. The analysis was underpinned by a comprehensive literature review, which served to contextualize the findings within the broader field of gastrodiplomacy and to inform the preliminary assessment of which European countries have been at the forefront of promoting Indonesian cuisine. The review of literature also enabled us to clearly articulate the rationale behind selecting the Netherlands and France as the research focus. The study incorporated historical and cultural documentation tracing the development of Indonesian cuisine in both countries, including their colonial ties with Indonesia, the romanticization of Indonesian political exiles in France, the prevalence of Indonesian restaurants, and the broader societal familiarity with Indonesian culinary traditions. Furthermore, insights drawn from interviews with restaurant owners in both France and the Netherlands informed the selection of these two countries as target areas for expanding the ISUTW initiative. For instance, challenges raised by these stakeholders underscored the need for more robust support systems, which led to our recommendation to establish a centralized network for Indonesian culinary entrepreneurs in Europe. Thus, the literature review synthesized existing scholarship, critically evaluated prior studies, identified thematic linkages, and illuminated key issues within the

field.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, triangulation was employed by cross-referencing data from interviews, focus groups, and literature. This process involved comparing different sources of information to corroborate the study's conclusions. Throughout the research process, rigorous ethical standards were maintained, including obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and treating all participants with respect.

### **III. The Emergence of Indonesian Cuisine in the Netherlands and France**

The historical development of Indonesian cuisine in the Netherlands and France can be divided into three key periods, mirroring the evolving relationship between Indonesian food and European gastronomy. The first period, from the mid-19th century to 1940, marked the introduction of Dutch East Indies culinary traditions to Europe, particularly in the Netherlands and France. During this era, the *Rijsttafel* emerged as a prominent dining tradition, symbolizing the fusion of European, Indonesian, and Chinese influences that evolved in the Dutch East Indies (Ariwibowo, 2011). The second period, from the 1950s to the 1990s, represented the consolidation of Indonesian culinary identity in these countries, where it became an integral part of Dutch cuisine both at home and in restaurants. In this phase, Indonesian dining establishments also began to appear in France.

Repatriated migrants from Indonesia who returned to the Netherlands after 1945 established various platforms to celebrate *Indies culture*, referring to the heritage of the former Dutch East Indies. One prominent form was the *Pasar Malam* (night market), featuring stalls, food vendors, and cultural performances. These events were organized locally and regionally by communities, charities, restaurants, and professional organizers. Among them, *Pasar Malam Besar* in The Hague—later renamed the *Tong Tong Fair*—has held a central position as the largest and most prestigious Eurasian night market since the 1950s (Steijlen, 2015). Held annually

since 1959, except during the 2020–2021 pandemic hiatus, the *Tong Tong Fair* initially served as a cultural gathering where Dutch visitors could enjoy Indonesian cuisine and reminisce about the former colony. It gradually reached a broader audience and evolved into a major platform for promoting Indonesian cuisine in the Netherlands. The festival's Food Court remains a chief attraction, featuring dishes from regions such as Sunda, Java, Padang, and Palembang, thereby enriching the representation of Indonesian gastronomy in the country.

From the 2000s to the present, the third phase has seen the rise of restaurants specializing in ethnic Indonesian cuisine in the Netherlands, featuring regional dishes from Java, Palembang, Minangkabau, Manado, and beyond. This expansion coincided with a new wave of Indonesian migration to Europe after the Reform era, as migrants introduced the culinary diversity of their home regions. Support for these restaurants also grew through the increasing number of Indonesian students in Europe and the growing tourism flows from Europe to Indonesia. Consequently, European tourists returning home often sought the dishes they had enjoyed abroad, further driving demand for authentic Indonesian cuisine across Europe's gastronomic landscape.

To complement the *Tong Tong Fair*, the Indonesian Embassy in The Hague launched *Pasar Malam Indonesia* (Indonesian Night Market) in 2010, an annual cultural festival that ran for several years before being discontinued (Steijlen 2015). The event was organized in collaboration with various ministries, airlines, and local tourism agencies. As with other night markets, food was the main attraction, offering visitors a range of Indonesian dishes and live cooking demonstrations by professional chefs. By 2013, at least 30 Indonesian restaurants—mostly run by Indonesian migrants in the Netherlands—participated, reinforcing the festival's role as a platform for promoting Indonesian gastronomy internationally (detikTravel, 2013).

The culinary landscape and growth of Indonesian restaurants in the Netherlands and France can be traced back to the mid-19th century, marking an early phase of gastronomic exchange and

cultural integration. Indonesian cuisine entered Dutch society through widely circulated cookbooks from the Dutch East Indies, such as *Kokkie Bitja*, which reached domestic kitchens and sparked culinary curiosity among the Dutch. This interest was further encouraged by women returning from the Indies who offered traditional *Indies* dishes to local communities, often advertising their services in newspapers, particularly in The Hague. Mathijs Kuipers (2017) notes that by the late 19th century, “Makanan Djawa” (Javanese food) catering services were already advertised in The Hague, revealing an early commercial appreciation and demand for Indonesian cuisine.

