

The Globalization of Malaysia National Cuisine: A Concept of 'Gastrodiplomacy'

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Abstract

Malaysia national cuisines are inherited through various generations and have been created through multiple evolutions and assimilations, in which formed very unique and delicious cuisines using various tropical ingredients. However, Malaysia national cuisine is still new to some of the global citizens. Therefore, food globalization is very important, because food globalization not only contributes to the trade industries but also contributes to other local industries such as tourism industries. A new term known as 'gastrodiplomacy' has been introduced recently to explain how countries used their national cuisines as a method to promote their countries, cultures, foods, attract foreign tourists and also build political relations. Malaysia also has rigorously applying gastrodiplomacy practices especially through the 'Malaysia Kitchen for the World' programme (MKP). Not only that, media such as documentary programmes and cooking competitions somehow contribute to the globalization of Malaysia national cuisine. Though the government and the citizens have taken various actions, there are still rooms for improvements to make the cuisines further known world-wide. Malaysia has been recognized as one of the best gastrodiplomacy practitioners in the world, and it is hoped that this article could be as a platform to share how Malaysia used this method to promote its national cuisines.

Keywords:

Gastrodiplomacy; Culinary Diplomacy; Malaysia Kitchen; Traditional Food; Food Tourism; Food Marketing

1 Introduction

Malaysia is a tropical country located in the Southeast of Asia. Malaysia covers about 330,000 square kilometers and has diverse ethnicities and all living in harmony and respect for each other. Malaysia is covered by natural rainforests, wetlands, unspoilt islands with some of the world's most exquisite coral reefs and beaches, rich floras and faunas that are home to countless rare species of insects, birds, and animals, and that's not even mentioning the gastronomic heritage, which goes back many, many centuries (Withey, 2004). The temperature is always around 30°C which is hot and humid. A typical day will normally start with a crisp morning and clear skies followed by a hot and humid afternoon which may be cloudy ending with warm heavy showers and thunderstorms almost on every afternoon. The term enjoying a meal on a hot sunny afternoon is eating a spicy meal in an open-air restaurant or at a hawker's table with an oscillating fan while sweating streaks across the face and neck (Arshad, 2000).

Malaysia is a multicultural country. According to the latest data provided by the Department of Statistics Malaysia in 2016, Malaysia has a total population of 31.7 million that comprised of 68.8% Bumiputera, 23.4% Chinese, 7.0% Indians and 1% other races (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2016). The Bumiputeras or translated as 'people of the land' are Malay and *orang asli* from the Peninsular of Malaysia, and also the indigenous groups from the East of Malaysia which consist of the states of Sabah and Sarawak. Malays are the dominant ethnic group in Malaysia, representing more than half of the country's population (Raji et al., 2017).

Malaysian national cuisines are inherited from previous generations and descendants. They have been created through various evolutions. A dish is always identified by its name of origin; for example, *laksa Penang* or rice noodle soup is originated from Penang state (Arshad, 2000). While *laksa Sarawak* is originated from Sarawak state, *laksa Kelantan* is from Kelantan state, and *laksa Johor* is from the state of Johor; each of the *laksa* has a different flavour. Another popular dish is *satay Kajang* which is marinated chicken or beef on a wooden skewer originated from Kajang, Selangor (Arshad, 2000). Malaysians like their food to be enriched with coconut and chili. *Sambal* is one of the popular dishes which is grounded chilies cooked with onions, shrimp paste, and tamarind served with meals for dunking finger food (Hyman, 1993). *Sambal* can be made with anchovies, fish, chicken, and meat as well. Malaysian national dish mostly consists of a perfect combination of spicy, sweet and sour flavours.



Figure 1: *Laksa Penang*. Rice noodles soak together with hot herbal fish flavoured soup.

Local cuisine is usually cooked with spices, and the inclusion of various spices into the traditional cooking has created a unique and palatable cuisine. Rice is the staple food for Malaysians. Rice is a symbol of spiritual strength or *semangat*. Eating rice gives inner strength and energy to the individual. It is usually cooked by boiling, steaming or preparing it as porridge or as a base to other side dishes. Rice is usually served with fish, meat, chicken, eggs or tofu, and vegetables. Rice dishes can also be served as a main meal in itself. The addition of seafood, meat or chicken with some vegetables to the rice recipes makes the dish a complete meal in itself. Some of the popular rice dishes are *nasi lemak*, *nasi goreng*, *nasi kerabu* and *nasi ayam*. The method of preparation includes roasting, boiling, frying, steaming, toasting, and sun drying and marinating. Most traditional foods make use of traditional products including chicken eggs, duck eggs, glutinous flour, rice, meat, prawns, fish, fruits and others (Arshad, 2000).

