Exploring Filipino Culinary Identity through Filipino *Adobo*

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the characteristics of Filipino culinary identity through an in-depth analysis of the Filipino dish, *adobo*. Anchored in the perspective of a Filipino chef and guided by post-colonial theory, the study employs a qualitative methodology grounded in relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology. A comprehensive literature review situates the research within scholarly discussions on food and identity, nationalism, the historical multicultural food identity of the Philippines and its contemporary foodways. Using qualitative meta-synthesis for data collection and reflexive thematic analysis, the research identified eight emerging characteristics of Filipino *adobo* from 10 different *adobo* recipes. The study found that Filipino *adobo* is characterised by its: (1) flavour profile, (2) fundamental and non-fundamental ingredients, (3) cooking method, (4) regionality, (5) personal preference, (6) authenticity and adaptability, (7) state before and during Spanish colonisation, and lastly (8) symbolism in the contemporary Philippines. Ultimately, these characteristics are also found to be present within the broad Filipino culinary scene. The findings reveal the dynamic interplay between tradition, adaptation, and colonial legacy in shaping Filipino culinary expression. The study concludes by critically stating the implications of these findings, highlighting the researcher's limitations and offering recommendations for future research on Filipino cuisine.

Acknowledgements

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed: Rea Kim Ambion

Date: 27/10/2025

Chapter 1: Introduction

Filipino cuisine continues to be a multifaceted and often-debated topic, both within the Philippines and among the diaspora. In the influential anthology *The Culinary Culture of the Philippines* (Cordero-Fernando, 1976), a collaborative effort among Filipino culinary experts, historians, and academics, the introductory question highlights this persistent uncertainty: “What makes Philippine cuisine Philippine? This question is perhaps a gentler form of a broader, more pressing one: what makes someone Filipino?” (Mercado, 1976, p. 9). Similarly, Filipino cookbooks frequently begin by questioning the very essence of Filipino food, asking, “What is Filipino food?” and “How does food become Filipino?” (Ponseca & Trinidad, 2018, p. 15). Such questions reflect the ongoing cultural discourse and reveal the underlying complexities of Filipino identity as conveyed through its culinary traditions.

Furthermore, Filipino cuisine has also struggled to achieve mainstream global recognition despite the Philippines being one of the most significant sources of global migration, particularly to countries such as the United States, where Filipino Americans constitute a significant and long-established population (Commission on Filipino Overseas, 2022; Orquiza, 2020). Unlike other Asian culinary traditions that have gained widespread acceptance and popularity, Filipino food faces marginalisation, and is often misunderstood or undervalued internationally (Cox, 2016; Ponseca & Trinidad, 2018). Even with high-profile endorsements from global figures such as the late Anthony Bourdain, who predicted it as the “next big thing” in food, Filipino cuisine has yet to claim a consistent presence on the world culinary stage (Atienza, 2018; Cox, 2016; Soriano, 2023). Perhaps the ambiguities

mentioned above provide the reason for its lack of recognition, as even Filipinos find it difficult to comprehend the essence of Filipino cuisine.

Therefore, this dissertation explores the evolving Filipino culinary landscape from the prehistoric to the contemporary Philippines, as well as food and cultural identity and food representation. To do so, it uses the Filipino dish, *adobo*, as its focus. Adobo, a braise meat and vinegar dish, is widely known as the unofficial national dish of the Philippines. Ultimately, the rersearch seeks to understand what constitutes Filipino food, which leads the researcher to pose the following research questions.

Research Questions

The primary goal of this research is to answer the overarching question:

- What are the characteristics of Filipino cuisine that help define its own identity?

This overarching question is underpinned by the following question:

- Often regarded as the unofficial national dish, what key characteristics of Filipino *adobo* reflect the broader identity of Filipino cuisine?

Rationale of the Research

This research represents a personal and scholarly undertaking by a Filipino chef and researcher to explore the historical foundations and cultural influences that have shaped Filipino cuisine. By tracing the origins, evolution, and external contributions to Filipino culinary traditions, the researcher seeks to develop a more nuanced

understanding of Philippine food identity, ultimately informing and enriching how Filipino cuisine is represented and promoted through professional culinary practice. The author, as a Filipino researcher, acknowledges a lack of scholarly literature and documentation on Filipino food. This lack of resources can be attributed to several factors observed by the researcher: (1) limited governmental support and initiatives to promote Philippine cuisine both internationally and domestically; (2) the lack of educational content and significant representation of Filipino culinary heritage in mainstream Philippine media; and (3) the prevailing ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding the identity of Filipino food within the general population.

Through this research, the author aspires to contribute meaningfully to the Filipino community by fostering deeper engagement with the nation's culinary heritage. The study aims to inspire a broader appreciation of Filipino food—not merely as daily nourishment, but as a significant cultural expression—and to stimulate critical dialogue on how Filipino cuisine can be preserved, understood, and evolved with pride and authenticity.

Overview of the Structure of the Dissertation

To guide readers through the flow of this research, the dissertation is organised into five chapters, each building on the next to explore the characteristics of Filipino culinary identity through Filipino *adobo*. Chapter 1 has introduced the research topic and central questions, alongside the researcher's rationale for undertaking the study, particularly its significance from the perspective of a Filipino chef. Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive literature review, divided into four key sections: (a) food and identity, (b) food, nationalism, and cuisine, (c) multicultural food identity in the

Philippines, and (d) food identity in contemporary Philippine society. These sections collectively establish the scholarly context for the study. Chapter 3 outlines the research frameworks and methodology employed, detailing the type of research conducted and the approaches used for data collection and analysis. This study is qualitative research following a relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology, guided by post-colonial theory. Furthermore, the research used a qualitative meta-synthesis data collection and reflexive thematic data analysis. Chapter 4 presents the findings derived from the data, which serve as the foundation for addressing the research questions. The findings were clustered into eight sub-themes with corresponding contextual views, overarched by three major themes. Finally, Chapter 5 critically discusses the findings in relation to the sub-themes and their contextual perspectives, and connects them to the research questions. This chapter also includes the conclusion, acknowledges the study's limitations, and offers recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Food and Identity

Food has long been recognised as essential for all living beings' survival, growth, and functioning. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, food is placed at the foundational level, highlighting its critical role as a basic physiological necessity (Maslow & Lewis, 1987). While initially understood purely as a means of survival, human curiosity and cognitive development have driven further exploration into the broader impact of food on human life, leading to various studies that seek to define and understand its more profound significance including the recognition of one's identity.

Food's basic classification is based on its safety for consumption; however, beyond its nourishment, it is also a symbolic communication tool within cultures. It reflects social meanings through ingredients, culinary practices, eating habits, and preparation methods, contributing to a broader system of cultural interpretation (Caplan, 1997; Stano, 2015). Food studies by anthropologists examine food through two different lenses: the structural and developmental approaches. The structural approach, closely associated with Lévi-Strauss and later expanded by Mary Douglas, views food as a language-like system embedded with symbols, meanings, and social rules. Meanwhile, the developmental approach, although it values a few important findings from structuralists, uses a more realistic and critical approach in determining food meanings.

Lévi-Strauss began his theory by asserting that cooking is a universal concept similar to language, serving as a means of communication that transcends historical and racial boundaries (Lévi-Strauss, 2012; Lévi-Strauss et al., 1970). He

emphasised that, unlike animals, humans predominantly require their food to be cooked, making cooking an integral aspect of human culture. To better understand this cultural phenomenon, Lévi-Strauss applied the idea of binary opposition—the human tendency to organise thoughts through contrasting pairs such as “black and white” or “good and evil”. By focusing on the binary pair “raw and cooked,” he illustrated that transforming raw food into cooked food gives it its cultural significance and meaning. Furthermore, he also explained that food must be “not only good to eat” but also must be “good to think with” (Caplan, 1997; Fischler, 1988), emphasising that food, beyond serving as a source of human sustenance, must be understood in terms of meaning and symbolism. Barthes (1975) likewise views food as a semiotic system—a means of communication similar to language. However, he perceives it to be more complex than the binary concept posited by Lévi-Strauss. Just as language relies on grammar to convey meaning, food also operates through a structured system, where elements such as ingredients, methods of preparation, and consumption habits all contribute to its significance. Even minor alterations—whether through adding, substituting, or omitting components—can change a food’s overall meaning or symbolic value (Caplan, 1997; Stano, 2015). Moreover, while Mary Douglas agreed that food symbolises social meanings, she also critiqued Lévi-Strauss for relying too much on binary oppositions and limited cultural samples in his analysis of food symbolism. Instead, she emphasised the importance of understanding food categories in broader social and sequential contexts. Through her work, especially “Deciphering a Meal” (1972), she claimed that the structure of meals reflects social hierarchy, relationships, and cultural values. Douglas also analysed biblical dietary laws to show how food taboos express ideas of purity, morality, and sacred order, ultimately arguing that food practices are deeply

embedded in and reflective of a society's social and religious systems (Caplan, 1997; Murcott, 1988; Stano, 2015).

Lévi-Strauss' structuralist approach has also been criticised for being too rigid and unable to account for social change. Elias (1939, 2006) attributed this to "process reduction," a Western concept that tends to seek fixed patterns in a constantly evolving society. In response, other anthropologists have constructed and adopted a developmental approach in examining the practical and critical significance of food, which views food and taste as evolving due to generational changes, with forms of social transformation—such as shifts in class, migration, globalisation, or political movements—seen as important forces that influence how food is valued, perceived, and experienced culturally (Stano, 2015). For instance, Goody (1982) recognised the significance of culture in food classification but argued that political economy, both at the household (micro level) and national (macro level), also plays a crucial role (Caplan, 1997; Murcott, 1988). He used the correlation of food and gender as an example, arguing that women are stereotypically responsible for domestic cooking in many societies. Meanwhile, elite and royal households in hierarchical contexts are primarily staffed with men, a pattern predominantly evident in contemporary commercial kitchens, where the space remains more male-dominated, particularly in high-ranking positions (Harris & Giuffre, 2015; Murcott, 1988). Goody also challenged Douglas' notion that social structure alone determines food classification, such as "high" versus "low" cuisines, by highlighting examples of societies—two distinct North Ghanian tribes—where, despite social structural differences, the shape of their cuisines remains remarkably similar. He contrasts this with societies in China, India, and Western Europe, where social hierarchy significantly shapes culinary

practices and influences dietary practices across different social classes (Goody, 1982; Stano, 2015). Overall, Goody argued that a comprehensive understanding of food must extend beyond symbolic and cultural interpretations to include considerations of power dynamics, social class, and economic structures.

Similarly, Mintz (1986) used sugar as a case study to explore how colonial histories, labour exploitation, and economic systems shape global consumption. In *Sweetness and Power*, he examined how sugar became a global commodity shaped by colonialism, slavery, and capitalism. He showed that although sugar was introduced to the Caribbean by Europeans, it became central to the region's economy through the exploitation of enslaved African labour. Over time, sugar shifted from an elite luxury to a staple in the British working-class diet. Mintz argued that this change was driven by global economic forces rather than cultural preference, and he used sugar as a symbol of the social and power relations between producers, plantation owners, and consumers (Caplan, 1997; Mintz, 1986; Murcott, 1988).

Fischler (1988) also argued that food, beyond being a source of nourishment, is central to a human's sense of identity and crucial to identity formation, anchoring to the famous sayings "tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are" by Brillat-Savarin (2009), and "you are what you eat'' by Rozin and Fallon (1987). He further explained this theory biologically by discussing humans as natural omnivores who experience a paradox that reflects human eating behaviour's dual nature that while people eat for survival, there is also a simultaneous drive for exploration and seeking dietary variety (*neophilia*) and the fear amidst unfamiliarity (*neophobia*) (Rozin, 1976). This concept is called the omnivore's paradox and is further complicated by

the fear of incorporation, in which humans experience deep-seated anxiety about consuming unfamiliar food due to its irreversibility once it has entered the human body (Rozin & Fallon, 1986). Cultural and social influences further reinforce these fears, determining what is acceptable or taboo within a given society (Fischler, 1988). By correlating to the double bind theory (Bateson et al., 1956), individuals inevitably navigate two conflicting forces: the omnivore's natural curiosity and biological adaptability, which promote dietary diversity, and an inherent aversion to unfamiliar food sources coupled with caution against potential harm, which naturally evokes feelings of disgust and hesitation (Fischler, 1993). The feeling of disgust is described as a socially re(constructed) biological safeguard against unknown food sources that might be harmful or poisonous, whether physically, mentally or emotionally. This tension underscores the complexity of human food choices, as they are shaped not only by biological necessity but also by psychological, cultural, and social frameworks (Fischler, 1988; 1993).

The concept of "food identity" connects food not only to consumption but also to cultural traditions, social significance, and personal identity through elements such as preparation, taboos, enjoyment, and symbolism (Abbey & Rigg, 2024; Ciliotta-Rubery, 2016; Sasahara, 2019) However, the concept of identity is highly subjective, vague and versatile. Thus, MacClancy (2004) pointed out the numerous risks of using the term academically. One primary concern is the risk of misrepresentation, as researchers, coming from an outsider's point of view, may focus on aspects of an individual's life that the subject either deems insignificant or considers widely shared rather than personally defining. Additionally, identity is often treated as a rigid, structured construct—akin to a box with clearly defined boundaries—rather than a

dynamic and fluid phenomenon influenced by external factors. The singular use of the term further neglects the reality that individuals navigate multiple, intersecting identities, including gender, race, and culture (MacClancy, 1996). For example, a female individual can be a wife and a mother to her family but simultaneously be a leader or activist in her work or social community. Moreover, identity is frequently conceptualised as an unproblematic category as it is expected to remain static and coherent, failing to acknowledge that it is inevitably evolving and complexly shaped by historical, social, and personal influences over time (MacClancy, 1997). This rigid application of the concept of identity ultimately limits its analytical utility in capturing individuals' multifaceted and shifting experiences. To address these risks, (MacClancy, 2004) proposed several methods for recognising and understanding identities—such as by observing communities, rituals, and traditions and examining literature and historical contexts.

Food, Cuisine and Nationalism

Recognising one's national identity is crucial in fulfilling psychological and social needs. Social identity theory suggests that people seek to be identified within groups to foster a sense of belonging and maintain self-esteem (Reddy & van Dam, 2020). This correlates with the theory of self-categorisation, which emphasises humans' tendency to classify themselves based on ethnicity, gender, and religion to establish a position within society (Turner, 1975; Turner et al., 1987). Among social identities, national identity is ingrained in individuals from an early age, often through seemingly non-ideological, or banal, means through the presence of national symbols in everyday life, such as flags, coins, buildings, public spaces, and monuments (Billig, 1995). Furthermore, early education also plays a significant role

in reinforcing national identity by introducing students to these symbols and fostering a sense of belonging. For instance, the Filipino educational curriculum incorporates history and social studies subjects that enable primary and secondary students to develop a foundational sense of national identity and promoting pride in their cultural heritage by learning about the national flag, national anthem, and even national heroes (Mulder, 1998). Understanding national identity reinforces social unity and enables individuals to connect with their cultural heritage and societal responsibilities.

Beyond its biological and psychological functions, food plays a vital role in shaping social and national identity. As Fischler (1988) argued, food and cuisine are central to fostering a collective sense of belonging and distinguishing cultural groups through their unique dietary practices. This distinction affirms one's identity and emphasises differences from others (Caplan, 1997). Complementing this perspective, food culture contributes to national identity through symbolic meanings and repetitive everyday practices—such as purchasing, preparing, and consuming food—that become embedded social norms (Ashkenazi & Jacob, 2000; Ranta & Ichijo, 2022). Drawing on Edensor's (2002) concept of everyday nationalism, these mundane routines structure daily life and help define how individuals experience time, space, and cultural belonging. When confronted with unfamiliar food cultures, these normalised practices become more visible, reinforcing the boundaries of national identity and highlighting what is culturally specific and familiar (Ranta & Ichijo, 2022). Therefore, the power of food can be seen as a synecdoche that symbolises an entire culture and can serve as a medium for conveying cultural knowledge. For example, food has become a significant attraction in various

destinations, such as beignets in New Orleans or fish and chips in England, serving as cultural landmarks (Metro-Roland, 2013). Additionally, the association of particular foods with ethnic or national identities is widespread, with common examples including Asians being identified with rice, Italians with pasta, and the French with bread.

Furthermore, particular blends of flavours, spices, and seasonings largely shape the distinct identity of a culture's cuisine. These characteristic combinations serve as cultural markers—for instance, soy sauce, ginger, and garlic are commonly associated with Asian cuisine; tomato, basil, and oregano with Italian dishes; and chili, cumin, and coriander with Mexican or Indian cooking (Rozin & Rozin, 1981). However, Fischler (1988), contended that "flavour principles" alone cannot fully capture the essence of cuisine, as they are highly subject to variation across the national, regional, local, household, and even individual levels. For instance, there are hundreds of interpretations of a Filipino *adobo*, with vinegar often being the only consistent ingredient (Tayag et al., 2022). Therefore, cuisine is not only about its structural components but also what is explicit beyond.

The development of a national food culture or cuisine plays a significant role in nation-building. Political leaders and national movements often draw upon shared—or even constructed—culinary traditions to unite diverse populations and promote a unified sense of identity. They form an "imagined community" that strengthens national unity by establishing standard food practices (Ranta & Ichijo, 2022). National food cultures often emerge in contrast to foreign influences, particularly in post-colonial contexts where establishing a unified cuisine helps assert cultural

independence (Cusack, 2004; Pilcher, 1998). For example, emphasising “national,” “local,” or “traditional” foods serves as a response to foreign culinary presence, reinforcing cultural ownership and identity. This distinction between “authentic” and “foreign” food plays a vital role in defining and legitimising a nation’s cultural identity (Caldwell, 2002; Cesaro, 2000). In this context, food culture and cuisine are important not only in social and cultural terms but also have a political dimension.

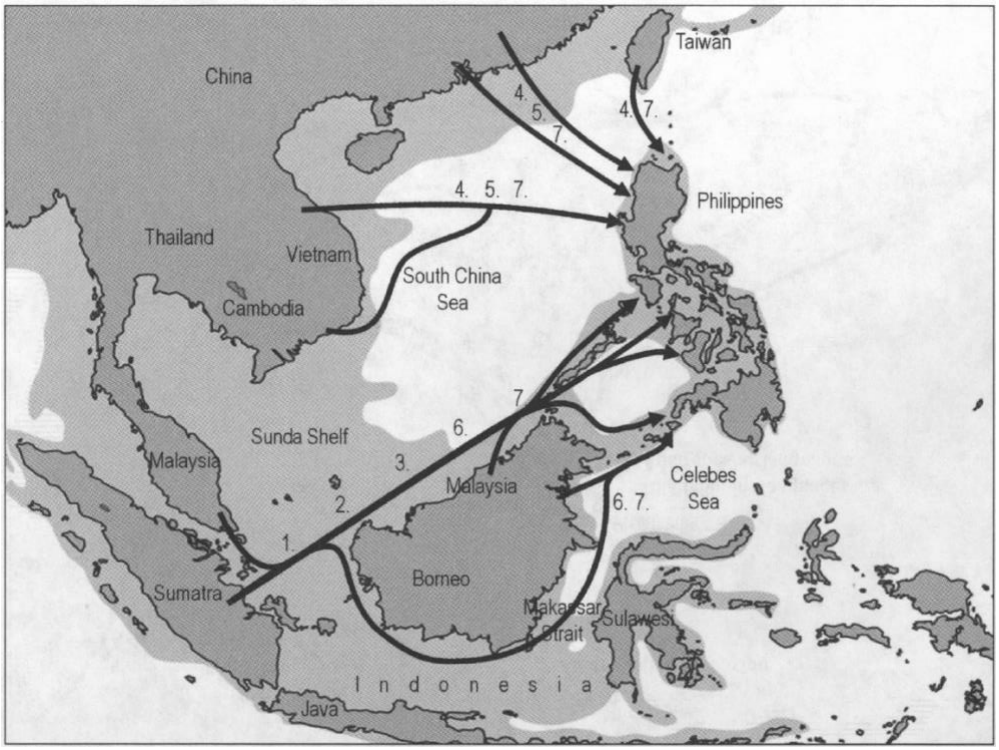
Food also plays a significant role in preserving cultural identity and heritage among migrant communities. As individuals relocate, their emotional attachment to their place of origin often intensifies. The experience of being away from their former home may weaken their sense of belonging, leading them to find comfort in familiar culinary practices that trigger memories and feelings associated with home (Andrei, 2010). Tan and Tan (2024) discussed how first-generation Chinese immigrants in the multicultural society of Malaysia use food culture as an anchor to maintain their ties to their homeland, reinforcing their nationalism and sense of belonging. However, second- and third-generation immigrants, having weaker ties to their ancestral land, gradually lose aspects of this connection over time. Nonetheless, for many, abandoning these traditional practices is out of the question as it is often seen as breaking ties to one’s family, community and religion (Gabaccia, 1998). Thus, by examining the relationship between food and place, it can be seen that it enables immigrants to comprehend their ancestral connections, aiding them in shaping their identities within a multicultural society (Tan & Tan, 2024). For instance, in one study it was found that several Korean migrants living in the United States chose to include kimchi in their family meals to affirm or maintain their Korean identity rather than excluding it in favour of fully adopting an American identity (Oum, 2005).

