



## Survey on Different Races Understanding about Traditional Food in Malaysia

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### Abstract

Traditional food is closely associate with food heritage has become a significant role in the life of society. This project examines on how far Malaysians know about their food heritage identity and how it can strengthen the bond of unity known as food assimilation. The relationship between a different races thoughts, knowledges, religion and belief, are observed as it leads to a comprehensive survey of the factors which affects the field of consumer behaviour in Malaysian society. The traditional foods include the three major races in West Malaysia which is Malay, Chinese and Indian. The food origination, consumption and their mutual influence are also examined, together with the impacts of modern trends in food intake. Discussion includes the various ways of food preparation, ingredients, etiquette, the relationship of food with the pattern of livelihood, traditional food and its distinctiveness, and eventually the pattern of contemporary food intake effect in today's society. In order to determine how heritage and traditional food are able to connect between different ethnics in Malaysia, a further study was carried out. A total of online survey involved below 40 respondents, while the interview that held in Terminal 1 Seremban, involved less than 15 respondents. There is significant relationship between genders with the definition of food heritage and the association of food heritage questions. The overall finding revealed that young generation these days nearly understand the definition, the criteria and type of traditional food associated with food heritage.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Food is signified as markers for identity regardless of geographical, social and political differences separating the populations. Takaki (2012) deduced that food identity ostensibly contributes to prosperity, international identification and reputation of a country and positive influence on the economy. Without common identity, a nation will have an ambiguous and conflicting identity due to lack of consensus which creates an adverse image and effects on the social integration within a country (Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2011). In many multi-cultural countries, to have a commonly accepted food identity to represent the image of a nation is important especially in term of tradition and authenticity. Malaysia is a gastronomic delight with a wide variety of foods and dishes. With citizens from three large ethnic groups namely Malay, Chinese and Indian, each with their own cuisine the availability and mix of flavours and recipes are astounding. There are fusions or blends of these foods. Malay Food, Chinese Food and Indian Food are all common in Malaysia. Each ethnic group tends to eat foods associated with their group. Malays tend to favour things like spicy rice and curry; the Chinese like noodle and rice dishes and the Indians eat their curries as well as things like mutton stew. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the knowledge of traditional food.

## 2. TRADITIONAL FOOD IN MALAYSIA

With people of diverse cultures residing in Malaysia, it is no surprise that Malaysia offers an impressively wide-range of dishes. Each ethnic group in Malaysia has their own unique foods, such as Malay food, Indian food and Chinese food. The food we used as a sample for information gathering through interviewed are as below.

### 2.1 NASI LEMAK

It is believed that when the local Malay community resided by the seafront, the ready availability of ingredients such as the coconut milk, as well as the flavourful outcome of adding it to rice, resulted in the innovation of nasi lemak. Side dishes added to the rice came from the village's natural resources: kangkong was plucked from the garden and anchovies were caught from the sea. Others suggest that packets of rice wrapped in banana leaves were brought to padi fields (rice fields) for working farmers. In Malaysia, nasi lemak is also sold at transient road side stalls or even from food trucks. Today, it is a popular dish eaten not only at breakfast, but also throughout the day. Despite of changing side dishes menu; dried anchovies, fried or hard-boiled egg, spicy *sambal*, cucumber or even fried chicken, the authenticity of the flavour remains to be a symbolic of Malaysian food.



Picture 1 Nasi Lemak

### 2.2 DUMPLING

Chinese dumpling, also called Jiaozi, is one of the most important and traditional dishes in Chinese culture. These crescent shaped dumplings with pleated edges are normally filled with ground meat or vegetable filling wrapped into a thin-rolled piece of dough, plus, you will occasionally find recipes calling for more unusual ingredients such as shrimp and even winter melon. The filling ingredients are enclosed in flour and water dough that is thicker than a wonton wrapper. The dumplings are frequently boiled, although they may also be pan-fried. In Malaysia itself, dumpling has become a popular dish that consumed by many people in multiracial, not only specifically by Chinese.



