Abstract

This study examines the differences of food neophobia among the higher learning institution students comprised of 200 respondents among three major races, Malay, Chinese and Indian in Klang Valley (Shah Alam, Subang and Klang), Malaysia. It also identifies the levels of food neophobia and examines the relationship between food neophobia levels and demographic factors. Quantitative approach using self-administered questionnaire was applied. Age, gender, race, marital status, level of education, area of living and respondent’s monthly income related to neophobia levels among the students. The Malay, Chinese and Indian students were also discovered to have almost the same level of neophobia.

Keywords: Foodways; young generation; practices; Malaysian ethnic festival

1. Introduction

Each ethnic group in Malaysia is fortunate compared to those in certain other countries, as the Malays, Chinese, Indians and other ethnic groups are happy living together as their social cultural (custom, value, norms and manners) and religious festivals can easily be practiced (Abdullah, 1994). Foods in fact have long become cultural practices and are present in feasts such as Hari Raya, Chinese New Year, Wesak day, Pongal, Lantern and Moon cake festivals, Gawai Dayak, Tadau Keamatan (Harvest Festival),
weddings, Thaipusam and many others (Muhammad et al., 2013). For instance, lemang, rendang, ketupat and few others are synonyms with Malay ethnic festival such as Hari Raya (Hari Raya Aidilfitri and Hari Raya Haji). During these festivals, lemang is prepared using glutinous rice and cooked in bamboo tubes while ketupat is made from rice or glutinous rice and wrapped in leaves. These foods are accompanied with another most popular dish called rendang which is cooked using meat or chicken with chilli and herbs. Not to exaggerate that Hari Raya celebration is dull without the present of these foods. There are also many other types of foods prepare for these religious festival.

For Chinese, nian gao besides vegetables, oyster, abalone, carps, duck or chicken is one of the special and most important dish for Chinese New Year celebration (Lee, 1986). This traditional cake is made from glutinous rice, flour, water and sugar, and wrapped in the leaves and served not only to the family members, relatives but also to the guests during the festival. The Chinese believed this cake symbolize the unity and togetherness among the family members and friends. For Indian, Deepavali as their religious festival is considering meaningless without the presence of lamb massala, gobi pakoras, aloo gobi, murukku, idlis, puri, vadai, ommapadi especially appom, ponggal and aatherasam. The traditional sweets and desserts like jalebi, murukku, gulab jamun, ladu, palkova and kesari are also present in this festival. According to Caplan (1997), in most festivals, social meetings and gatherings, besides other attributes, food and drink are the main attractions and contribute more than just their primary function of satisfying hunger and thirst.

Mitchell (2004) asserted that the ethnic group customs and religious festivals are opportune times for transferring the cultural knowledge of ethnic festival foods, including the preparation and consumption of food, from the older generation to the younger generation. Traditionally, certain events and ritual times bring several generations of family members and neighbours together to be involved in the food preparation; the elders always become the heads of food preparation and other family members are given different tasks (Cusak, 2003).

Nevertheless, the wave of modernizations through technological advancement, commercialization and social advancement that associated with lifestyle may have given impact to the culture and social aspects of ethnic festival foodways particularly to the young generation practices (Muhammad et al., 2013). Fiumerodo (2008) contended that some of the young generation know their ethnic festival food only by the name but do not know how to prepare it. Landrine and Klonoff (2004) noted that the young generation depends on the old people to prepare the traditional foods for the festival celebrations. Many researchers have argued that countries might lose their traditional food and foodways if they are not passed on to the young generations (Fiumerodo, 2008; Counihan, 2004; Mitchell, 2004; Bakalian, 1993). Some of the young generations of each ethnic in Malaysia are also seen less able to prepare their traditional festival food (Muhammad et al., 2013). They also know their ethnic festival food only by the name but do not know how to prepare. In addition, some of them also only depend on the old people to prepare the traditional foods for the festival celebrations. These issues raises a critical question to what extent modernization gives the impact of the alteration to the young generation practices? Thus, this study examine the impact of the alteration of Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic festival foodways on their young generation practices in Malaysia setting.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Modernization, transformation and social change