However, food culture, similar to identity, is not static; it evolves in response to historical and social changes (Ranta & Ichijo, 2022; Tan & Tan, 2024). Calvo (1982) noted that, in cases of migration or within minority cultures, specific elements of traditional cuisine are often preserved, even when the original language of that culture has been lost. As immigrants adapt into new environments, food traditions naturally merge with other ethnic groups, creating a blended culinary practice that reflect adaptation and even resistance. In Hong Kong, for example, fusion dishes in tea cafés have become a symbol of local identity, differentiating Hong Kong people from their colonial past. This blending of cuisines also mirrors existing power dynamics, highlighting the complex interactions between Hong Kong and mainland China (Chan, 2019).

Multicultural Food Identity in the Philippines

Until the last glacial period, the Philippine islands were connected mainly as a single landmass, separated from the broader Sundaland region by the Mindoro Strait and Sibutu Passage (Larena et al., 2021). Sundaland encompassed the Southeast Asian mainland — present-day Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore — and the major Indonesian islands of Sumatra, Java, and Borneo (Jinam et al., 2017). Genetic studies by Jinam et al. (2017) established that the Negrito populations represent one of the earliest known branches of anatomically modern humans to have reached Southeast Asia. Referred to as the “First Sundaland People” and traditionally associated with a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, these descendants of early human groups are still found in the Philippines and other parts of Southeast Asia.

Figure 1: Waves of Migration Theory



Note. A visual reinterpretation, illustrating the seven waves of Migration Theory. From "Earliest People of the Philippines," by H. O. Beyer, 1950, *Manila Bulletin, 27.* The figure also includes additional details from the theory's reevaluation in *Anthropology of the Filipino People*, by F. L. Jocano, 1998, PUNLAD Research House.

The Austronesians are another significant group believed to have participated in early human migrations to the Philippines.[1] Two main theories attempt to explain their arrival. The out-of-Taiwan model first posits that Austronesians migrated to the Philippines approximately 5,230 years ago via ocean voyaging, crossing the 350 km Bashi Channel (Thomas, 2011). This migration is thought to have introduced the Austronesian language, pottery, and cereal agriculture (Larena et al., 2021; Thiel, 1984). Bellwood (1997, 2005) also suggested that Austronesians brought domesticated animals like pigs and cultigens like rice. However, a more recent study by Gutaker et al. (2020) challenged this view, indicating no substantial evidence

[1] Refer to Figure 1, Two migratory waves entered the Philippines—one from the north, and another from the southwest.

supporting the derivation of Philippine rice varieties from Taiwan, nor does it affirm a predominantly out-of-Taiwan rice dispersal. The second theory proposes an origin within Island Southeast Asia, specifically from a region known as Wallacea, involving both land-based migration and sea travel within sight of land. Despite this alternative perspective, linguistic evidence supporting the Wallacean origin appears weaker than the more substantial archaeological and genetic support for the out-of-Taiwan model (Thomas, 2011).

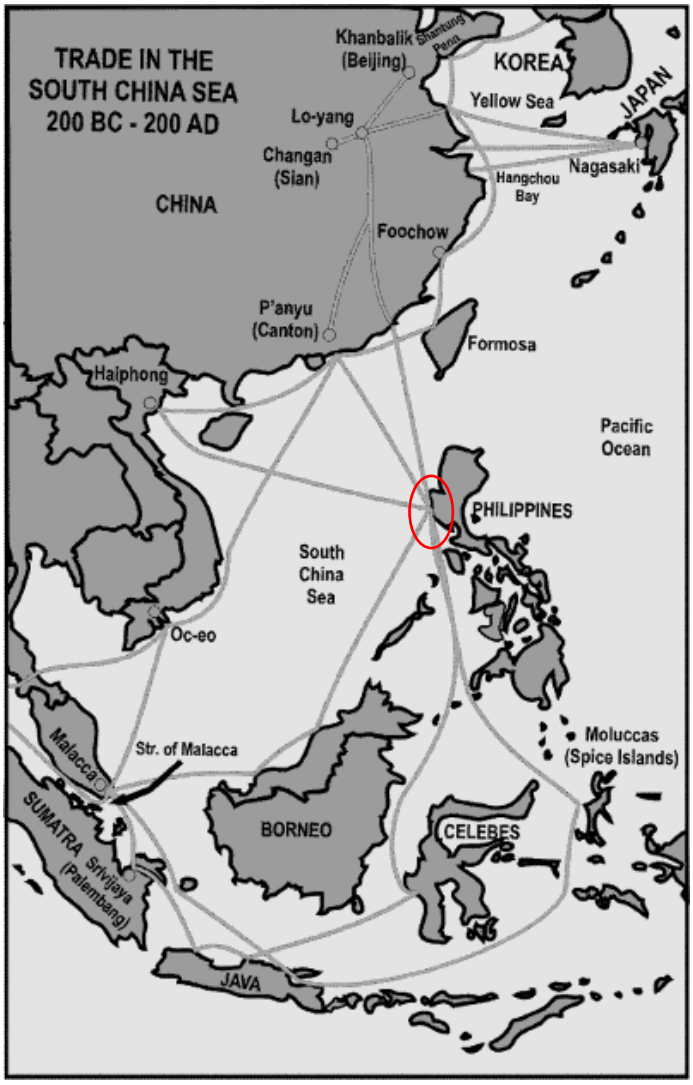
Larena et al. (2021) presented evidence suggesting that the demographic history of the Philippines is more complex than the traditional out-of-Taiwan or out-of-Sundaland models alone can explain. Their study identified at least five significant waves of ancient human migration over the past 50,000 years. The first wave consisted of Paleolithic hunter-gatherer groups, known as the Negritos, whose descendants also remain a significant part of the Philippine population today. Two additional migration waves followed this via the southern route through Island Southeast Asia, a westward expansion, and migration from South China-Taiwan groups.

This multilayered sequence of migrations highlights the diverse and dynamic human history that shaped early the population of the Philippine archipelago. Since then, the Philippines has had a long history of colonisation, which has contributed to the complex nature of its culture. Often overlooked, though, is the presence of Chinese, Arabic and Indian traders during its pre-colonial era, which might go back as early as 1000 AD (Herrera, 2015). These three communities were already present in the Philippines years before its “discovery” by Spanish explorers during the 16th century.

Due to the absence of written historical records from the Indigenous populations of the Philippines, much of the country's documented history tackled in this chapter relies on accounts produced by foreign influences, such as those who migrated to, traded with, or colonised the country.

Chinese

Figure 2: Map of South China Sea Trade Route



Note. A map showing the participation of the Philippines, particularly the western part of the island of Luzon, in the South China Sea trade during the period 200 BC – 200 AD. From *Trade on the China Sea*, by Nabataea, n.d.

The earliest recorded reference to the region appears in the writings of Southern Chinese traders from the Song dynasty (960–1279) (Kueh, 2014; Rafael, 2018). These writings describe commercial exchanges with particular Philippine locations, including Ma-I, which is referred to as a small island in the western part of the archipelago named Mindoro (Kueh, 2014). Early Chinese trade records mentioned importations of cacao, food crops, tobacco, wax, pottery, lead, glass beads, cooking pans, iron needles, and silk (Chu, 2010; Keesing, 1962). Throughout the years of trading, several early Chinese traders decided to establish settlements in Manila,[2] which is situated on the same side but on the larger north island called Luzon near Mindoro. Furthermore, some official papers regarding the admission of the Chinese to the Philippines in 1779 contain a testimony stating that experts in noodle-making, as well as other types of cooks, were part of the group that travelled to the Philippines (Mercado & Andalecio, 2020). This may suggest that the Chinese intentionally introduced their cuisine to the Filipino people.

Chinese influence on Philippine cuisine is so deeply integrated that it often goes unrecognised. Many common ingredients and dishes in daily meals and special occasions originate from China (Liwanag & Alejandro, 2019). Filipino names for meat cuts, soy products such as soy sauce, tofu and bean sprouts, as well as several vegetables like Chinese cabbage and string beans, to name just a few, are derived from Chinese words (Fernandez, 2019; See, 2011). Chan-Yap's (2012) study identified 63 Hokkien lexical borrowings across 19 categories within the Filipino culinary vocabulary, including dishes of Chinese origin. Some of these dishes have retained their original forms, such as Filipino *siomai*, an open-faced pork dumpling

[2] Refer to Figure 2.

similar to the Chinese *siu mai*, which traditionally consists of pork and shrimp. Others, however, have been re-interpreted and adapted to local tastes, like the Filipino noodle dish *pansit*. In Hokkien, the phrase “pian I sit” does not explicitly refer to a noodle dish but instead describes any food that is quickly and conveniently prepared (Fernandez, 2019). Within Luzon alone, *pansit* is said to have 101 variations influenced by regional and local culinary traditions. Each variation is named and differentiated based on factors such as the ingredients used, the type of noodles, method of cooking, and the region or location where it originated (Fernandez, 2019; Mercado & Andalecio, 2020).

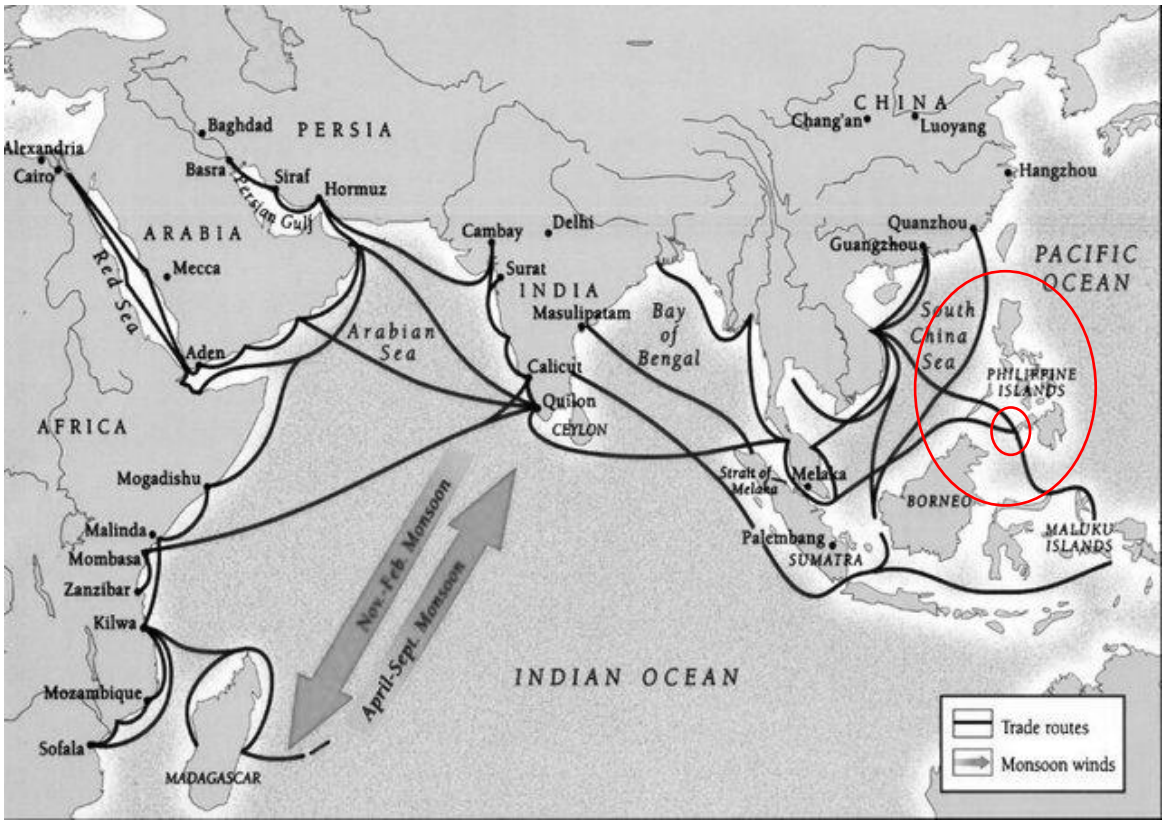
Arab

Detailed records regarding the introduction of Islam to the Philippines are rare. However, various items in the literature have mentioned its arrival in Mindanao, the southern island of Philippines, from the 12th to the 15th century through Arab traders and missionaries travelling through Southeast Asia as part of the trade across the Indian Ocean (Hayase, 2007; Majul, 1966; Orillaneda, 2016; Sakili, 2003). However, while it gained prominence in the southern island of the archipelago,[3] its influence remained limited among the predominantly animist populations in the north (Thohir, 2015), except for Manila. Manila was under the rule of Muslim Rajas from the ruling family of Brunei before the Spanish explorers took over the city (Majul, 1966). During this period, the archipelago did not exist as a unified political entity under a single ruler or religious system (Rafael, 2018). Scholars suggest that if the Spanish had arrived later, they may have encountered a unified Muslim country (Herrera, 2015;

[3] Refer to Figure 3. The southern main island is called Mindanao.

Majul, 1966). Mindanao was one of the most challenging regions for Spanish explorers to convert to Catholicism due to the deeply rooted presence of Islam on the island. As a result, it remained largely unaffected by Spanish colonial influence at the time (Thohir, 2015).

Figure 3: Map of Indian Ocean Trade Route



Note. A map showing the participation of the Philippines, particularly the western part of the Island of Mindanao, in the Indian Ocean trade. From "India and Thailand: Soft Power Ties 1," S. Srichampa, 2015, *Journal of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts, 15,* 121-150.

In Islamic dietary law, the Arabic terms *halal* and *haram* differentiate between what is religiously permissible and forbidden. The core principle of these dietary regulations is that all food is generally considered *halal* unless it is explicitly designated as *haram* in the Qur'an or Sunnah. The classification of meat as *halal* or *haram* is primarily determined by specific religious procedures, particularly the method of slaughter, which ensures the food's spiritual cleanliness and acceptability within

Islamic teachings (Acas & Loanzon, 2020; Nayeem, 2018). Existing literature indicates that religion significantly influences consumer behaviour, particularly among Muslims. As such, the concept of *halal* plays a vital role in shaping their food consumption and purchasing decisions, guiding them to choose products that align with their religious beliefs and values (Acas & Loanzon, 2020; Alserhan, 2010). A prevalent misunderstanding among non-Muslim communities is the belief that *halal* denotes a particular cuisine or food type. The distinction lies not in the food—though swine and its products are inherently *haram*—but in how the food is processed and prepared, especially following specific slaughtering rituals or practices (Askomi et al., 2018; Ramli et al., 2023).

There is a lack of extensive research or documentation on specific food items, such as saffron (Zialcita, 2012), from Islamic countries contributing to Philippine cuisine, particularly in Mindanao. However, various food cultures and practices influenced by Islamic traditions continue to be observed within Muslim communities and across the Philippines, a point which is discussed later on this chapter.

Spanish

Europeans first sighted the Philippines on March 17, 1521, when Ferdinand Magellan and his expedition reached the central province of Cebu and named the land as “the Archipelago of San Lázaro” – the historical name for the Philippine Archipelago. After claiming the land for King Charles I of Spain, Magellan was killed by the courageous native leader Lapu-Lapu on Mactan Island in Cebu. This confrontation would later be known as the historic Battle of Mactan (Angeles, 2007; Jackson, 2020).

Figure 4: Philippines Map

Note. A map of the Philippines, showing the distance between the cities of Manila and Cebu. From "Baguio: A Mismanaged Evolutionary Narrative of the City Beautiful to the City Problematic," by I. Morley, 2018, *Asian Geographer, 35*(2), 197-215 (https://doi.org/10.1080/10225706.2018.1527236).

In the following decades, the Spanish Crown sent several expeditions to the archipelago to continue what they had started, resulting in Miguel López de Legazpi's arrival in Cebu in 1565 (Stošić et al., 2016). Initially, economic prospects appeared limited to cinnamons coming from Mindanao (Ango, 2010; Legarda, 1955; Reyes, 2017). This was until Legazpi learned of the active trade between Luzon and Chinese merchants, who were particularly interested in Spain's abundance of silver. Recognising China's high demand for silver, the Spanish aimed to engage in direct trade but were initially restricted to central islands, relying on intermediaries from Luzon. The explorers relocated from Cebu to Manila (*Maynila*) to bypass local

traders, facilitating direct commerce with China (Kueh, 2014). The Spanish and Chinese viewed this trade as mutually beneficial, prompting a significant wave of Chinese migration to the Philippines, with the settler population exceeding 20,000 by the early 17th century (Wickberg, 1962). Taking advantage of the rich Chinese resources, the Manila-Acapulco Galleon Trade was established in 1571 and connected Asia to the Americas. This trade involved the Philippines supplying Chinese goods to Spanish colonies, primarily New Spain or what is now called Mexico. Manila was the main trade hub, with Filipino labour facilitating commerce until 1815 when Spain lost control of its Mexican colony (Maquivar, 1976).

A significant portion of the food imported into the Philippines during Spanish colonial rule arrived via the Galleon Trade, and included such foods as cacao, corn, pineapple, vanilla and papaya (Fernandez, 2019; Legarda, 1955; Reyes, 2017). These food items arrived as seeds, young plants and fruit trees, which were planted and thrived in Philippine soil. Some were intentionally cultivated, while others grew naturally in the wild (Fernandez, 2019; Reyes, 2017). While historical records do not specify the exact timeline or identification of these food imports, Fernandez (2019) highlighted that many fruits and vegetables commonly found in Filipino cuisine have names of Mexican origin, similar to several Chinese Hokkien loanwords within the Filipino culinary vocabulary. Therefore, this may be suggestive of strong Mexican influences, and the presence of food items with derived Mexican names further confirms the integration of Mexican, primarily Spanish, flavours into Filipino food and culture.

Table 1: Spanish Loanwords within the Filipino Culinary Vocabulary

English Name	Mexican or Spanish Name	Filipino Name
Pineapple	Piña	Pinya
Corn	Maiz	Mais
Choko*	Chayote	Sayote
Sweet Potato	Camote	Kamote
Anatto Seeds	Achiote	Atsuete/Achuete

Note. Retrieved from "Hispanic Words of Indoamerican Origin in the Philippines," by P. Albalá, 2012, *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints, 51*(1), 6. * "choko" is the Australian and New Zealand term.