Malaysian foods resulted from the assimilation and transformation of broad racial mix and immigrants who came to Malaysia in the past. This assimilation has created a unique and flavourful food. It is believed that satay is originated from kebabs which came from the Arabs where they had brought onions, almonds, pistachios, and raisins to Malaysia. Next, the Indians were brought to Malaysia adding more spices to the Malaysian cuisine, from bread, rice pilaus, curry, to unique vegetarian dishes. The Indians had brought their bread, and curry while the Indonesians brought Chinese soy sauce, bean sprouts, and tempeh. There are many regional differences in Malaysian food (Hyman, 1993).

The eastern state of Kelantan and northern states such as Kedah and Perlis are influenced by the proximity of Thailand with its heavy use of tamarind, fish sauce and lime. In the southern state of Johor, the food there is mostly influenced by the

Javanese food culture (Withey, 2004). The state of Negeri Sembilan is influenced by the migration of the Minangkabau people from Sumatra, known for its very hot curries. The main meats are chicken, lamb, duck, and beef. Fresh and saltwater fish, prawns and squid are also very popular.

2 Food Globalization

Food globalization must be welcomed because no cultures have ever remained identical and unchanged over time. Globalization is the main cause for the border of cultures between countries to vanish and has created a new world of openness. The new generations are more open-minded, and they learn to assimilate into other cultures. 'Globalization will not make local cultures disappear,' on the contrary, in a framework of worldwide openness; 'all that is valuable and worthy of survival in local cultures will find fertile ground in which to bloom' (Llosa, 2001). Food globalization has created food neoculturism among the global citizens where nowadays global citizens have accepted international foods such as pizza which is originated in Italy and also sushi which is originated from Japan in their culture. Sushization has become the food trends and sensation around the world, where there is a variety of sushi's topping suited to the taste of local citizens in particular country. Though sushi is available globally, still sushi has not lost its status as Japanese cultural property. Globalization does not necessarily homogenize cultural differences nor erase the original cultures (Hall et al., 2008).

Same goes for pizza, for example in Malaysia there are *sambal* and *rendang* toppings for pizza sold by Pizza Hut Malaysia. Food glocalization is vital so that people around the world could accept foods new to their taste buds. Glocalization has been long applied by McDonald's for example in Paris a city well-known for its love for fine cuisine has now well acceptance towards fast food, such as the revered French bread has been McDonaldized (Ritzer, 2000). The term 'McDonaldization' has been globally used to not only described in the food glocalization but also on many aspects such as business and marketing.

United Kingdom through its supermarkets such as Marks & Spencer (M&S), ASDA and Tesco have sold many ethnic foods where most of the ethnic foods are described as authentic and healthy. ASDA UK is currently selling ASDA 'A Taste of Malaysia Mango Laksa Curry' which is manufactured in Leeds, UK and sold at ASDA supermarket at the price of £1.29. While Marks & Spencer UK (M&S) has not only sell instant *laksa* paste but also has provided a recipe on chicken *laksa* preparation on its website 'cook with M&S' and has described *laksa* as 'This delicious Malaysian soup makes a great starter.' M&S also has portrayed *laksa* as healthy ethnic cuisine and easily prepared within 10 minutes by using the *laksa* paste.

3 Gastrodiplomacy

According to Rockower in 2012, gastrodiplomacy is defined as ‘how countries conduct cultural diplomacy through the promotion of their cuisine which is also an increasingly popular strategy for public diplomacy and nation branding.’ Numerous middle powers have invested on culinary diplomacy projects as a medium to promote their culture, globalize their food industries, create broader tourism and build relations through their national cuisines (Pham, 2013; Rockower, 2012).

The main actors are no longer limited to chefs and politicians but include celebrity chefs, food corporations, and tourist agencies. The United Kingdom (UK) and United States (US) have treated their politician guests’ by serving their national cuisines as symbols of the importance of relations between countries. For example, in 2003 the UK government treated Russian president, Vladimir Putin with a royal banquet to amplify the significance of his visits to the UK and also to further enhance the diplomatic intimacy between UK and Russia. While in 2001, the previous US president, George W. Bush invited Putin to his ranch in Texas and treated him with local American cuisines (Zhang, 2015).