In France, the introduction of “Makanan Djawa” to the French public was notable during the Exposition Universelle 1889 in Paris, as portrayed by Fadly Rahman (2023). Towards the end of the 19th century, this period witnessed a burgeoning interest in “Makanan Djawa” across Europe, particularly in the Netherlands and France, through various publications, newspaper advertisements, and books of the era. In the early 20th century, the Dutch experienced a significant shift in terminology, with the term “Rijsttafel” becoming widely used to describe the culinary tradition and gastronomy originating from the Dutch East Indies (Ariwibowo, 2024).

The *Rijsttafel* represents the cultural hybridity that flourished in the cosmopolitan urban centers of the Dutch East Indies from the mid-19th to early 20th century—an era often described as *Indies* culture. This culture arose from the acculturation of diverse cultural, social, and economic groups within the colony’s emerging urban and industrial societies. Cities with mixed populations fostered cross-cultural interaction, giving rise to a colonial urban subculture known as *Indies culture* (Riyanto, 2000, pp. 163–65). The *Rijsttafel* embodied the fusion of dining traditions from the heterogeneous communities of Java and Sumatra’s urban areas, creating a distinctive culinary subculture within the broader *Indies* context (Ariwibowo, 2024).

The *Rijsttafel* transcends its identity as a mere dish; it represents a complete gastronomic tradition encompassing preparation, production, and presentation. It also reflected the identity and

culture of its colonial-era proponents. More than the sum of its parts, this tradition embodied the cultural interplay and integration that characterized the Dutch East Indies. Observed through the lens of the *Rijsttafel*, one can trace the layers of cultural exchange, adaptation, and innovation that defined colonial urban society, making it an essential key to understanding the historical dynamics of cultural hybridity in colonial contexts (Ariwibowo, 2024). (Ariwibowo, 2024).

During the 1920s, Dutch East Indies (Indonesian) cuisine gained broader recognition in the Netherlands and France, marking a significant period of gastronomic expansion and cultural exchange. In the Netherlands, this era witnessed the emergence of numerous restaurants serving *Rijsttafel* alongside companies such as Conimex, which began offering instant spices for typical Dutch East Indies dishes. These products, including spices for making *Nasi Goreng*, *Bakmi Goreng*, *Soto*, and *Gado-gado*, enabled Dutch homemakers to prepare *Rijsttafel* at home, thus facilitating the convenient integration of this culinary tradition into domestic settings (Ariwibowo, 2024; Verriet, 2017).

In France, the *Rijsttafel* was first introduced to a wider audience through the *Warung Djawa* restaurant at the 1931 Colonial Exhibition in Paris. *Warung Djawa* served as a cultural and culinary showcase of the Dutch East Indies, with the *Rijsttafel* at its center. Its presentation at the exposition not only displayed the traditional and “exotic” foods of the colony but also symbolized Dutch colonial superiority, emphasizing the empire’s abundance of resources and culinary wealth (Ariwibowo, 2024).

Until the 1970s, the *Rijsttafel* was viewed as a recreational meal for the urban Dutch public, remaining somewhat outside the traditional culinary canon despite its 19th-century origins. By the 1920s, awareness of the *Rijsttafel* had grown, though it was still regarded mainly as a leisure menu. During this period, retirees and repatriates from the Dutch East Indies often hosted *Rijsttafel* feasts, while women who had lived in the Indies prepared them at home to evoke memories of colonial life. This era marked a significant step toward incorporating the *Rijsttafel* into Dutch culinary identity.

It bridged cultures by integrating Indonesian culinary practices into Dutch gastronomy, serving as a medium through which memories of the Indies were preserved and celebrated. Its gradual acceptance signalled a transition from exotic curiosity to a recognized element of the Netherlands' diverse culinary heritage, suggesting wider processes of cultural assimilation.

After World War II, many people from Indonesia, including Dutch nationals, individuals of mixed ancestry, and Indonesian loyalists who supported the Dutch, migrated to the Netherlands. Between 1950 and 1970, this movement played an integral role in establishing the *Rijsttafel* as a defining element of Dutch cuisine. Yet integration proved difficult due to public resistance, which complicated questions of citizenship and national identity. These repatriates, who lacked strong social or cultural ties to native Dutch society, brought with them enduring connections to Indonesia, including culinary traditions that were initially met with protest. The unfamiliar and often pungent aromas of their cooking, emanating from homes and migrant-owned restaurants, unsettled some Dutch communities. Despite this early resistance, the growing migrant population after 1957 gradually fostered broader acceptance of this culinary tradition.

The affordability of *Rijsttafel* and Chinese-Indonesian restaurants—offering family-sized portions at reasonable prices during the postwar economic recovery—greatly contributed to this transition. These establishments adapted their dishes to Dutch tastes, fostering broader acceptance and incorporation of the *Rijsttafel* into national culinary culture. This period marked a pivotal transformation in the Dutch gastronomic landscape, where cultural integration and economic recovery converged, leading to the emergence of the *Rijsttafel* as a cherished element of the Netherlands' diverse culinary heritage.