On the other hand, some Filipino dishes with names resembling Mexican counterparts show little to no direct connection upon analysis. For instance, in Mexican cuisine, *menudo* and *menudillo* refer to a soup or stew made with various animal offal, not limited to just pork or beef. In contrast, the Filipino version of menudo is a stew consisting of diced pork and liver, typically cooked with potatoes and carrots (Fernandez, 2019). However, there are also certain Hispanic desserts and sweet treats, like *flan de leche, barquillos,* and *penuche*, where Filipino versions—despite having localised names such as *leche flan* and *panucha*—have remained broadly similar to their Hispanic origins (Bernal, 1965). On top of that, new cooking methods were introduced to the native Filipinos during this era, particularly sautéing and frying (Zialcita, 2012).

American

The American occupation of the Philippines in 1898 coincided with the Spanish-American War and, as part of the Treaty of Paris, the United States acquired the Philippines from Spain for $20 million in exchange for its liberation, or so the

American Government would have liked it to appear (Orquiza, 2021). In 1899, Filipino leader Emilio Aguinaldo declared an independent Philippine Government to establish self-rule. However, neither Spain nor the United States acknowledged the government, contradicting purported attempts to help the Philippines gain liberation (Valderrama, 1970). In reality, the Americans viewed the country as a doorway through which the United States could gain more of a financial foothold in Asia. Between the treaty's signing and the Philippine-American war, the Philippines again fell under foreign control, subject to the laws and policies of another distant power (Herrera, 2015).

The United States expanded economic opportunities by promoting American business interests and securing military bases, strengthening its position in Chinese trade (Rafael, 2018). Like the Spanish, the Americans recognised the importance of trade with China. Additionally, the Philippines was integrated into the United States economy through free trade policies, benefiting agricultural landowning elites while making the country economically dependent on the United States. Filipino migration to the United States increased notably in the early 20th century, beginning in 1901 with the recruitment of Filipinos into the United States Navy. By 1903, select Filipino students— pensionados—were sent to study in the United States in exchange for future government service upon their return after the study (Constantino & Constantino, 2008; Rafael, 2018). Throughout this period, Filipinos were subjected to racial discrimination and perceptions of inferiority, both within the Philippines and abroad. American literature often highlighted stark differences between Filipino and American lifestyles, portraying Filipino customs as primitive in contrast to what was framed as America's sophisticated social norms (Isselhard, 1904; Shunk, 1914).

During the Great Depression, the United States Government facilitated the migration of Filipinos; however, this time, it was not for education but to serve as a source of exploitable labour. Following the enactment of the Immigration Act of 1965, which removed the immigration quota system, which significantly favoured Western European countries, there was a significant increase in Asian migration to the United States. Among them were Filipino professionals, who played a key role in expanding the Filipino diaspora across America (Andrei, 2010; Keely, 1971; Kennedy, 1966; Ponseca & Trinidad, 2018). This sense of American cultural superiority was particularly evident in food, influencing perceptions of what Filipinos ate and how they ate.

Unlike the Chinese and Spanish, who influenced Philippine cuisine by introducing local ingredients from their respective countries and colonies, the American impact on Filipino food culture during their colonial rule took a different form. Rather than promoting the exchange of culinary elements, the Americans often dismissed and belittled Filipino cuisine. This cultural imposition led to a deliberate shift in local dietary habits, as Filipinos were encouraged—if not pressured—to adopt American food practices and alter their eating patterns (Orquiza, 2021). Filipinos were known for their *kilawin* and/or eating fish in its fresh or raw state, as well as eating with bare hands with no cutlery, habits which were deemed appalling by the Americans, and resulted in the cuisine being seen as lowly compared to theirs (Isselhard, 1904; Ponseca & Trinidad, 2018; Shunk, 1914). This may also back up why, despite a large number of Filipino migrants in the United States, Filipino food has not made any progress on the American table (Orquiza, 2020). The Americans used food to instill their sense of superiority in Filipinos, introducing the concept of domestic science,

now known as home economics, to the Philippines through educational curriculum and the use of books, like recipe books, and media through advertisements (Fernandez, 2019; Orquiza, 2021). These resources were used to educate Filipinos on American food preparation methods, proper food safety practices, and hygiene standards. The Americans prioritised highlighting the presence of international cuisines in the Philippines—especially in Manila—including American, French, Italian, Chinese, Spanish, and Russian, to give the perception among American travellers that the country was progressing and modernising through the American regime (Orquiza, 2021).

Japanese

In 1935, the Philippine archipelago became a Commonwealth with a Filipino chief executive and a new constitution to prepare the country for complete independence within a decade (Lawrence, 1966). However, this plan was disrupted in 1941 when the Philippines became a casualty of the broader conflict following Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. At the time, the United States controlled four key Pacific territories: the Philippines, Hawaii, Guam, and Wake Island (Farber & Bailey, 2019). Following the attack, Japan successfully occupied the Philippines from 1941 to 1945. During the Japanese regime, Filipinos were subjected to severe hardships, including forced labour and the requisitioning of food and resources. The occupation, though lasting only three years, was marked by relentless military oppression and widespread violence, leaving behind significant devastation, particularly in Manila (Ara, 2022; Rafael, 2018).

During the war, Japan faced significant food shortages in the Philippines. Upon their arrival in the Philippines in 1941, the administration's food initiatives were still in the early stages, leading to a chaotic food situation. One of the most pressing issues was the rice shortage in Manila, the country's administrative centre, as it became evident that rice was considered a staple in the Filipino diet (Lem, 2023). The Japanese Military Administration introduced a rice rationing system to address the rice crisis; however, this measure was short-lived due to rice reserves being insufficient (Jose, 1998). Agricultural production suffered as the war coincided with the critical harvest season for rice and corn. Key rice-producing provinces—Pangasinan, Tarlac, Pampanga, Bulacan, Laguna, Cavite, and Rizal—became active war zones, compelling farmers to abandon their lands and flee to safer areas. Consequently, the Philippines lost a considerable proportion of its already insufficient output in rice (fell by 30%) and corn (fell by 20%) (Danquah, 1990; Jose, 1998). Moreover, the disruption of meat imports from Australia led to a severe meat shortage and rising prices. This situation resulted in the widespread slaughter of farm animals, particularly water buffaloes, which are crucial for agricultural work. While this was done partly to feed the local population, it served the needs of the Japanese troops first (Lem, 2023). The situation escalated to the point where the Japanese administration had to intervene by restricting the slaughter of animals, allowing only those no longer capable of working in the fields to be used for consumption (Jose, 1998).

To reduce dependence on rice, the administration encouraged bread consumption and urged bakers to increase production. However, this solution was also short-lived, as key ingredients like flour and baking powder had to be imported (Jose, 1998). To

address long-term food security, the Japanese administration sought to improve rice production by enhancing irrigation systems, supplying fertilisers from Japan, and introducing Horai rice, a fast-maturing variety from Taiwan, to significantly increase yields (Danquah, 1990). However, ongoing warfare and a lack of public trust and cooperation made resolving the food crisis difficult for the Japanese Military Administration. Only after the Japanese occupation ended and the United States regained control did food supplies, though rationed, become available through army provisions. By 1946, when the newly established Philippine Government took over, one of its priorities was the restoration of war-damaged agricultural lands and pursuing self-sufficiency in food production. As part of this effort, the government decided to continue the agricultural programmes initiated by the Japanese (Jose, 1998).

Given the Philippines' extensive history of colonisation—from Spanish rule to Japanese occupation—it is inevitable that food became a tool for asserting colonial dominance. Veracini (2022) highlighted that the core of the relations between colonial settlers and Indigenous people lies in the struggle over land and power, noting that colonial settlers often seize land to prioritise support for the food necessities of the settlers. For colonial settlers, these food practices are deliberately shaped to reinforce their control and presence. Moreover, Grey and Newman (2018) also introduced the concept of culinary colonialism, which describes how Indigenous cuisines are not exchanged in mutual cultural appreciation with settler cuisines, but instead commodified and reshaped to cater to settler preferences and, therefore, erase historical injustices and prolong Indigenous marginalisation. While Filipino food was also considered marginalised during the Spanish and Japanese era, this was

mostly evident during the American regime wherein American foodways became mandatorily part of the education system and publications by American authors ridiculing native Filipino food culture were prevalent (Isselhard, 1904; Shunk, 1914).

After gaining independence from the Japanese and American soldiers and with the official formation of the current Philippine Government, the Philippines became a complex hybrid entity—officially a sovereign nation but still heavily influenced by the United States (Constantino & Constantino, 2008). Despite political and cultural shifts, the country remains closely linked to American geopolitical interests, reflecting its colonial past while striving for distinct national development (Rafael, 2018). Herrera (2015) also recognised the Filipino struggle to shape a clear national identity and food identity in terms of Filipino culture, tradition and food following the lasting impacts of Chinese, Arab, Spanish, American and Japanese influences.

Food Identity in Contemporary Philippines

The influences described in the previous section have shaped Filipino food culture in different ways. Carmelea See (2011) described the Filipino adaptation of global cuisines as indigenisation or transculturation, where foreign dishes are transformed to reflect Filipino tastes and identity (Fernandez, 2019). As an archipelago, Filipino food has always been regionally diverse, primarily due to varying local resources, which explains the regional variations of dishes, such as the 101 variations of a noodle dish (Mercado & Andalecio, 2020). On the other hand, Ponseca and Trinidad (2018) argued that, by adopting multicultural influences, Filipinos may have lost the essence of their food, potentially making it feel inferior compared to foreign cuisines.

Chinese

Amidst the colonisers, China stands out as a nation that has exerted and continues to exert substantial influence on the ancient and modern Philippines despite never formally colonising the country. As noted earlier, Chinese contributions to Philippine cuisine date back several centuries, making them so deeply embedded in the culture that they are often unnoticed (Liwanag & Alejandro, 2019). Chinese-origin ingredients such as soy sauce, tofu, and noodles have become staples in Filipino cooking, while Chinese-inspired dishes have gained cultural prominence (Lantrip, 2017). For example, the Chinese influenced Filipino dish pansit holds a meaningful place in Filipino culture, particularly during birthdays and special occasions, due to its symbolic association with long life, prosperity, and community (Ponseca & Trinidad, 2018). This belief, rooted in centuries-old tradition, continues to be passed down through generations both in the Philippines and among Filipino communities abroad (Johnson-Kozlow et al., 2011; Narciso, 2005). During the Spanish colonial era, the dish was only considered to be a simple takeaway food but it has since become central to marking life milestones in Filipino society (Fernandez, 2019). In contrast, other Chinese-influenced dishes like *siomai* and *siopao* were integrated into Filipino food culture as everyday fare—commonly consumed during afternoon snack and not typically featured in feasts and special occasions—reflecting their social positioning as casual, accessible foods in both Chinese and Filipino contexts (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Fernandez, 2003; Lantrip, 2017).

Arab

Mindanao, the southern Island of the Philippines, is inhabited by various Muslim ethnolinguistic groups, with the Maranao and Maguindanao tribes being the most

populous (Stark, 2003). The Maranao predominantly reside in Lanao Province, while the Maguindanao are mainly located in Cotabato Province (Saber, 1963). The Maranao language includes several Arabic loanwords, particularly culinary terms, reflecting influences similar to those from Chinese and Spanish. Examples of such loanwords include *alak/araq*, derived from the Arabic *a'raq*, meaning "wine," and *nanas*, from the Arabic *ananas*, meaning "pineapple" (Sohayle & Reem Adib, 2021).

In the Philippines, Islam is the second largest religion, being practiced by 6.4% of the population, following Catholicism, which accounts for 74.4% (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2023). The majority of the Muslim population is concentrated in Mindanao, with a smaller percentage residing in Metro Manila. This demographic distribution has historically contributed to the lack of national focus on *halal* food production, leading to ongoing challenges for Muslim communities in accessing appropriate food options. Nonetheless, recent efforts by both regional and national government bodies have aimed to address these issues by promoting the development and certification of *halal* food in the country. Despite these initiatives, the *halal* food industry—particularly outside Mindanao—remains in a developmental stage (Acas & Loanzon, 2020). Academic research has begun to address the lack of representation and awareness surrounding the significance of the *halal* industry's expansion in the country. For example, Tallara (2023) examined how food—particularly *halal* offerings—served as a bridge between two major religious groups in Quiapo, Manila. As a common religious centre for both Muslims and Catholics in Metro Manila, Quiapo demonstrates that food can serve as a meaningful medium for fostering mutual understanding and coexistence between the two distinct religions.

Spanish

Spanish food, when absorbed into Filipino culture, gained a high social status and became associated with festive occasions like Christmas and family reunions. A dish like *cocido*, which is considered an everyday meal in Spain, became luxurious and special in the Philippines due to the rarity and cost of its ingredients, such as ham and sausages (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Fernandez, 2003). This transformation reflects the influence of colonial power, where Spanish food came to symbolise wealth, class, and urban sophistication, standing in stark contrast to the simpler native diet of fish and vegetables (Reyes, 2017). Catholicism introduced religious dietary practices in the Philippines, enforcing fasting, abstinence, and feasting based on the church calendar. During fasting periods like Lent, meat, dairy, and fowl were prohibited, encouraging a humble, Christ-like diet of vegetables, fish, and seafood (Sta. Maria, 2021a, 2021b). Interestingly, this aligned with the native Filipinos' traditional diet, which already centred around plain rice and fish. Meat remained a rare and special food due to its cost and association with feasting. Fiestas and festivals in the Philippines are typically religious and cultural events held in honour of patron saints, such as the Feast of the Black Nazarene (Wendt, 1998). These celebrations, which originated during the Spanish colonial period, blend Catholic practices with native traditions, resulting in lively communal gatherings that emphasise shared meals and hospitality. As part of the festivities, families often serve grand feasts that include dishes like *lechon* (spit-roasted pig) and various rice-based treats—foods that represent prosperity and the spirit of giving (Fernandez & Alegre, 1988; Fernandez, 2019). Additionally, Kato (2022) suggested that Christianity may contribute to the significance of meal sharing and commensality in Filipino food

identity, drawing a connection to the symbolic importance of the Last Supper, where Jesus dined with his disciples.

American

Although it is commonly stated that Americans influenced Filipino cuisine by introducing fast food, canned goods, hamburgers, and hotdogs, historical evidence suggests that their impact went beyond simply bringing in their food culture and supplementing local food traditions. The American colonial agenda promoted the idea that Filipino food and foodways were inferior, fostering a colonial mentality that continues to influence Filipino preferences today (Orquiza, 2021). This mindset helps explain why many Filipinos tend to favour imported products over locally sourced alternatives, as Western dishes are often perceived as either healthier or more refined. It also sheds light on why returning Filipino migrants often bring back items like canned Spam and sausages during their home visits, despite the availability of indigenised Spanish cured meats such as *longganisa* (Andrei, 2010; Hof, 2018; Obsioma et al., 2020). Furthermore, although Filipinos are one of the significant immigrant groups in the United States, their culinary contributions are often overlooked or underappreciated in mainstream American food culture (Commission on Filipino Overseas, 2022; Orquiza, 2020). This stands in stark contrast to the Philippines, where American food influences, such as fast food, fried chicken and burgers (Ponseca & Trinidad, 2018), are not only embraced but celebrated, as seen in the global success of Filipino fast-food chains like Jollibee (Matejowsky, 2020).

Japanese

Despite the Philippines being under Japanese rule during World War II, Japanese influence on Filipino culture remains minimal. One key reason is that the Japanese did not intend to spread their culture in the Philippines; instead, their primary focus was trade and investment, particularly in rice agriculture (Yu-Jose, 2001). Additionally, Japanese immigration to the Philippines was limited, and unlike the Spanish or Chinese, Japanese settlers showed little interest in intermarriage with Filipinos. Instead, this period was marked by widespread abuses, particularly against young women, known as comfort women (Rafael, 2018). Furthermore, Japan's colonial rule over the Philippines was relatively brief compared to Spanish and American occupations, leaving little time for deep cultural integration (Yu-Jose, 2001). Therefore, the presence of Japanese influences in Filipino cuisine today is primarily attributed to globalisation rather than historical ties to Japanese imperialism.

Conclusion

Despite the rich food influence brought by the history of colonialism and multicultural migrations, the unique relationship between Filipinos and food has remained true to its pre-colonial identity. Filipino food reflects the Filipino value of deeply connecting to the environment, fellow human beings, and the world. Rooted in simplicity and a respect for nature, Filipino food is seen as a gift from nature, emphasising sustainability and adaptability (Fernandez & Alegre, 1988; Florendo, 2019). Furthermore, it symbolises the Filipino value of humility and hospitality through communal practices, like *sawsawan* (dipping sauces), highlighting participatory and democratic social dynamics (Florendo, 2019; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Fernandez,

2003). The chef and the diner are equals; eating is a collaborative act of creation where both take part. At the same time, incorporating foreign influences into Filipino cuisine demonstrates the culture's ability to adapt without losing its identity (See, 2011). A prime example of this is the Filipino dish *adobo*, which was previously mentioned as the main focus of this research. *Adobo* is widely considered as the unofficial national dish, embodying Chinese and Spanish influences while still remaining distinctly Filipino (Estrella, 2022; Fernandez & Alegre, 1988; Rampe, 2023).

Colonialism, oppression, and a sense of inferiority have unfortunately become part of the Filipino identity. However, these historical experiences have also shaped Filipinos into resilient, resourceful, and courageous people. The nation's long history of colonisation has contributed to the richness and diversity of its culture and cuisine. While colonisation may have obscured an untouched, pre-colonial Filipino identity, it is not too late to rediscover it. The evolving contemporary Filipino food scene, led by pioneering restaurants that celebrate Indigenous culinary traditions, offers a promising pathway toward reconnecting with the essence of Filipino cuisine in its most authentic form.

Chapter 3: Research Frameworks and Methodology

Research Approach

Qualitative research is an approach that focuses on gaining a deep understanding of human behaviour, values, and beliefs within the specific contexts in which they occur (Azungah, 2018). It plays a vital role in examining underexplored phenomena by facilitating a thorough analysis of complex issues and amplifying voices and perspectives that are often excluded from mainstream discourse. Furthermore, uncovering rich, contextual insights helps researchers gain a deeper understanding of problems or experiences that require nuanced interpretation (Liamputtong, 2020). Researchers reflect on their own biases (self-reflexivity), situate findings within specific settings (context), and provide rich, detailed accounts (thick description) to uncover deeper meanings and social insights (Tracy, 2019).

As previously stated in Chapter 1, this study explores Filipino food's identity and characteristics through Filipino *adobo*. Therefore, qualitative research is the ideal research approach since food and identity are complex social phenomena. Furthermore, in this study, I have adopted a relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology within a post-colonial theoretical paradigm.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

A research framework ensures coherence, consistency, and rigour throughout a study, particularly in qualitative research, where meaning and subjectivity are central (Luft et al., 2022). This chapter introduces the foundational elements of research—ontology, epistemology, and paradigm—which are deeply interconnected and shape

the researcher’s theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods (Crotty, 1998). Ontology concerns the nature of reality, epistemology addresses how knowledge is constructed and understood, and the research paradigm reflects the overarching worldview that guides the inquiry (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

In presenting the theoretical framework and the theories identified as most relevant to addressing the research questions, the following sections also introduce the conceptual framework, which reflects the researcher's integrated understanding and synthesis of these theories that concern the specific questions the study seeks to answer. This framework establishes the philosophical and analytical foundation that supports a coherent and meaningful research inquiry.