From a social sciences perspective, modernization relates to a social condition of adjustment and reconfiguration to a new environment or an evolutionary transition from a traditional to a modern society which involves alteration, modification or change. Modification or change, on the other hand, is a process
of becoming different and involves the alteration stages that are beneficial to society. However, besides bringing positive impacts, alteration also carries negative effects and consequences that undermine or eliminate the existing ways of life (Haralambos & Holborn, 2004). Paul & Martine (2008) stated that social barriers and personal identity also influence the alteration or modification of changes in order to achieve a set of comfortable conditions. The processes of modernization include any transforming of social activities such as trades, markets, education, health services and the activity of the mass media (Char & Andreas, 2003) which involve complementary alterations or changes in the demographic, economic, political, communication and cultural sectors of the society (Leamson, 2007). In addition, Inglehart (2005) noted that modernization relates to various elements and factors, such as production and technological development, and changes in the human life styles which are extensively shaped by modernization (Sobal, 2000).

In relation to that, the Rationalization Theory of Max Weber (1920) is also concerned with modernity. According to this theory, modernity represents the changing ways of society and involves a process in which a person enters and applies practical knowledge to achieve an end. The nature of sociality or social relations is changing to the extent that human beings appear to be more of an individual unit, often differentiated by their relationship to money rather than according to their relationships with other human beings. Weber describes four types of rationality that relate to the changing process and these consist of 1) practical, which is found in normal daily activities, 2) theoretical which is a more cognitive rationalization, 3) substantive, which denotes cultural values that are used for guidance in day-to-day living, and 4) formal, which is the use of rationalization on a large global scale. Although the Rationalization Theory has been used in a wider realm, in the context of the study it is specifically looked at from a sociological perspective. In this perspective, rationalization is the process whereby an increasing number of social actions become based on considerations of teleological efficiency or calculation rather than on motivations derived from morality, emotion, custom or tradition. As this study is looking at the alteration of ethnic festival foodways, the modern food consumption typifies the process of rationalization. The food preparation in traditional societies is more laborious and technically inefficient while modern society has striven towards speed (in terms of preparation) and precision in its delivery (consumption).

The Theory of Modernization by Rostow (1978), also called Rostow’s Stages of Growth or the Rostovian Take-Off model explains the process of modernization within societies and touches on the internal factors that can transform the development of traditional countries to developed countries. In other words, it attempts to identify the social variables which contribute to social progress and development of societies and seeks to explain the process of social evolution. Modernization theory not only stresses the process of alteration or change, but also the responses to that alteration, and looks at the internal dynamics while referring to social and cultural structures and the adaptation of new technologies. The theory postulates that modernization occurs in five basic stages, namely traditional society, preconditions for take-off, take-off, drive to maturity and the age of high mass consumption.

According to Rostow, the traditional stage is when societies have strong cultural values that oppose any technological innovation and thus have a low standard of living. The penetration of modernity from a developed area to an underdeveloped area however destroys traditionalism and simultaneously creates the preconditions for take off. As market economics begin to flourish and people no longer produce something for their own consumption, the take off stage occurs which depends on progressive influences including technological advancement. Once the take off stage is in a stable state, it becomes the stage of technological maturity where traditional practices are likely to declining. High mass consumption is a final stage where modernization is realized when everything is treated as offerings (products and services). In line with this theory, the Malaysian ethnic festival foods (Malay, Chinese and Indian) through their foodways have undergone all five stages when the preparation and consumption are
assumed to be altered due to modernization elements, such as technologies, commercialization and social advancement which affect the practices among the young generation.

2.2. Food, modernization and changes

As food is accepted as one of the most basic requirements for human existence, it is no surprise that it also forms a basic cultural component and it is contended that human interaction with food is the determinant of what can be considered as culture (Abarca, 2004). Food and its consumption relate to the formation of nationhood which is the making of a sense of identity for the society and the thread that binds people together (Powell, 2007). Guldan (2000) described the role food and cuisine played in the development of the national identity, as it is in the preparation and consumption of food or foodways that the society expresses its customs, traditions and culture.