In the Netherlands and France, several Indonesian dishes have become well-known and beloved staples in the local culinary scene. *Nasi Goreng* (fried rice), *Nasi Rames* (mixed rice), *Gado-gado* (vegetable salad with peanut sauce), *Rendang* (slow-cooked spiced meat), *Soto* (aromatic soup), *Bakmi* (noodles), and *Satay* (grilled

skewered meat) are now core items in nearly every Indonesian restaurant. Celebrated for their distinctive flavors and cultural depth, these dishes act as culinary ambassadors of Indonesia, bringing its gastronomic traditions to European audiences. They enrich the multicultural food landscapes of the Netherlands and France, where both locals and expatriates embrace them as part of everyday dining and as symbols of Indonesia's vibrant culinary heritage.

In the postwar period, the *Rijsttafel* gained widespread popularity in Indonesian restaurants across Europe, attracting both locals and tourists. In the Netherlands, *Rijsttafel* became a favorite among visitors, coinciding with the rise of urban tourism after the 1950s. Corresponding this trend, *The Atlantic's* May 1957 issue featured an article titled "Tourist in Holland," depicting the *Rijsttafel* served at Restaurant Bali in Amsterdam and The Hague. The restaurant offered an elaborate selection of 15 to 35 dishes, accompanied by white and fried rice, all for about \$2—including a bottle of Heineken beer—making the *Rijsttafel* an appealing and affordable dining experience (Rolo, 1957).

Restaurants serving *Rijsttafel* typically offer 15 to 20 dishes in one sitting, spanning appetizers, main courses, and desserts. These reflect both Indonesia's ethnic cuisines and the hybrid culinary traditions formed during the colonial era. Popular items include *Pisang Goreng* (fried bananas), *Gado-gado*, *Satay*, *Nasi Goreng*, *Babi Kecap* (pork in sweet soy sauce), *Empal Goreng* (fried beef) with *serundeng* (spiced coconut), and *Sop Buntut* (oxtail soup). A traditional *Rijsttafel* meal is accompanied by beer or white wine, followed by ice cream with fruit slices for dessert. Even today, travel guides to the Netherlands include *Rijsttafel* and recommend top restaurants serving this iconic dish in major tourist cities, underscoring its enduring place in Dutch culinary culture.

In Paris, the Indonesian restaurant scene was shaped by political exiles who fled Indonesia after the 1965 coup. Many were students barred from returning home due to political unrest and established restaurants in the 1980s to sustain their livelihoods (Marching, 2023). One notable example is *Restoran Indonesia*, founded by this community. Unlike their counterparts in the

Netherlands, which range from simple eateries to high-end hotel bistros, these Parisian restaurants adopted a semi-bistro model targeting France's middle class and the expatriate community. Their menus blended traditional Indonesian dishes with fusion cuisine, prepared with refined presentation to appeal to local tastes. They also incorporated *Rijsttafel* traditions into home-style service, combining Indonesian hospitality with Paris's sophisticated dining culture. This approach preserved culinary heritage while adapting it to French gastronomic expectations, offering a unique cultural and culinary experience.

#### **IV. Current Development of Indonesian Cuisine and Restaurants in the Netherlands and France**

Since the 2000s, Indonesian cuisine in restaurants across the Netherlands and France has undergone a notable transformation. This period is marked by the rise of ethnic-flavored restaurants originating from various regions in Indonesia and establishments offering more authentic tastes. Dishes such as *Rendang* began to be served with the spicy-savory profile true to Indonesian taste, marking a departure from earlier adjustments for European palates. This evolution toward authenticity reflects a broader global trend, as increasingly cosmopolitan diners seek genuine cultural and culinary experiences.

The growth of Indonesian ethnic restaurants in Europe stems from greater mobility of people and capital between Indonesia and Europe, supported by more open immigration policies and stronger economic ties. This period was marked by Indonesians who came to Europe for study or work and later entered the restaurant industry, bringing fresh perspectives and direct links to their culinary heritage. It also witnessed a shift in ownership of traditional *Rijsttafel* restaurants to new Indonesian proprietors who acquired existing licenses and redefined menus with more authentic regional flavors, revitalizing the Indonesian culinary presence abroad.

Since the early 2000s and throughout the 2010s, there has been a notable emergence and growth of ethnic and authentic

Indonesian restaurants in the Netherlands. These establishments predominantly feature dishes from regions such as Minangkabau, Palembang, Java, Manado, Bali, and Maluku. This trend reflects the demographic composition of the Indonesian diaspora and migrants in the Netherlands, many of whom originate from these areas or have solid cultural and identity ties to them. This connection influences the type of cuisine offered and ensures the authenticity and traditional preparation of the dishes served.