Ontology and Epistemology: Theoretical Framework

Ontology concerns the study of being and addresses the fundamental question of what constitutes reality (Crotty, 1998). It involves a broad spectrum between two opposing positions: realism and relativism. Realism posits that a single, consistent reality exists independently of human perception (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Though it may not be universally experienced, its meaning is already present for humans to uncover. In contrast, relativism asserts that multiple realities exist, each shaped by individual or group experiences; these realities are localised, specific, and dependent on those who construct them (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Unlike realism, relativism views reality as constructed rather than discovered, with meanings created through human interaction rather than pre-existing independently (Scotland, 2012).

Epistemology refers to the study of the nature of knowledge, and addresses questions such as how is knowledge created, acquired, and communicated (Cohen et al., 2002). It also explores the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In essence, epistemology examines how individuals receive, process, and interpret knowledge and meaning. Clarifying one's ontological stance is crucial for establishing one's epistemological position, as the understanding of knowledge is deeply influenced by perceptions of reality. In the context of this study, an example is constructivist epistemology, which asserts the existence of multiple realities and maintains that knowledge is constructed differently by individuals based on their unique perspectives and social experiences. Constructivist epistemology recognises that reality is shaped through human interaction, culture, history, and social position, meaning that reality is continuously co-constructed through various interconnected influences (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013).

Ontology and Epistemology: Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature review, it is established that food and identity are not objective realities but are instead subjective and dynamic concepts. Food and its identity continually change and are shaped by a range of internal and external influences. Recognising this, I have adopted a relativist ontology, acknowledging that there is no singular, unified interpretation of Filipino cuisine among Filipinos, as individual perceptions may differ due to variations in personal experiences, environments, symbolic interactions, cultural practices, traditions, historical contexts, religion and other factors. Moreover, the meanings and symbolic values attributed to food have developed over centuries of human interaction, evolving from a basic

biological and psychological necessity into a significant aspect of personal, social, and national identity.

Consequently, it is also understood from the literature review that food and identity are socially constructed phenomena that continue to evolve, allowing individuals to create authentic narratives and form meaningful connections with food. Furthermore, different societies assign meaning to specific food, develop rituals and norms around eating, and create identities tied to cuisine. For example, perceptions of what is edible or taboo differ across cultural and religious contexts, while national and ethnic cuisines frequently function as markers of heritage and collective identity. Thus, food is not merely a material necessity but also a site where social values, power dynamics, and cultural identities are negotiated and expressed. Therefore, I aligned with a constructivist epistemological approach, acknowledging that the identity of Filipino food is constructed through a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and political influences that shape how Filipinos define, experience, and represent their cuisine. The construction of Filipino food identity also varies regionally, as the Philippines is an archipelago populated by diverse ethnic groups whose culinary practices reflect local environments, cultures, traditions and religion.

Research Paradigm – Theoretical Framework

A paradigm, as defined by Guba and Lincoln (1994), is a fundamental worldview or system of beliefs that guides the researcher's approach to inquiry. It encompasses core assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge which, although not empirically provable, shape how researchers understand the world and conduct their investigations (Lincoln, 1985). It integrates assumptions about reality (ontology),

knowledge (epistemology), and the appropriate methods for investigation (methodology) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). According to Chalmers (2005), a paradigm also includes the shared theoretical assumptions, principles, and methods a scientific community accepts. In qualitative research, it is widely recognised that four main paradigms—positivism, post positivism, critical theory, and constructivism—serve as the foundational frameworks guiding different approaches to inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Pernecky, 2016).

Within the context of this research, post-colonial theory critiques the lasting impacts of colonialism on culture, identity, and knowledge systems (Epstein, 2014). The theory is grounded ontologically in recognising multiple, fluid, and relational realities constituted through historical and ongoing power structures. At the same time, epistemologically, it privileges marginalised and supposedly inferior knowledges, offering a critical interrogation of dominant Western epistemic frameworks (Loshkariov, 2022; Said, 2014), which is particularly valuable in research that seeks to centre marginalised voices and deconstruct dominant narratives, such as exploring Filipino culinary identity in a historically colonised context.

However, post-colonial theory has also drawn criticism for potentially intertwining political activism with scholarly research, which some argue compromises conventional standards of scientific objectivity and introduces potential biases in the research process (Felsch, 2023). Nonetheless, its benefits outweigh these criticisms, rendering it the most appropriate paradigm for this study. Therefore, this study is positioned within the framework of post-colonial theory.

Research Paradigm – Conceptual Framework

The literature review revealed a long history of power imbalance between the native Filipinos and the nations that have tried to control the country through commerce, religion and force. Situated within post-colonial theory (Epstein, 2014), this analysis explored how histories of multicultural migration and colonialism have influenced Filipino food, particularly *adobo*, in terms of its ingredients, cooking methods, and meanings. While *adobo*'s roots lie in colonial influence, it has become a symbol of Filipino identity and resistance, continuously evolving to represent national pride, resilience, and cultural reclamation. This framework allowed the study to explore how the dish reflects Filipino historical experience, redefined and reinterpreted by contemporary Filipinos in a post-colonial context. It also examined how the Filipino version of *adobo* can be privileged or marginalised in global discourses about authenticity and cultural identity.

Furthermore, this study also recognised that power influences social constructs and, therefore, it aimed to question the formation and existence of this dynamic within Filipino food identity. The research critically examined how Filipino cuisine, particularly *adobo*, was represented and how social, cultural, and political forces shaped such representations, locally and internationally.

Methodology and Methods

This section outlines the methodological framework and research method employed in this study. It details the research design, including data collection techniques and analytical procedures. Together, these elements provide a coherent and transparent foundation for understanding how the study was conducted.

This study used secondary data to explore the concept of “food identity” within Filipino cuisine by looking into its defining characteristics and meaning within the Filipino community and how it has been heavily shaped by the Philippines’ long history of migration and colonisation. The data analysis focused on examining various interpretations of Filipino *adobo*—widely regarded as the unofficial national dish—within both local and overseas Filipino communities in the contemporary era. By doing so, the study aimed to discover Filipino cuisine’s evident and underlying characteristics by analysing the dish.

Methodology

Qualitative meta-synthesis is an interpretive method of investigation that integrates findings from multiple qualitative studies to produce a more comprehensive and conceptually robust understanding of a phenomenon than a single study could offer. Its key objectives include theory building, theory explication, and theory development, enabling researchers to gain a holistic view of complex phenomena (Chrastina, 2018; Jensen & Allen, 1996). Unlike simple summaries, meta-synthesis involves reconceptualising and interpreting findings to generate new insights. Despite its growing recognition and value, methodological debates remain regarding study selection, inclusion criteria, quality assessment, synthesis techniques, and reporting standards. Therefore, this labour-intensive process requires methodological expertise and deep familiarity with the research topic (Mohammed et al., 2016).

Application of Methodology: Meta-Synthesis Model

Secondary data, particularly “grey sources” have become increasingly commonly used for the meta-synthesis model across various research fields, such as public health. Incorporating grey literature into evidence syntheses has reduced publication bias by including studies that may not be published in academic journals, such as those with negative or inconclusive results. This creates a more balanced and complete picture in systematic reviews by ensuring all relevant findings are considered (Adams et al., 2016; Hopewell et al., 2007). Adams et al. (2016) further categorised “grey sources” into three types: grey literature (unpublished documents), grey data (user-generated online content), and grey information (informal or personal records). Compared to traditional scholarly reviewed literature, using grey sources poses greater challenges due to the vast and varied range of materials available online. As a result, establishing clear and systematic search criteria is essential to ensure the validity and reliability of the collected data.

This study used “grey data”, particularly online food blog content, focusing on Filipino *adobo* recipes. Comparable uses of qualitative meta-synthesis on online and grey data can be seen in Kammes et al. (2022), which analysed social media contents shared by mothers of children with Down syndrome as qualitative material. As part of the data collection process, blog content was sourced using FeedSpot.com, a content aggregator that ranks blogs based on relevance, popularity, and social media engagement. Given that this is a research dissertation, the sample size was intentionally kept small, comprising 10 blog recipes—5 from domestic sources and 5 from overseas. Dividing the data into two sets enabled the researcher to explore potential underlying similarities and differences in how *adobo* is perceived within the

Filipino food community, particularly in relation to migration. The initial data set was selected from FeedSpot's (2025) list of the "50 Best Filipino Food Blogs and Websites." To ensure cultural authenticity, the researcher specifically focused on recipes authored by Filipino bloggers, as FeedSpot's curated list highlights food blogs dedicated to Filipino cuisine created by Filipino content creators.

Figure 5 shows the process of collecting the primary data set. From 50 blogs, the list was narrowed to the selection of blogs based in the Philippines. Next, blog sites containing posts related explicitly to Filipino *adobo* were identified. Five of approximately 10 qualifying blogs were selected based on the highest combined social media following, indicating broader audience engagement. For each of these five blog sites, the *adobo* recipe post with the highest level of engagement—measured by available metrics such as likes, views, or comments—was identified and selected for analysis. This process yielded a final sample of five blog entries, which comprised this study's first thematic analysis dataset.

Figure 5: Framework for Primary Data Set Collection

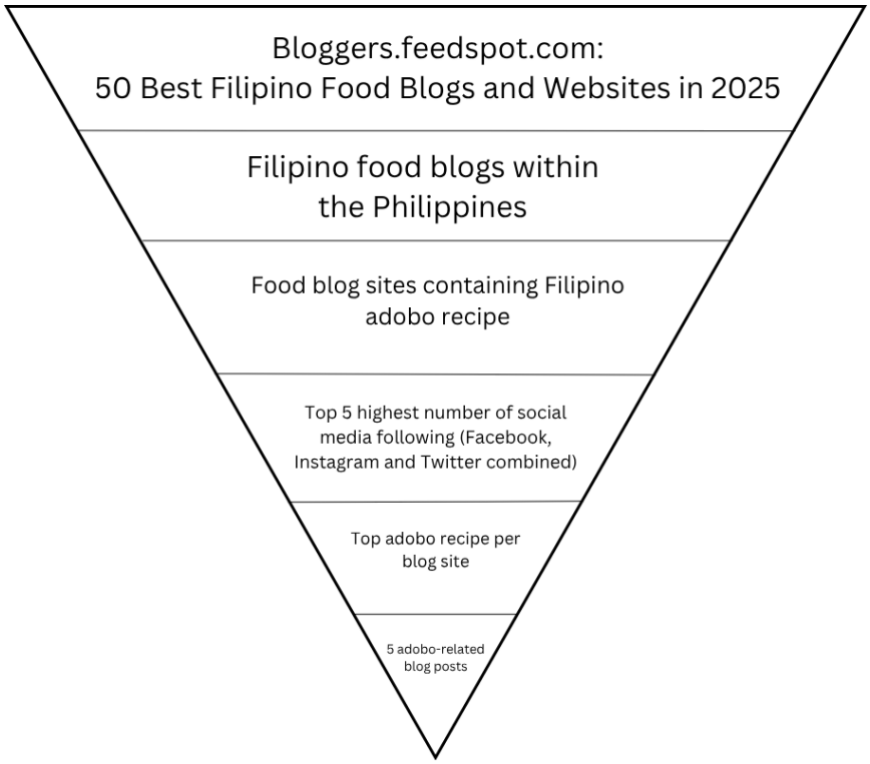
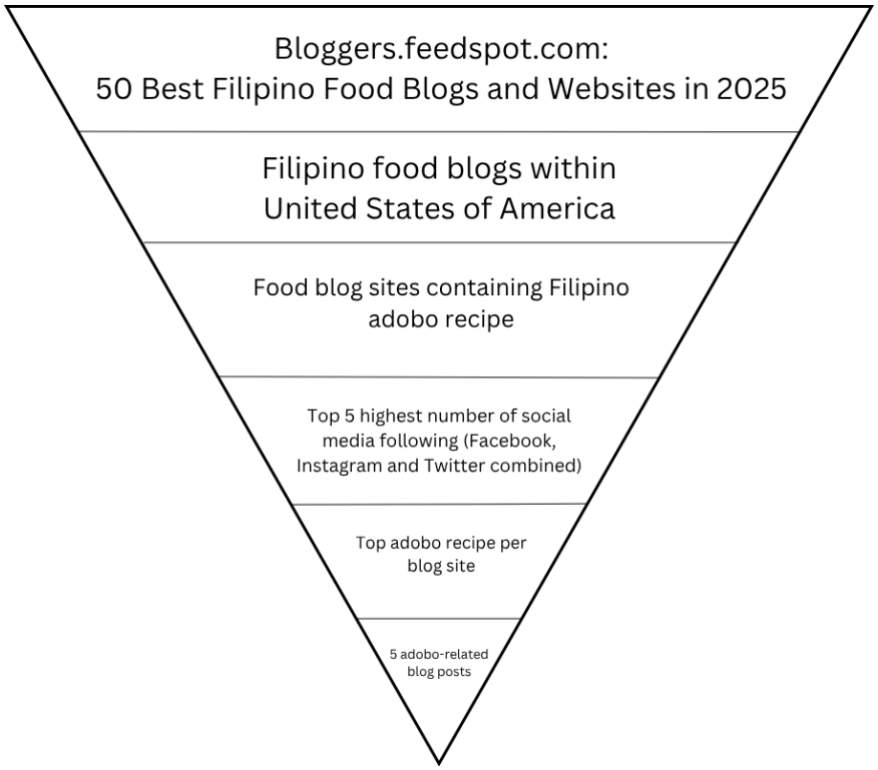


Figure 6 shows a similar process to collect the second data set, focusing on Filipino food blogs based outside the Philippines, specifically in the United States. The initial list of 50 blogs was refined to include only blogs authored by individuals of Filipino descent residing in the United States, whether by birth or emigration. This focus is supported by data from the CFO, which reports that the United States has been the leading destination for Filipino emigrants for over four decades, accounting for 59.81% of all Filipino emigration as of 2022 (Commission on Filipino Overseas, 2022). The *adobo* recipe post with the highest engagement from the five most-followed qualifying blogs was selected, resulting in the final sample for the second dataset used in this study.

Figure 6: Framework for Secondary Data Set Collection



Method: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a flexible method used in qualitative research to identify and interpret patterns of meaning in data. It involves coding relevant data segments and developing themes to capture key ideas, allowing researchers to identify both semantic (surface-level) and latent (underlying) meaning within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Unlike other methods, thematic analysis is not limited to any particular paradigm. It is flexible and adaptable across epistemologies and research questions, and can be applied in both inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) qualitative research approaches (Burnard et al., 2008; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Thomas, 2006). Although there are concerns regarding data validity and reliability, Thematic analysis emphasises a rigorous and reflective approach in which the researcher's active engagement and systematic processes contribute to the depth

and reliability of the analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Holloway & Todres, 2003). In particular, reflexive thematic analysis involves the researcher critically reflecting on their values, beliefs, assumptions, and perspectives throughout the research process. It emphasises an awareness of how these personal factors shape, limit, or influence what is explored and how knowledge is constructed, recognising that the researcher's subjectivity inevitably impacts the outcomes of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Such structured methods help ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the study's findings (Nowell et al., 2017).

Thematic analysis is a valuable method for synthesising qualitative data within a meta-synthesis framework, as it enables the identification and interpretation of recurring patterns or themes across multiple studies. Reflexive thematic analysis, in particular, allows researchers to integrate diverse findings and incorporate reflexive insights, contributing to a more cohesive and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Chrastina, 2018; King, 2004; Mohammed et al., 2016). By systematically coding and analysing data, thematic analysis helps uncover underlying meanings and relationships, enhancing the depth and richness of the synthesis. This method's flexibility and adaptability make it well-suited for exploring complex social phenomena and informing practice and policy decisions.

Application of Method: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

As a Filipino and a chef, I understand food as a meaningful expression of Filipino cultural values such as hospitality and adaptability, characterised by flexibility and fluidity, often resisting rigid definitions and prompting ongoing debates around

authenticity. Rather than seeing these debates as limitations, I view them as opportunities to explore the dynamic nature of the cuisine. This perspective highlights the importance of engaging critically with Filipino food to deepen my culinary knowledge and enrich my understanding of cultural identity and its evolving expression through food. Acknowledging my personal experience and perception as the researcher, this study employed a reflexive thematic analysis to examine secondary data related to Filipino culinary identity, explicitly focusing on Filipino *adobo*.

The analysis follows an inductive approach, allowing patterns and themes to emerge organically from the data rather than being shaped by predefined categories or theoretical frameworks (Burnard et al., 2008; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Thomas, 2006). This approach aligns with the study's relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology, which recognise that knowledge and meaning are socially constructed and context dependent. By analysing the data through a thematic lens, the research aimed to interpret and analyse common characteristic themes and patterns and test whether Filipino *adobo*, despite its multicultural composition, embodies a broader understanding of Filipino cuisine and identity. The flexibility of thematic analysis also supports the integration of post-colonial perspectives that may surface from the narratives embedded in the data.

Table 2: Six-phase Analysis for Thematic Analysis

Phase	Process	Description
1	Familiarisation with the data	Reading, understanding and being familiar with the data collected.
2	Generating initial codes	The identification and collection of reliable data, along with analysis of its relevance to the research question, are

		foundational steps. The assignment of initial codes is key to recognising emerging patterns.
3	Searching for themes	Reviewing the initial codes to identify how they can be grouped and integrated into broader, overarching themes.
4	Reviewing themes	Review each theme to ensure that the coded data within it forms a coherent and meaningful pattern.
5	Defining and naming themes	Refining and clarifying the developed themes.
6	Writing a report	Writing a coherent narrative of refined themes with supporting evidence related to the research and existing literature.

Note. Retrieved from “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology” by V. Braun, and V. Clarke, 2006, *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.

This study followed the six-phase analysis formulated by Braun and Clarke (2006) which included the processes of: familiarisation, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and writing a report. The phases, together with corresponding descriptions, are shown in Table 2.

Chapter 4: Overview of Findings

This chapter outlines the key findings of the research. To ensure clarity and the development of a comprehensive analysis, eight sub-themes were first identified through data coding, and these were subsequently organised into three broader, overarching themes.

Table 3. Themes and Sub-themes

Major Themes	Sub-themes
Tangible Characteristics of *Adobo*	a. Flavour Profile b. Fundamental and Non-fundamental Ingredients c. Different Cooking Methods
Authenticity in Variety	a. Regionality b. Personal Preference c. Authenticity vs Adaptability
Evolution of *Adobo* as a Symbol	a. *Adobo* Before and During Spanish Colonisation b. *Adobo* in the Contemporary Era

These themes and sub-themes were derived from the two data sets discussed in the previous chapter. To provide context for the analysis, an overview of the 10 research participants is included in the next section, followed by a summary of the main findings.

Introduction of the Participants

Table 4. Filipino Food Blog Sites in the Philippines

Name or Organisation	Blog Name	Website link	Content type	No. of followers*	Location
Summit Publishing Company	Yummy.ph!	yummy.ph	Online food magazine	5.10M	Metro Manila, Philippines

Joseph	Panlasang Pinoy Recipes	panlasangpinoyrecipes.com	Personal blog	1.30M	San Francisco, Quezon, Philippines
Noemi Lardizabal-Dado	Pinoy Food Blog	pinoyfoodblog.com	Personal blog	950K	Metro Manila, Philippines
Pepper.ph	Pepper.ph	pepper.ph	Online food content	800K	Metro Manila, Philippines
Ed Joven	Filipino Recipes Portal	pinoyrecipe.net	Personal blog	220K	Philippines

Note. *Approximate number of combined Facebook, Instagram and Twitter followers.

Table 4 shows the list of the top five Filipino food blog sites in the Philippines for the first 6 months of 2025 based on overall social media following. For domestic websites, two out of the five websites—**Yummy.ph** and **Pepper.ph**—are Philippine-based online food magazines. They feature a range of food-related content, including recipes, current culinary trends, product and market updates, and restaurant reviews within the Philippines. While they focus on local food culture, their content also highlights global cuisines, often incorporating local ingredients to reflect Filipino tastes. In contrast, **Panlasang Pinoy Recipes**, **Pinoy Food Blog**, and **Filipino Recipes Portal** are personal blog sites that offer similar food-related content, though with the exception of product and market updates. These blogs typically present what they describe as authentic Filipino recipes or international dishes adapted with local ingredients to suit the Filipino palate.

