The *kuyon* legacy: A qualitative assessment of traditional cookware in Tablas restaurants

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the integration of *kuyon* (traditional clay pots) within the culinary landscape of Tablas Island, Romblon, examining its perceived utility, operational challenges, and socio-cultural significance in contemporary food service. Adopting a qualitative descriptive design, the study utilized semi-structured interviews to elicit insights from a purposive sample of restaurant owners, culinary professionals, and patrons across five establishments. The investigation is theoretically grounded in Cooking Efficiency Theory, Sustainability Theory, and Behavioral Economics, providing a multi-dimensional framework to analyze the factors influencing the adoption or rejection of traditional implements in modern settings. Findings indicate that *kuyon* significantly enhances the organoleptic attributes of food, specifically flavor profiles, aroma, and thermal retention. It simultaneously presents logistical constraints such as material fragility, prolonged cooking durations, and maintenance complexities that may compromise operational throughput. Despite these impediments, the study identifies cookware as a vital conduit for cultural heritage preservation and a tool for advancing environmentally sustainable culinary practices. The study concludes that *kuyon* maintains profound relevance in contemporary gastronomy when balanced with modern kitchen demands; consequently, it recommends iterative product development focusing on durability and standardized dimensions, alongside strategic market interventions to support local artisans. Ultimately, this study underscores the viability of traditional cookware as a catalyst for sustainable, heritage-driven culinary innovation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cooking methods and cookware significantly influence food flavor, nutrition, and cultural identity (Tandra & Minantyo, 2025). Traditional clay cookware, such as the *kuyon* or *palayok*, is valued for its even heat distribution, moisture retention, and ability to enhance the taste and texture of slow-cooked dishes (Bawa & Sobti, 2025). Its natural and biodegradable properties also support sustainable and environmentally friendly cooking practices. However, the widespread use of modern cookware in commercial kitchens has contributed to a decline in

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the everyday use of clay pots due to convenience, durability, and consistency (Bawa & Sobti, 2025). Despite this, interest in traditional cooking methods is re-emerging as part of global movements toward sustainability, authentic culinary experiences, and cultural preservation (Batyrbek & Chisbiyah, 2025).

This study explores the perceptions and experiences of restaurant owners, chefs, kitchen staff, and customers regarding the use of *kuyon* (clay pots) in restaurant settings. It examines the benefits, limitations, and challenges associated with clay cookware, as well as its role in promoting authentic cuisine, cultural heritage, and sustainable practices. Addressing a gap in existing research, the study aims to provide insights into how traditional clay pots can be integrated into modern restaurant operations and contribute to sustainable and culturally meaningful dining experiences.

The National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009 (Republic Act No. 10066) declares that it is the policy of the state to protect, preserve, and promote the nation's cultural heritage, including traditional knowledge, skills, and practices. Under this act, local communities are recognized as key stakeholders in the safeguarding of cultural heritage and are encouraged to sustain indigenous craftsmanship, such as pottery-making, through education, practice, and public awareness (Andalecio, 2021). This legal framework supports initiatives that integrate heritage practices into modern life, such as the use of *kuyon* in cooking, which help preserve cultural identity while addressing contemporary concerns like sustainability and health.

Locally known as *kuyon*, these clay pots are not only used in household cooking across Tablas Island, Romblon, but are also gaining attention in some local restaurants. Restaurateurs are increasingly interested in adopting *kuyons* not only for their culinary advantages but also for their environmental benefits. Unlike modern cookware, such as stainless steel, cast iron, or non-stick pans, whose production processes often involve harmful chemicals and contribute to industrial pollution, k*uyons* are made from natural clay materials. Their eco-friendly nature and energy efficiency, due to excellent heat retention, contribute to reduced cooking gas consumption.

Beyond environmental benefits, restaurant owners must also consider factors such as cost-effectiveness, kitchen efficiency, durability, and customer preferences when deciding whether to adopt *kuyons* in their food preparation processes. While the environmental appeal is strong, the practicality of daily use in a commercial kitchen must also be assessed (Nugroho et al., 2020).