The predominance of ethnic restaurants from these specific regions is also partly due to the familiarity of their cuisine among the local Dutch population. Many Dutch nationals have previously encountered these flavors during visits to Indonesia or through interactions with Indonesian friends and relatives in the Netherlands. Such experiences have made these Indonesian rich and diverse flavors more accessible and appealing to Dutch palates. Consequently, the menus in these restaurants often cater to both the “authentic” tastes sought by Indonesian expatriates and the adapted preferences of Dutch customers, facilitating a culinary bridge between the two cultures and enhancing the local acceptance and popularity of Indonesian cuisine.

The growing availability of processed Indonesian food products in the Netherlands and France represents a significant trend in the global distribution of Asian culinary products. These items enter European markets through various channels, including official import routes and more personalized services like concierge shopping, catering to specific consumer demands. This diverse distribution network ensures a steady supply of Indonesian instant meals, snacks, cooking spices, and other processed food items, satisfying the cravings of the Indonesian diaspora and introducing new tastes to European consumers.

The establishment of the Indonesian Diaspora Network (IDN), a global network designed to consolidate the contributions of the Indonesian diaspora to national development in 2012 has also contributed to promoting cuisine within the framework of cultural diplomacy. IDN, initiated by Indonesian overseas communities, established a Culinary Task Force as a thematic unit aimed at

promoting Indonesian cuisine through restaurant networks, festivals, and cross-sectoral collaboration (Trihartono et al. 2020; Yayusman & Lissandhi 2022). This task force is expected to serve as a bridge between diaspora culinary practitioners and government policies in efforts to expand the global influence of Indonesian gastronomy. In the IDN Netherlands Chapter, the Culinary Task Force is committed to increasing the visibility and promotion of Indonesia's culinary diversity, led by Chef Agus Hermawan. Born in Java, Hermawan learned to cook from his mother and started his culinary career in the Netherlands around two decades ago. He has served as a chef at Ron Gastrobar Indonesia and was appointed by the Indonesian Minister of Tourism as the country's culinary ambassador to the Netherlands (IDN-NL 2021).

Alongside the initiatives of the IDN, Indonesian exporters have innovatively adapted their offerings in response to stringent European food safety and import regulations, particularly concerning meat-based products. While traditional *Rendang*, a beloved Indonesian meat dish, faces import restrictions due to its composition, non-meat alternatives and specially formulated *Rendang* spices have been developed to comply with these regulations. For example, Egg *Rendang* offers a unique twist on the classic dish, enabling it to be enjoyed within the legal frameworks of European countries. Furthermore, the export of *Rendang* spices and innovative plant-based *Rendang* versions, such as those made from jackfruit and fern leaves (*Diplazium esculentum*) is gaining traction. These plant-based alternatives cater to vegetarians and vegans and align with European dietary trends towards more sustainable and environmentally friendly food choices.

This research has observed an emerging trend in modifying traditional Indonesian dishes such as *Rijsttafel* and *Nasi Rames* in eateries across the Netherlands, signaling broader shifts toward health-conscious eating habits in Europe. Amidst the growing popularity of plant-based diets, Indonesian cuisine is adapting by increasing the incorporation of vegetable-based dishes and soy products, such as tempeh and tofu. These modifications cater to the health trends and align with the sustainable eating practices gaining traction across the continent. In Paris, several locally produced

tempeh products are now available in supermarkets, illustrating the integration of Indonesian culinary elements into the French market.

An Indonesian restaurant in Paris, conveniently located in the heart of the city, also offers locally produced tempeh and a variety of other Indonesian cuisines and spices. The owner has the praiseworthy objective of promoting Indonesian cuisine and spices by offering popular Indonesian dishes, such as *Nasi Goreng* and *Gado-gado*, and presenting a diverse range of traditional Indonesian souvenirs in the storefront to introduce distinctive aspects of Indonesian culture.

In the Netherlands, Indonesian restaurants are also embracing plant-based menu innovations. In The Hague, *De Vegetarische Toko* specializes in vegan interpretations of traditional dishes such as *Rendang* and *Dendeng*, along with a range of vegetable, tempeh, and tofu-based creations. This shift responds to the dietary preferences of Europe's growing vegan and vegetarian community. According to the restaurant's owners (Personal Communication 2023), their mission extends beyond culinary innovation to address environmental sustainability, climate change, and the rising demand for healthy lifestyles in Europe. By introducing new flavors and textures to European palates, *De Vegetarische Toko* strengthens the appeal of Indonesian cuisine while promoting nutritious and sustainable dining practices.

