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CURATED WORK

Tempe as Language—An Indonesian Village Revitalisation Mini-Project

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Abstract

In Kandangan, a village in the Temanggung Regency (Kabupaten Temanggung) in the Province of Central Java, *tempe bunguk* used to be a daily food—using locally grown *bunguk* beans—and made in many households. But imported blocks of *tempe* from China made with industrially grown soy beans have slowly crept in and replaced it. As part of her food skills mapping (a part of the Spedagi Project), Francisca Callista (Siska) went searching for what used to be eaten in her village, and for those who could remember how to make it.

Keywords

Indonesia; Java; Jawa; design; tempe bunguk; preserving; fermenting; permaculture; food cultures; food practices; food design; food tradition; slow food

In Kandangan, a village in the Temanggung Regency (Kabupaten Temanggung) in the Province of Central Java, tempe bunguk used to be a daily food—using locally grown bunguk beans—which was made in most households. But imported blocks of tempe from China, made with industrially grown soy beans, have slowly crept in and replaced it.

As part of her food skills mapping—within the [Spedagi Project](#), an Indonesian ‘movement in village revitalization’—Francisca Callista (Siska) went searching for what used to be eaten in her village, and for those who could remember how to make it.

She found Parni, who remembered how to make tempe bunguk as her mother did, so they went to the market and purchased two kilograms of dried bunguk beans. The resulting tempe worked, much to everyone’s delight and slight surprise, and it sold out in the first three households. And so more was made.

Following word that tempe bunguk was again being made in the village, after two months Subiyani came forward to tell Parni and Siska that he was growing bunguk just at the edge of the village—as a living fertiliser for his banana crops. One hundred percent ‘Kandangan tempe bunguk’ was born!

The husk and bean skins have traditionally been used as a batik dye, and so Siska has been passing them along to Yuni, a local batik artist, to begin experimenting with.

Parni and Mujiya now make about five kilograms of tempe bunguk a week, in small banana leaf wrapped parcels. The resulting tempe bunguk is intended primarily to supply the village, and any extra is sold at Pasa Papringan, the monthly no-waste market in Kandangan that focuses on traditional foods and crafts.

Siska describes the tempe bunguk mini-project as a language—a way to re-establish community connections. The project provides sustainable, environmental, economic and cultural glue for the families involved in its creation. And it results in lots of tasty tempe bunguk.

Kirsten Bradley visited Kandangan and the Spedagi Project as part of the [IndoAust Design Futures Project](#).



Figure 1 Bunguk beans (*Mucuna pruriens*) growing in Mujiyah’s garden, digital photograph, 2016 © Kirsten Bradley



Figure 2 Parni handing across some Bunguk beans, digital photograph, 2016
© Kirsten Bradley



Figure 3 Dried Bunguk beanpods, ready to be shucked, digital photograph, 2016
© Kirsten Bradley



Figure 4 Shelling bungk beans, digital photograph, 2016 © Kirsten Bradley



Figure 5 Mujiyah's house—centre of tempe bungk enterprise, digital photograph, 2016 © Kirsten Bradley



Figure 6 Mujiyah boiling bunguk beans, digital photograph, 2016 © Kirsten Bradley



Figure 7 Removing boiled bunguk beans for cooling, digital photograph, 2016 © Kirsten Bradley



Figure 8 Slipping the skins off boiled bunguk beans, digital photograph, 2016
© Kirsten Bradley



Figure 9 Mixed with starter, the beans are now ready to be packaged up,
digital photograph, 2016 © Kirsten Bradley



Figure 10 Wrapping bunguk in banana leaf, digital photograph, 2016
© Kirsten Bradley



Figure 11 Tempe bunguk ready for fermentation, digital photograph, 2016
© Kirsten Bradley



Figure 12 Parni and Mujiyah pack the tempe into it's incubation chamber, digital photograph, 2016 © Kirsten Bradley



Figure 13 Tempe is then set aside for 2 days to ferment, digital photograph, 2016 © Kirsten Bradley



Figure 14 The finished product! Tempe bunguk ready for cooking, digital photograph, 2016 © Kirsten Bradley



Figure 15 Tempe bunguk for breakfast, digital photograph, 2016 © Kirsten Bradley