Despite the growing appreciation for traditional cooking methods, there remains limited local evidence on how *kuyon* is being utilized within restaurant operations across Tablas Island, Romblon. Although research on clay pot use in commercial kitchens is scarce, the province's long-standing pottery tradition and the recognized culinary and environmental advantages of *kuyon* indicate an emerging interest and potential for wider application in the

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local food industry. Preliminary observations suggest a mix of interest and hesitation, but no clear statistics currently capture the extent of their usage or the motivations behind adoption or rejection. Hence, this study seeks to address this gap by exploring the perceptions, preferences, and practices of restaurant owners, chefs, kitchen staff, and customers regarding the use of *kuyon* in food preparation and service.

The research aims to identify both the advantages and challenges associated with its use, particularly in terms of food quality, practicality, operational efficiency, and sustainability. Ultimately, this study aspires to contribute to a deeper understanding of how traditional cookware such as *kuyon* can play a meaningful role in promoting sustainable culinary practices while preserving cultural and gastronomic heritage. The insights generated may assist local restaurants in developing innovative, environmentally conscious, and culturally rooted approaches to modern Filipino cuisine.

By examining the role of traditional cookware in contemporary food service, this study aligns with emerging research on culinary heritage, operational integration, and sustainable dining. For instance, Canet (2026) highlighted how indigenous cooking vessels enhance the perceived authenticity of regional cuisine in Filipino restaurants, while Trivedi et al. (2017) demonstrated that clay pot usage correlates with higher customer satisfaction due to improved flavor retention and texture. Furthermore, Batyrbek and Chisbiyah (2025) argued that reviving traditional culinary tools supports sustainable tourism by reinforcing local heritage and reducing dependency on energy-intensive modern equipment. These findings collectively underscore the strategic relevance of investigating *kuyon* integration within commercial kitchens.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Material Properties and Culinary Advantages of Clay Pot Cooking

Clay pots exhibit significant structural durability, maintaining their integrity for extended periods when subjected to proper maintenance. These implements are particularly suited for high-thermal applications, as they are capable of withstanding temperatures up to 1,000°F. A primary advantage of earthenware is its capacity for nutrient retention; by effectively sealing in moisture, clay pots facilitate a cooking environment that enhances both the flavor profile and the nutritional density of the food (Trivedi et al., 2017; Khan & Banerjee, 2020).

Utilizing clay cookware provides a range of physiological benefits while simultaneously streamlining the culinary process. Compared to standard metallic utensils, clay pots offer a superior cooking medium that improves the overall quality and chemical integrity of the final dish. The inherent porosity and natural insulation of clay promote the uniform circulation of heat and moisture. Although this necessitates a more protracted cooking duration, it provides a functional benefit by preventing the thermal degradation or charring of ingredients. More

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importantly, the use of clay significantly reduces the loss of moisture and essential nutrients compared to metal or enamel-lined alternatives (Muhmed et al., 2019).

The adoption of sustainable kitchen practices reflects a growing commitment to environmental stewardship within the culinary industry. The use of reusable, biodegradable kitchenware and energy-efficient appliances illustrates the modern convergence of gastronomic innovation and ecological responsibility. In leading culinary institutions, the integration of advanced hardware, ranging from precision sous-vide equipment to avant-garde plating tools, has revolutionized the professional landscape. Conversely, in traditional contexts, revered implements such as the Mexican molcajete and the Thai mortar and pestle remain essential for preserving the authenticity and sensory characteristics of heritage cuisines (Trisdayanti et al., 2026).

Contemporary kitchenware, constructed from stainless steel, non-stick polymers, and silicone, is engineered to meet the efficiency and aesthetic demands of a fast-paced, health-conscious society (Pereira, 2020). This evolution marks a shift in the culinary ethos: while traditional utensils relied on the natural properties of raw earth and metals, modern design prioritizes specialized material customization for human convenience, reflecting an increasing degree of environmental control over food preparation (Lisboa et al., 2024).