Indonesian restaurants in the Netherlands are showing a new trend, with a growing number of establishments offering regional cuisines. Representatives of the Indonesian Embassy in The Hague (Personal Communication 2023) note a recent surge in Indonesian culinary ventures across the country. Among the new openings are *Praboemoelih* and *Lapek Jo*. *Praboemoelih* specializes in authentic dishes from South Sumatra, particularly Palembang, including *Pindangan* (a spiced fish soup), *Sambal Tempoyak* (a durian-based chili sauce), *Tekwan* (fishball soup), and *Empek-empek* (fish cakes). The owners' confidence in introducing Palembang cuisine to The Hague is remarkable, attracting both Indonesians and locals with a nostalgic or exploratory interest in Indonesian food. According to *Praboemoelih's* owner (Personal Communication 2023), younger

generations are especially curious about new culinary experiences. Similarly, *Lapek Jo* offers authentic Minangkabau cuisine, including *Rendang* that closely resembles its Indonesian original. The expansion of Indonesian cuisine and restaurants in the Netherlands and France is undeniable and as such can be utilized by the Indonesian government to bolster the ongoing advancement of ISUTW.

## V. The Story Before Indonesia Spice Up the World

Inaugurated on November 4, 2021, the ISUTW initiative is a substantial cooperative endeavor involving multiple ministries and non-state actors, designed to increase the global popularity of Indonesian cuisine and enhance its economic value internationally. Nevertheless, the global promotion of Indonesian cuisine was already underway before ISUTW was established. Since 2008, five significant initiatives have been considered part of Indonesia's efforts in gastrodiplomacy. These programs include Indonesia Inspired (2008), Indonesia-Spain Culinary Cooperation (2012), and Spice It Up! Program at Frankfurt Book Fair (2015–2016), Wonderful Indonesia Co-Branding Program (2017), and The First Congress of Indonesian Gastrodiplomacy (2020) (Yayusman & Mulyasari 2024).

At first, Indonesia Inspired gained recognition as Indonesia's leading and largest contemporary festival. It also served as a platform to showcase Indonesia's culinary heritage (Antara 2008). The event, held in October 2008, was a successful partnership between the Indonesian Embassy in London and the Asia London Culture Centre (Asia House). It showcased Asian arts and culture, with a particular focus on Indonesia. In our conversation with Pringgoharjono (Personal Communication 2022), a former committee member of this event, we concluded that Indonesia Inspired represents one of Indonesia's pioneering efforts in gastrodiplomacy. This event marked a crucial milestone in showcasing Indonesian cuisine globally with its inclusion of fashion, films, and food.

Furthermore, the Indonesia-Spain Culinary Cooperation

represents another initiative conducted by Indonesia to promote Indonesian food. In late 2012, William Wongso, a prominent culinary expert and chef from Indonesia, decided to promote Indonesian food at the Casino de Madrid in Spain, collaborating with the Real Academia Gastronomica de España. This collaboration aimed to enhance network strength and resilience, thereby advancing Indonesia's gastronomy (Personal communication 2022). The Indonesian Embassy in Madrid took advantage of this opportunity to showcase Indonesian cuisine in Spain, featuring culinary demonstrations by William Wongso at the CETT Barcelona School of Tourism, Hospitality, and Gastronomy in Barcelona and the Alambique Cooking School in Madrid (Kompas 2012). This collaboration marked Indonesia's early efforts to raise awareness of Indonesian cuisine in Europe. It also highlighted the significant influence of non-governmental entities in promoting food, as demonstrated by the influential figure of William Wongso.

Spice It Up! Program at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2015 and 2016 was regarded as an outstanding attempt to promote Indonesian culinary heritage in Europe. Indonesia was designated the Guest of Honor Country at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2015, one of Germany's most significant book fairs. At the book fair, Indonesia organized culinary workshops, shows, talks, and cookbook launches featuring renowned Indonesian chefs and culinary experts (Spice It Up! 2015). During this occasion, Indonesia showcased over 50 indigenous spices and opened the Spice Island Café, which offered high-quality Indonesian coffees and teas (Spice It Up! 2015). The success of Spice It Up! in 2015 led to an ongoing opportunity to showcase Indonesian culinary culture at the Frankfurt Book Fair the following year. In 2016 Indonesia participated in the Book Fair and organized the Food Explorer event. During this event, Indonesian chefs and students from a vocational school in Germany collaborated with approximately 1,000 children aged 12 to 18 from schools in Germany, Italy, and other European countries to prepare meals. This initiative exemplified an innovative approach to gastrodiplomacy, engaging students at vocational schools and introducing Indonesian cuisine to children from various European countries. According to Pringgoharjono (Personal Communication 2022), former Chief

Program Officer of Spice It Up!, the program represents the first Indonesian government effort to implement a large-scale culinary initiative in Europe, involving chefs, authors, and culinary experts.

Subsequently, this program preceded the formulation of ISUTW and served as one of its key precursors. Several ISUTW contributors were also involved in the *Wonderful Indonesia Co-Branding* initiative, launched in early 2018 by Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism, which was subsequently renamed the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy in 2019. The program aimed to build partnerships with restaurants founded by members of the Indonesian diaspora worldwide. (Trihartono et al., 2020; Datau, Personal Communication 2020). The Wonderful Indonesia program, which aims to support Indonesian businesses overseas in promoting Indonesian cuisine in their respective host countries, has partnered with around 100 restaurants. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Tourism in Indonesia promoted tourist sites by displaying photos, artworks, and sculptures that reflect the country in these restaurants.

