

Malay Traditional Eidul Fitr Food Practice: The Mechanisms of Adoption and Adaptation Processes

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Abstract

This research study identifies the approaches that support the process of adoption and adaptation of Malay traditional Eidul Fitr food practice. An interview was carried out in this research which involved 30 women consisted of grandmothers, mothers and daughters of one family with 20 years of age gap. Some insightful information on the practices with relatives and friends were collected. Recipe collection, cooking program and demonstration is identified as the approaches that support the process of adoption and adaptation of Malay traditional Eidul Fitr food practice.

Keywords: Adoption, Adaptation, Malay, Traditional Malay Festive Food, Practices

Introduction

The traditional food knowledge integrates a number of academic disciplines like social, culture, nutritional anthropology, human ecology, agriculture, population health, family studies, community development, education and others (Kwik, 2008a; Warren, 2001). In human ecology, traditional food knowledge is a system that is being acknowledged as valuable in protecting the integrity of natural resources with regard to food (Egeland et al., 2009; Kuhnlein et al., 2009; Turner, Harvey, Burgess, & Kuhnlein, 2009). In social, cultural, and nutritional anthropology perspective, traditional food knowledge (TFK) or also known as food knowledge transmission refers to a cultural tradition of sharing food, recipes and cooking skills and techniques and the collective wisdom is passing down through generations (Kwik, 2008). Traditional food knowledge also mean of asserting cultural identity and be a way to connect people to the natural world (Kwik, 2008). It is a product of generations which usually involves women through learning from each other and their environment on how to nourish themselves. This knowledge has been passed from generation to generation, empowering each one to be as self-sufficient as possible with regard to food in their environment through the transmission of the preceding mentioned attributable (Chenhall, 2011). Gutierrez (1999) initially mentions that traditional food preparation and consumption or foodways are mostly being passed down from generation to generation and Zahari et al. (2011) argue that the

transmission of food preparations, cooking methods, cooking skills and food decorum occur orally and through demonstration.

The mode of food knowledge transfers normally occurs either through observation, hands-on, assistant or helper, or given instructions. However, with regard to the traditional food practice, the processes of adaptation and adoption are the common practices involved. In this sense, adaptation on food is the application of the food knowledge which involves the adjustment and enhancement in accordance with the requirements of materials, ingredients, equipment's and facilities available that provide convenience and limited time (Kwik, 2008) while adoption refers to a food knowledge acquisition that is often applied and practiced solely without any adjustment (Chenhall, 2011). Nevertheless, in order for these two processes to happen, there must be the underlying mechanisms to support and thus understanding those mechanisms is crucially important. With that, this study is to identify the approaches that support the process of adoption and adaptation of Malay traditional festive food practices among the three generations of Malay women.

Literature Review

Food Adaptation and Adoption

Adaptation is an active process that engages individuals and groups in the effort for their daily routine, living and social activity in adjustment to cultural surroundings (Bourdieu, 1977). Adaptation causes the knowledge to be gained, changed and modified according to the situation and surroundings requirements (Qin et al., 2015). The adaptation process generally involves an intertwining of the components that officiate with important principles, values, and realities of the new culture and knowledge (Wilson, Ward, & Fischer, 2013). They further argue that it is a dialectical process in which the original intervention is confronted by the cultural realities of the new culture to arrive at a synthesis representing a meaningful adaptation. Culture adaptation is the evolutionary process by which an individual modifies his personal habits and customs to fit in to a particular culture. In other words, adaptation plays a fundamental role in accepting, altering and improving a process that may affect the daily work routine, family, social, value of life as well as many more activities including food knowledge and practices (Badra, Cordier, & Lieber, 2009).

