The Importance of Knowledge Transmission and its Relation towards the Malay Traditional Food Practice Continuity

Mohd Shazali Md. Sharif*a, Mohd Salehuddin Mohd Zahari*a, Norazmir Md Norb, Rosmaliza Muhammad*a

*aFaculty of Hotel & Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 42300 Puncak Alam, Malaysia
bFaculty of Health Sciences, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 42300 Puncak Alam, Malaysia

Abstract

This study is to justify the importance of Malay traditional food knowledge transmission towards young generation practice and gain further understanding of the methods of transfer of Malay traditional food knowledge. Ethnographic methods were used in this study by means of observation and photographing techniques of four sets of respondents consist of mothers and daughters. The result shows that most of the older generation and young generation concern about preserving the Malay traditional food. In conclusion, knowledge transmission from the mother to the daughter is essential to preserve Malay traditional food knowledge.

© 2016 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd.

Keywords: Food knowledge; knowledge transmission; Malay ethnic; Malay traditional food

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +60-13-2499309; fax: +603-3258-4868.
E-mail address: shazali@salam.uitm.edu.my

doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.05.215
1. Introduction

Every ethnic group in this world has diverse native, and each of them has their cultural practices, beliefs and social norms. Each native possess to have their individuality as being expressive identity and integral component of cultural and tradition, especially in the unique treasures of food. According to Stringer (2009), food can be seen as a middle of cultural identity that belongs to the particular society or ethnic and some elements of food preparation and consumption. Thus, traditional food is seemed look as a symbol of heritage, trademark, and culture. Nowadays, it is important to preserved food practice of each ethnic group. In Malaysia, Malay modern society especially in the young generation has gradually ignored the Malay traditional food practice due to social transition and unlimited information technology. For instances, the young generation is too exposed to pre-prepared, packaged and convenience foods, in which the impacts from that can lessen their interest in adopting the knowledge and practices traditional cooking from their mother. Nevertheless, the issue of preserving traditional food can be encouraged and protected by the young generation as long as the knowledge of transmission of food traditional food practice occurs between the older generation and the younger generation (Md. Nor et al., 2012).

2. Methodology

In this study, the method that has been applied was an observation and ethnographic technique. It is involved the process of taking pictures particularly on the actual preparation procedure of the Malay festive celebration that is Eid al-Adha. According to (Merriam, 2009), ethnography is a social science research method and the ethnographers often work in multidisciplinary teams. It relies heavily on up-close, personal experience and possible participation and not just observation. The reason this method is choosing because the ethnography has its roots planted in the fields of anthropology and sociology. In addition, events that are captures are documented in the natural setting and valuable for the discovery of the non-verbal behavior and communication such as emotions and facial expressions.

Using Perak, Penang and Negeri Sembilan as an appropriate setting, four set of samples population took places. The sample population for this research was specifically focused on women with two generations that are involved older generation and younger generation in four families. This is due to the transmission process of Malay traditional food that was usually happening between the mothers and daughters. This study involved the sample of selected group of the older generation with age range from 50 to 60 years old women while the group of younger generation with the age range between 20 -22 years old. The observation and captures the picture was carried out to both generations to gain insight into sample’s experiences related to Malay traditional food knowledge transmission and the effect on practices. Instead that, researchers had recognized that it is difficult to get the desired information throughout the entire in each group with the time constraints and busy with other work for preparation of Eid al-Adha celebration. As said by Hair, Money, Samouel and Page (2008), to gain the whole population normally will be time limited and costly.

There is no exclusion in transferring the traditional food knowledge in term of preparation, method and skill in ensuring the continuity of food culture included Malay traditional food. According to Peniak (2009), traditional food is usually passed down from one generation to another generation in which the food preparation exactly according to traditional manner with no exploitation included in terms of taste and ingredients aspects. In this study, the information was collected through observation and took pictures in which the mother attributes transferred knowledge to the daughter by shown the ingredients, preparation, methods of cooking, cooking skill, and equipment. It is only involved some of the famous Malay dishes during Hari Raya like rendang, ketupat nasi, ketupat pulut and few others. The processes of preparation is normally started one day before the Hari Raya in with the mother will ask their daughter to help them together to go to the wet market to buy ingredients. It is motivating to note that some daughter will naturally aware and learn the understanding about the transferring of cooking knowledge in which included ingredients, preparation, methods and skills of cooking. The processes of transmission of Malay traditional food knowledge started at the early age of 12 to 18 years old and some of them had voluntarily helped their mother in the kitchen due to the felt of responsible to their mother. The modes of transferring the Malay traditional food knowledge included observation, oral communication and hands from mother to their daughter. These methods of a learning process are more effective and significant in preserving traditional food to make sure the continuity of the
future generations. Based on the methods of ethnography, observation and pictures that have been taken are analyzed and described according to the situation that was relied on the research objective.