In 2010, the Malaysian government through the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE) had rigorously promoted Malaysian national cuisine abroad through ‘Malaysia Kitchen for the World’ programme (MKP). Malaysia had actively applying various forms of gastrodiplomacy through MKP in various countries in the world, especially in the UK, US, Australia and China due to the population size of the countries and bigger market opportunity (Sae, 2015). Malaysia is also one of the best gastrodiplomacy practitioners in the world (Solleh, 2015). Not only that, United Nation World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) ranked Malaysia as the tenth most visited country in 2012 (Sae, 2015). According to Solleh in 2015, people fly to destinations where food is one of their concerned. The tourists who came to Malaysia will bring the lasting memory of the Malaysian cuisine as well as the culture.

3.1 Malaysia Kitchen for the World

The Malaysian government has introduced a project called ‘Malaysia Kitchen for the World’ programme (MKP) in 2006 where Malaysians who lived overseas has the chance to participate in this project. ‘Malaysia Kitchen for the World’ programme (MKP) is a programme where the government will help the Malaysian restaurateurs to open and improve their restaurants abroad (Jalis et al., 2009). MKP was launched by the government to introduce Malaysian cuisines to the world through Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE) under the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI). MATRADE has taken an active action to promote Malaysian cuisines and Malaysian restaurants overseas with the aim to increase the interests of the international consumers towards Malaysian cuisines. Furthermore, by increasing these interests, the aim is also to increase the affinity towards Malaysian food products. Hence, increasing the exports of processed food,

food ingredients, agriculture produce, and attract tourists to Malaysia (Nordin, 2010; Bernama, 2012).

In 2010, Malaysia Kitchen promotion programme was launched by the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia. The event was attended by leading British Celebrity Chefs including Chef Gordon Ramsay, Atul Kochar, and Angela Hartnett, British media, Malaysian restaurant operators and key influencers. A similar promotion campaign was also launched in New York in the same year by Malaysian Ambassador in Washington (Mohamed, 2010). This initiative was supported by the government. Currently, Malaysian restaurants can be found in UK, US, Canada, Germany, Finland, China, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines and the Netherlands.

There were 465 Malaysian restaurants worldwide participated in the MKP in 2010. The number of Malaysian restaurants worldwide registered with MKP rise to 647 restaurants in 2012. The restaurateurs registered with MKP received financial support from the Export-Import Bank of Malaysia Berhad (EXIM Bank) which was delegated by the Malaysian Government under the control of Ministry of Finance to provide special assistance called 'Malaysia Kitchen Financing Facility.' One of the requirements that need to comply with the participating restaurateurs in MKP; the food must serve Malaysian food which is traditionally and customarily consumed by Malaysians (Sae, 2015).

The campaign logo for MKP is mortar and pestle wherein Malay it is called as *lesung batu*. Mortar and pestle is a kitchen utensil which is very synonym with Malay culture, where it is used to pound and grind foods especially shallots and garlic in almost every Malay traditional food preparation. Not only that, in the ancient time, mortar and pestle is a symbol of Malay woman's competency in cooking. In traditional match-making, the intended bride was expected to be a competent cook and would often receive an unexpected visit from her intended groom during the pounding and making of the spices and pastes. The pounding and beat of the pestle into the mortar would indicate her competency. There could be nothing worse for the bride-to-be than have her intended husband eat a meal that she had prepared only to be told that it was coarse and lacked flavour. This was as good as being told that the wedding as off (Withey, 2004).

According to MITI in 2015, the outcome of MKP is about 1.3 billion individuals in New York, London, Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Auckland, and Wellington aware about Malaysia through the MKP programme. Not only that, 150 million people took part in MKP campaigns, and 23.5% more people in New York, London, Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Auckland, and Wellington choose to eat Malaysian cuisine. More than a thousand Malaysian product lines are representing 265 brands in 50 mainstream supermarkets in London, New York, Sydney, and Auckland, following 23.7% growth in revenue for restaurants registered with MKP. Moreover, overall 864 reviews regarding MKP activities undertaken were lodged in the biggest online Food Guide in London and New York. It is a proud moment for Malaysians when Malaysian restaurants received

Michelin awards for the first time in New York and acknowledgment in Hong Kong (MITI, 2015). MKP has promoted the national cuisines through the MKP's website. MKP's website has provided recipes and lists of Malaysian restaurants overseas such as Malaysia Kitchen New York website with its website www.malaysiakitchennyc.com. MKP has caught many foodies' attention in US, UK, Australia, and China somehow these foodies have made Malaysian cuisine known globally through their writing on Twitter, Facebooks, and blogs.