Table 5. Filipino Food Blog Sites in America

Name	Blog Name	Website link	Content Type	No. of followers*	Location
Lalaine Manalo	Kawaling Pinoy	kawalingpinoy.com	Personal Blog	3.60M	California, USA

Cecilia	Casa Baluarte Filipino Recipes	casabaluartefilipinorecipes.com	Personal blog	860K	Texas, USA
Vanjo Merano	Panlasang Pinoy	panlasangpinoy.com	Personal blog	690K	Chicago, USA
Malou Nievera	Skip to Malou	skiptomalou.net	Personal blog	6.9K	California, USA
Jocelyn	Joz Mahal	jozmahal.com	Personal Blog	1.5K	USA

Note. *Approximate number of combined Facebook, Instagram and Twitter followers

Table 5 presents the top five Filipino food blog sites in the United States for 2025, ranked according to their total social media following. All five are classified as personal blogs, primarily showcasing Filipino cuisine. **Casa Baluarte Filipino Recipes** focuses exclusively on Filipino dishes, preserving traditional cooking methods. **Kawaling Pinoy** and **Panlasang Pinoy** offer a broader range of content, featuring both Filipino and Asian recipes prepared using both traditional and contemporary techniques. In contrast, **Skip to Malou** and **Joz Mahal** take a more innovative approach to Filipino cooking. **Skip to Malou**, authored by a Filipino immigrant in the United States with exposure to food media from both the Philippines and America, reimagines traditional Filipino dishes through modern culinary techniques, aiming to elevate Filipino cuisine for a global audience. **Joz Mahal**, while primarily centred on Filipino recipes, incorporates Asian fusion and emphasises quick, easy, and health-conscious meals using natural and organic ingredients available in the United States. Her mission is to introduce Filipino cuisine to every household, one recipe at a time.

Research Findings

The description of *adobo* may vary depending on several factors. Nevertheless, based on the blog recipes analysed, an overarching description can be summarised as follows:

> Filipino *adobo*, as opposed to the Spanish, Mexican or Latin *adobo*—traditionally marinated with a combination of spices—is widely regarded as a cooking method for preservation, as well as a quintessential everyday dish that is generally prepared by braising meat or vegetables in a mixture of vinegar, garlic, bay leaves, and either salt or soy sauce, with additional ingredients occasionally incorporated to enhance its flavour.

Tangible Characteristics of *Adobo*

The first central theme focuses on the tangible elements of the Filipino dish *adobo*. This theme is supported by three sub-themes: fundamental and non-fundamental ingredients, the differences in cooking methods, and flavour profiles. This presentation of findings refers to the participants using their blog names for clarity and easier readability.

a. Flavour Profile

This section explores the participants' similar and differing views on *adobo*'s flavour profile as expressed in their blog posts. A table is included to show the particular flavour qualities each participant mentioned in their *adobo* recipes.

Table 6. *Adobo* Flavour Profile

Blog Name	Location	Flavour Profile
Yummy.ph	Philippines	salty and sour; savoury and sour
Panlasang Pinoy Recipes	Philippines	salty, sour and a little bit sweet

Pinoy Food Blog	Philippines	a bit sour (due to the absence of soy sauce)
Pepper.ph	Philippines	umami and tangy
Filipino Recipes Portal	Philippines	-
Kawaling Pinoy	United States	salty and savoury; can be slightly tangy and/or a bit sweet
Panlasang Pinoy	United States	umami and garlicky
Skip to Malou	United States	-
Casa Baluarte Filipino Recipes	United States	slightly spicy
Joz Mahal	United States	sweet, savoury, tangy and umami

The data indicate that *adobo* is frequently characterised by its salty, sour, tangy, and savoury flavour profile. Due to its rich and umami-forward taste, all recipes consistently recommend serving it with white rice. Notably, several bloggers also suggest repurposing leftover *adobo* into fried rice, reflecting a broader observation that the dish develops deeper, more complex flavours over time, thereby enhancing its appeal as a leftover meal.

> *"It's a great make-ahead dish that tastes better after a day or two when the flavours have melded. … Leftovers can also be turned into delicious fried rice. Shred cooked meat and toss with day-old steamed rice in a hot pan along with a few tablespoons of the sauce."* (**Kawaling Pinoy**)

Somewhat similar to the quote above, **Skip to Malou**'s *adobo* recipe does not wait for a day-old rice to turn its *adobo* into a fried rice.

> *"Put cooked jasmine rice on the same pan where you cooked the adobo… (remember the pan with the adobo sauce you saved earlier). Remove excess sauce as it may make the rice too mushy. Add toasted garlic."*

b. Fundamental and Non-fundamental Ingredients

In reviewing different *adobo* recipes, common ingredients were evidently considered as key ingredients. Nine out of 10 participants stated key ingredients include vinegar, soy sauce and garlic, while a number of recipes commonly include bay leaf and peppercorn in the list. However, **Panlasang Pinoy Recipes** pointed out that:

> "*With adobo, other than the fundamental ingredients, we're not limited to using a strict set of ingredients. The meat for adobo is typically chicken or pork, but the ingredients like beef, seafood and even vegetables and but can also be cooked via the process of adobo."*

This is further supported by **Yummy.ph's** *adobo* recipe called *adobong pusit* in which squid is the main ingredient of the recipe. Furthermore, additional non-fundamental ingredients were seen across both domestic and overseas recipe. For better understanding, Table 7 is provided to show the additional ingredients indicated in each blog recipe.

Table 7. Non-Fundamental Ingredients

Blog Name	Location	Additional Ingredients:
Yummy.ph	Philippines	onion
Panlasang Pinoy Recipes	Philippines	onion, pineapple juice and sliced pineapple
Pepper.ph	Philippines	brown sugar
Filipino Recipes Portal	Philippines	onion, ginger, red chili and scallion
Kawaling Pinoy	United States	onion
Panlasang pinoy	United States	sugar
Skip to Malou	United States	cornstarch, flour, yoghurt, sugar and chives
Casa Baluarte Filipino Recipes	United States	onion, brown sugar and oyster sauce
Joz Mahal	United States	coconut aminos, fish sauce and jalapeño

Joz Mahal used coconut aminos as a gluten-free substitute for soy sauce while **Pinoy Food Blog** is the only recipe completely omitting soy sauce or any type of

gluten-free soy ingredient as part of her recipe. Instead, she completely relied on salt to achieve the salty flavour of *adobo*, resulting in a lighter colour of *adobo* or so-called white *adobo*. Moreover, although not included in the list, a couple of blog posts mentioned additional ingredients commonly used in cooking *adobo*. **Kawaling Pinoy** mentioned:

> *"Potatoes and hard-boiled eggs are a delicious way to extend servings."*

In addition, **Pinoy Food Blog** also mentioned:

> *"My two favourite recipes are the white adobo, and the adobo cooked in coconut milk."*

These two statements were further supported by **Filipino Recipes Portal**, which stated:

> "*There are many different versions of adobo, some add potatoes, some recipes have sauce, others are dry, and others add coconut milk."*

Hence, determining the essential and non-essential ingredients of *adobo* contributes to its diverse manifestations within Filipino cuisine—an aspect that is examined in greater depth in the subsequent thematic discussions.

c. Difference in Cooking Methods

After reviewing 10 recipes, a few shared cooking methods stood out—either through the very definition of *adobo* or how the dish was differently prepared in each recipe to elevate the classic method. Three out of 10 posts started by defining *adobo* as a

cooking process or technique in which a certain type of meat or seafood is stewed or braised in vinegar and soy sauce. These posts belong to **Pepper.ph, Kawaling Pinoy and Panlasang Pinoy**. Notably, while the cooking processes began in three distinct ways, eight out of 10 recipes concluded similarly with stewing or braising. Meanwhile, the remaining two finished by deep-frying the meat. To illustrate this clearly, Table 8 shows each blog recipe's starting and ending methods.

Table 8. Cooking Methods

Blog Name	Location	Cooking Method Sequence
Yummy.ph	Philippines	sauté – braise
Panlasang Pinoy Recipes	Philippines	marinate – sauté – braise
Pinoy Food Blog	Philippines	stew/braise
Pepper.ph	Philippines	sauté – braise – deep fry
Filipino Recipes Portal	Philippines	sauté - braise
Kawaling Pinoy	United States	marinate – sear (sauté) – braise
Panlasang Pinoy	United States	marinate – sear (sauté) – braise
Skip to Malou	United States	stew/braise – deep fry
Casa Baluarte Filipino Recipes	United States	sauté - braise
Joz Mahal	United States	stew/braise

Table 8 indicates that seven of the 10 blog recipes analysed incorporated sautéing in their cooking methods. Four of those seven began the cooking process with sautéing, while the remaining three applied it as a subsequent step. Two of the latter specifically used the searing method. Arguably, searing and sautéing utilise a similar dry, high-heat cooking method, resulting in a brown colour; therefore, grouping them allows for a more streamlined analytical approach (Barber & Broz, 2011; Sheridan, 2002). Notably, only two of the 10 recipes used marination and explicitly emphasised its significance in the cooking process, both of which originated from the blog recipes based in America. To quote **Kawaling Pinoy**:

"Properly searing the meat before adding the braising liquid is an important step, as it gives the dish delicious colour and incredible depth of flavour."

Similarly, **Panlasang Pinoy** emphasised:

"The most important part of cooking chicken adobo is the marinade. The longer you let your chicken marinate in the rich combination of adobo flavours, the tastier it'll be!"

Interestingly, two out of 10 recipes concluded the cooking process distinctively by deep-frying the meat—one reduced the braising liquid into a thick dipping sauce, while another prepared an entirely separate sauce to accompany the fried *adobo* meat.

"Add neutral oil to a small frying pan until about ½ inch deep. Heat the oil over medium-high, then fry the pork between 350-375°F until golden brown on all sides. The pork is already cooked at this point, so the point of frying is to get it crispy. Make sure your oil is hot so you can fry quickly—not-hot oil will cause your pork to cook longer and soak in the oil." (**Pepper.ph**)

"Fill a large skillet about a half full of vegetable oil. Heat until very hot. Meanwhile, roll the (braise) chicken pieces into the breading. Shake off excess flour and drop into the hot oil… Deep fry until golden brown." (**Skip to Malou**)

Both sources suggest that frying the braised meat enhances the classic recipe, adding a richer and more textured flavour profile.

Authenticity in Variety

Across the Philippine archipelago, *adobo* takes on many forms that reflect the country's rich regional diversity and the cuisine's culinary freedom and adaptability. Rather than conforming to a standard, *adobo* thrives through its many expressions—each shaped by region, personal taste, and cultural heritage. This is seen in several blog posts from both data sets.

> *"You'll find endless variations on adobo across the Philippines, each with their own unique flavours, ingredients, spices and textures."* (**Pepper.ph**)

> *"The many ways adobo is prepared are as diverse as the islands and dialects in the Philippines. Adobong pula with atsuete, adobo sa gata and pineapple pork adobo are just a few versions of this classic Filipino dish."* (**Kawaling Pinoy**)

> *"Each household in the Philippines has its own version of the Filipino adobo and each household claims that they have the best one. Other than the staple adobo varieties like adobong puti, adobong sa gata, and many more, each region in the Philippines also has its own specialty version of the ever-versatile adobo."* (**Panlasang Pinoy Recipes**)

> *"Adobo preparation is endlessly adaptable, and nearly every Filipino cook prepares adobo in a slightly different way."* (**Filipino Recipes Portal**)

> *"There are as many recipes for adobo as there are Philippine islands."* (**Pinoy Food Blog**)

> *"Filipino food is known for its big, comforting flavours, but one of the best open secrets to Pinoy ulam dishes is how versatile it is."* (**Yummy.ph**)

Building on the previous statements, this section explores how *adobo* varies, focusing specifically on its regional variations, individual preferences, and the balance of authenticity and adaptability.

a. Regionality

The regional diversity of the Philippines plays a significant role in shaping its cuisine. Given the country's composition of numerous small islands, uniformity and standardisation of recipes prove challenging, mainly due to resource differences and localised cooking practice. Therefore, this leads to the emergence of distinct regional versions of several Filipino dishes such as *adobo.*

> *"In Ryle's household, it's nagmamantikang adobo: adobo reduced until the sauce has completely evaporated, and a film of fat emerges. Other characterizes adobong Bisaya by the frying that comes after braising. Once the meat has softened and soaked up the flavourful braising liquid, it's shallow fried until crusty all over."* (**Pepper.ph**)

> *"Tarlac is a beautiful place in the Philippines located in the plains of Central Luzon. … Upon first look, Adobong Tarlac looks like the typical recipe, but the pineapple bits in the dish indicated something special. … It has all the flavour that was expected of the staple adobo recipe but the hint of pineapple flavour brings out a sweetness and acidity to the dish that I just love."* (**Panlasang Pinoy Recipe**)

Another variation originates from the central Philippines—the *Iloilo*-style or *Ilonggo*-style chicken *adobo* featured by **Casa Baluarte Filipino Recipes**. While the author attributes the recipe to a friend from Iloilo City, she fails to elaborate on what defines or differentiates the *Ilonggo* style. This lack of contextual detail weakens the cultural

specificity of the post and leaves readers without a clear understanding of what makes this regional version distinct.

Further exploration into the distinct characteristics of these regional variations of *adobo* would be valuable, particularly in examining the factors that set them apart—whether through modifications in ingredients or differences in cooking techniques.

b. Personal Preference

Notably, the choice of meat or primary protein in *adobo* is not categorised under fundamental or non-fundamental ingredients. This omission reflects the role of individual preference in selecting the type of protein—be it meat or seafood—which is considered a viable main component of the dish. The authors' personal preferences regarding protein selection were another layer of variation observed in the data. Most recipes featured pork and chicken, which are considered the most popular versions of *adobo*, as highlighted by **Joz Mahal** who states in their blog post:

> *"Pork and chicken adobo are the most popular variation."*

Table 9. Protein and Cut Preference

Blog Name	Location	Protein
Yummy.ph	Philippines	squid
Panlasang Pinoy Recipes	Philippines	pork (leg cut)
Pinoy Food Blog	Philippines	pork (butt or belly)
Pepper.ph	Philippines	pork (belly)
Filipino Recipes Portal	Philippines	chicken (thigh)
Kawaling Pinoy	United States	pork (belly)
Panlasang Pinoy	United States	chicken (thigh, drumstick, breast)
Skip to Malou	United States	chicken

Casa Baluarte Filipino Recipes	United States	chicken
Joz Mahal	United States	Chicken (wings)

Table 9 suggests a notable distinction in protein preferences between Filipino and United-States-based authors, with the former predominantly favouring pork and the latter showing a preference for chicken in their *adobo* recipes. In addition to protein selection, the choice of meat cuts also emerges as a significant factor influencing the dish's overall taste and texture. For instance, **Panlasang Pinoy** features pork leg in his recipe, whereas **Kawaling Pinoy** prefers pork belly, recognising pork leg as a viable alternative.

> *"I prefer to use pork belly in my adobo because I like its melt-in-your-mouth but you can substitute pork shoulder, which, although leaner cut, has enough ribbons of fat to bring equally delicious results. Other cuts, such as pork chops legs, hocks, and ribs, are also good option for slow cooking."*

While it has been previously noted that *adobo* generally develops a richer flavour after a day or two, this characteristic may not be applicable to all variations. For example, **Yummy.ph**'s reader-recommended *adobo* recipe features squid as the primary protein, which is typically best consumed fresh to preserve its optimal texture and taste.

> *"Unlike its chicken and pork counterparts which taste just as good (if not better) overnight, adobong pusit is best eaten as soon as it's cooked because the more time you reheat the squid, the tougher and more rubbery its texture becomes!"*

In addition to preferences for specific types of meat or protein, food-related memories and emotional connections also played a meaningful role in influencing one of the author's recipe choices. As **Pinoy Food Blogs** wrote:

> *"My favourite recipes are the white adobo and the adobo cooked in coconut milk. Food memories at my dorm in UP consisted of adobo that mom cooked for us. Mom's adobo did not contain any soy sauce and I often wondered how she cooked it. I never got to ask my mom because she died while I was a teenager who was not yet eager to cook."*
>
> "*This chicken adobo version is very easy to cook and my family's favourite.*" (**Filipino Recipe Portal**)

These two statements suggest that food memories—particularly those tied to nostalgia and family experiences—can influence individual food preferences. This idea is explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

c. Authenticity and Adaptability

As previously discussed, food, much like society, is constantly evolving, shaped by the emergence of new cooking techniques, ingredients, and innovations. For many, this evolution offers an opportunity to enhance or reimagine familiar dishes, tailoring them to suit the ingredients and conditions of their present context. The final sub-theme on variety examines the interplay between authenticity and adaptability, specifically through the lens of two modern Filipino *adobo* interpretations from the collected data.

> *"I guess growing up in Adobo Nation made me veer away from cooking adobo, I'm all adobo-ed out!! But don't get me wrong, I still serve it to my family but only sporadically … I usually put my 'twist' on the dish. In my entry Adventures of the American adobo, I 'americanised' my adobo by adding apples to the dish."* (**Skip to Malou**)

In this context, the author connects the term "*Adobo* Nation" to the Philippines—an association that is further examined later in this chapter. Interestingly, the recipe she showcased in this post differs from her earlier description. In one of her adapted versions, *adobo* chicken delight, she begins by traditionally braising or stewing the chicken. Still, she adds a personal twist by deep-frying the meat and serving it with a creamy, yoghurt-based sauce instead of the customary braising liquid. Notably, the concept of an "americanised" dish emerges within this context, even though apples—associated with American cuisine—originated in Central Asia (Brite, 2021). This raises questions about the use and implications of the term "americanised," which is further examined in the following chapter.

Similarly, **Joz Mahal**, another Filipino blogger living in the United States, suggested using an Instant Pot—a versatile electric cooker developed in Canada that gained widespread popularity in the United States—instead of a stove-top cooking pot to prepare her *adobo* (Murphy, 2017). She explained that this method offers a quicker, easier, and healthier way to make the dish. Additionally, she substituted regular soy sauce with coconut aminos for a gluten-free alternative and added fish sauce and jalapeño for extra flavour.

Notably, both modern interpretations of *adobo* were found in the overseas dataset. Meanwhile, most recipes, especially from the domestic data set, either adhered

closely to the traditional method or followed conventional cooking techniques. This contrast may reflect the influence of migration and the diaspora on how Filipino *adobo* is perceived and adapted outside the Philippines, which is discussed in the next chapter.

Evolution of *Adobo* as a Symbol

This section examines the shifting symbolic and intangible meanings of *adobo*—tracing its significance from the pre-colonial and Spanish colonial periods to its role in the contemporary Filipino culinary landscape—as revealed through the data gathered in the study.

a. Adobo *Before and During Spanish Colonisation*

Within the Filipino community, the term *adobo* is generally recognised as referring to a method of preservation through cooking that was already practiced by Indigenous Filipinos long before the Spanish colonisation began in 1565.

> *"The word 'adobo' in Tagalog is derived from how the meat was prepared. In the early days, when refrigeration was scarce, meat was preserved using plain white vinegar and garlic."* (**Joz Mahal**)

> *"The adobo cooking process was initially a way to preserve food. Pre-colonial Filipinos prepared meat and seafood in vinegar and salt to prolong shelf life."* (**Kawaling Pinoy**)

Bearing a Spanish-influenced name, it is widely assumed that Spanish colonisers introduced this culinary technique during their occupation. However, despite the

shared terminology, the Filipino iteration of the dish is markedly distinct from its Spanish counterpart.