Picture 2 Chinese Dumpling

### 2.3 LADDOO

These ball-shaped snacks are so sweet; they cannot be binge-eaten (unlike murukku). It is made with any kind of flour with cashews, raisins, saffron and a light flavour cardamom, and shaped into small balls for serving. To get the slightly brown and orange hue in the laddoo, the flour is slowly browned in ghee. After the flour turns golden brown and fragrant, it is mixed with sugar and cardamom powder and formed into small balls. The sweet dish is usually being eaten during festive and religious occasion such as Diwali and New Year.



Picture 3 Laddoo

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study intends to explore the knowledge of traditional food identity between races using the online questionnaire surveying and interview method to gather all necessary information.

#### 3.1 INTERVIEW

The information needed for this study was collected from 11 respondents in Terminal 1, Seremban area using interview session. The target was the civilian (Malaysian), consisting of major ethnic groups; Malay, Chinese and Indians. Malaysian citizens, consist of the ethnic group Bumiputra 61.7% (Malays and indigenous peoples, including Orang Asli, Dayak, and Anak Negeri), Chinese 20.8%, Indian 6.2%, other 0.9%, non-citizens 10.4% (2017 EST.). The reason for choosing the three major ethnic groups because their foods are commonly accepted among Malaysians, hence, classified as Malaysians foods and qualified to be endorsed as heritage food (Bernama, 2012) and listed under the National Food Heritage (Negara, 2012).

This studying method leads to more reliable results, mainly because from direct discussion we can get more information from different opinions resulting in fewer errors in collecting data. Due to high population concentration, the respondent was selected among Malaysian, which comprises of the federal constituency in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia located within Seremban District. Respondents were selected based on their nationality (must be Malaysian) states upbringing, and they should be 18 years or older, and familiar on the subject matter (traditional food).

During the interview session, we have set one game to make it more interesting by providing a box with three partitions. Each panel contains a sample of one chosen of the three major races tradition food which is Nasi Lemak, Dumpling and Laddoo. The respondents were asked to pick one by one and guess what is inside, followed up with some explanations whether short history, belief or celebration and more, same goes for the second and third pick. Through this game, we can gather information from experiences, thoughts, knowledge and suggestions.

At the end of the session, the respondents received actual foods as in the mystery box and mineral water as an appreciation for their cooperative. Same goes for second phase, where the tool used are the printed image of the same chosen traditional food. For the second interview, the location selected at Kuala Kubu Bharu (abbreviated to KKB), is a district capital of Hulu Selangor District, Selangor.

### 3.2 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The self-administered questionnaire was developed and adapted based on several variables derived from the framework of the conceptual study using Google Form. The items in each dimension (independent and dependent variables) and scales used in the exploratory stage. The items in each dimension were adapted from previous studies. A preliminary screening process was carried out to select suitable candidate/respondent. The screening process based on the criteria was set by the researcher, to be precise respondent should be 18 years or older and is familiar on the subject matters. Respondents who fulfilled the required criteria could proceed with the questionnaire. Respondents have been briefed on the aims of the study before the questionnaire was given. Collected data were analysed using responses summary through Google Form. Statistical methods such as frequencies and cross-tabulation using races with all traditional food questions used to address the objective of the study.

### 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.1 RESPONDENT PROFILE

Simple frequency and descriptive analysis were conducted on the respondent’s demographic profile in Pie chart 1 and Graph 1. As reported in the table, the respondents, female percentages slightly above than male. Regarding the age group, more than half of the respondents are between 15-25 (68.6%) years old and the least number of respondents aged 36 and above (8.6%). Based on races, the majority are Malay (75.8%) and the lowest percentage are the others (3%) group, which comprised of Bumiputera: Sabah, Sarawak and International.