In 2011, Malaysia also had taken advantage on the popularity of food truck in the US and adapting it by selling and also giving free Malaysian national cuisines on the food truck in New York and several other cities in the US. While, in the UK, Malaysia has set up 'Malaysian Night Market' which is a popular culture in Malaysia known as *Pasar Malam* in middle of London at the Trafalgar Square (Rockower, 2011). In 2014, 'Malaysian Night Market' at the Trafalgar Square received 43,000 people in one day just because of the event. The Mayor of London called the 'Malaysian Night Market' as an annual event (Solleh, 2015). This night market gathered the participating restaurateurs in MKP to sell their foods. Not only that, but this event also brought the top chefs for a cooking demonstration of Malaysian cuisines and Malaysian cultural dance performance on the main stage (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 2011). This 'Malaysian Night Market' had also been set up in the US at Santa Monica 3rd Street Promenade and in the Meatpacking District at New York City (Rockower, 2011). Night market or *Pasar Malam* in Malaysia is a street market that opens in the evening, where the locals usually buy their goods such as rice, fish, chicken, fruits, snacks, clothes and many more. Anything can be bought at *Pasar Malam*.

In Beijing, MKP collaborated with Shangri-La's China World Hotel to promote and increase awareness of Malaysian cuisines to the high-end Chinese customers through buffet lunch and dinner cooked by Malaysian celebrity chef, Yang Jamil (Yi, 2013). The hotel attracts 500 to 600 customers daily for lunch and dinner which was a good platform for Malaysia to publicize the cuisines. The 10-day festivals served authentic Malaysian dishes such as *nasi lemak*, *roti canai*, *rendang*, *Soto*, *mee rebus*, *teh tarik* and assorted *kuih-muih*. The same festival also held by MKP in Dalian, located in the northeastern of China and also in Shanghai Marriott Hotel City Centre. Some of the raw materials of the dishes served were brought from Malaysia so that the authenticity of the cuisines is well-preserved. Dishes such as *satay*, *laksa*, *sup ekor* (curry oxtail soup) and *teh tarik* were among the favourites (Bernama, 2015; The Edge, 2013; Yi, 2013).

According to Bernama (2012), there were 50 Malaysian restaurants registered with MKP in China, which is 18 in Beijing, 26 in Shanghai, 2 in Dalian, 5 in Guangzhou and Shenzhen. In Beijing, a registered restaurant with MKP showed an increase of about 40% growth from 5000 customers per month in 2010 to 7000 customers per month in 2012. Malaysian government through MATRADE also has been collaborating with Parkson Retail Group to promote food and beverage (F&B) products in China through food exhibitions. MATRADE also cooperate with 7-Eleven at its 200 outlets in Beijing

and Tianjin (The Edge, 2013; Bernama, 2012). Besides 7-eleven, MATRADE has been collaborating with Jia Hui Group, which has 57 outlets in Hebei province. Hard work by MATRADE paid off when the export of Malaysian F&B products to China showed growth of 107.5% from 2009 to 2011 (Bernama, 2012).

In Australia, MATRADE had organized the 'Taste of Malaysia' and 'Christmas Ala Malaysia' in Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, and Brisbane to promote Malaysian cuisines (Bernama, 2014a). In 2014, Australia had the most numbers of Malaysian restaurants which is 224 restaurants. The Australians found that Malaysian and Asian food is healthier and stimulating (Bernama, 2014a). Increasing the awareness of Malaysian cuisines in Australia had created high demand for Malaysian food products such as ingredients, confectioneries and frozen foods (Bernama, 2014b). Malaysia-Australia Free Trade Agreement implemented in the year 2013, has created massive opportunities for Malaysian food and beverages (F&B) products and services into the Australian market (Bernama, 2014b). MATRADE also cooperated with major food importer in Australia to organize the in-store promotions in independent grocery stores in Victoria state. MATRADE participated in the 'Fine Food Australia' every year by spearheading Malaysian exhibitors to the expo. 'Fine Food Australia' is the biggest trade show in Australia that brings together the leading producers and suppliers globally to one location every year; which Australia alternates between Sydney and Melbourne each September (MATRADE, 2016). Hence with all these efforts by MATRADE, in 2016, Australia is Malaysia's fourth largest export destination for processed food (MATRADE, 2016).