Despite these advancements, traditional cookware remains valued for its high thermal mass and ability to enhance flavor profiles. Clay and stoneware, for instance, offer non-reactive surfaces ideal for slow-cooking acidic dishes while preserving heat and nutrient integrity (Ruci et al., 2025). Furthermore, traditional metal vessels like brass and copper can leach essential trace minerals (such as zinc and copper) into food while offering inherent antimicrobial properties (Singh & Goel, 2021). Rather than replacing these traditional tools entirely, modern manufacturing techniques, such as advanced non-porous ceramic glazing and precision temperature controls, are increasingly applied to hybridize traditional materials with modern gas and induction kitchen infrastructure (Lisboa et al., 2024; Pereira, 2020).

Traditional cookware remains highly valued for its thermal mass and its ability to impart unique flavor profiles that modern alternatives often lack. For example, clay and stoneware are ideal for slow-cooking acidic ingredients, as their non-reactive surfaces preserve both taste and nutritional value. Furthermore, brass and copper utensils contribute essential trace minerals, such as zinc and copper, to the diet and possess inherent antimicrobial properties that reduce the necessity for reheating, thereby maintaining nutrient integrity (Veronica, 2024). While modern cookware prioritizes speed, contemporary innovations have been applied to traditional tools to enhance their utility. Modern glazing techniques, for instance, reduce the porosity of clay to facilitate easier sanitation without compromising heat retention, while

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traditional wood-fired ovens now incorporate precision temperature controls to align with modern gas-burner infrastructure (Özbek et al., 2024).

The Role of Indigenous Materials in Culinary Practices

Indigenous materials such as brass, copper, iron, clay, and stone have played a significant role in traditional culinary practices, offering both cultural significance and health benefits. These materials are valued not only for their functional properties in cooking but also for their contribution to nutrition, food safety, and sustainability. Research highlights that traditional utensils made from brass, copper, and iron contribute essential trace minerals to the diet. For instance, copper in known to promote collagen synthesis, while brass helps in water retention, which can improve immunity. Cast iron cookware enriches food with bioavailable iron, particularly when cooking acidic foods, thus helping prevent iron deficiency (Ruci et al., 2025). Clay and earthenware pots enhance flavor and preserve nutrients by slow, even cooking without leaching harmful substances, making meals healthier and more digestible (Heimann, 2025) Indigenous materials are deeply intertwined with cultural identity and culinary heritage. The use of traditional cookware preserves ancestral knowledge and food sovereignty, especially among Indigenous communities. Tableware crafted from locally soured clay or metals carries symbolic motifs and supports sustainable food systems by emphasizing the use of natural, eco-friendly resources (Natarajan et al., 2019).

According Villardo (2021), explored the traditional local indigenous foods of the Subanen people in Zamboanga City, Philippines. The study revealed how indigenous material and techniques are integral to preparing native dishes such as coconut milk-based meals and rice wine. Villardo (2021) emphasized that these culinary practices are at risk of being forgotten due to socio-cultural changes, recommending documentation and preservation efforts to maintain indigenous culinary heritage culinary claims as cultural heritage preservation have been emphasized who note that indigenous materials and cooking methods are vital to sustaining regional culinary traditions across generations. These practices not only preserve food heritage but also affirm indigenous identity and cultural continuity.

In the Philippines, they studied the use of native clay pots *(palayok)* in traditional Filipino cooking. Their research showed that clay pots enhance the nutritional quality and flavor of food, and customers are increasingly aware of these benefits. The study recommended promoting clay pot cooking in restaurants to preserve indigenous culinary heritage and improve food quality (Quicho et al., 2019).

Local food sourcing plays a critical role in promoting sustainability across environmental, economic, and social dimensions. Research over the past two decades has emphasized the environmental benefits of sourcing food locally, primarily through reducing transportation distances which significantly lowers greenhouse gas emissions associated with food supply

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chains (Burg et al., 2025). A study by Iowa State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (2022) further supports this by demonstrating that local vegetable production and distribution yield significant environmental advantages overall, including reduced carbon footprints and resource use.

The sustainability of local food system is complex and multifaceted. While some literature debates the exact relationship between local food and sustainability, many agree that local sourcing supports sustainable agricultural practices such as organic farming, crop rotation, and water conservation, which help preserve soil fertility and ecological balance (Burg et al., 2025). Moreover, local sourcing reduces the need for preservatives and packaging, contributing to a cleaner environment.