As previously mentioned, Kwik (2008) refers food adaptation as the application of the food knowledge which involves the adjustment and enhancement in accordance with the requirements of materials, ingredients, equipment and facilities available that provide convenience and limited time. In food knowledge adaptation, there are many factors that affect the processes such as gender, age, area, socioeconomic, behavior, environment, preference, food choice and mass media (Isaacs et al., 2010; Qin et al., 2015). Family is the main factor that significantly influence and exposed an individual in adapting the food knowledge and behavior through a long development which starts when they were born. It indirectly affects the individual preference and perception of various aspects of the act or behavior including food knowledge, consumption and practice (Hunt, Fazio, MacKenzie, & Moloney, 2011). Similar to adoption the process of adaptation of food knowledge is often depends on the level of skill, understanding and familiarity in carrying out the cooking routines or activities. The longer they are exposed and practiced the cooking routine the easier they would adapt the knowledge (Chenhall, 2011).

Adoption on the other hand is an activity that connects closely with an act or process of commencing something new or different approach to be carried out further (Mama et al., 2014). It is often associated with a process of acceptance and implementation by a profession or organization of knowledge that is disseminated (Jacobson, 2013). Adoption commonly leads the individual or organization to choose and follow all sorts of behaviors and practices that may provide benefit and targeted achievements. It also may include in a form of theories, ideas, policies, strategies or plans (Lizardo, 2011). Adoption in food refers to a food knowledge acquisition that is often applied and practiced solely without any adjustment (Chenhall, 2011). It often refers to a type of dishes that is hard or inflexible to be adapted or simplified by the method of the food preparation. Muhammad, Zahari, Abdullah, and Sharif (2015) argue that food knowledge adoption does not only focus on recipes but it relates to raw materials or ingredients as alteration and modification that affect the taste and appearance of the dishes. Kwik (2008) contends that certain ethnic food must solidly be adopted, adapted and adjusted or redeveloping would totally over ruin the original taste, texture and the appearance of the foods or dishes.

Methodology

In identifying the approaches that support the process of adoption and adaptation of Malay traditional festive food, a qualitative approach is applied by carrying out an interview for information gathering. The sample population is among three generations of Malay women, namely grandmothers (age between 70 to 85 years old) known as the **First Generation**, mothers (age between 50 to 69 years old) known as **Second Generation** and daughters (age between 20 to 40 years old) known as the **Third Generation**. A Malay residential area in Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, and Johor are the contextual setting for this study. These peoples normally act as primary role models and teachers of cooking and food preparation skills across ages and socioeconomic groups (Chenhall, 2011). In addition, the contextual location for the data collection will be focusing on those four states due to their main dishes for Hari Raya are significant in these states (Muhammad et al., 2009). With that, in understanding the phenomena, the qualitative approach will be explored. In the context of phenomenology, face to face interview the interview session with the three generation women on the topic that being investigated will be undertaken. This is usually involving a transfer of information from the interviewee to interviewer whereby unstructured or open-ended conversations with prearranged questions to highly structured conversations through the specific questions are applied. It is strongly believed that choosing the combined approach would able the researcher to understand, recognize the phenomena or unveil the investigated matters. A set of semi structured interview questions was developed to guide the informants to share their knowledge, experience and opinion on the issue investigated. This is also suited to the hallmarks of ethnography and phenomenology as it provides the flexibility in term of information gathering and most importantly of both techniques able to investigate the on-going phenomena which in the context of the present study is to see whether the cultural traditions of sharing food provisioning skills, techniques and cultural between are still practicing among the Malay ethnic group.

Before the actual interviews, six sets of informants (grandmother, mother, and daughter) were first identified through relatives and head of the Malay community in each area involved from selected settings. All respective set of informants were contacted via

telephone for permission, date, times and venues for the interviews were to be conducted. Subsequently, the interviews were successfully conducted within two weeks. All the information was analyzed using thematic analysis.

Analyses and Results

A thematic analysis is used in the interpretation of the interview information in this study. This is dealt by identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns or themes within the information gathered.