> *"Adobo is actually a Spanish word that means "to marinate. Despite its Spanish name which came from Spaniard colonisers back when they first came to the Philippine archipelago, adobo is an indigenous Filipino cooking process. You see, Spain has a recipe called adobo where they also marinate their meat in a mixture. When the say the indigenous people of the Philippines preparing their food in a similar way, the immediately dubbed as the process as adobo. However the only similarities that the Filipino adobo has with the Spanish adobo marinating process and the used of vinegar and garlic. … The original name that the indigenous Filipino gave to what we referred to today as the adobo is sadly lost in history. But the original cooking process using the same indigenous ingredients are alive and thriving to this day in the Philippines."* (**Panlasang Pinoy Recipes**)

> *"Not to be mistaken with Mexican adobo … according to several experts in Asian food history, Filipinos were cooking adobo before Spanish colonisation. Cooking with vinegar preserves meat, and is one of the earliest food preservation practices."* (**Panlasang Pinoy**)

Adobo is, therefore, acknowledged as uniquely Filipino despite efforts to rename it during the colonial era. As highlighted in the literature review, *adobo* is one of several Filipino dishes with Spanish-derived names that differ significantly from their Spanish counterparts.

b. Adobo *in the Contemporary Era*

In contemporary times, *adobo* transcends its role as a simple, everyday Filipino household dish. The findings also highlight its cultural importance, as it is frequently regarded as the national—albeit unofficial—dish representing the Philippines.

> *"We can't have a discussion about Filipino recipes without mentioning adobo … often referred to as the unofficial dish of the Philippines because of how universally loved it is amongst Filipinos."* (**Panlasang Pinoy Recipes**)

> *"… this hearty stew is the Philippines' national dish for a good reason!"* (**Kawaling Pinoy**)

Accordingly, *adobo* is a universally appealing dish often regarded as a comfort food among Filipinos, owing to its familiar and soothing flavours and its status as a staple household meal that members of the Filipino community have traditionally consumed regularly throughout their lives.

> *"The taste of juicy chicken in a succulent, umami adobo sauce makes chicken adobo a comfort food for all ages. From kids to adults, we can't get enough of this mouthwatering meal!"* (**Panlasang Pinoy**)

> *"Filipino Chicken Adobo Recipe is a favourite Filipino dish all year round."* (**Filipino Recipe Portal**)

Although this recognition originates within the Filipino community, it is also notable that individuals outside the community commonly associate *adobo* with the Philippines, and vice versa.

> *"For a Filipino, the word adobo sounds like a nickname. When you introduce yourself as a Filipino, instantly what comes to mind when it comes to food is– yes, ADOBO! A few years ago in Florida, someone asked me if I'm from Hawaii… 'No! I'm from the Adobo Nation" was my quick reply and she said 'Oh, so you're from the Philippines!' she said. This proved me that adobo is synonymous to Filipino cooking."* (**Skip to Malou**)

Based on these statements, it is particularly noteworthy how *adobo*—recognised as a multicultural dish through the analysis in this chapter—is regarded as a signature and beloved dish within the contemporary Filipino community. This analysis is further discussed in the next chapter.

Summary of Findings

In summary, Table 10 presents the themes and sub-themes alongside a synthesis of the participants' perspectives gathered in this study. These contextual insights serve as the foundation for the discussion of findings in the subsequent chapter.

Table 10. Summary of Findings

Major Themes	Sub-themes	Contextual View
Tangible Characteristics of *Adobo*	a. Flavour Profile	- Salty, sour, tangy and savoury.
	b. Fundamental and Non-fundamental Ingredients	- Fundamentals are vinegar, soy sauce, garlic, and bay leaf; all other components are considered optional.
	c. Different Cooking Methods	- Sautéing, stewing/braising, and frying.
Adobo's Authenticity in variety	a. Regionality	- *Adobo* recipes vary across different regions.
	b. Personal Preference	- Preparation of *adobo* is often shaped by individual taste and preferences.
	c. Authenticity and Adaptability	- Contrast between traditional approaches and contemporary interpretations of *adobo* recipes.
Evolution of *Adobo* as a Symbol	a. *Adobo* Before and During Spanish Colonisation	- *Adobo* is a pre-colonial dish that was attempted to turn into a colonial dish through its name.
	b. *Adobo* in the Contemporary Era	- *Adobo* is well-loved by the Filipino community and is seen as the signature dish of the Philippines.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter combines the discussion and conclusion of the study to avoid repetition in the presentation of the data analysis. It begins by restating the research question to reorient the reader to the study's purpose and support the comprehension of the data analysis. The chapter then explores the key findings collected in Chapter 4. It also considers the study's limitations, recognising the broader complexity of Filipino cuisine that extends beyond the boundaries of this research. Additionally, it reflects on the challenges encountered during the research process and outlines suggestions for future investigation.

Revisiting the Research Question

At the beginning of this research journey, the goal was to answer the overarching question:

- What are the characteristics of Filipino cuisine that help define its own identity?

This overarching question is underpinned by the following question:

- Often regarded as the unofficial national dish, what key characteristics of Filipino *adobo* reflect the broader identity of Filipino cuisine?

Research Discussion

Chapter 2 explored the concept of food identity alongside the rich and multicultural history of the Philippine food landscape. A prime example of a dish shaped by the Philippines' complex food history is the *adobo*, often considered the unofficial

national dish of the Filipino cuisine (Estrella, 2022). Its composition is influenced by the Chinese through soy sauce as a fundamental ingredient, while its name is derived from the Spanish word *adobar* meaning “marinade”, or the Mexican word *adobado* meaning “to marinate”. However, it remains distinctly Filipino in its cultural ownership and representation (Fernandez & Alegre, 1988; Rampe, 2023).

To address the research questions, the analysis centred on Filipino *adobo* to identify its key characteristics that may also be present across other dishes, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of Filipino food identity. Therefore, this section explores the key characteristics of *adobo* as identified through the analysis of both primary and secondary data sets from Chapter 4. The discussion is structured around the themes and sub-themes, using the contextual perspectives as central points of analysis[4].

Tangible Characteristics of *Adobo*

This section discusses the tangible characteristics of *adobo* such as its flavour profile, fundamental and non-fundamental ingredients, and cooking methods.

a. Flavour Profile

As seen in Chapter 4, findings showed that the common flavour profiles of Filipino *adobo* were considered to be salty, sour, tangy and savoury. Four flavours dominate the Philippine palate and thus the food repertoire: salt, sour, sweet and bitter. In Filipino, these flavours are named *alat, asim*, *tamis* and *pait* (Fernandez, 2019).

[4] Refer to Table 10 (Summary of Findings) in Chapter 4 for a detailed overview.

Additionally, in the context of the Filipino culinary vocabulary, sour and tangy are considered synonymous and are both commonly referred to as *asim* in Filipino, while savoury is translated as *linamnam* (Barreto et al., 2008). However, for the purpose of this research, this sub-theme discusses the flavours present in *adobo* within the four dominant flavours which are salty *(alat)* and sour *(asim)*.

- *Alat*: As an archipelago of over 7,000 islands surrounded by the sea, salt has long been an essential resource in the Philippines, and fish was considered the primary source of meat and protein for early Filipinos (Fernandez, 2019; Newman, 2021). During times of abundance, when the fish catch exceeded daily or market needs, the surplus would be preserved with salt for future use. Typically, the fish were salted and dried using various traditional methods (Fernandez, 2019). A well-known example of a Filipino staple prepared using this method is *tuyo*, a name taken from the Filipino word *tuyo*, which means “dry” or “dried.” This classic and simple Filipino dish is usually made by drying small to medium-sized fish such as sardines or herring (Urbano, 2018).

  Moreover, the Philippines has multiple salt types and production techniques, including smoked and sun-dried varieties like the *asin tibuok* and *irasan* salt beds to name a few (Montojo et al., 2024). Beyond plain salt, other common salting agents include *toyo* (soy sauce), *patis* (fish sauce), and fermented products like *bagoong* made from fish or shrimp (Ponseca & Trinidad, 2018).

- *Asim*: Fernandez and Alegre (1988) considered *kinilaw*, rather than *adobo*, to be the official national dish of the Philippines. *Kinilaw* is a sour dish made from

marinating fresh fish or seafood in *suka* or vinegar. The term *kinilaw* refers to the dish while *kilaw* means the preparation of raw fish or seafood using vinegar's sourness to "cook" it. It is believed to be among the earliest food preparation methods used by native Filipinos, alongside salting. The term itself originates from the central region of the Philippines, particularly Cebu, where the local language gave rise to its name (Sta. Maria, 2021c). Rather than serving as a means of preservation, as with *adobo*, *kinilaw*'s simple vinegar-based preparation was seen as the Filipino ancestors' way to honour and respect the ocean's bounty by preserving its freshness and natural taste (Fernandez, 2019; Newman, 2021).

Another sour Filipino dish recognised worldwide is the *sinigang.* Instead of the frequently mentioned *adobo*—which is often labeled as a Philippine stew in international cookbooks—*sinigang* appears to better capture the true Filipino flavour (Fernandez, 2019). *Sinigang* is a sour broth stew made with fish, meat, or shrimp. It could be considered the national stew of the Philippines, as it is native to the country and enjoyed in nearly every province under various names and regional variations, much like *adobo* (Ponseca & Trinidad, 2018). However, this dish does not use vinegar as its souring ingredients. Instead, it uses a wide of variety of ingredients, from tamarind, green mango, guava, *calamansi*, *dayap* (native lime), and native *kamias* (Fernandez & Alegre, 1988; Newman, 2021).

Therefore, the distinctive sour flavour—primarily from vinegar—is a defining feature of many beloved Filipino dishes. This sourness is integral to the essence

of Filipino cuisine and is crafted through a wide range of souring ingredients, underscoring its important role in shaping the country's unique food identity.

Many Filipino dishes continue to showcase a harmonious blend of salty and sour flavours. Another example is *bistek Tagalog*, a dish made with beef marinated in a mixture of soy sauce and *calamansi*, combining the saltiness of soy sauce with the sourness of calamansi (Ponseca & Trinidad, 2018). In cases where a dish is predominantly salty or sour, Filipino diners often modify the flavour profile to suit their personal preferences through the use of *sawsawan*—a traditional array of condiments commonly composed of *toyo* (soy sauce), *patis* (fish sauce), suka (vinegar), and *calamansi*, occasionally enhanced with chili for added spice (Barreto et al., 2008). It reflects a mindset that contrasts sharply with the dominant approach to the dish. In some contexts, modifying a prepared dish is seen as disrespectful or offensive. However, in the Philippine context, the diner is an active participant, contributing to the shared experience of the meal. These condiments are typically placed at the centre of the dining table, reflecting a communal approach, as well as personal freedom, to customise flavour in Filipino food culture (Florendo, 2019; Newman, 2021; Ponseca & Trinidad, 2018). This flavour component is discussed further as this chapter progresses.

Due to their bold and intense flavours, Filipino dishes can be overpowering when eaten alone or altogether, which is why steamed white rice is crucial in Filipino meals. This was noted on all the *adobo* recipes found on the selected blog sites.[5]

[5] *"Just serve your adobo with a platter of steamy white rice and you've got a typical delicious Filipino meal."* This is a representative statement found across numerous blog recipes that highlights the central role of rice in Filipino dining.

The plain taste helps mellow the richness of the main dishes, which is why Filipino rice is commonly cooked without seasoning (Aguilar, 2005; Fernandez & Alegre, 1988). A simple example of the distinctly Filipino combination of protein, rice, and *sawsawan* is the quintessential pairing of *tuyo*, rice, and vinegar.

Therefore, *adobo* is considered to be an authentic Filipino dish due in part to its bold, salty and sour flavours which are enjoyed alongside plain steamed white rice that helps balance the intensity of the dish.

b. Fundamental and Non-fundamental Ingredients

As discussed in the literature review, documentation from the pre-Spanish colonial period is scarce, primarily due to the fragility and impermanence of early Filipino writing systems (Fernandez & Alegre, 1988). Consequently, much of what is known about pre-colonial and early colonial food practices comes from Spanish sources written during the early colonial period. One of the earliest known references to Filipino food appears in Antonio Pigafetta's *Primo Viaggio,*[6] which chronicled the first circumnavigation of the globe. In his account, Pigafetta described receiving fish, palm wine, bananas, coconuts, oranges, ginger, and other local products from Filipinos shortly after arriving. However, he placed particular emphasis on the palm tree and the various products that the natives were able to derive from its fruit—the coconut—including vinegar (Fernandez, 2019; Miroy, 2021; Sta. Maria, 2021c).

[6] Pigafetta, A. (1800). *Primo viaggio intorno al globo terracqueo ossia Ragguaglio della nauigazione alle Indie orientali per la via d'occidente fatta dal caualiere Antonio Pigafetta... sulla squadra del capit. Magaglianes negli anni 1519-1522. Ora pubblicato per la prima volta, tratto da un codice ms. della Biblioteca Ambrosiana di Milano e corredato di note da Carlo Amoretti.* Nella stamperia di G. Galeazzi

It also has been well established that soy sauce is a product introduced through trade with China and, as such, is not native to the Philippines (Fernandez, 2019). Likewise, bay leaf—known in Filipino as *dahon ng laurel*—was introduced to the Philippines by the Spanish; while garlic is thought to have originated in Central Asia, although some sources also point to western China as a possible place of origin as it was also believed to be used by the Chinese settlers and Indigenous Filipinos prior to the colonisation of the Philippines (Dhall et al., 2023; Lantrip, 2017; White, 2021). Given this information, vinegar appears to be the only core among the four essential ingredients of *adobo* that can be considered indigenous to the pre-colonial Philippines.

The collected data revealed several non-essential ingredients used in *adobo* variations, such as pineapple, coconut aminos, fish sauce, oyster sauce, and various chilies. As noted in the literature review, pineapple was likely introduced to the Philippines during Spanish colonisation, an idea supported by the resemblance between the Filipino term *pinya* and the Spanish *piña* (Fernandez, 2019). Coconut aminos are believed to have originated in Southeast Asia, particularly in countries like the Philippines and Indonesia, which are also leading global exporters of coconut products. Traditionally produced by fermenting coconut sap, coconut aminos are a gluten-free soy sauce alternative. Despite being derived from coconut, fermentation significantly alters the flavour, making coconut aminos distinct from the fruit. Moreover, although the Philippines has abundant coconuts, coconut aminos are rarely used in Filipino households, where soy sauce remains the preferred condiment (Johnson et al., 2024; Newport, 2018; Smith, 2013). The commercial version of coconut aminos gained popularity more recently, particularly in Western

health-conscious markets such as the United States, largely due to its perceived dietary advantages. Brands like Coconut Secret and Sokfarm, a Vietnamese company, played a significant role in introducing the product to a global audience since early 2000s (Neo, 2024; Smith, 2013; Verdugo, 2021). So, while the base ingredient—fermented coconut sap—has indigenous roots in Southeast Asia, the term “coconut aminos” and its modern use as a soy sauce replacement are more recent and Western-driven in origin. Oyster sauce has its roots in Chinese cuisine, while jalapeños trace their origin to Mexico as they were named after the town of Jalapa (Anderson, 1988; Bosland & Votava, 2012). However, jalapeños appear to be among the Mexican products that either were not introduced through the Manila-Acapulco galleon trade (1571-1815) or failed to thrive in the Philippine climate, as there is no historical evidence of their integration into traditional Filipino food culture. Meanwhile, fish sauce, locally known as *patis*, is recognised as indigenous to the Philippines despite its presence in other Southeast Asian cuisines such as Thailand and Vietnam (Fernandez & Alegre, 1988; Fernandez, 2019).

In summary, the core ingredients of *adobo*—soy sauce, vinegar, garlic, and bay leaf—are fundamental to the dish. Notably, majority of these essential and optional ingredients are not indigenous to the Philippines. Their presence reflects the country’s long history of trade and colonisation, particularly by Chinese and Spanish influences, and illustrates how migration and various diasporas have shaped culinary adaptations to new environments. Among these, vinegar stands out as the core element of *adobo*, while the other ingredients reflect how Indigenous Filipinos incorporated foreign elements that complemented their culinary practices. Viewed

through its changing ingredients, *adobo* serves as a culinary chronicle of Philippine history.

c. Cooking Method

Sautéing, braising/stewing, and frying were the primary cooking techniques identified in Chapter 4, while marinating emerged as a common preparatory step, with some recipes highlighting its significance. However, it is believed that traditional *adobo* was prepared through slow cooking in clay pots, allowing the pork fat to render and the meat to become exceptionally tender. In his account, Pigafetta noted that the native Filipinos served his party, as guests, with full bowl of rice and two platters of pork with its gravy, among other dishes, which Filipino food historian Joel Binamira speculates may have been an early version of *adobo* based on its characteristics and preparation method (Sta. Maria, 2021c; Tayag, 2022).

As previously noted, early Filipino culinary traditions valued the freshness of natural ingredients, favouring cooking methods that preserved their original qualities. Pre-colonial Filipino cuisine preferred simpler food preparations in contrast to European cuisine during the Middle Ages—which often emphasised the use of rich sauces and bold spices as essential components of a well-crafted dish (Freedman, 2020). According to Fernandez and Alegre (1988), techniques such as *kinilaw* (sour-based curing), *inihaw* (grilling), *pasingaw* (steaming), and *nilaga* (boiling) were characteristic of traditional Filipino cooking. Notably, methods such as braising or stewing were not part of the Indigenous culinary repertoire. However, historical records indicate that the pork dish described by Pigafetta was served with its own

gravy—a preparation that can be achieved through slow cooking processes such as braising and stewing (Miroy, 2021; Sta. Maria, 2021c).

In Filipino culinary terminology, sautéing is known as *gisado* and frying as *prito*, terms that closely resemble the Spanish *guisado* and *frito*, indicating the influence of Spanish culinary practices on Filipino cooking (Fernandez & Alegre, 1988; Zialcita, 2012). These techniques have since become foundational in the preparation of many Filipino dishes. The cooking begins with sautéing aromatics such as garlic, onion, and occasionally ginger in oil—paralleling the Spanish *sofrito*, which traditionally involves the slow cooking of garlic, onion, peppers, and tomatoes in oil (Ponseca & Trinidad, 2018). Frying has also become a widely adopted and convenient cooking method for meats such as chicken, pork, and fish, as well as for various Filipino snacks and street foods. These include sweet snacks like *banana cue* (bananas coated in caramelised sugar) and *turon* (bananas wrapped in spring roll wrapper, deep-fried and coated in caramelised sugar), as well as savoury items like *kwek-kwek* (quail eggs covered in bright orange batter), fish balls (made from fish paste), and the crowd pleaser during Filipino parties, *lumpia* (Filipino-style spring rolls) (Fernandez, 2019; Ponseca & Trinidad, 2018; Tacardon et al., 2023).

Moreover, although marinating and searing are not explicitly listed among traditional Filipino cooking methods, elements of these techniques can be identified in pre-colonial culinary practices, albeit not in their modern forms. Marination, defined as the process of soaking food in a seasoned liquid before cooking (Williams, 2012), therefore, can be loosely associated with the Indigenous method of *kinilaw*. However, it is essential to note that in *kinilaw*, the acidic liquid does not precede

cooking but instead functions as the cooking agent. As such, *kinilaw* aligns more accurately with curing rather than marinating in the conventional sense.