Economically, local food sourcing boosts local economies by keeping money circulating within communities, supporting small-scale farmers, and creating jobs in agriculture, marketing, and sales sectors. This economic sustainability is evident in restaurant businesses that employ local sourcing, which benefit from better food quality, customer satisfaction, and supply chain control, leading to improved sales and profits (Sunjaya et al., 2025). Additionally, local sourcing fosters entrepreneurship and innovation within the food sector.

Health and safety benefits also arise from local food sourcing (Andjarwati et al., 2023). Shorter supply chains ensure fresher, more nutritious food with higher vitamin and mineral content. Local sourcing enhances food safety by reducing contamination risks and improving transparency through direct relationships with producers (Baikadamova et al., 2024). Public food procurement studies highlight the growing consensus among stakeholders on the importance of purchasing local and organic products to promote environmental sustainability. However, challenges such as logistics for small producers and the need for better climate footprint data remain (Baikadamova et al., 2024).

The enduring relevance of traditional clay pot cookware, along with its profound cultural, nutritional, and environmental benefits, serves as a reminder of the importance of preserving indigenous culinary practices. As we continue to navigate the complexities of modern life, embracing these time-honored methods not only enriches our culinary experiences but also fosters a deeper connection to our cultural heritage and the environment. The revitalization of traditional kitchenware and local food sourcing offers a path toward sustainability, healthier communities, and the preservation of food traditions for generations to come (Natalie et al., 2023).

Cultural Continuity and Heritage Preservation

Mercado and Andaleciao (2020) conducted a qualitative investigation into the revival of traditional cookware in Barangay San Vicente, Ilocos Sur. Findings showed that elders play a key role in transmitting knowledge about the palayok to younger generations, maintaining not

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only culinary traditions but also a sense of identity. However, the study lacked quantitative data on usage patterns or health impacts.

In a more cultural and archaeological lens, Melendres (2015) explored the decline of traditional cooking pot-making in Gatbuca, Bulacan. This study used an ethnoarchaeological approach to document the fading community craft due to modernization. The research underscored the importance of heritage conservation policies and cultural tourism initiatives as viable means of sustaining dying local traditions.



Figure 1. A Local Artisan in Barangay Anahao, Odiongan, Romblon Demonstrating the Traditional Fabrication of *Kuyon* Cookware
Source: Odiongan Tourism Office

Further reinforcing the importance of cultural continuity, Yankowski (2019) published a contemporary review of historical pot-making practices in Batangas. Revisiting his earlier work from 1917, Yankowski (2019) assessed how traditional clay cookware continues to serve both functional and cultural roles in modern Filipino households. His findings affirmed that despite modernization, clay cookware remains a valued kitchen tool in preserving traditional cooking methods.

Luquin (2021) conducted an ethnographic study on traditional cookware usage in Mindoro. She noted that Mangyan communities still use clay pots daily for both cooking and

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spiritual rituals. This dual purpose underscores the deep cultural resonance of clay cookware in Indigenous Filipino life, extending beyond utility to symbolism and spirituality.

Womack et al. (2019) researched the use of clay cookware in rural China, particularly in Fujian Province. They found that traditional clay pots are still widely used for dishes like claypot rice, which retains more flavor and nutrients than cooking with modern cookware. Their study highlights the ongoing cultural relevance of traditional cookware in rural communities and the need for institutional support to preserve these practices.

Joby (2025) conducted a study in rural Taiwan. This research explored how clay pots are used in family recipes passed down through generations, focusing on dishes like lou rou fan and chicken soup. The study found that cooking with clay not only enhances the flavor and nutritional quality of food but also strengthens family bonds by fostering shared cooking practices. The researchers argued that traditional cooking methods are crucial for maintaining a cultural connection to food in the face of rapid modernization.

Galego et al. (2020) examined the role of traditional cookware in Colombia. They found that cooking with clay in rural Colombian communities is linked to environmental sustainability, as it reduces reliance on gas and electricity. Additionally, the study found that clay cookware plays an important cultural role, especially in preparing traditional dishes like arepas and tamales. Galego et al. (2020) emphasized the ecological benefits of using clay and the potential for its revitalization in modern kitchens.

