

From Bowl to Soul: Exploring the Emotional and Social Role of *Kinalas* Among Young Nagueños

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RESEARCH ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: August 23, 2024 Reviewed: November 15, 2024 Accepted: December 07, 2024 Published: December 30, 2024</p> <p> Copyright © 2025 by the Author(s). This open-access article is distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.</p>	<p>Food has always been viewed as significant in our lives as it provides us with nourishment and sustenance. However, the underlying impact and role of these foods are often overlooked and not fully recognized. Therefore, this study explored the emotional and social roles of <i>Kinalas</i>, a local favorite noodle dish in Naga City, Philippines, among young Nagueños. A phenomenological research design was employed, wherein participants' responses were collected and thematized. It was revealed that <i>Kinalas</i> serves as a source of personal satisfaction and joy. Participants expressed unique experiences of the dish that flourished by sharing it with their loved ones. Socially, <i>Kinalas</i> acts as a medium for connection and storytelling. It represents a communal experience that is often enjoyed in the company of family and friends where stories, laughter, and memories are exchanged. Culturally, <i>Kinalas</i> is a symbol of Nagueño's identity as it serves as a medium of cultural diffusion. Therefore, <i>Kinalas</i>, more than a culinary delight, is a cultural emblem and social glue in Naga City which weaves heritage. Initiatives should focus on ensuring that <i>Kinalas</i> remains a vibrant form of preservation, social engagement, and promotion.</p>

Keywords: *cultural identity, kinalas, Naga City, phenomenological research, social bonding*

Introduction

Food has long been a central element in contemporary society not just as a means to quell hunger but to embody a web of meanings and significances in individuals' lives. However, the subtle ways in which food mediates interactions between individuals and their communities frequently go unrecognized.

Rostami et al. (2020) introduced the Personal Food Model, focusing on the multi-sensory food experience—sight, taste, smell, and sound—and its capacity to deliver joy and novel experiences. This model aims to digitize an individual's food preferences and biological characteristics to offer tailored food recommendations, suggesting a novel approach to personalized nutrition and gastronomy.

Healthy food intake and social eating practices are shown to enhance well-being in a dose-response manner. Holder (2019) linked the enjoyment of food to well-being, emphasizing the connection between dietary choices, social interactions, and psychological health. Also, Salahodjaev and Mirziyoyeva (2021) demonstrated that food insecurity negatively affects personal satisfaction, highlighting the importance of food security in improving life quality and the socio-economic implications of food access.

In addition, Matran (2018) discussed the relationship between food, psychosocial factors, and well-being, reinforcing the idea that food's role extends beyond sustenance to include psychological and social well-being. Liu and Grunert (2020) also explored this relationship among the elderly in China, finding a significant correlation between food satisfaction and overall life satisfaction, which then underscores the importance of food enjoyment across different life stages. Further research delved into food presentation (Kokaji & Nakatani, 2021), the shared experience of eating (Spence, 2018; Woolley & Fishbach, 2019), and the acceptance of unfamiliar flavors (Park et al., 2020), highlighting food's role in fostering social bonds and enhancing sensory experiences. Studies on non-verbal expressions of enjoyment (Wiggins, 2019) and the significance of storytelling in cultural and familial contexts (Jones & Ackerman, 2018; Liaqat et al., 2022) also underscore the complexity of human-food interactions.

Furthermore, additional research on food sharing (Marovelli, 2019; Schanes & Stagl, 2019) and the cultural significance of food (Edwards & Davies, 2018; Kandil, 2022) demonstrates food's pivotal role in community building and cultural exchange. The exploration of heritage food (Almansouri et al., 2021) and the impact of culture on food security (Alonso et al., 2018) emphasize the connections between food practices, cultural identity, and sustainability.

While numerous studies have explored the communal bonds fostered by cultural foods, there are still knowledge gaps in the literature with regard to identifying the emotional effects of eating cultural foods, particularly *Kinalas*, how this food brings comfort to oneself, and the advantage of using food to socially create bonds and relationships. This study aimed to fill this gap by exploring the foundation of emotional and social effects or significance of a cultural food, particularly from the perspective of young Nagueños, underscoring the profound implications of food in social interactions, emotions, and the preservation of local culture.