Searing is a high-heat cooking technique used to create a crust on protein surfaces through the Maillard reaction—a chemical reaction discovered by French chemist Louis-Camille Maillard (1912). While this specific method and terminology were not part of early Filipino culinary vocabulary, traditional cooking practices such as *inihaw* (grilling) and roasting over open flames pre-date modern searing and could produce similar effects. Grilling, which involves direct exposure to high heat, can induce the Maillard reaction, even if ancient cooks were unaware of the scientific principles behind it (Tamanna & Mahmood, 2015). Nonetheless, these high-heat methods and multi-step cooking processes were not considered traditional and essential in preparing *adobo* in early Filipino cuisine, unlike in several of the blog recipes analysed, where searing is intentionally emphasised to enhance flavours and texture. Filipino cuisine continues to develop and transform as it incorporates new ingredients, cooking techniques, styles, and methods introduced from both local and international influences (Churillo, 2014). This ongoing transformation is reflected in the diverse cooking methods—from traditional to modern—observed in *adobo* recipes. As part of Filipino cuisine, *adobo* embodies this adaptability, with its preparations evolving in response to local and international culinary influences.

Authenticity in Variety

This section explores the diverse variations of Filipino *adobo* and examines the elements that render each version authentic to the dish's essence despite differences shaped by regional influences, personal preferences, and *adobo*'s

inherent adaptability. *Adobo* is a compelling example of a Filipino dish whose authenticity is constructed through versatility in ingredients and preparation methods.

a. Regionality

Several distinct regional dishes have become widely recognised within the mainstream Filipino culinary landscape, each carrying distinct cultural and geographic identities. *Bicol express*, a creamy coconut-based pork dish known for its rich and spicy flavour, originates from the Bicol region, which is renowned for its preference for chili-based dishes (Ponseca & Trinidad, 2018). *Bagnet*, a deep-fried and preserved pork delicacy, hails from the Ilocos region, with its name derived from the local term *bagnetin*, meaning to preserve pork. *Chicken inasal*, popular roasted chicken dish in the Western Visayas, particularly Iloilo and Bacolod, derives its name from the Hiligaynon word *inasal*, meaning grilled or roasted (Polistico, 2017). *Lechon,* or whole roasted pig, is celebrated nationwide, but *Cebu lechon* stands out for its distinct seasoning and flavour, making it one of the most iconic versions in the country (Ponseca & Trinidad, 2018). Additionally, to reiterate, *kinilaw* is also associated with Cebu, further highlighting the region's culinary contributions to the national palate. These are only few of the Filipino dishes that originated from different parts of the Philippines and were made known and loved by the Filipino community. According to *Toyo Eatery* executive head chef and owner Jordy Navarro, throughout the Philippines, each region or locality has its distinct cooking techniques and preparations. However, it is perplexing to realise that despite being geographically close to one another, Filipinos are much more aware of international influences than the diverse culinary practices found domestically (Quintero, 2022).

Previously mentioned in the literature review, *pansit,* a well-loved Filipino noodle dish with origins in Chinese migration, stands as a strong representation of the Philippines' culinary diversity, much like *adobo*. Traditionally linked to the symbolism of long life, *pansit* is a centrepiece at Filipino celebrations and special events. Its widespread appeal also extends beyond the Filipino community, making it one of the few dishes that consistently resonates with a broader audience (Narciso, 2005; Ponseca & Trinidad, 2018). Its many regional variations, named after their geographical origins, reflect local ingredients and cultural influences. For instance, *pansit Malabon* features seafood like shrimp and squid, *pansit Marilao* incorporates glutinous rice fritters, and *pansit Molo* replaces noodles with wontons in broth. Some variants are named after cooking techniques, such as *pansit guisado* (sautéed noodles), *pansit luglug* (noodles swirled in broth), and *pansit palabok* (garnished noodles) (Fernandez, 2012; 2019; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Fernandez, 2003; Lantrip, 2017). As previously stated, a study by Mercado and Andalecio (2020) recorded 101 types of *pansit* in Luzon alone, highlighting the dish's deep cultural significance and its role as a symbol of Filipino culinary creativity.

As noted in various blog posts, the phrases "each region has a version of *adobo*" and "there are as many islands and dialects as there are recipes of *adobo*" reflect its characteristic of deep localisation. In 2021, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) proposed standardising the *adobo* recipe in efforts to preserve and promote national culinary identity, emphasising its ancient definition as a cooking technique rather than a fixed dish (Department of Trade and Industry, 2021). However, the initiative was met with strong opposition from the culinary community, who argued that such standardisation would undermine the rich diversity and localised character

of Filipino cuisine. Eventually, the proposal was not pursued as majority of the Filipino community reacted heavily against it (Roxas, 2021; San Jose, 2021). Variations in how *adobo* is prepared across regions—like Bicol's rich and spicy version with coconut milk and chili, Ilocos' sharp and simple take using just vinegar and salt, Visayas' crispy, fatty, and sour style, and Tarlac's sweet-and-sour version with pineapple—highlight the cultural richness and versatility that contribute to *adobo*'s role as a strong emblem of Filipino identity (Lantrip, 2017).

b. Personal Preference

As previously established, Filipino *adobo* can be prepared using a range of proteins, including seafood, pork and chicken. However, findings from the previous chapter indicate that pork and chicken are the most commonly used protein sources in *adobo* recipes. Interestingly, a mixed recipe combining pork and chicken is also thoroughly enjoyed by some Filipinos, as it allows for the enjoyment of the distinct flavours and textures provided by each type of meat. Moreover, the choice of meat cut made by the blog authors is another factor influencing the dish's overall taste experience, with different cuts contributing varied textures.

The preference for pork and chicken over other proteins, such as beef, can be attributed to multiple factors. Pork and chicken are more commonly used in everyday Filipino cuisine, and their popularity is also tied to cultural, historical, and religious influences. Specifically, the prevalent consumption of pork in the Philippines can be attributed to the country's predominantly Catholic population, as religious and communal traditions often feature pork prominently in celebratory meals (Lingao et al., 2025; Sta. Maria, 2021a, 2021c). As discussed in the literature review, pork has

long been considered central to festivity since the Spanish colonisation era, often regarded as a staple dish in celebratory feasts—most notably in the form of *lechon* or roast suckling pig (Fernandez & Alegre, 1988; Fernandez, 2019; Sta. Maria, 2021a, 2021c). The widespread consumption of chicken in the Philippines is primarily attributed to its economic affordability, cooking efficiency and availability across various regions, including coastal areas. Additionally, its culinary versatility and perceived health benefits—such as lower fat content compared to pork—contribute to its popularity (Bendijo & Cruz, 2013; Laorden & Bangcaya, 2013). Furthermore, while it bears no significance for the Catholic population, chicken consumption across the country is also highly attributed to the consumption of the Muslim population. Research conducted in predominantly Muslim areas revealed a marked preference for *halal* chicken over beef when individuals were given the option, due to its cost accessibility and effectivity (Balogbog, 2018; Sarip, 2024).

Beyond cultural and religious influences, food preferences are also deeply informed by personal and familial experiences. Many of the recipes reviewed in Chapter 4 reference subtle recollections tied to family, whether through cherished household recipes, traditions passed down by relatives, or dishes favoured by the family. Douglas (1966) emphasised that food has the capacity to awaken memories and connect the present to meaningful aspects of the past, positioning it as a powerful trigger for both nostalgia and contested recollections. Such memories—particularly rooted in household practices in this case—play a key role in shaping an individual's taste and food preference and, by extension, shaping personal food identity (Almerico, 2014; Brillat-Savarin, 1826/2009; Douglas, 1966). For many Filipinos, as seen in particular in several participants' recipe blogs, the preparation of *adobo* is

tied to memories of home-cooked meals which is often associated with maternal figures (Andrei, 2010; Fernandez, 2019). This is consistent with traditional gender roles in pre-colonial Philippine society, where men were hunters and protectors while, at the same time, women took on the responsibilities of caregivers and primary food preparers in the home (Winter, 2017). This parallels other cultural contexts where cooking is closely associated with motherhood, such as the reference to “mother sauces” in French cuisine (Fernandez, 2019). However, evolving social dynamics have significantly changed household and kitchen roles. In contemporary Filipino society, men have become increasingly involved in cooking, particularly during communal events such as fiestas, where they are commonly entrusted with tasks such as grilling and roasting (Guevarra, 2019).

c. Authenticity and Adaptability

As noted in the previous chapter, two modern interpretations of *adobo* were primarily observed within the overseas dataset. In contrast, all recipes from the domestic dataset followed traditional preparations or conventional cooking methods. This distinction may illustrate the influence of migration and the diaspora on the evolving perception and adaptation of *adobo* within the Filipino community outside of the Philippines—particularly in the United States, a former colonial power whose historical ties to the Philippines contributed significantly to the migration of Filipinos to its shores through the Immigration Act of 1965 (Andrei, 2010; Constantino & Constantino, 2008; Rafael, 2018). Building on the discussion of the previous two sub-themes, and considering *adobo*’s inherently diversity and adaptable nature, this raises the question of where to draw the line between acceptable adaptation and a level of change that renders the dish inauthentic.

As discussed in the literature review, Calvo (1982) noted that as immigrants—particularly those in the second and third generations—adjust to new cultural settings, their food traditions often blend with those of other ethnic communities. This fusion results in hybrid culinary practices that signify both adaptations and, at times, forms of resistance. Similarly, Fernandez (2019) viewed food, much like language, as an evolving cultural expression. While traditional methods are valued for their reliability, the emergence of new practices should not be seen as a betrayal, especially when they are contextually appropriate and produce quality food.

In one of the participant's blog posts, Skip to Malou expressed the view that she was "all *adobo*-ed out!", suggesting a sense of fatigue with the traditional version of the dish, which led her to reinterpret and "americanised" it. This raises the question of whether the term "americanised" is being used to describe the transformation of Filipino cuisine to align with American tastes or culinary norms. When viewed through the lens of American colonial influence—particularly its deep impact on the Philippine education system—it is not far-fetched to suggest that such adaptations may stem from a long-standing perception among Filipinos that their native cuisine is somehow inferior (Fernandez & Alegre, 1988; Orquiza, 2021). However, such reinterpretation may also reflect a broader trend among Filipino-American restaurants that aim to elevate and reintroduce Filipino food within the United States dining scene, as exemplified by acclaimed establishments like the first and only Michelin-starred Filipino restaurant *Kasama* in Chicago. Is it a form of neo-colonial mentality or paying homage to what their perception of Filipino food is? Regardless of the reasoning, drawing clear lines between what is considered authentic or

inauthentic proves challenging, as the very notion of authenticity remains a contentious issue within the Filipino community, particularly Filipino-Americans who often have to adjust their cooking practices to align with American norms while simultaneously striving to preserve or reconnect with the cultural traditions of their homeland (Sevillano, 2023).

Evolution of *Adobo* as a Symbol

This section examines the evolution of *adobo* as a cultural symbol, tracing its development from pre-colonial times through the Spanish colonial period, and exploring how it is understood and represented in the contemporary context.

a. Adobo *Before and During Spanish Colonisation*

The origins of *adobo*—and much of Filipino culinary culture—during the pre-colonial period remain largely uncertain due to the absence of surviving documentation from that era. This lack of historical records can be attributed to the following reasons: the probable use of fragile materials like bamboo or bark for writing, the lack of system and intention to keep records as evidence or for preservation prior to colonisation, the extensive temporal gap of more than three centuries during the Spanish regime, and the minimal attention given to food in existing colonial documents, which were predominantly authored by friars and colonial administrators (Fernandez & Alegre, 1988; Punzalan, 2006).

In his book *The Ultimate Filipino* Adobo, Tayag et al. (2022) devoted significant discussion to what he considered pre-Hispanic variants of *adobo*, emphasising

regional dishes believed to have existed before Spanish colonisation. Among these are the Ilocos region's *dinaldalem* (a pork dish centred on liver), Pampanga's *kilain* (made with pork shoulder, liver, and lungs marinated in vinegar and cooked until dry), the Tagalog region's *paksiw na bangus* (made with milkfish simmered in garlic, ginger, salt, and vinegar), and Iloilo's *pinamalhan nga bilong-bilong* (a dish of moonfish stewed in vinegar, garlic, ginger, and spices until nearly dry). A unifying characteristic of these dishes is their shared use of vinegar as the primary stewing or simmering agent.

Meanwhile, Carmen Guerrero Nakpil (1973) posited that the origins of Filipino *adobo* may lie in the dish's introduction by Mexican settlers during the Manila-Acapulco trade (1571-1815), with Filipinos modifying it to align with local tastes and ingredients (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Fernandez, 2003). In contrast, Sokolov (1993), a food historian, argued that while the term *adobo* originates from Spanish, the Filipino version is distinct and shares only its name with the Spanish dish. He suggested that Spanish or Mexican colonisers encountered a native preparation resembling their own and referred to it as *adobo de los naturales,* a term documented by lexicographer Pedro de San Buenaventura in 1613. A closer examination of the cultural influences on Filipino *adobo* reveals that Spanish *adobo* is a relish composed of olive oil, vinegar, garlic, thyme, bay leaf, oregano, black pepper, and salt. This blend was later associated with meat dishes—typically pork or chicken—cooked using a simplified version of these ingredients. It is adapted to the Philippine context by omitting elements that were either unavailable or unfamiliar to the local palate. Meanwhile, the Mexican *adobo*, which involves marinating meat in a spiced

mixture, contributed to the naming convention and conceptual framework of what is now recognised as Filipino *adobo* (Fernandez & Alegre, 1988; Nakpil, 1973).

As discussed in Chapter 2, during the Spanish colonial period, Filipino cuisine experienced a degree of marginalisation, though to a lesser degree than during the subsequent American regime. An aspect of apparent culinary behaviour during the Spanish era was Filipinos' adaptation and localised use of Spanish-introduced ingredients, with these elements being incorporated into pre-existing culinary traditions. However, historical records on how colonial Spaniards consumed *adobo* are scarce, possibly because *adobo* was seen merely as an ordinary Filipino staple and thus excluded from formal documentation.

b. Adobo *in the Contemporary Era*

Beyond its role as a standard, everyday meal, *adobo* has come to be recognised as the signature—though unofficial—national dish of the Philippines. The association is so strong that when people think of Filipino cuisine, *adobo* is often the first dish that comes to mind. According to Nick Joaquin, a renowned Filipino novel writer and National Artist of the Philippines, and the highest form of praise he could receive as a writer was for readers to say that his work evokes the aroma of *adobo* and *lechon.* He noted that this sensory connection is intentional, as he experienced the scent of these iconic Filipino dishes while writing (Fernandez & Alegre, 1988). But what does this widespread recognition signify? What does *adobo* represent in the context of Filipino identity, and why has it emerged as the dish most closely linked to the nation?

Contemporary variations, such as *adobo* flakes or shredded *adobo* meat, are currently featured in diverse fusion dishes like sandwiches, salads, pasta, and even sushi rolls (Estrella, 2022). Globally, *adobo* is gaining prominence in major cities like New York and Chicago, where restaurants such as Purple Yam and Kasama have earned critical praise, including recognition from the prestigious Michelin Guide (Estrella, 2022; He, 2023; Wee, 2022). The dish has also made its way into mainstream Western media. Filipino chefs in popular cooking competitions like Top Chef and MasterChef select *adobo* to represent their heritage, often presenting creative and personalised versions of the classic (Bagaoisan, 2018; Estrella, 2022; Moll, 2015). Even the White House has experienced *adobo*'s influence through Cristeta Comerford, the first Filipina and Asian-American White House executive chef, who likely prepared a healthier dish for the Obama family (Bagani, 2014; Estrella, 2022). These examples demonstrate *adobo*'s growing relevance, adaptability, and cultural significance both within the Philippines and internationally, contributing to its expanding global recognition and evolution from a traditional Filipino staple to a dynamic and celebrated culinary icon.

Conclusion

Filipino cuisine is in a constant state of transformation, influenced not only by its Indigenous roots but also by Chinese traders and Spanish and American colonisers. It is shaped by more than just local traditions—it emerges through various culinary intersections, adaptations, and external influences. As (Manalansan, 2013) noted, this complex and sometimes chaotic mixture is characteristic of any cuisine, whether described as fusion, diffusion, or even confusion (Zappia, 2015). Furthermore, Filipino cuisine is marked by its freedom and versatility, with cooking as a highly

personal expression. This personal nature of food preparation may explain why recipe standardisation is generally resisted, as it can restrict the ability of Filipinos to honour and reflect the diverse cultural traditions that exist across the archipelago. The food culture reflects pre-colonial values such as nutrition for sustenance, conviviality for social bonding, and healing for medicinal purposes, highlighting that it serves not only as a source of nourishment and tradition but also as a vessel of cultural knowledge and ethical principles. Furthermore, rejecting rigid culinary norms functions as a means of cultural empowerment, enabling Filipinos to resist historical oppression and assert their identity through the preservation and celebration of their varied food practices.

In the literature review, it was shown that food identity connects food to cultural traditions, social significance and personal identity (Abbey & Rigg, 2024; Ciliotta-Rubery, 2016; Sasahara, 2019). The sub-themes discussed in the present chapter reflect these dimensions in alignment with this framework. Cultural traditions are reflected in *adobo*'s cooking techniques, flavour profiles, essential ingredients, and regional distinctions. The dish's social significance is demonstrated through its historical evolution, particularly its transformation during and after Spanish colonisation, and its sustained presence in contemporary Filipino culture. Personal identity is conveyed through individual preferences, varying interpretations of authenticity, and the dish's adaptability to diverse palates and contexts. Thus, these sub-themes—or the key characteristics identified in *adobo*—may be considered relevant indicators in defining the broader identity of Filipino cuisine.

At its core, Filipino *adobo* serves as a culinary testament to the Philippines' complex history as shaped by various foreign influences, particularly from Chinese and Spanish cultures. Initially, an Indigenous preparation using primarily meat, vinegar, and salt, *adobo* evolved as Filipinos selectively incorporated foreign ingredients introduced through trade and colonisation—such as garlic, soy sauce, and bay leaves—adapting them to suit local tastes and cultural sensibilities. This pattern of selective adaptation is evident in many other iconic Filipino dishes, positioning *adobo* as a compelling representation of Filipino food identity.

Limitations and Recommendations

As a Filipino researcher, my cultural proximity to the subject influenced specific interpretations despite efforts to maintain analytical objectivity. Additionally, the scarcity of pre-Spanish historical records limits a deeper understanding of *adobo*'s origins and transformations before colonisation. The blog posts used as data sources also carry inherent limitations, as individual perspectives shape them and often include disclaimers emphasising personal taste rather than authoritative claims. Despite these constraints, the findings point to promising directions for future research—particularly in critically engaging with authenticity in diasporic contexts and exploring how *adobo*, a culinary and cultural symbol, may continue to evolve in a globalised and increasingly hybridised food landscape. Additionally, further research examining the popularity of *adobo* recipes among non-Filipino blog authors and readers could offer valuable insights into how the dish is understood, received, and culturally interpreted beyond the Filipino community.