The most noticeable milestone leading to the initiation of ISUTW is the Congress of Indonesian Gastrodiplomacy, which took place in December 2020. The systematic implementation of soft power through gastrodiplomacy had just begun. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a growing interest in promoting Indonesian gastrodiplomacy. The Congress was the inaugural event where both state and non-state actors in Indonesia came together to collectively enhance the nation's branding by leveraging the use of food. The initiatives outlined in the Declaration of Indonesian Gastrodiplomacy (2020) include the need for collaboration among stakeholders, the establishment of a culinary center, the creation of an Indonesian food database, support for food export through airline partnerships, promotion of maritime and culinary diversity, enhancement of culinary narratives and education, an online platform to showcase cuisine, engagement with the diaspora, simplification of spice export-import procedures, global expansion of Indonesian restaurants, and the development of gastronomic cities within Indonesia. Significantly, a range of stakeholders, such as the Indonesian Embassy in The Hague, the Netherlands, and Indonesian diasporas, convened at IDN Global and conducted a series of

discussions involving chefs, businesspeople, decision-makers, and Indonesian diasporas. These discussions aimed to explore Indonesian cuisine and the use of gastrodplomacy as a strategic soft power tactic to cement Indonesia's international presence. Since then, Indonesia's Coordinating Ministry of Maritime and Investment Affairs has led the ongoing ISUTW discussion.

## VI. Strategy and Policy Development of the Indonesia Spice Up the World

Then, what is contained within the ISUTW? Following its official launch in November 2021, many stakeholders frequently convened to deliberate on the single narrative defining ISUTW as an Indonesian gastrodplomacy strategy. The collaborative program aims to actively promote Indonesian food and achieve an export value of USD 2 billion for Indonesian spices and condiments. It also aims to establish 4,000 Indonesian restaurants abroad by 2024 and introduce local spices and condiment products globally (Indonesia's Coordinating Ministry of Maritime and Investment Affairs 2022). Five primary food varieties should be introduced: *Gado-gado*, *Satay*, *Soto*, *Nasi Goreng*, and *Rendang*. In addition, the focus spices for export under this program are pepper, nutmeg, cloves, ginger, cinnamon, and vanilla, which are staples of authentic Indonesian cooking and have high global demand. The primary goal of ISUTW is to boost the export growth of processed food products, particularly spices, by leveraging the global production chain and enhancing Indonesia's competitiveness as a culinary tourism destination. By increasing the number of overseas Indonesian restaurants, ISUTW aims to bolster Indonesia's campaign to become a leading destination for global gastronomic tourism, thereby fostering greater international exposure to Indonesia's rich culinary diversity.

Before the commencement of the narrative, ISUTW was established with three primary objectives in addition to the two previously mentioned. These objectives encompassed advancing local tourism destinations (gastro-destination), specifically promoting gastronomic attractions to entice international tourists. In their

study, Fitria et al. (2016) defined gastro-destination as a strategy to encourage local, authentic cuisine to attract more tourists to a specific region. This idea was excellent. Initially, the design of ISUTW specifically targeted Australia and African countries as pilot projects. However, Sartin (2021) clarified that the current ISUTW is not restricted to specific countries but instead can be implemented by any country worldwide. In 2022, the formulation process prioritized 12 countries as frontier markets for ISUTW implementation. One of the top 12 nations is the Netherlands, while France has not made the list (Indonesia's Coordinating Ministry of Maritime and Investment Affairs 2022).

In the end of 2023 to early 2024, the Indonesian government also formulated a ministerial regulation by creating the Indonesia Spice Up the World Committee or *Komite Kuliner Nasional* under Indonesia's Coordinating Ministry of Maritime and Investment Affairs directive. This committee executes the ISUTW program, collaborates with various stakeholders to meet the initiative's targets, and reports the program's progress to the steering team through its secretariat. Structured to ensure comprehensive support and strategic execution, the committee includes several departments, each with specific roles ranging from research and mapping to production, processing, and business development.

The research and mapping department focuses on collecting supportive data and studies essential for the program's execution and expansion, including compiling databases of hotels and restaurants serving Indonesian menus and gathering export data on spices and culinary products relevant to ISUTW. Meanwhile, the production and processing department ensures compliance with international food safety standards such as Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and secures necessary export certifications for ISUTW business participants. The business development department is dedicated to formulating and implementing strategies for expanding the market for spices and Indonesian restaurants internationally, including setting up business meetings and preparing producers for overseas expansion. Marketing, education, financial access, and distribution and logistics are also critical components of the committee, each playing a vital role in promoting

ISUTW globally, educating potential chefs and workers, securing funding, and managing the logistics of spice and restaurant supply chains to support the international growth of Indonesian culinary ventures. This organized approach aims to enhance the global presence of Indonesian cuisine and solidify Indonesia's position as a critical player in the world gastronomic tourism industry. Until mid-2024, the regulation has not yet been adopted.