Naga City is considered one of the economic, cultural, and industrial centers of the Bicol Region. It has become a hot topic when it comes to food highlighting its best *Kinalas* also known as "local ramen". *Kinalas* has become a part of the everyday life of Nagueños, whether in their business or as regular customers. It has also become an integral part of their identity and culture. There is something special about *Kinalas* that brings comfort and joy when eaten, whether it's the sauces added, the noodles, or the hot and fresh broth and soup that come with it. It became one of the recommended

foods to try when tourists and foreigners are about to enter Naga City. This is significant because it promotes and fosters the culture and the people themselves, making it known by many (Salgado, 2020).

Methods

Research Design

This study employed Max van Manen's (2003) phenomenological approach to examine the emotional and social impacts of *Kinalas* consumption among young Nagueños. Phenomenological approaches conclude assumptions about certain phenomena depending on how the participants experience them (Dovetail Editorial Team, 2023). This method facilitated a detailed investigation on how this traditional dish is more than a culinary experience; it acts as a cultural bridge, linking local heritage, community ties, and personal feelings. Through engaging participant conversations, van Manen's (2003) framework allowed for an insightful understanding of *Kinalas*' role, uncovering its significant effects on social dynamics, emotional health, and cultural preservation. This comprehensive and empathetic approach provided a deep, genuine insight into food's crucial influence on emotional and social connections in the community, underscoring its importance beyond basic nourishment.

Respondents of the Study

This study focused on young Nagueños aged 16 to 25, an age group considered to be young adults, a dynamic demographic whose engagement with *Kinalas* could provide a distinct perspective on the younger generation's connection to the city's cultural heritage, while also illuminating shifting cultural trends and social meanings. The research accumulated 10 participants who provided significant points used in the research paper. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for a detailed grasp of their viewpoints. It was crucial to ensure that individual opinions did not bias the research results. Rather, these experiences and insights were integrated to capture wider social and cultural themes.

Data Gathering Procedure

Interview guides facilitated in-depth interviews, the primary data collection method in this study. This strategy balanced predefined questions, which guided the respondents, with opportunities for them to express their personal experiences and reflections on *Kinalas*. The structured aspect of the interviews ensured consistency, while the open-ended questions allowed participants to explore their thoughts and feelings extensively. Each session was audio-recorded to capture the responses accurately. Verbatim transcriptions of these recordings formed the basis for a thorough thematic analysis, which is crucial for identifying dominant patterns and themes in the data. This analysis elucidated young Nagueños' complex experiences and perceptions of *Kinalas*, providing deep insights into its emotional and social significance.

Data Analysis

The researchers employed a comprehensive data analysis approach that integrated the seven phases of analytic procedures as outlined by Marshall and Rossman (2011), with thematic analysis to thoroughly examine the informants' narratives. Initially, the researchers delved deeply into the data through extensive interviews to gain a profound understanding of the participants' responses. Following the guidelines of Marshall and Rossman (2011), the researchers systematically

organized the data, using tools such as MS Excel for efficient referencing of the original responses. This meticulous organization facilitated the generation of categories and themes, laying the groundwork for the subsequent coding phase. Through this structured process, the researchers were able to identify significant patterns and themes that emerged in relation to each of the research questions.

Simultaneously, thematic analysis was utilized to further dissect and interpret the data, enabling the identification and articulation of the intricate layers of meaning within the informants' accounts. This dual approach allowed for an exploration of data, where the rigorous coding and categorization processes highlighted the key themes that provided a deeper understanding of the informants' experiences and perceptions concerning *Kinalas*.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers ensured the participants' voluntary involvement and anonymity through the use of code names. The study maintained ethical standards while offering rich insights into the emotional and social significance of *Kinalas* in their lives. This comprehensive methodological approach not only facilitated a detailed examination of the data but also illuminated the prevailing patterns and themes, thereby enriching the understanding of the study's subject matter.