Such gastrodiplomacy action taken by Malaysian government has promoted Malaysian national cuisines globally but also has promoted Malaysian culture and Malaysia as a country through its cuisine. According to Sae (2015), revealed that running Malaysian restaurant overseas able to create an intention to visit Malaysia as statistically proven in her study. Gastrodiplomacy practices is a long-term method, and the apparent result cannot be obtained in one or two years. It takes years, or even decades to be as the prestigious global gastrodiplomacy player (Solleh, 2015). Therefore, continuous promotions and gastrodiplomacy practices needed, in order to boost the Malaysia food industries, tourism industries and country's image.

3.2 Malaysia gastrodiplomats as culinary ambassadors

Gastrodiplomat is also known as culinary ambassador of a nation. This gastrodiplomat act as a representative of the country and introduce the nation's cuisine to the world (Rockower, 2012). Malaysia has hired top chefs as it gastrodiplomats from Malaysia, US and other countries to be as Malaysian culinary ambassador. One of the gastrodiplomats hired by Malaysia is Chef Gina Keatley who is a well-known US celebrity chef. She is a culinary dietitian and also a television host. She is the host of 'Deliciously Diverse: Malaysia, a culinary expedition designed to embrace new foods'. Besides that, Malaysia through MKP also has organized an event called 'Christmas ala Malaysia' in New York City with Chef Gina Keatley as the host on

the year 2015 (Sepulveda, 2015). Another Malaysia's gastrodiplomat is Chef Christiana Arokiasamy. She was born and raised in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. She has dedicated herself to transporting the Malaysian kitchen to the US. Christina has captured the beauty of Malaysian cuisines and cultures through her books. She is also a well-known teaching chef in US and has brought the authenticity of Malaysian cuisines to a higher level with her expertise in the culinary world (Arokiasamy, 2017).

Datuk Redzuawan Ismail or famously known as Chef Wan is a Malaysian celebrity chef and also a gastrodiplomat presenting Malaysia around the world (Tourism Malaysia, 2010). He was a former accountant for seven years when he decided to pursue his study at the prestigious California Culinary Academy in San Francisco, US (Dene, 2016; Hahn, 2004). Graduated as one of the best students in the academy, he has burning passion towards the culinary art world since he was small until now. He had received numerous awards internationally and locally throughout his career as a chef. Some of the awards were La Mah-zeal Pree honorary award for his commitment to promoting Asian cuisine to the world (Hahn, 2004). Chef Wan also has been awarded as 'The Best Celebrity Chef in the World' by 'World Gourmand Cookbook and Media Awards 2009' at Comedie Francaise near Palais Royal, Paris (Zieman, 2009). Not only that, the king bestowed him the honorary Malaysian title of 'Datuk' in 2010. In 2013, Chef Wan beat six other international chefs, including Jamie Oliver for the 'Best English Language Television Chef' at the Gourmand Awards in Paris (Dene, 2016). Chef Wan is also the culinary ambassador for MKP where he travels around the world to the events of MKP as the celebrity chef doing a cooking demonstration in the Malaysian Night Market, food festivals and many more. Chef Wan involvements in various projects locally and internationally have enhanced the Malaysian and Asian cuisine in the eye of the world.

4 Malaysian cuisine globalization through media

'GO ASEAN' is the 24-hour channel broadcast ASEAN member countries as travel destinations and food paradise for the global viewers (Yunus, 2015). ASEAN stands for Association of South East Asian Nations which is a 10-member states body from the Southeast Asia countries that represents more than 500 million people living in the region (BBC News, 2014). 'GO ASEAN' is a Malaysian-led initiative, launched by the former Malaysian Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Razak in 2015. In Malaysia, the channel is available on Astro Channel 737 (Yunus, 2015). Some of the programs aired on the channel are 'The Halal Foodie,' 'Food Maps,' and 'Supper Heroes.' 'The Halal Foodie' is a food documentary program with its host Papi Zak which is a comedian. This program features the best Halal eats in Southeast Asia. While 'Food Maps' premier food directory and features best restaurants around Southeast Asia for authentic dishes. Whereas, the 'Supper Heroes' covered among the best cities in ASEAN countries to experience nightlife where food never sleeps (GO ASEAN, 2018).