Further, the parties responsible for the ISUTW campaign are developing the operational framework for implementing this gastrodiplomacy strategy. The updated objectives of ISUTW entail a focus on the mechanisms of establishing restaurants and broadening Indonesian products' reach in international markets (Indonesia's Coordinating Ministry of Maritime and Investment Affairs 2023). Within ISUTW, the development of Indonesian restaurants is centered around two main objectives: expanding and improving existing Indonesian restaurants through the Food Startup mechanism and establishing the concept of Indonesian restaurants globally recognized by international audiences abroad and domestic customers. The concept of a Food Startup aims to address and improve the F&B industry by providing a framework for collaboration in opening restaurant franchises overseas, along with various mechanisms for investment opportunities. Simultaneously, the idea of launching a new Indonesian restaurant necessitates specific features. The establishment of a restaurant should encompass a wide range of authentic Indonesian cuisine options, be easy to operate, and demonstrate adaptability to the local context. The newly created ideas for ISUTW are highly captivating in response to the imminent conclusion of the first cycle of ISUTW.

## **VII. Thinking Europe: Way Forward for Indonesian Gastrodiplomacy**

In 2024, the first ISUTW cycle will conclude. The 2024 general election in Indonesia may usher in a leadership transition, which will inevitably impact the trajectory of the country's foreign policy. Indonesia's foreign policy has been focused on economic diplomacy under the Joko Widodo administration, and food as a soft power

diplomacy instrument may play a significant role in the country's ambitious effort to develop its economy. While the primary goal of gastrodiplomacy is to familiarize the international public with a specific country's national brand, this form of diplomacy could inevitably yield some degree of economic gain.

This section outlines an approach to Indonesian gastrodiplomacy for the potential second cycle of ISUTW. As the first term concluded in 2024, a new narrative for ISUTW is now taking shape—whether it continues under the same banner or adopts a different name with a similar purpose. Regarding restaurant establishments, it is also worth noting that the proposed new concept of ISUTW focuses on developing existing restaurants and establishing new ones, while determining the characteristics to be fulfilled when restaurants are built. These two foci aim to develop a mutual understanding regarding implementing Indonesian gastrodiplomacy.

Given these conditions, this study offers several findings to address existing gaps and strengthen the next cycle of ISUTW by reassessing target locations and action strategies. Expanding Indonesia's culinary presence abroad remains significant for promoting the country's national cuisine. While establishing fine-dining restaurants is valuable, increasing the number of Indonesian food stalls and food trucks can reach a wider audience—especially students and workers with limited time to dine in. Positioned in public spaces, these outlets can further enhance the visibility and accessibility of Indonesian food.

According to Nugraha (Personal Communication 2021), a chef at an Indonesian restaurant abroad, Indonesia should explore the concept of food trucks offering fast and accessible Indonesian cuisine. These trucks need not serve all five prioritized dishes but could focus on one or two with strong global appeal. As a reference, Vietnamese food trucks in Australia—offering *Banh Mi* and *Gỏi cuốn* (spring rolls)—have achieved broad recognition. Yayusman et al. (2024) also recommend featuring *Gado-gado* in food trucks to meet Europe's growing demand for quick and plant-based meals. Rather than investing heavily in overseas restaurants, developing a large

fleet of food trucks could effectively raise awareness and promote Indonesian cuisine across Europe.

The Indonesian government generally refrains from providing direct financial assistance to restaurants or businesses seeking to operate abroad. Therefore, collaboration with financial institutions, such as banks, becomes essential. For instance, the Indonesian restaurant *Lapek Jo* in the Netherlands received a soft loan from BNI, a state-owned bank in Indonesia. Establishing food truck businesses could offer a more cost-effective alternative for promoting Indonesian cuisine, reducing both operational and promotional expenses compared to traditional restaurant ventures.

Food truck and stall owners can also leverage social media to increase public awareness of Indonesian cuisine. YouTube influencers such as *Shanty di China* and *Yenni di China* exemplify this approach. Both use their channels to promote Indonesian food in their respective regions. Shanty, a mother based in Dandong, China, shares cooking tutorials from her home kitchen, featuring dishes such as *Klepon Ubi*, *Sate Maranggi*, and *Nasi Goreng* (Shanty di China 2024). She also documents her experiences selling Indonesian food from her attractively designed food truck, prominently labelled “Shanty di China—Selling Indonesian Foods,” in local plazas. Through these videos, she consistently communicates her goal of introducing authentic Indonesian cuisine to smaller cities like Dandong, where public familiarity remains limited compared to metropolitan areas such as Shanghai and Beijing. Shanty’s channel, which has amassed over two million subscribers and more than one million views per video (as of 2024), illustrates how digital platforms can function as tools of gastrodiplomacy. In the European context, similar strategies could be applied to promote Indonesian food trucks, particularly through widely used platforms such as Facebook (80.12%) and Instagram (7.61%) (StatCounter Global Stats 2024).