Results and Discussion

Kinalas As a Source of Personal Satisfaction and Joy

The discourse surrounding *Kinalas* reveals it as a wellspring of personal contentment and delight for many individuals. A notable theme among the participants is the transition from initial reservations to a deep-seated appreciation, facilitated by the dish's distinctive flavor profile and the added joy of partaking it with cherished companions. This evolution in perception highlights the dish's capacity to transcend preliminary judgments, securing its position as a valued source of solace and culinary enjoyment. The testimonials from participants 1 to 7, indeed, shed light on the *Kinalas* being a source of personal satisfaction and joy that transcends initial skepticism to become a cherished element of communal life and personal well-being.

Participant 1's journey from skepticism to appreciation is reflected in these lines: "*The first time I saw Kinalas, I thought that it's boring and common like other noodles, but in the end, I realized that it's good and delicious. It gave me satisfaction*". It underscores a common theme of initial underestimation of traditional dishes that later become sources of personal joy. This participant also emphasizes the communal dimension, stating, "*We always invite ourselves to eat Kinalas and during that, we will always talk and share our stories*," thereby illustrating how *Kinalas* serves as a conduit for storytelling and cultural expression within the community. This suggests how the art of eating *Kinalas* encourages individuals to interact with friends and family and build a deeper and stronger bond through sharing stories and experiences, and communicating as a whole.

Participant 2 reinforces the notion of *Kinalas* as a comfort food woven into the fabric of family life by stating, "*My father always forces me to eat Kinalas until I like it already to the point that I can finish a big bowl of it*." This narrative illustrates the role of family in shaping our culinary preferences and the joy. The participant even added, "*I'm happy because we're bonding while eating kinalas*," which then reflects shared familial experiences around food. The social underpinnings of *Kinalas* are further elucidated by Participant 3, who highlighted its role in social bonding, as is evident in his line: "*Eating*

Kinalas also strengthens bonds and relationships between friends and family." This statement reveals the communal aspect of dining on *Kinalas*, positioning it as more than just a meal, but as an event that fosters social connections.

Furthermore, Participant 4 offers a dual perspective of *Kinalas* as both a personal comfort and a symbol of local identity. He said, "*It's like my comfort food as well...Kinalas' role in our city is pretty big that it serves as one of Naga's identity.*" This attests to the deep-seated cultural and personal connections to *Kinalas*, underscoring its importance in defining community identity and individual comfort.

On the other side, Participant 5 associates *Kinalas* with positive emotions and social gatherings, saying, "*There's no day that I ate Kinalas feeling sad, it's usually when I'm happy,*" and "*I usually have my friends when eating Kinalas and along with it, we will have conversation with each other.*" These reflections highlight how *Kinalas* occasions become imbued with happiness and meaningful social interactions.

Additionally, the familial theme is echoed by Participant 6, who speaks to the intimate moments shared over *kinalas*, as evident in this interview extract: "*I'm always with my mother and father and while the Kinalas are still hot we talk to each other.*" This intimate snapshot of family life centered around *Kinalas* exemplifies how culinary traditions foster familial bonds and dialogue.

Lastly, Participant 7 captures the integration of *Kinalas* into significant life events, stating, "*When Christmas came, I asked my mom if we could include Kinalas and they agreed so we had Kinalas as one of our foods that day.*" This narrative illustrates how *Kinalas* transcends everyday consumption to become part of celebratory and ceremonial occasions, enriching these events with their cultural and familial significance. The theme regarding the significance of eating *Kinalas* in fostering joy, new experiences, and overall well-being resonates deeply with other literature. Rostami et al. (2020) underscored the comprehensive sensory experience of food consumption, which aligns with the communal enjoyment and multisensory appreciation of *Kinalas* described by the participants. Holder's (2019) findings on the contribution of food consumption to well-being through both nutritional value and social engagement reflect the narratives of familial bonding and social interactions facilitated by *Kinalas* gatherings. The emphasis on food security (Salahodjaev & Mirziyoyeva, 2021) further underscores the importance of accessible and culturally significant dishes like *Kinalas* in ensuring life satisfaction, while Matran (2018) and Liu and Grunert (2020) highlighted the integral role of food in psychosocial well-being and life satisfaction among varied demographics.