Gillette (2005) noted that some behavioural shifts are occurring in the preparation and consumption of food, and the local food consumption practices, particularly of the traditional food have been reduced and this is largely associated with modernization. Modernization not only affects daily food practices, but also traditional events and celebrations and especially the wedding ceremony. Food modifications or changes are also influenced by the new trends in consumption which Miele (1999) described as the emergence of a post-modern circuit of food and the rise of a new culture of consumption among consumers which slightly contributes to the changes. Within the context of her study, two bodies of work were formed. One relates to the issue of the globalization of the agri-food system and the other to the social relations and cultural forms of the food changes produced.

Sheely (2008) identified ten lifestyle issues which drive the demand for convenience foods. They are the aging population, the change of household structures, higher female participation in the labour force and longer working hours, consumer prosperity and technology ownership, a move toward healthier eating, a desire for new experiences, individualism, declining cooking skills, the breakdown of traditional meal times and value for money. Ward (1999) initially argued that the emergence of convenience food reflects the re-ordering of the time-space in relationship to everyday life in contemporary society.

According to Li, Yin & Saito (2004), a few traditional food practices are on the verge of being lost, but improvements through modernization benefit food industries, especially in the poorer regions and suggested more of them need some improvements with the existence of the modern world. However, they were looking at it from the perspectives of healthy eating habits. Bermudez & Tucker (2004) mentioned that the food-related practices of older people of any ethnic group provide challenges including the increase in requirements for important nutrients. This is because of the physiological changes associated with aging and the pathological effects of some chronic conditions. They pointed out that eating practices are ruled not only by physiological demands, food availability and choices, but also by cultural norms, knowledge and information, and access to food, which is often determined by economic conditions.

3. Methodology

All the data were collected by using short open ended questions containing three major questions from the young generation in Shah Alam and Klang districts. Klang is an area in the Klang valley, which besides Malay, is highly populated with Chinese and Indians, while Shah Alam has its Malay community. According to Njite et al., (2005) and Choe et al., (1993), to measure the actual impact of human behaviour, precursor and antecedent, those who have experienced it are able to give more meaningful information than those who have not had the experience. To be based upon actual experience, those age from 25 to 40 years of the young generation were therefore chosen as a sample. The recognition of the age to which the potential informer belongs was through observation based on appearance. Again, it
would be hard for the researcher to reach every house in each residential area. Therefore, 100 potential young informers were purposively selected in those selected residential areas either in grocery stores, restaurants, bus stations or other appropriate places. 10 sets of short questions were distributed to the target informers per day. Ten days were initially planned to be spent on information gathering from the young informers. Therefore, a hundred (100) short questions were collected. In planning the short questions instrument, consideration was initially given to two related issues. Considering the difference in the informers’ profiles and educational levels, the questions had to be simple and easily understand with minimum reading and writing. Questions were therefore composed so as to be as understandable as possible with simple language to reduce any possible uncertainty. The short open ended questions were developed in two versions (Bahasa Melayu and English) as some ethnic informers might have a poor understanding of either language. Descriptive in qualitative form analysis is applied in this section analysis to understand the phenomenon of modernization on the practices from the young generation perspective rather than attempting to control or predict what it is, or to explicate its meaning (Njite, 2005).

4. Results and Discussion

On the demographic, females outweighs the males young informants with 61 percent (n=76) against 39 percent (n=49) respectively. 44 percent (n=55) of the informants were Malays compared to 32 percent (n=40) Indians and 24 percent (n=30) were Chinese. The majority of the informants also belongs to the younger age group with 84 percent (n=105) were 25 to 32 years old, followed by 11 percent (n=14) who were between 17 to 24 years of age and 5 percent (n=6) were above 33 to 40 years old. 50 percent of the young informants (n=70) were government servants as opposed to 27 percent (n=34) private servant, 13 percent (n=16) were professionals and 10 percent (n=11) of the informants were students.