'Gordon's Great Escape' is a documentary television programme which Chef Gordon Ramsay had visited Malaysia and cover some of the famous Malaysian dishes

such as *rendang* and Borneo's bird nest (Mckanas, 2013). Gordon is an international British celebrity chef and restaurateur. According to Gordon, prior to exploring Malaysia, he only knew three dishes related to Malaysia which are *rendang*, *satay*, and *laksa*. In the documentary, Gordon has described Malaysian dishes as 'dish to every taste' and 'woman rule the power.' 'Dish to every taste' means Malaysian dishes consist of the best combinations of spices and flavours from various ethnics in Malaysia. While 'woman rule the power' means woman in Malaysia especially mothers are fully in charge of the kitchen. Gordon went to 'Aunty Aini's Garden Café' at Negeri Sembilan to taste one of the best Malay heritage cuisines in Malaysia which are *satay* and *rendang*. The owner of the restaurant which known as Aunty Aini had taught Gordon step-by-step on how to make *rendang* which has been listed as one of the top three flavours in the US (Solleh, 2015; Mckanas, 2013). This kind of documentary covered by the famous international chef as Gordon has promoted Malaysian cuisines indirectly to the global viewers.



Figure 2: Chicken *rendang*. Malaysian delight with its special ingredient, *kerisik*. *Kerisik* is grated coconut which toasted and ground to a paste.

The late Anthony Bourdain with his food and culture documentary television programme known as 'Anthony Bourdain: No Reservation' has documented Malaysia with its documentary title, 'Malaysia: Into the Jungle.' He has described *laksa* as delicious, and he imagined for having *laksa* stall in America instead of fast food restaurant (Cpome, 2012). *Laksa* is a rice noodle soak together with hot herbal fish flavoured soup. The documentary programme was aired on Discovery Travel & Living in August 2005. In 2015, Anthony once again visited Malaysia with his new documentary programme known as 'Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown' where he has covered Malaysia once again and went to Kuala Lumpur which is the capital city of

Malaysia and also to Sarawak located on the island of Borneo. This documentary was aired on Cable News Network (CNN) in April 2015. In this television programme, Anthony went to Aunty Aini's Garden Cafe too and had tasted a variety of Malay heritage foods known as *masakan kampung* or translated as the country's cooking. Bourdain has described that the Malay traditional foods as delicious (CNN, 2015).

A Malaysian, Duzy who lives in Seoul, South Korea has successfully become an entrepreneur selling *nasi lemak* through the online website. *Nasi lemak* is halal and also a popular national cuisine in Malaysia. He had just started selling *nasi lemak* in September 2017 using online marketing and delivered the food to the customers all over Seoul. Since he has been receiving high demands and good feedbacks, two months after that he collaborated with his South Korean business partner who owns a guesthouse in Itaewon. Duzy set up his business on the rooftop of the guesthouse with the view of Seoul's skyscrapers. Itaewon is the center of halal foods in South Korea, the demand for halal food in South Korea is rising, and it is a very good opportunity for Duzy to sell his foods to the tourists and as well as the locals (Geraldine, 2017).



Figure 3: *Nasi lemak* is a popular Malaysian heritage food which consists of coconut rice served with *sambal*, fried anchovies, baked peanuts, hard-boiled egg and fresh cucumber.

In 2014, Catherine Chin Wan Ping Coombes a Malaysian who lives in the United Kingdom had won the MasterChef UK with her dishes; *nasi lemak* and wanton soup (Awani, 2014). *Nasi lemak* is coconut rice served with *sambal*, fried anchovies, baked peanuts, hard-boiled egg and fresh cucumber, is also one of the famous Malaysian national cuisines. Recently, *nasi lemak* has been recognized as one of the ten healthiest international breakfasts by TIME Magazine. The article described *nasi lemak*

as “supremely delicious,” and the various condiments in *nasi lemak* consists of healthy nutritional contents, while the chili in *sambal* also boosts the metabolism (Albakri, 2016). In July 2017, a Malaysian from Johor Bahru, Diana Chan who participated in the MasterChef Australia crowned as the winner. As a Malaysia-born she had portrayed her cooking styles of the Malaysian heritage (Sathiabalan, 2017; Indramalar, 2017).