Kinalas As a Medium for Connection and Storytelling and Communal Experiences

The act of sharing *Kinalas* in the company of family and friends serves as a catalyst for communal bonding. This shared experience is not solely about savoring the flavors of the dish but about the exchange of stories, laughter, and memories that occur around the dining table. It is within these gatherings that the essence of *Kinalas* as a medium of connection truly shines. The dish becomes a backdrop against which people come together, share their lives, and strengthen their bonds.

Moreover, the preparation and serving of *Kinalas* often involve collective effort, further enhancing its role as a communal experience. The act of cooking, serving, and enjoying the dish together underscores the importance of cooperation and communal harmony. It is a testament to how culinary traditions can serve as a reflection of societal values, emphasizing the significance of togetherness and shared heritage.

In fact, Participant 1 describes *Kinalas* as not just a meal but a communal event that “serves as a bridge to connect with friends,” highlighting how the act of sharing *Kinalas* strengthens connections and fosters a sense of identity among Nagueños. This participant’s reflections underscore the social dimension of *Kinalas*, where the sharing of food and stories reinforces community bonds and cultural heritage.

Similarly, Participant 2 emphasizes the emotional comfort and familial bonding associated with *Kinalas*, noting how it “brings a deeper bond and connection” with others. The participant’s experiences of sharing *Kinalas* with family, especially during regular Sunday gatherings after mass, illustrate how this tradition fosters familial cohesion and shared happiness.

Moreover, Participant 3 and Participant 5 also reflect on *Kinalas* as a communal and identity-affirming tradition, with Participant 3 recalling memorable experiences of eating *Kinalas* with friends as a moment of bonding and Participant 5 associating *Kinalas* with happy moments and a key part of their cultural identity. These accounts highlight how *Kinalas* occasions are more about social interaction and collective memory-making than the food itself.

Likewise, Participant 4 and Participant 6 bring to light the role of *Kinalas* in everyday social interactions and the importance of sharing these moments with others. Participant 4 recalls inviting friends to share *Kinalas* as a way to relax and converse after a busy day, while Participant 6 talks about the familial discussions that unfold over a meal of *Kinalas*, further illustrating how these shared meals provide a setting for meaningful conversations and connections.

In addition, Participant 7’s narrative of eating *kinalas* during rainy days and special occasions like Christmas with cousins and family reiterates the significance of *Kinalas* in creating and sustaining social bonds. The participant’s preference for sharing *Kinalas* with others over eating alone speaks to the communal essence of the dish, where the act of sharing a meal enhances the dining experience and strengthens relationships.

The communal enjoyment of *Kinalas*, a traditional Filipino noodle dish, exemplifies the broader culinary principles highlighted in various studies, including the enhancement of a dish’s appeal through meticulous plating (Kokaji & Nakatani, 2021), the transformation of skepticism into fondness in shared dining experiences as seen in the resurgence of fondue (Spence, 2018), and the promotion of cooperation and positive social interactions through communal eating practices (Woolley & Fishbach, 2019). Similarly, the gradual acceptance of bold flavors, such as in the study of American consumers’ acclimatization to Kimchi (Park et al., 2020), reflects the potential for communal dining to familiarize and endear unfamiliar dishes to skeptics. Furthermore, the shared expressions of enjoyment, akin to the “mmms” during infant mealtimes (Wiggins, 2019), underscore the significance of collective dining experiences in shaping food perceptions. Thus, the tradition of sharing *Kinalas* not only enhances the sensory experience but also serves as a medium for cultural exchange and communal bonding, illustrating how food transcends mere sustenance to become a pivotal element in social cohesion and cultural identity.

Kinalas As a Symbol of Nagueños’ Identity

Kinalas, beyond its culinary value, stands as a pivotal emblem of Nagueños’ identity, deeply interwoven with the cultural fabric of Naga City. According to the participants, this dish transcends mere sustenance, embodying a rich narrative that champions the preservation and celebration of local traditions. *Kinalas* is more than a gastronomic delight; it serves as a conduit for communal belonging and pride,

encapsulating the essence of the city's heritage. This culinary tradition is thus pivotal in fostering cultural continuity, securing its place as an indispensable component of the local cultural landscape.

