



From the Shores of Pangasinan: The Taste of Resilience in Every Jar of Bagoong

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ABSTRACT

Bagoong, a traditional fermented fish condiment, is an enduring symbol of Pangasinense identity, cultural heritage, and resilience. This study explored the cultural significance of bagoong through a qualitative narrative inquiry design. Using purposive sampling, five participants representing different sectors of the local bagoong industry, a producer (P1), a vendor (P2), a distributor (P3), a local historian (P4), and a tourism officer (P5), were selected based on their knowledge and involvement in preserving the tradition. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic narrative analysis. The findings revealed that bagoong extends beyond its role as a culinary product, serving as a symbol of cultural identity, family legacy, resilience, and community pride. Participants emphasized the importance of preserving traditional knowledge while adapting to challenges such as commercialization, rising production costs, and changing consumer preferences. They also highlighted the need for youth engagement, innovative marketing strategies, and stronger government support to sustain the local bagoong industry. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on food heritage and community resilience, emphasizing the importance of preserving traditional foodways as an integral part of Pangasinan's intangible cultural heritage.

Keywords: Bagoong, Pangasinan, Cultural Heritage, Narrative Inquiry, Identity, Community Resilience

INTRODUCTION

Food transcends its basic role as sustenance, emerging as a powerful medium of cultural expression and identity (Pugra et al, 2025). Across cultures, traditional dishes serve as repositories of history, reflecting the customs, values, and shared experiences of a community (Graham, 2013). These culinary legacies are often preserved through generations, forging a profound sense of belonging and continuity (Di Giovine & Brulotte, 2016). In this way, food becomes a universal language, connecting people to their heritage and fostering communal pride (Ahmed, 2023).

In the Philippines, condiments like bagoong, a fermented fish or shrimp paste, reflect the ingenuity and adaptability of its people in preserving their culinary legacy (Fernandez, 2019). With its bold umami flavor and versatile use in Filipino cuisine, bagoong stands as a culinary cornerstone that enhances both simple meals and intricate dishes. Its widespread appreciation highlights its significance as more than just a food product but as a cultural artifact deeply intertwined with Filipino life (Scott, 2024).

Among the regions in the Philippines, Bagoong from Pangasinan is more than a mere condiment, it is a cultural symbol reflecting the ingenuity and resilience of its people. This culinary staple also serves as a connection to the province's marine environment, emphasizing Pangasinenses' historical dependence on coastal resources for their livelihood (Aster, Castillo, Cheng, Varlez, & Mercado, 2023). The province's natural wealth of salt and fish resources made it an ideal place to perfect the fermentation process, turning raw fish into a condiment beloved across the country (Soriano et al., 2025).



The production of Pangasinan bagoong is a labor-intensive process rooted in tradition and craftsmanship. Small fish like anchovies and slipmouth are fermented in layers of salt for months, yielding a product celebrated for its distinctive aroma and rich taste (Chowdhury et al., 2025). This careful fermentation process ensures its high quality and makes it an indispensable ingredient in traditional dishes like pinakbet and kare-kare, further elevating its cultural significance (Raymund, 2024). Over generations, these methods have been passed down in family-run businesses, maintaining the authenticity of bagoong while supporting local livelihoods (Sani et al., 2024).

For Pangasinenses, bagoong transcends its status as a condiment to become a symbol of cultural pride and a testament to their enduring heritage (Dalisay, 2015). Festivals celebrating bagoong, such as the Lingayen Bagoong Festival, highlight its cultural and economic significance, showcasing how this tradition continues to thrive amidst globalization (Celario, 2024). Through the lens of bagoong, one can glimpse the values, history, and identity of the Pangasinan people, offering a rich narrative of their love for this iconic culinary treasure.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a narrative inquiry approach to explore the cultural significance of bagoong as a symbol of identity and resilience among the Pangasinense. Qualitative research is appropriate for understanding individuals' lived experiences, meanings, and social realities from their own perspectives (Dodgson, 2023). Narrative inquiry enables researchers to gather and interpret personal stories that reveal how individuals construct meaning from their experiences while situating these narratives within broader cultural and historical contexts (Ladzekpo et al., 2024). This approach allowed the researchers to examine how bagoong reflects the identity, traditions, and resilience of the Pangasinense community.