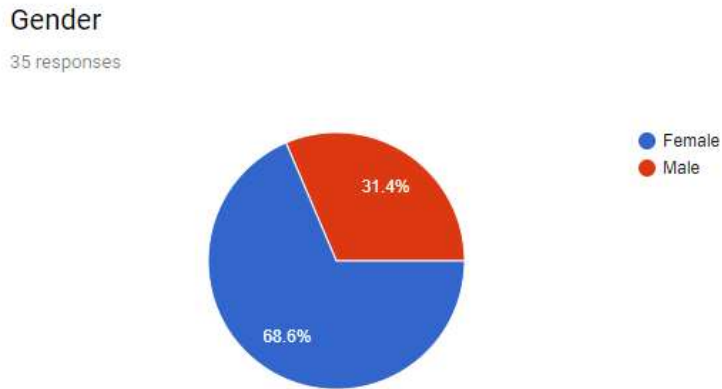


Figure 1 Distribution of Gender among Samples

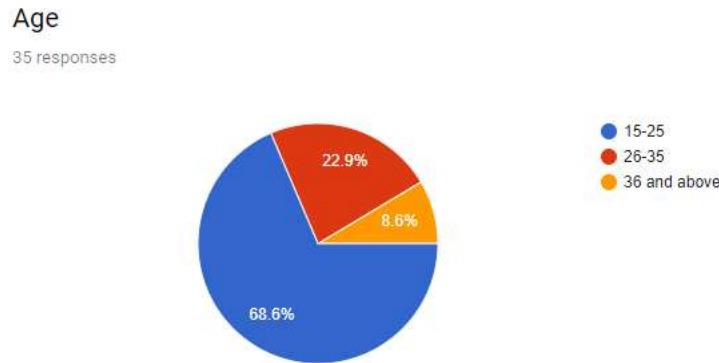


Figure 2 Distribution of Age among Samples

What is your ethnic?

33 responses

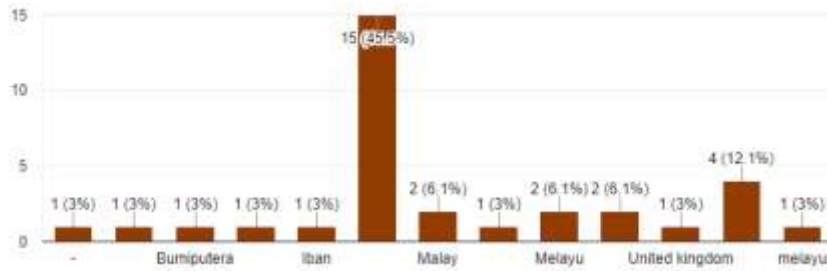


Figure 3 Distribution of Ethnic among Samples

4.2 KNOWLEDGE ABOUT TRADITIONAL FOOD

Majority respondents in Malaysian know about their food heritage identity as shown in Pie Chart 2 with 100%. The Pie Chart 3 shows 94.3% respondents have consumed traditional food from different ethnics. Meanwhile, the lowest percentage is the rest (2.9%), which comprised of yes, no and a few. In Pie Chart 4 with 48.6%, most of people thought it is interesting idea to substitute traditional food over their birthday cake. Come in second with 3.4% agreed it should be adapted and the least number of respondents say no (17.1%). This questionnaire is aimed to study how far Malaysians are willing to honour their identity. Pie Chart 5 shows full percentages of respondents familiar with three main chosen food which is Nasi Lemak, Dumpling and Laddoo that represent, Malay, Chinese and Indians traditional food. Last but not least, Pie Chart 6 shows that 62.9% response did not know much about other ethnic traditional foods and only 37.1% responses are well known.

Have you ever heard about any Malaysian traditional food?

35 responses



Pie Chart 2: Knowledge percentages on any Malaysian traditional food

Have you ever tasted/consumed a Malaysian traditional food product?