3. Literature review

3.1. Malay ethnic

Malay is an ethnic group of Austronesian people who live in a specific location known as Alam Melayu consisting regions of the Malay Peninsula, East Sumatra, southern Thailand, the southern coast of Burma, Singapore Island, the coast of Borneo, including Brunei, West Kalimantan, and Sarawak and Sabah coast and the smaller islands which lie between these locations. (Azri, 2006; Crouch, 1996; Gung-wu, 1985; Jaffar, Hussain, & Ahmad, 1992; Munan, 1990; Rahman, 2011). Hutton (2000) consider Malay ethnic covers broader group of peoples involving the descendants of Indonesians, Phillippines and people of Oceania but totally different from the concept of Malay race. Malays had identified as Muslims, and this religion remained ever since. (Mastor, Jin, & Cooper, 2000). The emergence of ethnic Malays into Southeast Asia is believed to originate from the island of Madagascar and then spread to the Hawaiian Islands, small islands in New Zealand, Easter Island far to the East end of the Pacific Ocean, and the Chatham Islands are located in the South Pacific Ocean. It also includes the northern part of Taiwan Province Malays (Ishak, 2009; Rahman, 2011). Malay culture is formed by the absorption and adaptation of pre-history, Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic civilizations. Merge with Islamic civilization was eventually forming Malay as a more organized form of human groupings (learned, rational) and adherence to acknowledge God Almighty (Thomas, 2011). There began monarchy, social hierarchy, country, city, law with all patterns, courtesy of culture, science, physics and metaphysical exploration and life more meaningful and important and Human-Environment-existence of God (Omar, 1983).

3.2. Food knowledge

Food knowledge is defined as oral transmission of knowledge concentrate on how food is being produced by the communities and ethnic groups from one generation to the next. (Guerrero et al., 2009; Milburn, 2004; V.Kuhnlein, Donald, Spigelski, Vittrekwa, & Erasmus, 2009). The modes of transmission can be via words of mouth, hands-on activities, observation and by consuming the foods that were taught by the elder generation to younger ones. The food provisioning skills, techniques and cultural beliefs from late generations are passed down through the cooking skills, techniques, and recipes. Food knowledge can be discovered in a number of different settings (Kwik, 2008; Trichopoulou, Soukara, & Vasilopoulou, 2007; Yohannes, 2009) such as from home learning and gain information from community members. Also, during social occasions or festivals celebration, ethnic communities can exchange knowledge and experience regarding food and culture once they exposed to other food habits and food traditions. The significance of food knowledge referring especially to the traditional food dishes as cultural identity can be seen when each culture, ethnic group or region has specific food traditions and practices. Kwik (2008) contended some food traditions portrayed custom of ethnic culture and other associated with religious ceremonies. Maintaining the food tradition for its development and utilization depend on the food knowledge especially the traditional one (Ohiokpehai, 2003). Communities and ethnic group play a major role to carry on and apply the food knowledge to the younger generation to make sure the culture identity does not disappear throughout time.

3.3. Knowledge transfer

Knowledge transfer is defined as one direction, and focused type of communication of knowledge occur between individuals, groups or organization where the knowledge receiver has cognitive understanding, has ability to utilize the knowledge or applies the knowledge. A wide variety of interactions takes place from one party to another either between individuals, groups, and from groups to the organization during the process transferring of knowledge (Wilson, Ward, & Fischer, 2013). (Patriotta, Castellano, & Wright, 2012) suggested types of knowledge that are being transferred were categorized into embraced, embodied, cultured, embedded and encoded. Conceptual skills
and cognitive abilities dependent are the characteristics of embraced knowledge. Embodied knowledge is action oriented knowledge that is more focused on the social acquisition and the way a person communicates and interprets their environment. The definition of the encultured knowledge is socialization and acculturation act as a medium during the process to obtain shared understandings. Embedded knowledge covers the relationships between roles, technologies, formal procedures and emergent routines within a complex system. For encoded knowledge, it is the information that utilizes the signs and symbols as communication then decontextualized into codes of practice. The process of knowledge transfer was starting with determines who is the knowledge holder within organization and try to encourage and convince them to share. Prepare the sharing mechanism so that the executing transfer plan going smoothly. After measuring to make sure the transfer, apply the knowledge before the last step monitoring and evaluation (Szulanski, 2000).