Participants of the Study

The study employed purposive sampling to select five participants who possessed extensive knowledge and firsthand experience in the bagoong industry. The participants represented different sectors of the local community, including one producer (P1), one vendor (P2), one distributor (P3), one local historian (P4), and one tourism officer (P5). They were selected based on the following criteria: (1) direct involvement or expertise related to the bagoong industry, (2) at least five years of relevant experience, (3) residency in Pangasinan, and (4) willingness to voluntarily participate in the study. Purposive sampling enabled the researchers to obtain rich and information-filled narratives that directly addressed the objectives of the study.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data were gathered through face-to-face semi-structured interviews using an interview guide developed from the objectives of the study. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to openly share their experiences, perceptions, and insights while providing the researchers with sufficient flexibility to probe for deeper explanations (Rabionet, 2022). The interviews focused on the participants' experiences in the bagoong industry, its cultural significance, challenges encountered, and strategies for preserving the tradition. With the participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented with field notes to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the collected data. The interviews were transcribed verbatim before analysis (Chand, 2025).

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic narrative analysis. The researchers first read each transcript repeatedly to become familiar with the participants' narratives. Meaningful statements were identified and assigned initial codes. Similar codes were then grouped into categories, from which broader themes emerged. The analysis focused on both the content and context of the participants' stories, allowing the researchers to

understand how cultural meanings were constructed through lived experiences (Ahmed et al., 2025). The resulting themes formed the basis for interpreting the cultural significance of bagoong as a symbol of identity and resilience among the Pangasinense.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants were informed of the purpose and objectives of the research before the interviews and voluntarily agreed to participate through informed consent. They were assured that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. To protect their identities and maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms in the form of participant codes (P1–P5) were used throughout the study. Audio recordings, transcripts, and other research materials were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

RESULTS

The thematic narrative analysis generated four major themes that describe the cultural significance of bagoong in Pangasinan: (1) Bagoong as a Symbol of Cultural Identity, (2) Resilience Through Traditional Livelihood, (3) Intergenerational Transmission of Knowledge, and (4) Sustaining Bagoong in a Changing Society. These themes emerged from the narratives of the producer (P1), vendor (P2), distributor (P3), local historian (P4), and tourism officer (P5).

Theme 1: Bagoong as a Symbol of Cultural Identity

Participants consistently described bagoong as more than a fermented fish condiment. It was portrayed as a symbol of Pangasinense identity, history, and cultural pride.

P1 shared,

"For me, bagoong is a symbol of our identity as Pangasinenses. It represents our perseverance, creativity, and deep connection to the sea."

Similarly, P2 explained,

"Bagoong is not just food. It is a legacy passed down by my mother and a reminder of our family's history."

P3 also emphasized,

"When people hear 'Lingayen bagoong,' they immediately think of quality, authenticity, and our heritage."

Meanwhile, P4 explained that bagoong reflects the historical relationship between the Pangasinense people and their coastal environment, while P5 noted that it has become one of the province's cultural icons promoted through tourism activities. Collectively, these narratives demonstrate that bagoong functions as an important cultural marker that preserves local identity and strengthens community pride.

Theme 2: Resilience Through Traditional Livelihood

Participants viewed bagoong-making and trading as more than a livelihood; they described it as a reflection of resilience in overcoming economic and social challenges.

P1 stated,



"The cost of fish continues to increase, but we continue because this is our family's livelihood and our tradition."

P2 reflected,

"Selling bagoong allowed me to raise my children despite the difficulties I faced as a single parent."

P3 added,

"Commercial brands may be everywhere, but customers still come back because they know authentic bagoong has a different quality."

P4 observed that the survival of the bagoong industry reflects the determination of local communities to preserve their traditional livelihoods despite modernization. Likewise, P5 emphasized that supporting local producers contributes not only to economic development but also to cultural preservation.

Theme 3: Intergenerational Transmission of Knowledge

Participants emphasized that the knowledge and skills involved in bagoong-making have been transmitted across generations.

P2 narrated,

"Everything I know about making bagoong came from my mother. She patiently taught me every step of the process."

P1 likewise explained,

"I hope the younger generation will continue this tradition because bagoong is part of who we are."

P4 highlighted that documenting traditional practices is essential to preserving Pangasinan's intangible cultural heritage, while P5 emphasized that schools, museums, and tourism programs can encourage younger generations to appreciate traditional foodways.

These narratives illustrate that preserving bagoong depends on continuous knowledge transfer and community participation.