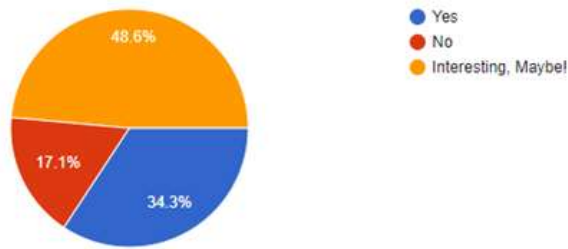
35 responses



Pie Chart 3: Traditional food product consumer

Did you want to substitute Malaysian traditional food over your birthday cake?

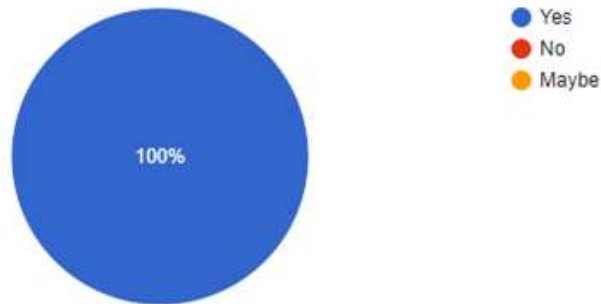
35 responses



Pie Chart 4: Traditional food substitute

Are you familiar with Nasi Lemak, Dumpling and Laddoo?

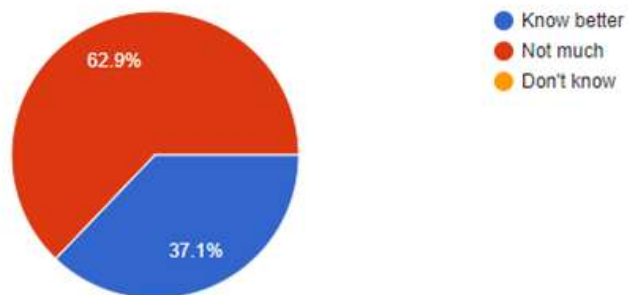
35 responses



Pie Chart 5: Familiarities of three main traditional foods

How much do you know about other ethnic traditional food?