3.4. Food practice continuity

Food practice continuity is quality application of food knowledge that does not stop or change as time passes. The process of continuation of food practice habitually involves mother as the transfer mediator and the daughter or children as the recipient of knowledge. Sharif, Zahari, Nor, and Muhammad (2013) stated that the contribution of food knowledge transfer from mothers is very important in long lasting survival of the ethnic food traditions and identity. The mothers were normally passing down the knowledge when their children were reaching adolescents stage as the mother believed they had ability to practice the food knowledge. The ingredients, preparation, methods of cooking, equipment and cooking skills are being revealed during the food knowledge transmission. The mothers usually spend time during school holidays and religious festival day such as Hari Raya to spend time handing down the food tradition to the young generation. The food practice inherited from the ancestor can be continued once they gain knowledge and experience from the cooking knowledge process. The evidence for the food practice continuity showed when the daughters keep contact with their mothers at their early marriage to ask again about ingredients, preparation, methods of cooking, equipments through telephone in order to practice by themselves for their family food preparation. The food knowledge sharing and transferring from the elder generation to the younger ones not an easy task as commitment from career and demands prevent them to involve in practicing traditional food cooking at home (Chenhall, 2011; Md. Nor et al., 2012; Sharif, Nor, & Zahari, 2013).

4. Findings

Results from the observation processes carried towards the selected Malay families involved throughout the process of preparing food for the festive celebration has establish a realities of how importance the transfer of food knowledge to the younger generation. Below are the points that justify the importance of food knowledge transmission or transfer:

- Capable to prevent the loss of Malay traditional foods in order to ensure its continuity.
- Assist the young generation to recognize the ingredients of Malay traditional food products.
- A proper knowledge transfer of techniques and production of Malay traditional food.
- Facilitate young generations to gain confidence by practicing the preparation of Malay traditional foods with a proper guidance and practice.
- Encourage young generations to familiarize and practice Malay traditional food.

4.1. Capable to prevent the loss of Malay traditional foods in order to ensure its continuity

Figure 1 is taken from a different family sample. Two of the photos from Figure 1 show ‘ketupat palas’ that wrapped with ‘palas’ leaves whereas ‘ketupat nasi’ that wrapped with coconut leaves shoots. For ‘ketupat nasi’, rice is put in coconut leaf sheets that have been woven before being boiled. In Malay ethnic, during Eid Adha, they usually prepared ‘ketupat nasi’ and served it with ‘lontong’ or/and ‘rendang daging’. ‘Rendang daging’, as shown in above figure, is usually eaten with ‘ketupat palas’. Ways meals are served not much difference according to family. 'Ketupat nasi’ that has been boiled, cut up and served on a plate along with other dishes. This food is served in a bowl or platter. Uniqueness of Malay traditional food can be seen in terms of manufacturing and the way food is
served. Such foods should be maintained by the younger generation to ensure the food is not extinct through time. Willingness of family members to provide traditional Malay food on special days especially on the feast can create opportunities and awareness for young people to reach out and recognize various culinary traditions that can be forgotten and omitted. This could also attract and influence the younger generation to practicing and continue the tradition of food ethnicity for festive events and ceremonies.

![Traditional Malay food served during Eid Adha in 2013](image1)