In the local context of San Juan, Batangas, De la Cruz, (2021) carried out an entrepreneurial study on clay pot-makers. The research examined the economic viability and cultural sustainability of the traditional pot-making industry. It emphasized the pressing need for innovation and improved market access to sustain the livelihood of artisans and to keep the practice relevant in the modern economy. Similarly, Claveria (1994) investigated the entrepreneurial challenges faced by clay pot manufacturers in Tiwi, Albay. The findings highlighted key socio-economic constraints, such as limited government support and weak market linkages, which hinder the growth and sustainability of this traditional craft. The study recommended the provision of stronger institutional support and the development of marketing strategies to revive public interest in traditional kitchenware.

Tungpalan et al. (2026) analyzed the integration of clay pottery into sustainable livelihoods in Vigan, Ilocos Sur. The study emphasized that the declining practice of *palayok*-making threatens not only tangible heritage but also intergenerational knowledge. Tungpalan et al. (2026) advocated policy support and community-based interventions to preserve the craft. Mercado and Andaleciao (2020) surveyed public perceptions of traditional kitchen tools in Central Luzon. Their mixed-methods study revealed that older adults valued *palayok* for its authenticity and environmental friendliness. However, younger informants viewed it as outdated, revealing a generational divide that needs to be bridged through educational

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campaigns and heritage-based cooking initiatives. Williams (2018) focused on Mexico in their study by comparing cooking practices in rural and urban settings. Williams (2018) found that the use of clay cookware not only enhances the flavor of food but also promotes sustainability by reducing reliance on industrially produced materials. Their study highlighted the broader cultural and environmental significance of preserving traditional cooking methods in an increasingly globalized world.

3. METHODOLOGY

Applying a retrospective lens, this study utilized a qualitative descriptive research design systematically documenting the perceptions, preferences, and praxis surrounding the utilization of *kuyon* among gastronomic stakeholders across Tablas Island, Romblon. By prioritizing a phenomenological adherence to the participants lived experiences, this methodological framework facilitated a factual, nuanced account of traditional cookware integration within contemporary culinary environments without the imposition of prior theoretical constraints. Data acquisition was executed through semi-structured interviews with a purposively selected cohort of 16 participants, comprising eight restaurant professionals and eight consumers from establishments in Tablas Island. This approach ensured the procurement of rich, longitudinal insights into the cultural resonance and operational exigencies of *kuyon* usage, specifically targeting individuals with a minimum of six months' professional tenure or firsthand dining experience.

The investigation, conducted from September to December of the 2025, leveraged purposive sampling to isolate informants whose specialized knowledge offered the highest degree of teleological relevance to the research objectives. This non-probability technique allowed for a rigorous exploration of the dialectic between ancestral culinary artifacts and modern commercial kitchen requirements. By conducting interviews in sites across the diverse municipalities of Tablas Island, the researchers captured an authentic cross-section of the island's evolving culinary heritage. Ultimately, this methodological synthesis provided a comprehensive understanding of the *kuyon*'s enduring significance, effectively bridging the gap between traditional materiality and the socio-economic dynamics of the contemporary regional restaurant industry.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Restaurant Owners and Staff

Culinary Excellence and Sensory Appeal

Informants consistently noted that cooking with *kuyon* enhances the quality of cooking and improves the aroma of the food. It is perceived to provide a better taste compared to

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stainless steel cookware because it allows the flavors to be fully absorbed *("lasang-lasa yung pagkain")*. Furthermore, its ability to retain heat ensures that food remains hot and fresh when served to customers.

This theme suggests that *kuyon* serves as more than just a vessel; it is a culinary tool that adds value to the sensory experience of dining. The natural properties of clay contribute to superior food quality through enhanced thermal retention and aromatic intensification, which directly influences customer satisfaction.

Cultural Identity and Branding

The use of *kuyon* is strongly linked to Filipino tradition and heritage. Staff members described it as a way to preserve culture and show respect for tradition. It provides a "*probinsya* vibe" (provincial vibe) and reminds customers of home-cooked meals. This cultural connection helps restaurants establish an authentic identity as a true Pinoy establishment.