35 responses

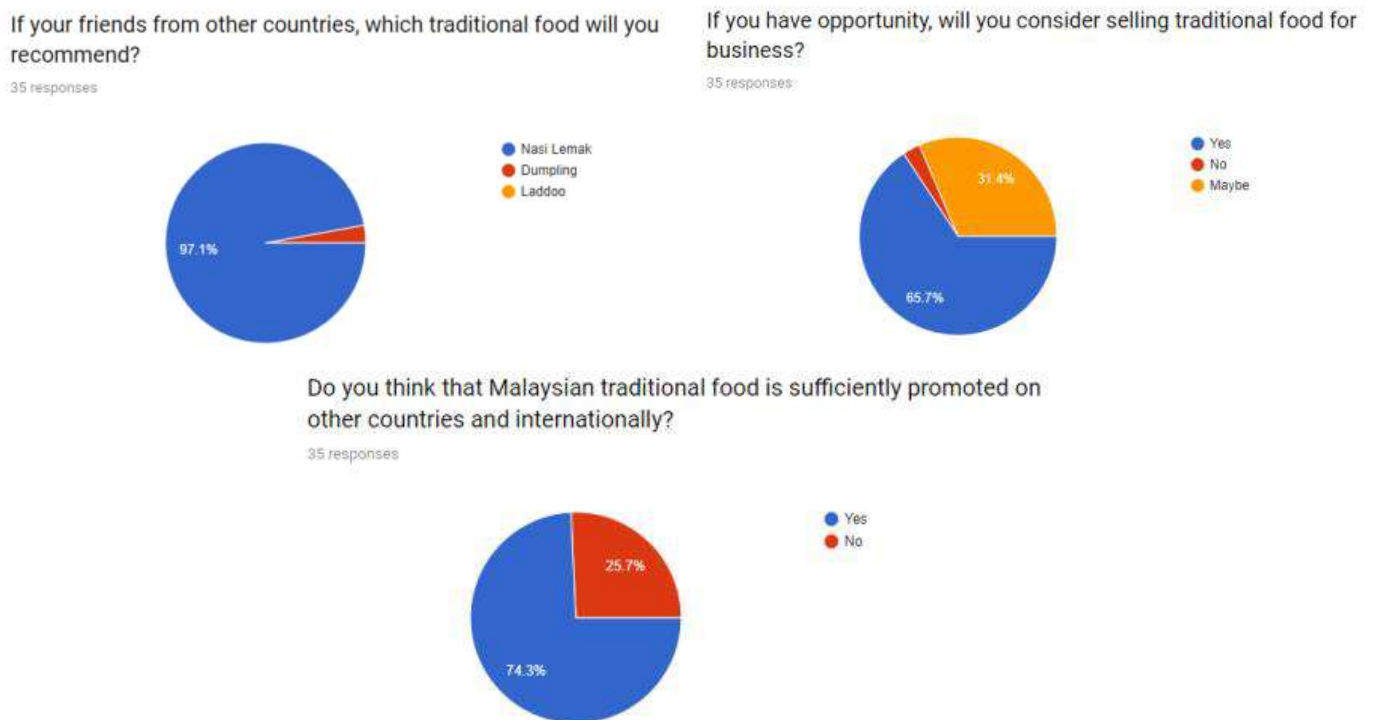


Pie Chart 6: Knowledge percentages on other traditional food

Malaysia is a country with rich culture. The population is made of mainly Malay, Chinese and Indians. Malaysian food is very much reflective of the diversity of the people staying here. These questionnaires are intended to see how far Malaysian citizens recognize and understand other ethnic traditions in their country by sharing experience and information about other ethnic traditional food.

#### 4.3 FURTHER EXPECTATION OF TRADITIONAL FOOD

Pie chart 7 represent question of further expectation of traditional food Malaysian citizens thought that help expand and keep traditions from exist. In pie chart 7 shows 97.1% respondents agree that Nasi Lemak is the excellent recommendation to tourist or friends from other countries. Second most frequent mention is 2.9% goes to dumpling and none for Laddoo. Findings revealed that within 35 responses, 65.7% respondents are considering that selling traditional food for business in an opportunity to expand the popularity. Second place with 31.4% goes to maybe and third place with 2.9% to no due to economy development. Respondents are identified that Malaysian traditional food is sufficiently promoted on other countries and internationally with 74.3% agreement and least thought no (25.7%). Overall, majority respondents positively expecting that Malaysian traditional food are potential getting in the bigger marketing and are acknowledge worldwide.



Pie chart 7: Malaysian Expectation Toward Traditional food

#### 4.4 RESPONDENT IMPRESSION

Malaysia is a gastronomic delight with a wide variety of foods and dishes. With citizens from three large ethnic groups namely Malay, Chinese and Indian, each with their own cuisines. Table 1 showed the opinion of citizens to the pattern of traditional food intake in today's society which intermediate respondents have consumed almost every day in their daily life.

<b>How the pattern of traditional food intake in today's society</b>
<b>Positive comment</b>
Good
Often
Seldom
People <i>lepak</i> mamak every day and they ate traditional food like <i>roti canai, nasi lemak</i>
Every day we can buy or taste traditional food nowadays....
Famous
Almost every time in everyday
Everyday
Daily meals
Overdose
Extremely progressing
It also make it to modern food
All is nice
Very simple
Breakfast
Not bad
Great
<b>Negative comment</b>
Bad
Nowadays traditional food are not preferable in today's society because most of the traditional food are not healthy and have a lot of sugar/fat in it that can cause variety of illnesses especially obesity and heart attack.
Same and lame
Most of the young people nowadays lost interest in traditional foods because of existence of many western foods.