Theme 4: Sustaining Bagoong in a Changing Society

Participants recognized that preserving the tradition requires balancing heritage with innovation.

P1 suggested,

"We should teach the youth through workshops and use social media to show them that bagoong is still relevant today."

P3 recommended,

"Improving packaging and promoting authentic local products will help us compete with commercial brands."

P5 further explained,

"Collaboration among local government units, tourism offices, educational institutions, and producers is essential to preserve bagoong as both a cultural heritage and an economic resource."

Across all narratives, participants agreed that cultural preservation, innovation, youth engagement, and institutional support are necessary to ensure the continued relevance of the bagoong industry. Their experiences demonstrate that bagoong remains a living expression of Pangasinense identity, resilience, and cultural heritage.

DISCUSSION

Bagoong as a Symbol of Cultural Identity

The findings reveal that bagoong is more than a traditional fermented fish condiment; it serves as a powerful representation of Pangasinense identity and cultural heritage. The participants consistently associated bagoong with their history, traditions, and sense of belonging within the community. P1 described bagoong as *"a symbol of our identity as Pangasinenses,"* emphasizing its connection to perseverance and the coastal way of life. Similarly, P2 viewed bagoong as a family legacy passed down through generations, while P3 associated authentic Lingayen bagoong with quality, heritage, and community pride. The perspectives of P4 and P5 further reinforced that bagoong represents not only a culinary tradition but also an important cultural resource that strengthens local identity and promotes Pangasinan's heritage through education and tourism. These findings suggest that bagoong embodies both tangible and intangible aspects of Pangasinense culture, serving as a lasting symbol of the province's history and collective identity.

The present findings support previous studies that recognize traditional food as an important expression of cultural identity and heritage. Pugra et al. (2025) emphasized that traditional foods preserve cultural values and strengthen social identity by fostering a sense of belonging within communities. Similarly, Di Giovine and Brulotte (2016) argued that food functions as a form of cultural heritage because it preserves collective memory and connects present generations with their historical roots. In the Philippine context, Fernandez (2019) explained that Filipino food reflects the country's history, traditions, and cultural practices, while Aster et al. (2023) identified Philippine condiments, including bagoong, as significant components of the nation's culinary heritage. The participants' narratives affirm these perspectives by demonstrating that bagoong is valued not only for its culinary function but also for its role in preserving Pangasinense identity, history, and community pride.

Resilience Through Traditional Livelihood

The findings demonstrate that resilience is a defining characteristic of individuals engaged in the bagoong industry. The participants described how producing and trading bagoong have enabled them to overcome economic hardships while preserving a tradition deeply rooted in Pangasinense culture. P1 explained that despite the increasing cost of fish and other raw materials, the family continues producing bagoong because it serves as both their livelihood and cultural legacy. Likewise, P2 shared that selling bagoong allowed her to support and educate her children despite the challenges she encountered as a single parent. P3 emphasized that maintaining the authenticity and quality of locally produced bagoong has enabled them to remain competitive despite the growing presence of commercial brands. Meanwhile, P4 observed that the survival of the bagoong industry reflects the determination of local communities to preserve their heritage, while P5 emphasized that supporting traditional producers strengthens both the local economy and cultural identity. These findings suggest that resilience is reflected not only in the participants' ability to adapt to economic challenges but also in their commitment to preserving a valuable cultural tradition.

The present findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting the relationship between cultural heritage and sustainable livelihoods. Daskon and McGregor (2012) explained that cultural traditions serve as valuable forms of cultural capital that contribute to sustainable community livelihoods by strengthening resilience and economic security. Similarly, Liu et al. (2022) found that preserving cultural heritage supports local livelihoods

while promoting long-term community development through continued participation in traditional industries. The participants' experiences also reflect the observations of Goodwin et al. (2019), who argued that traditional enterprises must continuously adapt to changing market conditions while maintaining product quality and authenticity to remain competitive. Furthermore, Francis et al. (2022) emphasized that sustaining traditional practices requires perseverance, innovation, and community participation. These studies support the present findings that the bagoong industry continues to thrive because of the resilience, adaptability, and dedication of the individuals who preserve this long-standing cultural tradition.