Approaches That Support the Adoption and Adaptation Processes of the Malay Traditional Eidul Fitr Food Practices

From the response received, three themes were identified, and they are: ***Relatives and Friends, Recipe Collection, and Cooking Program and Demonstration***

Relatives and Friends

Relatives and friends often seen as one of the mediator or guider that may affect the individuals in many areas of either positive or negative depending on the extent of their relationship. The role of relatives and friends in fact can lead to a significant change to the individual if it is lead to something useful and adaptable. In this research context, relatives and friends are referred to a group of people or individual that contributes in sharing cooking knowledge particularly the traditional ones. Many scholars denote that relatives and friends are the closest or appropriate mediator and mentor in improving and gaining cooking knowledge after their mothers especially once they move away from their parents. Relatives and friends were often being referred probably because they are living together or more comfortable to share the cooking knowledge particularly on the recipe and method of preparation of the specific dishes. These elements are often being the main doubtful among the individuals due to lack of confident and self-reliant of the individual especially for those who have not done the cooking itself.

In Malay culture perspective, even though mothers are often seen as individuals who are highly skilled in the matters of food preparation and housework, the children especially in the eighties often distance themselves from their mother as the mother is often seen as a critical and strict individual. Therefore, relatives and friends are always being the alternative thus referred any matters including food or cooking knowledge from them. This is in line with the Malay culture who always practiced a courtesy visit to their relatives and friends particularly during the Hari Raya celebration. The visit is also giving room for them to gain and exchange the food knowledge based on the traditional *Hari Raya* food served during the visit and subsequently allowed them to adopt and adapt the knowledge gained. The impact of adoption and adaption of the knowledge absorbed from the relatives and friends contributes a self-confident and motivation for them to improve and continue practicing the Malay traditional Hari Raya foods. In other words, visiting and received a visit from relatives and friends and vice in reality, not only in strengthening the kinship but also beneficial in sharing the traditional food knowledge which originally adopted and adapted from their mothers.

The above statement is strengthening with information received from the three generation women. Interestingly, the three generation women conveyed that besides mothers, their relatives and friends have somewhat contributed and support the adoption and adaptation processes of the Malay traditional food knowledge. The kinds of supports prevailed are through observing the products during a courtesy visit make by them to their relatives and friends and feedback on the products by their relatives and friends. As revealed, this scenario is obviously occurring among the third-generation women compared to the first and second generations. In sum, the relative and friends always acted as their reference for cooking knowledge and practices after the absence of their mothers. Some of the three generation women responses are as follows:

*"After my mother passed away, the only channel and supports that I have in adopting and adapting the Malay traditional Eidul Fitr food is my relatives, and friends. Not denying the fact that I've got a lot of culinary knowledge from my mother, but knowledge gained from my relatives, particularly aunties and friends strengthened the existing process. I should say they aid the spirit and confidence in continuing my mom cooking legacy"***(First Generation Woman)**

*"Basically, besides mother and mother in law, I also learned that the Malay traditional Eidul Fitr food from my elder sisters and friends from my village. Mind you, I gained the knowledge when they came to my house and taste the Eidul Fitr dishes that I made..... Their feedback is crucial to me... and made me adjusted and enhanced whatever necessary for the following year. This process continues for many years and it is far better improved you know. One thing for sure, I always developed my traditional cooking skills until it became similar to my family traditional taste and preference you..."***(Second Generation Woman)**

*"To me visiting friend and relatives during Eidul Fitr do not only strengthen the friendship and family bonding, but create the opportunity to taste their dishes and exchanging ideas including on how adoption and adaptation made on the popular traditional Eidul Fitr food. This indirectly improved and tightened each other knowledge on the traditional Eidul Fitr food gained from my mother and their mothers. What could I say is that as a third generation, besides mother, relatives and friends are the individuals that support the adoption and adaptation processes and practices of the Malay traditional food knowledge"***(Third Generation Woman)**