Participant 1 says that *Kinalas* serves as a conduit for social interaction and cultural continuity. The participant's narrative highlights how this humble noodle dish transcends its culinary components to become a medium for storytelling and shared experiences among friends and family. Participant 1 said, "*Kinalas serves as a bridge to connect with my friends... We can build connections and relationships... and preserve our culture and tradition.*" This statement underscores *Kinalas*' role in nurturing communal ties and reinforcing a collective identity among the people of Naga.

Similarly, Participant 2's reflections on *Kinalas* encapsulate the warmth and comfort the dish brings, likening it to a ritual that strengthens familial bonds. The act of sharing *Kinalas* with loved ones, especially in the context of tradition and routine (e.g., Sunday meals after mass), imbues it with a sense of continuity and belonging. The participant mentioned, "*Kinalas is my comfort food... Many Nagueños have been united by Kinalas,*" highlighting the dish's intrinsic value in weaving the social fabric of the community.

Additionally, Participant 3's account further reinforces *Kinalas*' emblematic status, noting its appeal to both locals and visitors. By stating, "*Kinalas represent Naga City for its unique characteristics... Eating Kinalas also strengthens bonds and relationships,*" the participant acknowledges the dish's dual role in promoting local heritage and fostering interpersonal connections.

The narratives of Participants 4 and 5 resonate with themes of memory, identity, and communal pride. Participant 4 recalls personal anecdotes that link *Kinalas* to healing and comfort, while Participant 5 cherishes the joyous moments shared with family over the dish. Both accounts highlight *Kinalas*' integral role in the cultural and emotional landscape of Nagueños, with Participant 5 asserting, "*Kinalas is our signature... it has a prominent role in the lives of Nagueños.*"

Participants 6 and 7 offer perspectives that intertwine *Kinalas* with daily life and special occasions, illustrating its versatility and enduring appeal. The anecdotes of shared experiences, whether humorous or mundane, reflect the dish's capacity to bring people together and foster a sense of community. Participant 7's mention of *Kinalas* during festive times, such as Christmas, signifies its place at the heart of Nagueno traditions and celebrations. The communal sharing of *Kinalas* as recounted by local participants, embodies a universal phenomenon explored in academic research, where food sharing transcends mere sustenance to become a pivotal medium for cultural expression, social cohesion, and identity formation. Research by Schanes and Stagl (2019) and Marovelli (2019) underscored how food sharing acts as a conduit for emotional expression and community building, mirroring the way *Kinalas* fosters connections and celebrates Nagueños' heritage. Moreover, Kandil (2022) highlighted the role of traditional foods in shaping dietary behaviors and fostering a sense of belonging, akin to *Kinalas*' role in Nagueños' culture.

Furthermore, Edwards and Davies (2018) and Caudwell et al., (2020) further illustrated how food sharing initiatives can bridge communities, enhance connectivity, and address societal fragmentation, reflecting the communal and cultural exchange facilitated by *Kinalas* in Naga. Together, these insights underline the transformative power of food sharing in nurturing community ties, preserving cultural identities, and facilitating cultural exchanges, as vividly illustrated by the shared experiences surrounding *Kinalas*.

Kinalas Bridges Naga City with Other Communities

Kinalas serves as a cultural envoy that bridges communities. By introducing *Kinalas* to visitors, Nagueños share a piece of their heritage, thus fostering cultural exchange and understanding. This culinary gesture highlights how local dishes can be potent instruments of cultural diplomacy, promoting unity and enriching global cultural tapestry. Through such exchanges, food transcends its basic utility, becoming a medium for storytelling and a catalyst for connecting diverse cultures.

Participant 1 underscores the social and cultural dimensions of *Kinalas*, noting that it “*serves as a bridge to connect with my friends*” and “*can start and strengthen connections with other people*.” This statement supports the idea that *Kinalas* is more than just food; it is a medium through which Nagueños can share their culture and build relationships. In addition, Participant 2 reinforces the idea of *Kinalas* as a comfort food that brings people together, particularly highlighting family bonds, saying: “*I'm happy because we're bonding while eating Kinalas.*” This observation emphasizes the role of *Kinalas* in creating a shared sense of belonging and identity among the people of Naga.