Beyond its functional use, *kuyon* acts as a powerful branding tool. By tapping into nostalgia and national identity, restaurants use clay pots to differentiate themselves in the market. The vessel itself communicates a story of authenticity and cultural pride, creating a unique dining atmosphere that resonates emotionally with local customers.

Operational Challenges and Vulnerabilities

The primary operational challenge identified is the slow cooking time and delayed serving. Unlike metal cookware, clay pots take longer to heat up. Additionally, durability is a major concern; *kuyon* is described as fragile, prone to cracking under high heat, and easily broken if not handled with extreme care. Cleaning and maintenance also pose difficulties, as the porous material can retain odors if not washed meticulously.

While *kuyon* offers culinary benefits, it introduces significant operational risks. The conflict between traditional slow-cooking methods and the fast-paced requirements of modern restaurant service necessitates careful time management. The material's fragility also introduces a financial and logistical burden, as constant breakage requires frequent replacements and specialized handling by staff.

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Figure 2. Diversity of Clay-Based Products in Tablas Island–A Standard *Kuyon* Featured Among Other Traditional Ceramic Utility Wares
Source: Odiongan Tourism Office

Innovation for Modern Commercial Use

To make *kuyon* more suitable for modern restaurant operations, informants suggested several design and material improvements. These include adding handles to prevent burns, ensuring fitted lids to maintain heat, and making the pots thicker for better durability. There were also recommendations for makers to use social media for better marketing and to offer eco-friendly packaging and discounts to attract more business.

There is a clear demand for a modernized *kuyon* that retains its traditional soul while meeting professional standards of safety and efficiency. Innovation in ergonomic design (handles) and material science (structural reinforcement) is essential for the continued viability of clay pots in the commercial food industry. This transition from traditional handicraft to improved commercial product represents a necessary evolution for local pot-making industries.

Customers

The Gastronomic Advantage of Traditional Cookware

Customers reported a significant difference in the sensory quality of food served in *kuyon*. The data highlights codes such as Enhanced Flavor Preservation and Appetizing

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Aroma. Participants noted that the food is *"mas malinamnam"* (more flavorful) and that the *"lasa"* (taste) is better preserved compared to metal cookware. Furthermore, Heat Retention was a recurring point, with customers noting that the food remains hot until the end of the meal.

The use of traditional cookware provides a functional culinary edge that modern alternatives struggle to replicate. The porous nature of the clay and its unique thermal properties do not just serve as a container but act as a flavor enhancer. This suggests that for customers, the *kuyon* is synonymous with culinary superiority, transforming a standard meal into a premium sensory experience through consistent heat and intensified aromas.

Elevating Restaurant Identity through Visual Tradition

This theme focuses on the decorative aesthetic and unique presentation of the *kuyon*. Customers expressed being "amazed" by the presentation, describing it as "native style," "unique," and *"maganda at malinis tingnan"* (beautiful and clean to look at). The data indicates that the visual presence of the clay pot adds a layer of aesthetic identity to the establishment.

In the competitive restaurant industry, visual differentiation is key. The *kuyon* serves as a powerful visual cue that elevates the restaurant's brand from a generic eatery to a specialized destination. By integrating Visual Tradition, restaurants leverage the rustic charm of the clay pot to create an exciting and "Instagrammable" atmosphere that appeals to the modern diner's desire for unique and aesthetically pleasing experiences.

Preservation of Cultural Heritage in Modern Dining

The qualitative data reveals a deep Cultural Connection felt by the customers. Participants mentioned that the use of *kuyon* "gives us culture as a Filipino" and provides a nostalgic connection to *"lutong bahay"* (home-cooked meals) and the ways of *"matatanda noong unang panahon"* (elders in the old days). This category is defined by the preservation of culinary heritage.

Dining is interpreted by customers as a medium for cultural transmission. The *kuyon* acts as a bridge between the past and the present, allowing modern diners to reconnect with their ancestral roots. For the restaurant, using clay pots is not just a service choice but an act of cultural preservation. It fulfills a psychological need for belonging and identity, making the dining experience feel more "authentic" and "meaningful" through shared national history.