4.2. Assist the young generation to recognize the ingredients of Malay traditional food products

Figure 2 demonstrate the purchasing and preparation activities of Malay traditional food ingredient that needed to be prepared. The process of knowledge transmission between mother and daughter occurred during these preparations. Normally, a few days prior to the 'Eid Adha, the mother would invite daughter to go to the wet market or supermarket to accompany and selecting ingredients to be cooked on the day of the festival. Materials needed to cook traditional Malay food usually much. A way to accompany the mother to the market, daughter can identify specific cooking materials with right quality and quantity needed. Result of the observations made, it was found daughter was excited and wanted to be involved in the process of selecting the necessary items. The daughter willing, not to sleep back after dawn and spend their time about one to two hour accompanies their mother at the wet market. Mother would tell the necessary ingredients and daughter will choose the ingredients. Mother will also help daughter choose fresh ingredients and raw food rather than choose the convenience product. Usually, the daughter already knows the specific ingredients necessary to cook a traditional recipe. Daughter continues to choose the specific material without having to be told by the mother. Typically, the specific ingredients needed to cook ‘rendang’ will be provided prior to the cooking process is done. This is because the materials that will be used a lot.
Daughter will help the mother in the kitchen preparing these ingredients. Specific ingredients needed to saute with ginger, onion, garlic, lemon grass, turmeric and four spices like cloves, star anise, cinnamon stick and cardamom be separated from the other ingredients that will be used later. Through this involvement, the daughter can train herself to become more efficient in cooking. When the ingredients to cook traditional food is prepared in advance, the next job will be easier, and required materials will not be left behind, over or under the cuisine. Daughter will feel much easier to perform the cooking process.

**Fig. 2. Scenario of food material purchasing activities in a wet market, supermarket, and food preparation at home before cooking the process**

4.3. A proper knowledge transfer of techniques and production of Malay traditional food

Figure 3 exhibit the involvement of daughter to help their mother in the kitchen. This scene is taken from different settings at home in which the younger generation will sit alongside the older generation to do the work of weaving coconut leaf shoots to made ‘ketupat nasi’ casings and opened ‘palas’ leaves to wrap ‘pulut’. ‘Palas’ leaves will usually open a few days before wrapping ‘pulut’ to make it soft and simple leaf wrapped later. ‘Palas’ leaves will be folded like ‘pulut’ wraps to insert into it. The way to weave ‘ketupat nasi’ casings and wrap ‘ketupat palas’ quite unique and different from each other. When see the technique done, the younger generation will understand and try to learn how these wraps. As shown above, can be seen the involvement of the younger generation to learn the techniques swathe from the older generation. The older generation will be next to serve as mentors to guide young people to do the job the right way and technique. Picture on the right shows the involvement of a younger generation that involved during the wrap ‘ketupat palas’. ‘Ketupat’ wrap process is done at night, the day before the
'Eid al-Adha. Two kilograms of ‘pulut’ is cooked into half cook before wrap with ‘palas’ leaves. With the involvement of the younger generation, the time allocated to wrap ‘ketupat palas’ be shorter and faster.

One of the pictures above shows a daughter of a family was standing and provides materials to be cooked while her mother on the side is being cut meat to make ‘rendang’. Willingness of the older generation to teach and train the young generation in the making of Malay traditional dishes can make young people receive the knowledge, skills and proper technique.

Figure 3. Scenario of food preparation and cooking process for ‘Eid Adha 2013

4.4. Facilitate young generations to gain confidence by practicing the preparation of Malay traditional foods with a proper guidance and practice

Figure 4 below displays the young generations can do food preparation and cooking process of Malay traditional food without receiving help from their mothers, starting from preparation to the cooking process. The pictures show that the young generations were preparing the ingredient through various methods such as blending and chopping, and also do the cooking without help. The preparation of Malay traditional food is not very easy, so the young generations need to be taught especially by their mothers. In the beginning, the young generations need to be taught and guided regarding the ingredients needed; the way to choose the ingredients, preparation of the ingredients and also the correct cooking method. They will be sitting together with their mothers in the kitchen and observe what the mother does. While the mothers are cooking, she will explain about the cooking process and show the way. The mothers will explain how certain dish should be prepared, the reason the dish is prepared in certain ways, the best way to prepare the dish, how long to prepare the dish and others. The young generations will then ask questions about what they do not understand regarding the preparation. They will also help the mothers during the preparation
such as cut the chicken, blend the ingredients and cooking. By monitoring and helping what the mothers do, starting from selecting and purchasing ingredients, preparation of ingredients and cooking of dishes, the young generations gain knowledge and slowly build their confidence to do all those things alone without help. So, they can still continue the practice of Malay traditional food preparation even when the mothers are not around not only during festive seasons but also on daily life. Thus, knowledge transmission is very important in order to build confidence to prepare Malay traditional food among young generations.

![Image of young generations preparing food](image)

Fig. 4. Young generations able to do food preparation and cooking process without help.