Recipe Collection

A recipe is a set of instructions that describes how to prepare or produce certain products and it's usually refers to a culinary dish. Recipe collection basically is a reference material for individuals who wish to produce or cook the any dishes that they ever enjoyed or continue the family food tradition. Recipe in facts acts as a main weapon in the process of food preparation because it lists the requirements of raw materials or ingredients as well as quantity and the cooking instructions. The transformation recipes involved into three stages which in the early days it frequently shared only among the individuals through verbal communications with limited information and centrally focus on the ingredients and proportions of the dishes that are going to prepare. Later, the recipes were composed through the handwritten materials and began available and shared in public and community through a small column in newspapers and magazines that only recorded basic information

such as ingredients, proportion without any picture attached. The transformation continues where the collection of recipes began to be printed and sold same as other book publications in the late seventies. This began the era of modern culinary recipes where thousands of cookery and recipe books available in the market. Modern culinary recipes normally consist of several components:

- The name (and often the locale or provenance) of the dish
- How much time it will take to prepare the dish
- The required ingredients along with their quantities or proportions
- Necessary equipment and environment needed to prepare the dish
- An ordered list of preparation steps and techniques
- The number of servings
- The texture and flavour
- A photograph of the finished dish

Some recipes note how long the dish could be kept and its suitability for freezing. Nutritional information, such as calories per serving and grams of protein, fat, and carbohydrates per serving, may also be given particularly when the recipe is created by the food product manufacturers. In actual facts, recipes collection is actually giving more impact or benefit to individuals who already have the basic cooking skills compare to those unskilled ones. Despite this notion, recipes collection is considered one of the mechanisms that contribute and support the adoption and adaptation processes of food including the traditional food knowledge.

The above statement is in line with the information gathered from the three generation women for this study. These generation women are sharing the same opinion and acknowledged that recipe collections is another element that provide an additional support the adoption and adaptation processes of the Malay traditional food knowledge. However, dissimilarity appeared on how the recipe collections influence their adoption and adaptation processes. With no written recipes collection and solely based on the verbal communications, observing and assisting their mother, the first-generation women admitted that adoption processes of the Malay traditional hari food knowledge are applicable with their generation compare to adaption process ranging from the pre-preparation process up to the end products. The second and the third generation women however revealed since the availability of the written and published recipe collection plus the commercialization of the convenient food products the adaptation has slightly overridden the adoption process of the Malay traditional Hari Raya food knowledge. They further contended that having or keeping the recipe collection alone is inadequate if they did not comprehend with the basic cooking skills and experience in the food preparation processes as to them cooking skills is important in producing dishes and recognized the whole procedures based the available recipes. Below is the response shared by the three generation women:

"During my younger days, I don't see my mother holding or referring to any recipe books or note you know... Like myself, even though I can read and write, the recipes are in my head... and mind you I can still remember all of them until today particularly in regard to the Eidul Fitri recipe dishes like ketupat, rendang, kuah kacang and kuah

*lodeh. I have digested the knowledge.... My recipes are by observing and assisting mothers with her cooking routine, including the preparation of the Malay traditional Eidul Fitr foods thus adoption process was solidly occurring. In other word, the adoption processes of the Malay traditional food knowledge is steadily based on the established recipes in my mind or inherited from my mother. However, I can see the scenario is different now **"(First Generation Woman)***

*"Recipe collection is a handy reference that actually supports more towards the adaptation as opposed to adoption in continuing my family food tradition practice. As a working mother..... So many things are lingering and meditating my thought and mind which unable me in memorizing many things including the recipes. Thus, my way out is recipes collection and adapting the Malay traditional Eidul Fitr food through the application of some of the convenience food products ... **"(Second Generation Woman)***

*"Since I got married, recipes collection from books, magazine, newspapers and family are my main guide or support materials in adapting and practicing the Malay traditional food including the Eidul Fitri ones. Yes, with the availability of the convenient products plus hundreds of recipe books would you think that we are able to fully adopt the traditional practice of the Malay traditional Eidul Fitr food? I don't think so **(Third Generation Woman)***