Commitment to Quality and Holistic Well-being

A distinct portion of the data relates to health and quality. Customers perceived the *kuyon* as being "toxic-free" and "chemical-free" compared to metal pots. There is a belief that

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the use of such materials indicates that the restaurant is "more serious about quality" and puts more "effort into the presentation."

Modern consumers are increasingly health-conscious and value holistic well-being (Kezia et al., 2023). The perception of clay as a "natural" and "clean" material translates into a perception of higher food safety and restaurant professionalism. This suggests that using traditional tools signals a commitment to quality that goes beyond taste; it suggests a care for the customer's health and a dedication to craftsmanship, thereby building deeper trust between the establishment and the patron.

Discussions

The utilization of the *kuyon* in Tablas restaurants represents a sophisticated intersection of sensory enhancement and cultural branding, where the material properties of the clay directly contribute to superior food quality. Empirical evidence from both culinary staff and patrons suggests that these traditional vessels significantly augment the organoleptic properties of the cuisine, imparting a *"lasang-lasa"* (full-bodied flavor) and an olfactory freshness that modern metallic cookware often fails to replicate. This sensory appeal is bolstered by the material's functional thermal inertia; the *kuyon* demonstrates exceptional heat retention, ensuring temperature stability throughout the duration of the meal and mitigating the necessity for repeated reheating. Beyond these technical advantages, the adoption of clay pots serves as a strategic marker of *"tunay na Pinoy"* (authentic Filipino) identity. By evoking a "probinsya vibe," the *kuyon* facilitates a nostalgic connection for the consumer, transforming the dining experience into a "native style" aesthetic event that aligns with contemporary preferences for "toxic-free" and holistic culinary practices.

Conversely, the integration of traditional earthenware into a high-volume commercial environment necessitates a critical evaluation of its operational vulnerabilities and maintenance requirements . The primary constraints identified center on the inherent fragility of the medium and its relatively low thermal conductivity, which results in protracted cooking times and potential service latencies. Furthermore, the porous nature of the clay presents unique sanitization hurdles, as the material is susceptible to staining and the sequestration of residual odors if not managed with specialized care. To reconcile these traditional methods with modern industrial standards, stakeholders advocate for targeted design innovations. Enhancing the structural integrity of the vessels, specifically through increased material thickness and the addition of ergonomic features such as lids and sturdy handles (halawidan), is essential for improving commercial durability. Such advancements would ensure that the *kuyon* remains a viable and robust instrument within the evolving landscape of the Philippine hospitality industry.

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5. CONCLUSION

The integration of the *kuyon* within the restaurant sector of Tablas Island represents a sophisticated convergence of gastronomic superiority and strategic cultural branding. This study concludes that traditional earthenware serves as a decisive catalyst for elevating the sensory quality of food, where its unique material properties enhance flavor preservation and olfactory appeal. Furthermore, the functional advantage of *kuyon* is rooted in its superior thermal inertia, which ensures consistent heat retention and maintains the ideal serving temperature, a critical factor in high-standard culinary service. Beyond its utilitarian role, the *kuyon* functions as a vital semiotic and branding asset, anchoring the identity of local establishments in *"tunay na Pinoy"* (authentic Filipino) heritage. This alignment with traditional craftsmanship fosters a profound nostalgic connection with consumers, who increasingly perceive the use of clay cookware as a hallmark of professional commitment to both cultural preservation and holistic, "toxic-free" well-being.

Despite these advantages, the research identifies a significant tension between the pursuit of traditional authenticity and the exigencies of modern operational efficiency. The inherent physical fragility and protracted thermal conductivity of the *kuyon* necessitates a strategic trade-off, as these factors can introduce service latencies and maintenance risks within high-volume commercial workflows. Furthermore, this study highlights a critical dearth of localized empirical data concerning the socio-economic motivations and logistical constraints of earthenware usage in the contemporary culinary landscape of Romblon. By addressing this knowledge gap, the research provides a foundational framework for reconciling the functional benefits of traditional implements with the rigorous demands of modern kitchen management. Future scholarly inquiry should, therefore, focus on design innovations and workflow adaptations that allow the *kuyon* to remain a robust and viable instrument in a sustainable, heritage-driven hospitality industry.

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