5 Improvements Needed

Malaysian national cuisines are still unknown to some of the international markets. However various ways, opportunities, and room for improvements are readily available for the government, non-government bodies and citizens to promote the cuisines. Malaysia can adapt some of the strategies from other countries. A marketing strategy applied by Portugal in a region called Alto Minho has distributed recipe book to the tourists to give the tourists the memory of tastes and pleasures dining at Alto Minho (Salehuddin and Zahari, 2009). Malaysia neighbouring country which is Thailand, more popular internationally especially for its tom yum soup (Karim and Chua, 2009). Malaysia could learn and adapt some of the successful strategies and marketing being done by other countries.

To make Malaysian national cuisines more well-known in the world, proactive actions need to be taken. Based on the previous literatures, the western tourists who came to Malaysia had responded that the foods were too spicy and too sweet for them (Jalis et al., 2009). In this case, the taste of foods served at Malaysian restaurants abroad somehow is similar to the one being served in Malaysia. The Malaysian restaurateurs abroad should consider the palates of the local clientele patronizing their restaurants. So, they should reduce the intensities of certain ingredients in the foods such as the spiciness and sweetness of the foods in their restaurants. For example, for Thailand, Chinese, Indian, and Korean foods to survive abroad, they have altered the original taste to the local taste. Otherwise, their restaurants will not be patronized by the local consumers. More research should be conducted regarding this topic so that more in-depth knowledge and understanding of the taste and needs of the international market could be met.

Servicescape was one of the critical considerations when any of the restaurateurs wanted to open their restaurants abroad so that their restaurant concepts represent Malaysia. According to Yoshino (2010), Malaysian restaurateurs in Japan did not apply the servicescape concepts to their restaurants, and they were very dull and unattractive ambiance. While Indonesia, a country having some similarity in cuisines with Malaysia has several successful Indonesian restaurants compared to Malaysian restaurants in Japan. Indonesian restaurateurs in Japan have portrayed the Balinese concepts that is very synonyms to the Indonesian culture. However, these problems did not imply all of the Malaysian restaurants abroad, because there are still numbers of other successful Malaysian restaurants worldwide. According to Sae in 2015, consistent food image has a significant effect on the desire of visiting Malaysia. Hence, adequate monitoring of Malaysian restaurants abroad by the government would be

vital to guarantee the quality and standard of the Malaysian food image. Inability to monitor the Malaysian restaurants abroad would harm the food image in the long term.

Most of the tourists visited Malaysia were food neophilic instead of neophobic; where they were willing to try Malaysian foods. These favourable attitudes will contribute to the food tourism and globalization of Malaysian foods. However, food outlets in Malaysia should provide menus with well-written descriptions of the food being sold together with the level of spiciness. These will better assist the tourists on their local foods preference and also their eating pleasure experience of Malaysian foods (Ling et al., 2010).

6 Conclusion

Globalization of Malaysian national cuisine is important because the food is not only as a tool to make human stomach full but also contributes to the trade industries, tourism industries, politics and country's image. Malaysian's government has taken proactive action by conducting 'Malaysia Kitchen for the World' programme (MKP). MKP is a form of gastrodiploamacy practices applied by the government in order to promote Malaysian cuisines to the world. MKP has taken various actions such as promoting Malaysian restaurants overseas, conducting food events, serving free food on the food truck, and food exhibitions. Starting in the year 2010, Malaysian's government have rigorously promoted Malaysian national cuisines in various countries around the world, especially in the United Kingdom, United States, Australia, and China due to greater market opportunity. Currently, gastrodiploamacy has been practiced actively by few countries which are Malaysia, Japan, Peru, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand. Positive impacts have been shown due to the various gastrodiploamacy forms applied by the government. Some of the positive impacts are export of Malaysian F&B products to China showed growth of 107.5% from 2009 to 2011, and also in 2016, Australia is Malaysia's fourth largest export destination for processed food. Not only that, in 2012 United Nation World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) ranked Malaysia as the tenth most visited country.

The gastrodiploamats or also known as culinary ambassadors play a vital role in gastrodiploamacy practices where these ambassadors help in promoting the cuisines through their cooking demonstrations and cooking shows. The media as a medium to promote the national cuisines also need to be acknowledged, because it is proven that media is a rapid and effective medium to distribute information to the global citizens. Documentaries, cooking competitions and also social media play significant impacts in promoting the cuisines to the global viewers. Though various forms have been applied by the governments and citizens to promote the cuisines to the world, several improvements are still needed to make the cuisines better known worldwide. Good initiatives by the Malaysian's government need to be applauded, and it is hoped that this gastrodiploamacy practices will be continually practiced in the future.

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