Table 1 Pattern of Traditional Food Intake in Today's Society

<b>What's your personal impression about these traditional foods?</b>
Yummy
Good
Traditional food is something that represent an ethnic that show the interesting and the way their culture
Delicious
It's have a unique vibes for tourism
Everyone should try it
Tasty
Unique and tasty
Never be better
Just nice!
Traditional food shown identity of some race. It's good to promote our race & our country to the world

Table 2.0: Traditional Food Impression

From this study, if young generations refuse to learn, practice and transmit their ethnic traditional food culture and tradition, it will lead to the loss of the existence of the ethnic traditional food knowledge which has been practiced for generations. However young generations nowadays decline to get involved and practice their ethnic traditional food. There is a growing awareness of the difficult to recreate when young generations have no longer practice the food traditions. If these keep going on, not only traditional food knowledge might loss, possibility that the bonding between ethnic might also loose. Traditional food is supposed to help the history from existence and also to teach whether X or Y generation with different races stayed together.



## 5.0 PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

People are experiencing external pressures on their culture and tradition, including the threat of losing their food heritage or identity. In these gastronomic interactions, a region's heritage foods form a valuable 'blueprint' of its people, whereby food represents not only the physical need but also local culture and custom. Our traditional foods are at risk because there will be a succession crisis. According to Borneo Post Online News, September 25, 2016 written by Bernard Goh, more young Malaysians are opting to patronise Western outlets, Japanese sushi bars, fusion restaurants and franchises. This phenomenon is mainly seen throughout large urban centres in Malaysia, Singapore and, to a certain extent, the region. Therefore, it is very difficult to find youths who are interested in inheriting traditional food business operations. In order to regain traditional food popularity, based from pie chart 7, (65.7%) showed that people are interested in selling traditional food for business. Which defines as opportunity to bring back marketing in bigger industry. In this case, it's also an opportunity for job- looking. While economy dropped down and vacancies are hardly available, this can effect in industry development. Naturally, every generation wants to do better socially and economically compare to the previous. Therefore, it is very difficult to find youths who are interested in inheriting traditional food business operations including folks. Business operations in selling traditional food open them a chance to grab the vacancies and also help them from being jobless. Bonding can be seen from working together in marketing. By having worker in different races and ages can strengthen the relations of ethnic. Besides, by working together, a lot of knowledge and opinion can be share and this resulting in understanding each other. In conclusion, it takes everyone to treasure, manage and preserve local dishes so that our heritage lives on, before it's too late.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

The overall study on traditional food established interesting finding between races especially the definition of food assimilation as the process of merger and consolidation between groups or individuals from cultures or races or ethnic groups into one group with the same identity. This concept is usually related to the cultural absorption of a group into another group. Food been transferred to generations and related to individual or society cultural background but less recognize as common or daily food although in the past literature stated that food can be common regardless ethnicity and belief of the individual or society. Each ethnic group in Malaysia has their own unique and food intake in term of history.

Methodology used in this study was interview using three main traditional foods such as Nasi Lemak, Dumpling and Laddoo, and research instrument as online questionnaire. Based on results from questionnaire and interview revealed that majority young generation lack of consciousness and less exposed to history. Meanwhile, opposite to X generations where they were all intellectual and very thoughtful about traditional food in Malaysia. This study contributes the current literature to the public knowledge towards traditional food identity and integrity among ethnic in Malaysia. It also can be used as a measurement tool for the Food Industry in developing a new way to impart knowledge and produces more traditional food to the public within Malaysia or overseas. Furthermore, it open opportunity for job vacancies that give chance for young generation and x generation to work together also help the economy development stabilized. In the future, research on different states in Malaysia could result in many interesting findings. The results are shown in the study only encircled the information that may not reflect the whole demographic background. It may suggest using others variables such as age, education background and ethnicity to make more informative findings that can relate more to topic of food assimilation.

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