4.5. Encourage young generations to familiarize and practice Malay traditional food

Figure 5 demonstrate that young generations involve in the preparation of Malay traditional food. Young generations need to be encouraged to familiarize and practice Malay traditional foods. The first picture shows that a boy and his sister together with their family are preparing Malay traditional foods. The boy is sitting together and interested to know what the family members are doing. The second picture shows that a daughter follows her mother to the supermarket to buy an ingredient for Malay traditional food. It is important to encourage young generations to familiarize and practice Malay traditional food in order to ensure its continuity. The elderly needs to play the main role in encouraging the young generations. The elderly can tell the history of the Malay traditional foods and explain why the continuity of the Malay traditional foods is crucial. Other methods that can be used to build interest in young generations on Malay traditional foods are bringing them along to buy the ingredients whether in wet market or supermarket, familiarize them with the ingredients, tell them the functions of the ingredients in cooking and ask
them to help in preparation and cooking. It is better to allow them to experience doing it on their own since this can further enhance the interest in them towards Malay traditional foods. For example, let them prepare the ingredients. The most important thing is to make all the processes exciting and enjoyable. By doing this, the young generations will be attracted to join along. The young generations will not get attracted if it is boring along the process. When the young generations are attracted and encouraged, they will find that preparing Malay traditional food is not that difficult. So, they can build their confidence and prepare the Malay traditional foods even without guidance from their mothers. Thus, this can ensure the continuity of Malay traditional foods.

![Fig. 5. Young generations involve in the preparation of Malay traditional foods](image)

5. Discussion and recommendation

Malay traditional foods symbolize Malay culture and thus its continuity is very crucial. Transmission of Malay traditional food knowledge is valuable in integrating bonding in the family as well as serves as family’s cultural bridge (Kwik, 2008). Even though young generations nowadays are more exposed to modern foods such as fast foods and convenience foods, they need to aware the importance of continuity of Malay traditional foods. Knowledge transmission on Malay traditional foods usually occurs between mothers and daughters. It will be more effective when both the mothers and daughters involve two ways communication during the process. Besides, the mothers also need to let the daughters do some works during the process on their own. This will build confidence in the daughters to prepare the food alone next time. It is also proven that by involving the daughters in the whole
process starting from going to the wet market to recognize and purchase the ingredients for the cooking process, will make the knowledge transfer more effective. From this research, it is known that food preparation process during festivals that involve more people will also help in knowledge transmission among the daughters (Sharif, Nor, et al., 2013). Although, young generations always claim that they do not have enough time to prepare and cook Malay traditional foods due to hectic working life, but they still love to eat foods that taste like their mothers’ cooking (Md. Nor et al., 2012; Sharif, Zahari, et al., 2013). Thus, most of the mothers believe that transmission of knowledge of Malay traditional foods to their children especially the daughters as early as adolescent age is very important for the continuity of Malay traditional foods. The mothers believe that children need to be guided in preparation and cooking process, and they need to be given chances to prepare them by themselves. However, young generations themselves also need to have an effort to learn and conserve the Malay traditional foods.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, knowledge transmission regarding Malay traditional foods to young generations is extremely important and crucial for its continuity and future generations. Through the ethnography method used in this research among four different families in Malaysia setting, it is discovered that the continuity of Malay traditional foods can still be preserved as long as transmission of knowledge from older generations to younger generations occurs. It is observed that exposing and guiding the daughters at every step of preparation and cooking for example recognizing and selecting cooking ingredients, preparing the ingredients and cooking process, are important (Md. Nor et al., 2012). It is also important to hands-on some process to the daughters. Even the technology keeps changing, and social changes occur, for example, urbanization but Malay traditional foods should not be abandoned and both the older generations especially the mothers and the younger generations especially the daughters need to have an awareness of the importance of the continuity of Malay traditional foods and give some effort towards it. Thus, further studies can be conducted to find out whether young generations able to continue practicing the knowledge transferred to older generations. Due to social changes for example urbanization, the continuity of Malay traditional food will face many challenges.

Acknowledgment

This research was funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia through Universiti Teknologi MARA under RAGS grant: 600-RMI/RAGS 5/3 (179/2012). Adibah Mohamad Daud, Nur Suria Abdul Ghafar, Nooramira Mohamad Kamis and Nurul Rafatin Rafiee Louis (HS2275, academic year 2014/15) who have assisted this study.

References