The first question asked the young ethnic informants ‘What are the most popular festival foods of your ethnic? Aggregation of overall answer, majority of the young informants (Malays, Chinese and Indians) knew about their popular festival foods. For the young Malays, 85 percent (n=47) claimed that they knew about their popular festival foods. It is not surprising as most of them noted that lemang, rendang, ketupat, nasi impit, nasi dagang, dodol, wajik and semperit are some of them. Nevertheless, few types of modern popular festival foods like almond London and pineapple tart were also revealed. Quoted some of the remarks;

- Most popular festival food is lemang
- Of course Ketupat, rendang and nasi impit
- Kuah kacang and nasi impit are the popular foods for Hari Raya
- Semperit
- Soto and lontong
- Nasi dagang
- Never leave dodol
- Wajik
- Almond London
- Pineapple tart

As of Malays, 62 percent of young Chinese (n=19) also knew about their festival foods. Nian gao, yee shang, sweet and sour carp, fried abalone, wantan, dumpling and moon cake are revealed by the young Chinese informants. The following are some of expressions given;

- Yee shang is synonym with Chinese New Year
- Nian gao is popular food
- Moon cake, shark fin soup, orange and carp fish
Wantan
Abalone and dumpling
For the young Indians, Laddu, mutton curry, idli, atheresam, muruku, payasam, rasam, sambar, upma or uppitu, chicken beriyani and masala and jalebi are the popular festival foods as disclosed by 78 percent (n=31) of them. Directly quoted some of their responses;
- Of course idli and aatheresam
- Can’t leave the muruku
- Mutton curry and briyani rice are the popular foods
- Laddu
- Jelebi and payasam are always popular for our festivals
- Rasam
- Sambar, upma or uppitu are our precious foods for festivals
- Cookies

The second question asked ‘What is your ability in preparing the festival foods ? This question is very important as it is used in validating the ethnic informants’ opinion in the qualitative section. Looking at the answer, it is not surprising that majority of the young informants, Malays (63 percent, n=35 out of 55), Chinese (77 percent, n=23 out of 30) and Indians (72 percent, n=29 out of 40) explicitly expressed that they are less able to prepare their own festival foods.

In line with the above notion the young Malays claimed that they are less capable in preparing some of the popular festival foods. Therefore, they admitted that they always rely on their parents when comes the preparation of the festival foods. The following are some of the responses given by the young Malays informants;
- Less able to prepare lemang as it takes longer time to cook.
- Lemang is all the time available, so just buy it.
- Like to learn how to cook lemang some day
- Most of them (nasi impit, serunding, reandang) come in handy now.
- It is interesting to learn to cook all our ethnic treasures
- Help….just to please parents preparing the festival foods

Similar responses were also revealed by Chinese young informants and some of the answers are;
- Mothers always cook and prepare the nian gao and yee shang for Chinese New Year, don’t bother to learn.
- Easily get all those Chinese festival foods as long as money there
- Life’s busy too busy now….don’t have time to learn and cook.
- With money, people celebrate festivals in hotels and restaurants, everything’s there.
- Always celebrates the festivals at hotels
- Just go to the restaurants…no need to prepare
- Just let mother cook the festival foods for the celebrations
- Don’t know how to cook the foods
- Very difficult to prepare the foods

As of Malays and Chinese, the identical expression was also given by the Indian young informants;
- Muruku is always available now….not even during festivals. Worth to learn it but not now
- Don’t bother about the foods.
- Just let the elders do it!
- It’s hard to prepare aatheresam
- Always busy and don’t know how to prepare the foods
- Most of the foods are difficult to prepare
- It’s time consuming to prepare jalebi and upma and not interested to learn it
The overall findings show that young generation are less able to prepare their festival foods. The availability of the festival foods through the commercialization plus the social advancement has slightly altered the interest of young generation to learn and prepare their own festival foods.

5. Conclusion

The young respondents admitted that they are less able to prepare their own festival foods. Modernization through the elements of commercialization of the festival foods during the festival seasons and social advancement influence their interest of preparing their ethnic festival foods. In addition and in fact the most significant finding revealed from this study is regard to the young generation practices. The young generations are no longer keen on practicing the traditions and always depend on their parents in preparing the festival foods. They are less interest, less able, could not care less and ignore about the festival food preparation which is the inheritance treasures of each ethnic. If this situation continuously happened without any efforts undertaken, sooner or later the traditional way of preparing ethnics food treasures festival in particular will totally disappeared. Therefore, some proactive action should be taken by the individuals (parents), community and government.

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References