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Glossary of Filipino Words

adobo – a Filipino dish stewed or braised in vinegar and soy sauce with garlic, black peppercorns and bay leaf; can also be referred as a cooking method

adobong Bisaya – a pork dish braised or stewed in vinegar and soy sauce and then deep-fried until crispy

adobong pusit – a squid dish braised or stewed in vinegar and soy sauce

adobong Tarlac – a pork or chicken dish braised or stewed in vinegar and soy sauce with pineapple juice and/or bits

alat – salty flavour

asim – sour flavour

asin tibuok – a rare Filipino artisanal salt traditionally made by filtering seawater through ashes, giving it a smoky flavour

bagnet – a deep-fried pork belly dish from the Ilocos region

bagoong – salted and fermented fish or shrimp sauce

banana cue – bananas coated in caramelised sugar

barquillos – crispy wafer cookies rolled into a tube or cone

bistek Tagalog – A beef or pork dish cooked with soy sauce and calamansi marinade

dahon ng laurel – bay leaf

dayap – Filipino native lime

dinaldalem – a pork and liver dish from the Ilocos region braised or stewed in vinegar and soy sauce

gisado – sauté

inasal – a spit-roasted chicken dish from the province of Bacolod

inihaw – grilled or roasted on coals

kamias – a sour fruit native to Southeast Asia, particularly in the Philippines and Indonesia

kilain – a pork and liver dish marinated in vinegar and cooked until dry from the city of Pampanga

kilaw – process of curing fish or shellfish using vinegar

kilawin/kinilaw – a dish of uncooked fish or shellfish cured in vinegar

kwek-kwek – deep-fried quail eggs covered in bright orange batter

leche flan – a Filipino dessert made with egg yolks, milk, sugar and vanilla extract; has a similar texture to a custard dessert

lechon – spit-roasted pig

linamnam – savoury flavour

longganisa – Filipino sausage commonly made with pork, beef or chicken

lumpia – a Filipino version of a Chinese spring roll; may contain pork, beef, chicken, shrimp, fish and vegetables

menudo – a stewed pork dish cooked in tomato sauce

nagmamantikang adobo – a pork *adobo* dish cooked until a film of its fat emerged on the sauce

nilaga – boiled

pait – bitter flavour

paksiw na bangus – milkfish dish simmered in salt and vinegar

pansit – a Filipino noodle dish; may be stir-fried or soup-based

pansit guisado – a stir-fried noodle dish made with pork, chicken, beef or shrimp

pansit luglog – a thick noodle dish cooked in shrimp sauce topped with pork, shrimp, squid, boiled egg and crushed crispy pork rind

pansit Malabon – a stir-fried noodle dish made with various seafood options from the city of Malabon, Metro Manila

pansit Marilao – a stir-fried noodle dish made with glutinous rice fritters from the town of Marilao, Bulacan

pansit Molo – a soup-based noodle dish made with molo wonton dumplings

pansit palabok – a thin noodle dish cooked in shrimp sauce topped with pork, shrimp, boiled egg and crushed crispy pork rind

panutsa – a snack or candied dessert made with peanuts and caramelised sugar

pasingaw – steamed

patis – fish sauce

pinamalhan nga bilong-bilong – a fish dish stewed in vinegar, soy sauce, garlic and chili or peppers

prito – fry or fried

sawsawan – dipping sauce; commonly consists of soy sauce, fish sauce, vinegar, calamansi and chili

sinigang – a sour soup dish commonly made with pork, shrimp or fish.

siomai – Filipino version of the Chinese *dim sum* called *siu mai*; may contain pork, chicken, beef, or shrimp

siopao – Filipino version of a Chinese bao bun; a steamed bun filled with various fillings but is commonly made with pork braised in soy sauce and *hoisin* sauce

tamis – sweet flavour

suka – vinegar

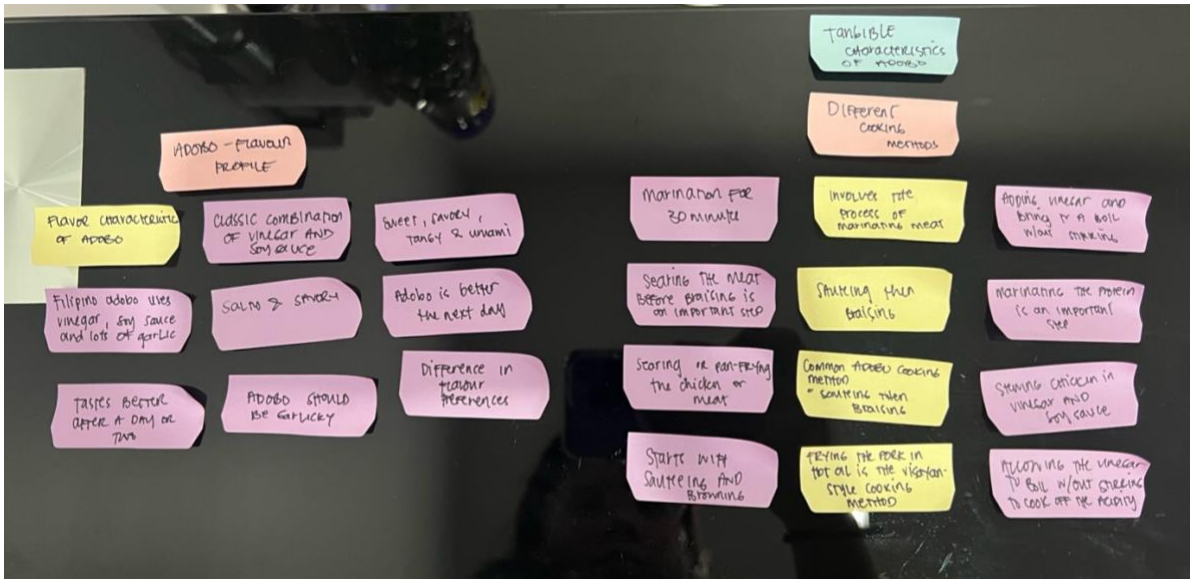
toyo – soy sauce

turon – a snack or street food made with bananas wrapped in spring roll wrapper, deep-fried and coated in caramelised sugar

tuyo – dried small to medium-sized fish

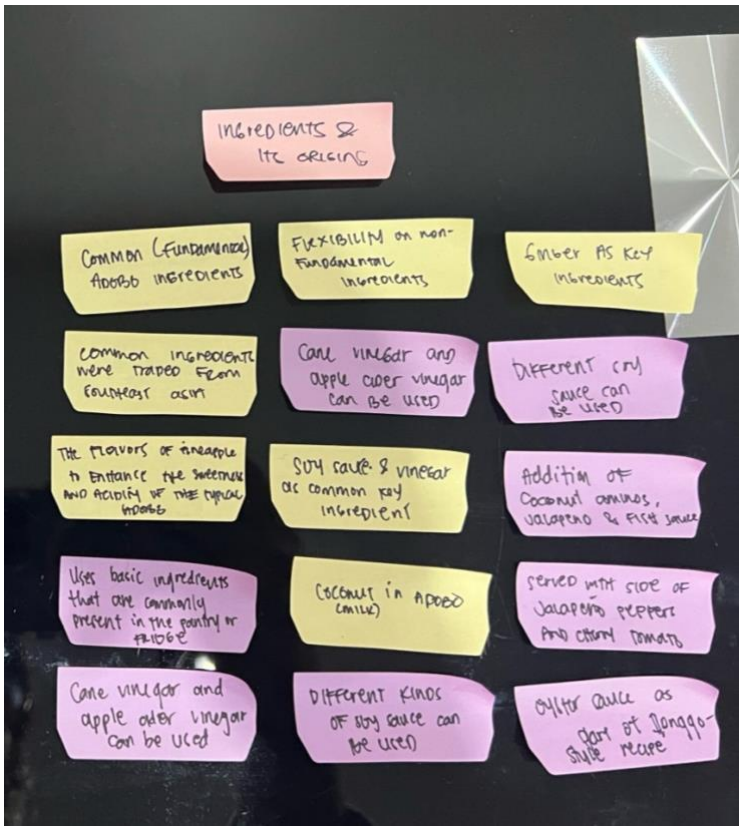
Appendices

Appendix A: Codes under Flavour Profile and Different Cooking Methods



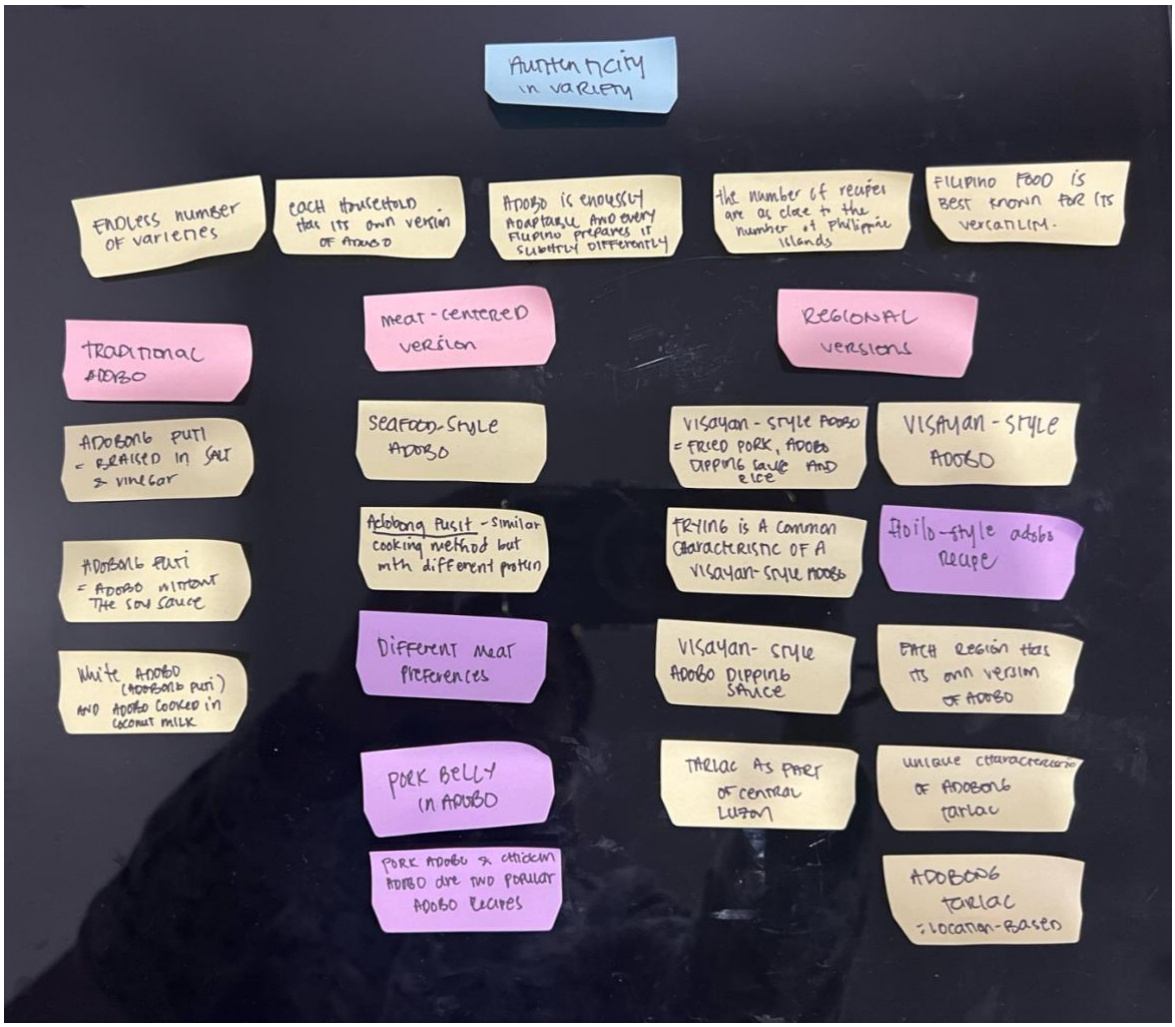
Appendix A presents the codes identified during data collection, categorised under the themes of “flavour profile” and “different cooking methods”. Codes derived from the overseas data set are indicated with yellow sticky notes, while those from the domestic data set are marked with purple sticky notes.

Appendix B: Codes under Fundamental and Non-Fundamental Ingredients



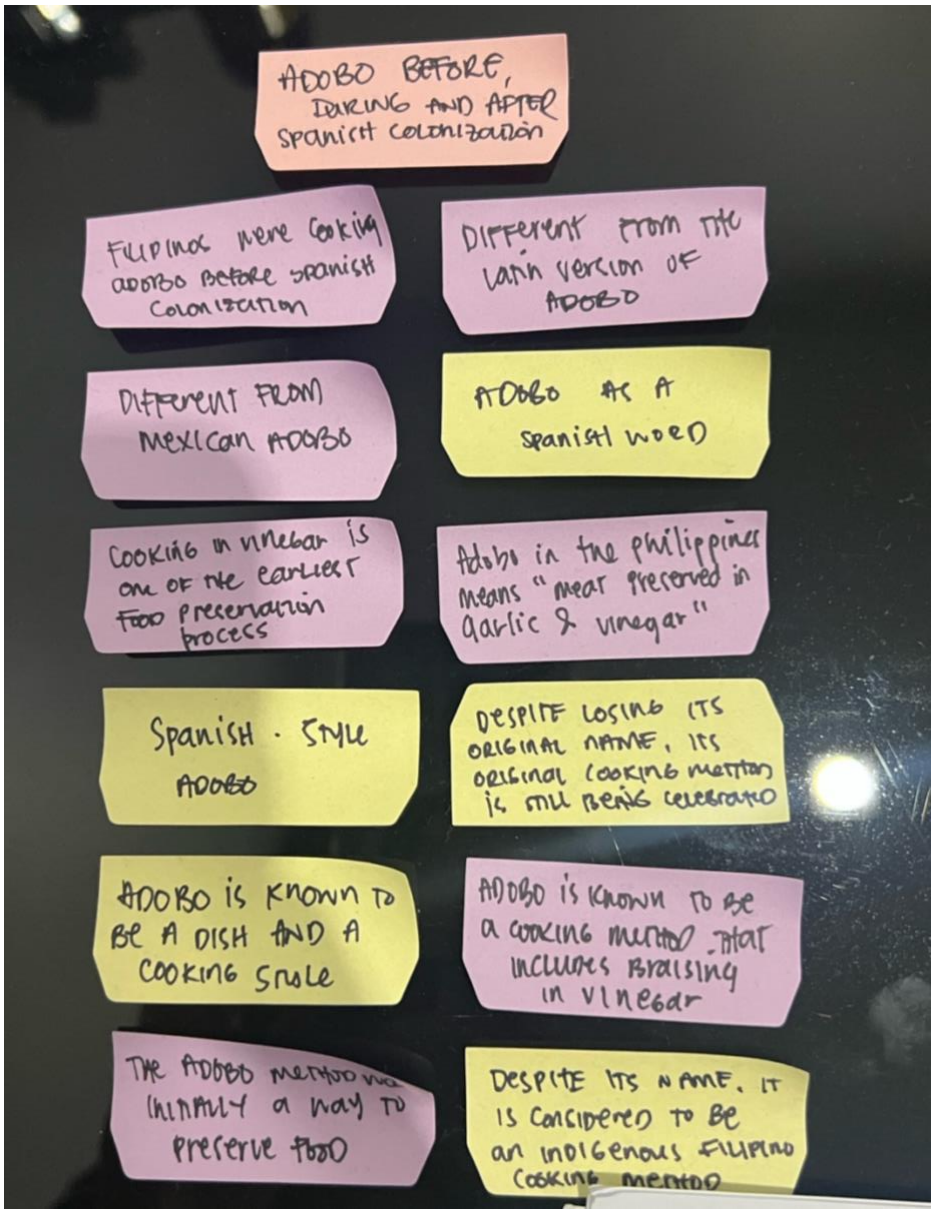
Appendix B presents the codes identified during data collection, categorised under the theme of “fundamental and non-fundamental ingredients”. Codes derived from the overseas data set are indicated with yellow sticky notes, while those from the domestic data set are marked with purple sticky notes.

Appendix C: Codes under Regionality, Personal Preferences and, Authenticity and Adaptability



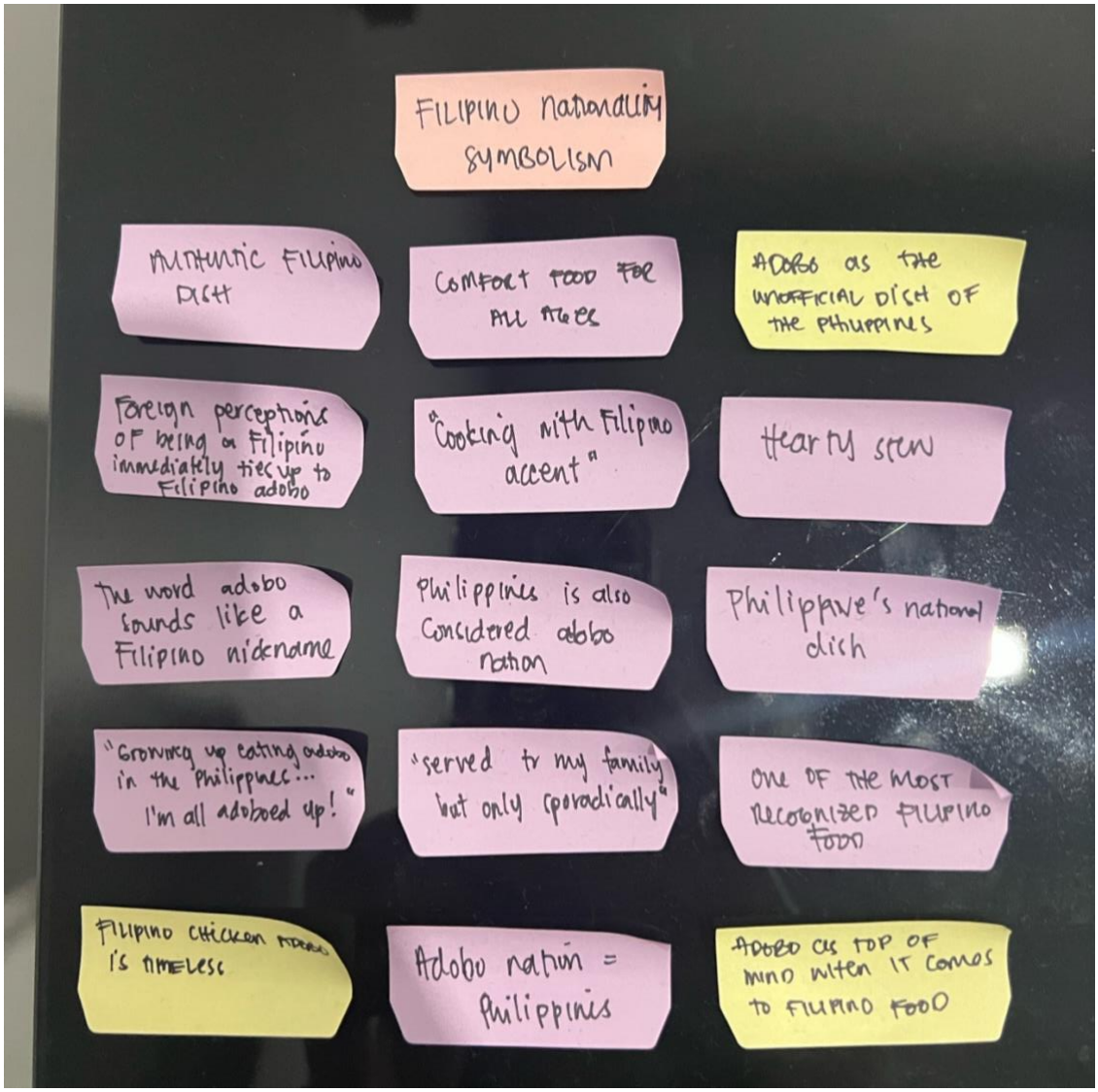
Appendix C presents the codes identified during data collection, categorised under the themes of “regionality”, “personal preferences” and, “authenticity and adaptability”. Codes derived from the overseas data set are indicated with yellow sticky notes, while those from the domestic data set are marked with purple sticky notes.

Appendix D: Codes under *Adobo* Before and During Spanish Colonisation



Appendix D presents the codes identified during data collection, categorised under the theme “adobo before and during Spanish colonisation”. Codes derived from the overseas data set are indicated with yellow sticky notes, while those from the domestic data set are marked with purple sticky notes.

Appendix E: Codes under *Adobo* in the Contemporary Era



Appendix E presents the codes identified during data collection, categorised under the theme "*adobo* in the contemporary era". Codes derived from the overseas data set are indicated with yellow sticky notes, while those from the domestic data set are marked with purple sticky notes.