Likewise, Participant 3 offers a perspective on *Kinalas* as a symbol of Naga City, highlighting the food as a representation of Naga City for its unique characteristics. The mention of tourists and foreigners visiting Naga to try *Kinalas* illustrates its potential as a tool for cultural diplomacy, inviting outsiders to partake in local traditions and thereby fostering mutual understanding.

On the other side, Participant 4 speaks of the communal aspect of enjoying *Kinalas*, noting it as an opportunity for conversations and a way to showcase pride in local culture. This is evident in this line: “*Kinalas' role in our city is pretty big that it serves as one of Naga's identities.*” This aligns with the narrative that local cuisine like *Kinalas* can be a means of promoting unity and cultural pride.

Moreover, Participant 5 describes *Kinalas* as associated with “happy moments,” suggesting that the dish transcends its culinary value and becomes a catalyst for joyful social gatherings. This personal testimony supports the narrative by illustrating how *Kinalas* facilitates community bonding and cultural transmission through shared experiences. Additionally, Participant 6’s story about sharing *Kinalas* with family and using it as a conversation starter reflects on the communal and inclusive nature of eating *Kinalas*, which can be a bridge to other communities to introduce the food to others. This participant’s experience illustrates the role of *Kinalas* in extending hospitality and cultural exchange beyond the immediate community.

Lastly, Participant 7’s preference for eating *Kinalas* with others, especially during communal occasions like Christmas, underlines the importance of *Kinalas* in bringing people together and creating shared memories, thereby reinforcing its potential to serve as a medium for cultural connection and diplomacy.

The findings from the narrative about *Kinalas* in Naga resonate with broader research on food sharing and its cultural implications, underscoring how local cuisines like *Kinalas* serve as potent vehicles for cultural expression, social bonding, and community identity. Studies such as those by Schanes and Stagl (2019) and Marovelli (2019) highlight the emotional, moral, and communal dimensions of food sharing, mirroring the way *Kinalas* fosters social connections and cultural exchange within and beyond the Naga community. Similarly, the emphasis on food culture’s role in shaping nutritional awareness and healthy behaviors (Kandil, 2022), along with the connective potential of food-sharing ecosystems (Edwards & Davies, 2018), reflects the integrative power of *Kinalas* in promoting community cohesion and cultural pride. The concept of

heritage food (Almansouri et al., 2021) and the socio-cultural sustainability of food systems (Zocchi et al., 2021) further underscore the importance of preserving culinary traditions like *Kinalas* for their intrinsic cultural value and their role in sustaining diverse, healthy, and resilient food systems.

Conclusion and Future Works

The narratives surrounding the consumption of *Kinalas* in Naga City reveal multifaceted elements of cultural identity, communal bonding, and personal joy. It is concluded that, first, the journey from skepticism to appreciation among the participants underscores the dish's ability to not only satisfy the palate but also to serve as a conduit for social interaction and community cohesion. Second, the repeated themes of familial bonding, communal meals, and the integration of *Kinalas* into significant personal and cultural events emphasize its role far beyond that of a mere culinary delight. And lastly, this extends to the broader spectrum of food's role in societal structures, where it acts as a medium for expressing cultural heritage, fostering relationships, and enhancing communal well-being.

This study offers insights into sociology by providing conclusions on how food shapes individuals, groups, and communities, which emphasizes its symbolic meanings and its pivotal role in shaping and solidifying cultural identity and bonds within society. Particularly, *Kinalas* exemplifies how food serves as a conduit for creating and rebuilding relationships, may it be through shared family meals, community gatherings, and broader social activities.

In light of *Kinalas*' significant cultural and social implications, it is recommended to further promote and preserve this culinary tradition within and beyond Naga City. This could involve initiatives aimed at documenting the history and preparation methods of *Kinalas*, ensuring its legacy is captured for future generations. Additionally, fostering community events centered around *Kinalas* could further enhance its role as a social catalyst, encouraging even more people to partake in this communal experience. Lastly, incorporating *Kinalas* into tourism and cultural exchange programs could serve as an effective means of cultural diplomacy, inviting others to explore and appreciate the rich heritage and hospitality of Naga City.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.