Intergenerational Transmission of Knowledge

The findings reveal that the continuity of bagoong-making depends largely on the successful transmission of knowledge, skills, and values across generations. The participants emphasized that traditional methods of production are learned primarily through observation, practice, and guidance from older family members and experienced practitioners. P2 shared, *"Everything I know about making bagoong came from my mother. She patiently taught me every step of the process."* Likewise, P1 expressed hope that younger generations would continue the tradition, stating, *"I hope the younger generation will continue this tradition because bagoong is part of who we are."* P4 explained that documenting local practices is essential to preserving Pangasinan's culinary heritage, while P5 emphasized that schools, cultural institutions, and tourism programs can play a significant role in encouraging young people to appreciate and preserve traditional foodways. These findings suggest that the sustainability of the bagoong industry depends not only on economic viability but also on the continuous transfer of indigenous knowledge and cultural values.

The findings support existing literature emphasizing the importance of intergenerational knowledge transmission in preserving cultural heritage. Graham (2013) explained that traditional food practices serve as repositories of history, allowing communities to preserve collective memory and cultural identity through generations. Similarly, Di Giovine and Brulotte (2016) argued that food heritage strengthens continuity by connecting present generations with the customs and traditions of their ancestors. Sani et al. (2024) further emphasized that family-based enterprises play a vital role in safeguarding cultural heritage by transferring traditional knowledge, skills, and values across generations. Moreover, Ladzekpo et al. (2024) highlighted that storytelling and personal narratives are powerful means of preserving cultural identity, enabling communities to communicate their history and traditions to future generations. These studies reinforce the participants' experiences, demonstrating that the preservation of bagoong depends not only on maintaining traditional production techniques but also on ensuring that the knowledge, stories, and cultural meanings associated with the practice continue to be shared with succeeding generations.

Sustaining Bagoong in a Changing Society

The findings indicate that preserving the bagoong industry requires balancing traditional practices with innovation to remain relevant in contemporary society. The participants recognized that while traditional methods should be maintained, adapting to changing consumer preferences and market demands is equally important. P1 suggested, *"We should teach the youth through workshops and use social media to show them that bagoong is still relevant today."* Likewise, P3 emphasized the need to improve product packaging and promote authentic locally produced bagoong to remain competitive against commercial brands. P4 highlighted the importance of documenting the history and cultural significance of bagoong to strengthen public appreciation, while P5 stressed that collaboration among local government units, educational institutions, tourism offices, and local producers is essential for preserving the industry. These findings demonstrate that sustaining bagoong requires a collective effort that integrates cultural preservation, innovation, education, and community participation.

The findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing that cultural heritage must continuously adapt to changing social and economic conditions to remain sustainable. Celario (2024) explained that cultural festivals such as the Lingayen Bagoong Festival play a vital role in promoting local culture while strengthening tourism



and economic development. Similarly, Aster et al. (2023) emphasized that Philippine condiments, including bagoong, represent valuable culinary heritage that should be preserved through community participation and cultural promotion. Bhattacharjee (2025) further argued that preserving traditional crafts contributes to sustainable development by protecting both cultural heritage and local livelihoods. Likewise, Nursanty et al. (2023) found that maintaining the authenticity of local products strengthens community identity and fosters cultural preservation, while Sharma (2025) emphasized that cultural heritage reinforces people's sense of identity and belonging amidst modernization. These studies support the participants' perspectives that sustaining the bagoong industry requires collaborative efforts among communities, government agencies, educational institutions, and the tourism sector to ensure that this important cultural tradition continues to thrive for future generations.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the cultural significance of bagoong as a symbol of identity and resilience among the Pangasinense through the lived experiences of individuals representing different sectors of the local bagoong industry. The findings revealed that bagoong is more than a traditional fermented fish condiment; it is an enduring expression of Pangasinense identity, cultural heritage, and community pride. The narratives demonstrated that bagoong embodies the values of perseverance, resourcefulness, and hard work while strengthening the connection between the people of Pangasinan and their coastal environment.

The study further revealed that the sustainability of the bagoong industry depends on the resilience of local producers and traders, the continuous transmission of traditional knowledge across generations, and the collective efforts of communities and institutions to preserve this important cultural practice. Although modernization, commercialization, and changing consumer preferences continue to challenge the industry, participants recognized that innovation, youth engagement, cultural education, tourism promotion, and government support can contribute to its continued development. Ultimately, preserving bagoong means safeguarding not only a traditional livelihood but also an important element of the intangible cultural heritage of Pangasinan for future generations.

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