Cooking Demonstration and Programed

Cooking demonstration is an activity that promotes and shared a specific cooking knowledge and skills to the public or group of peoples. It is considered as informal types of continuous education, even though it is being performed in a formal class setting. Cooking demonstration indirectly acts as a mediator of transferring and passing down the food knowledge and skills of producing the food dishes ranging from traditional and the modern dishes. Although there are various categories, the three types of food demonstrations highlighted here are the common ones; a). promoting the commercial cooking materials or products organized by marketing team of the manufacturers; b). introducing healthy eating organized by government and non-government bodies; c). sharing the modern, traditional and international food dishes commonly organized by institution or the individual demonstrator.

In relation to this study, the first-generation women were not so much excited compare to the second and third generation since those food demonstration elements (life demonstration, television show, multimedia) besides their mother are not yet popular or existed in their time. In other words, the Malay traditional food knowledge in their early years was purely adopted through their mother, but slightly altered with the waves of modernization. As for the second-generation women, they admitted that the cooking demonstrations and cooking programs were debuted during their teenager, thus excited by watching it on television and acknowledge that the current cooking programs are more interesting, and fascinating compared to their time. These two events according to the second-generation women indirectly aid and supporting the adoption and adaptation of the cooking knowledge initially gained from their mothers.

As they are well versed and constantly exposed to the information technology and multimedia, the third-generation women states that the food knowledge is easily accessible through the multimedia application like YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Tweepers and many others and these mediums act as an alternative way of watching and searching the cooking demonstration. For them, in getting such information, they just need to search the dishes via online. They further claimed that the technological advancement manifestly facilitates them in adopting and adapting the Malay traditional Eidul Fitr food knowledge regardless wherever they are. Some of the three generation women responses are as follows:

*"Yes, I wish the cooking demonstration and cooking channels are available during my time... I have never attended any cooking classes or cooking demonstration apart highly dependent on my mother. Thus, I have adopted everything taught by my mother, especially during the early days. However, mind you, with the waves of modernization, my process of adaptation is gradually apparent in preparing the traditional dishes including the traditional festive foods through cooking demonstration and the cooking shows"***(First Generation Woman)**

*"As for me, after my mother passes away cooking demonstration and the television cooking programs is really beneficial as I am hardly cooking the Malay traditional dishes including the Eidul Fitr ones. Thus, cooking program in addition to the ones gained from mother enhancing and support in adopting and adapting my cooking knowledge and practices. To be specific, cooking demonstration and the television cooking programs in a way polished my cooking skill and practices, especially the Malay traditional Eidul Fitr dishes... However, nowadays besides life demonstration and television program, it is even much easier to search for traditional cooking demonstration through other modern information technology"***(Second Generation Woman)**

*"Compared to my mother and grandmother time, apart from cooking demonstrations and television programs, the food knowledge is easily accessible and obtained nowadays through the multimedia applications. You know, internet through YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Tweepers and many others are the examples of the multimedia information. Now, it is an IT era, everything is there. I have learnt and taken many recipes from those applications and write them down. What can I conclude here is that technological advancement through multimedia information aid my generation in adopting and adapting the Malay traditional Eidul Fitr food knowledge regardless wherever they are."***(Third Generation Woman)**

Discussion and Conclusion

From the interview with three generation women, it is undeniable that relatives and friends, recipe collection, and cooking program and demonstration are the identified approaches that support the process of adoption and adaptation of Malay traditional Eidul Fitr food practices. However, due to the waves of the modernization, the process of the adoption of many except a few of the Malay traditional Eidul Fitr food is gradually outshone

by the adaptation processes through the technological advancement and information technologies. In other words, technological advances are continuously opening a chapter in creating a new mechanism and techniques in sharing and passing down the Malay traditional food knowledge. In addition, the multimedia technological advancement indirectly helps, especially the new generation in maintaining the knowledge of traditional foods that were previously shared only among the family thus it will not be totally varnished or abandoned.

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