In addition to establishing the ISUTW committee, it is essential to recognize the culinary industry as a social reality rather than merely a market opportunity. ISUTW must also acknowledge the challenges faced by small-scale culinary entrepreneurs, particularly

in the Netherlands and France. Moreover, the five priority dishes under ISUTW should be reviewed regularly—annually or within a designated timeframe. Introducing authentic, plant-based Indonesian dishes in these countries can strategically appeal to local taste preferences and enhance the visibility of Indonesian cuisine. *Gudeg* in a can, made from unripe jackfruit stewed with palm sugar and coconut milk, is highly recommended.

Furthermore, redefining the goal of developing gastro-destinations holds significant potential for ISUTW's future. Equally important is the coordination among stakeholders responsible for advancing tourism destinations, strengthening local food industries, and attracting international tourists to Indonesia. Such coordination ensures clear role distribution, prevents duplication of efforts, and avoids conflicts of interest among involved parties.

When considering GMP as a global food standard, knowing and anticipating the regional regulations within the European Union (EU), which include the Netherlands and France, is essential. The European Green Deal, introduced in 2019, includes a farm-to-fork strategy that addresses the connection between a healthier society and environmental protection. Launched in May 2020, the plan aims to promote sustainable food consumption and improve everyone's access to affordable, nutritious food (European Commission 2019). Additionally, it intends to decrease agricultural emissions and align farming methods with the EU's latest climate goals (Von der Leyen 2019).

The strategy's current implementation marks the beginning of revising Regulation (EU) No. 1169/2011, which deals with providing food information to consumers and proposing a new regulation initiative for a sustainable food system framework. While the concrete implementation of this new regulation within the farm-to-fork strategy is currently on hold due to internal disagreements, particularly from non-state actors, regarding the plan for a sustainable food system framework (Foote et al. 2023), it is still crucial to consider this agenda for partnering countries like Indonesia, especially when implementing ISUTW in EU member countries. Considering the EU's role as a regulatory power (Bradford

2012 & 2020), it is inevitable that extraterritorial implications will arise for countries, such as Indonesia, that partner with the EU. The EU, renowned for its rigorous regulations, will enforce specific standards to achieve food sustainability across the entire process, from production to distribution. These regulations may also impact the business of Indonesian food products, including spices, as well as the operations of the Indonesian culinary sector.

With or without ISUTW as a framework, the long-term success of Indonesian gastrodiplomacy depends on the consistency and continuity of cooperation and coordination among stakeholders to effectively engage with the foreign public. When engaging with other nations, it is crucial to thoroughly understand their society, market potential, political landscape, and any conflicts they may be experiencing. Additionally, it is indispensable to consider the target country's current lifestyle, as this can impact their dietary preferences.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

The mission of ISUTW is to elevate Indonesian cuisine on a global scale by establishing restaurants, expanding the spice trade, and fostering deeper cultural connections and mutual understanding between nations, thereby enhancing Indonesia's global culinary influence and economic vitality. The findings suggest that the historical ties between Indonesia and European countries like the Netherlands and France provides a strong ground for the successful implementation of gastrodiplomacy. Due to their established familiarity with Indonesian cuisine and cultural ties, the strategic focus on these nations is likely to facilitate greater acceptance and integration of Indonesian culinary practices. This targeted approach, combined with a commitment to continuous evaluation and adaptation to local tastes and culinary trends, is expected to support the sustained success and expansion of Indonesian gastrodiplomacy whether through the future of ISUTW or other potential taglines introduced by Indonesia's new administration of President Prabowo Subianto.

Expanding the scope of ISUTW is fundamental, not just through high-end restaurants but also by incorporating accessible culinary formats like food stalls and trucks, particularly in public spaces and urban centers. This expansion can widen the access to Indonesian cuisine, appealing to a broader audience, including younger people and busy professionals. Integrating social media strategies and aligning with global dietary trends, such as plant-based eating, can further enhance the outreach and appeal of Indonesian cuisine, making it relevant in today's health-conscious and digitally connected global environment. This inclusive approach values the diverse preferences and lifestyles of our global audience, making them integral to the success of Indonesian gastrodiplomacy.

Finally, the study advocates for a robust operational framework to support the implementation of future Indonesian gastrodiplomacy, emphasizing the need for stakeholder collaboration, adherence to international food safety standards, and strategic marketing. Aligning ISUTW with broader economic and cultural objectives, including tourism and export promotion, can catalyze a comprehensive national strategy, positioning Indonesia as a key player on the global gastronomic stage. This holistic approach promises to elevate Indonesia's culinary heritage internationally and contribute to its economic diplomacy efforts, indicating the substantial economic potential of the culinary industry and its relevance to stakeholders in economic development. Especially, the new administration of Prabowo Subianto (2024-2029) has a strong focus on food and agriculture; therefore, the future of Indonesian gastrodiplomacy, with or without ISUTW tagline, should be more promising.

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Received: November 25, 2024; Reviewed: August 1, 2025; Accepted: August 7, 2025.

