

Multinational Food Heritage in Malaysia: Case of Penang

According to Japan Foundation Grant for Field Research on Heritage Tourism program which was held on the 14th - 18th September 2017 in Penang, we had a chance to visit Penang and field research under the theme of Food Heritage. As we are students of Chiangmai University, we choose to study about food in Penang which are Malay food, Peranakan food, Indian food and western food.



Image 1: the map of Malaysia

(<http://www.abereducation.com/why-malaysia>)

Malaysia is a Southeast Asian country with 330,803 km² total area (Wikipedia, "Malaysia"). From image 1, it can see that Malaysia consists of two main parts: Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia. Peninsular Malaysia is the main land of Malaysia. It is bordered by Thailand at the North and Singapore at the south and it shares maritime borders with Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, and Indonesia. East Malaysia locates on Borneo Island, so sometimes it is called Malaysian Borneo. East Malaysia is bordered by Indonesia and Brunei and it shares maritime borders with Indonesia, Brunei, Philippines, and Vietnam. Sabah and Sarawak, the two largest states are in East Malaysia. Eventhough Peninsular Malaysia is 40% of the total country area, it is regared as the main land of Malaysia (Thomas Leinbach). It is the location of the capital city, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya which is the seat of the federal government.

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multilingual country because of coexistence of various ethnic groups in the country. There are four main ethnic groups of people in Malaysia: Malay, Chinese, indigenous and Indian. This cultural diversity makes Malaysia an abundant society, with various religions, foods, culture, and customs. Total population of Malaysia is around 32.05 million (Department of Statistics Malaysia). Malaysia consists of various regions that still maintain their own characteristic features. Islam is the official religion and Bahasa Melayu is the national language. However, all other religions are freely practiced and the ethnic groups also speak their ethnic languages and dialects (wonderfulmalaysia).

Rank	Ethnic Group	Share of Population of Malaysia
1	Malay (or Muslim Malay)	50.1%
2	Chinese Malaysians	22.6%
3	Non-Malay Bumiputera and Other Indigenous Groups	11.8%
4	Indian Malaysians	6.7%
	Other Groups	8.8%

Table 1: of ethnic groups of Malaysia (worldatlas.com, Benjamin Sawe)

The origin of social and cultural diversity can be well explained by Malaysia history. Different ethnic groups arrived at Malaysia in the different times. Originally, this land was belonged to aboriginal people who had moved and lived here before Christ. They were a combination of many peoples - Indians, Chinese, Siamese, Arabs, and Proto-Malays from China, however, they were simply called the Malays (Geographia). Since the Malays had found to be on this land for tens centuries before other regions, it is not surprising that the Malays are the largest ethnic group in the country with 50.1% of populations in Malaysia nowadays.

In 14th century, Malacca dominated Malaysia instead of Srivijaya kingdom that had dominated since 7th century. Malaysia became more a wealthy and powerful country by trading with Arab, Chinese and Indian ships sailing. Malacca became highly civilized and the economy grew so well. However, early in the 16th century, spice trade was routed within the eastern regions. The western regions noticed that and became aware of the need to expand a trade route to India and the Far East or Southeast Asia. Thus, the period of western colonization began for spice and trading ports at the source land. Malacca's golden age ended in 1511 when it fell to the Portuguese artillery and Portugal became the first country that occupied Malaysia. After that, the Dutch took Malacca from the Portuguese in 1641 (Geographia). Portugal and Dutch invaded Malaysia for the same reason: spice.

The Great Britain or England was the region who occupied Malaysia for the longest period comparing to other regions in Malaya history. The British came to Malaysia and put its mark area by area. British colonization officially started in 1711 when Great Britain attempted to build a trading port in Penang. In 1786, Francis Light captain occupied Penang and founded Georgetown. The British East India Company asked the Sultan of Kedah to build a fort on the island of Penang which becomes one of famous landmarks of Penang nowadays. Next when French colonization came to the shore, in 1824, the Dutch government agreed to let the British oversee the port in Malacca rather than hand it to the French. In 1819, Sir William Raffles, the British, was assigned to establish a trading port in Singapore. That completes the Straits Settlements of the Britain which included Penang, Malacca, Singapore and province Wellesley. British influence over Malaysia or so-called Malaya increased gradually. More and more states became under British protection (Tim Lambert). The British colonial states could be called British Malaya. The term British Malaya referred to "a set of states on the Malay Peninsula and the island of Singapore that were brought under British control between the 18th and the 20th centuries. British Malaya is often used to refer to the Malay States under indirect British rule as well as the Straits Settlements that were under the sovereignty of the British Crown." (Wikipedia, "British Malaya").

In the beginning of 20th century, Malaya rubber industry boomed. The Malayan tin industry was also successful and an oil industry was started in Singapore. The economy at that

time was booming, especially tin industry, so that many Chinese immigrants flooded to Malaya in order to work and settle down here (Geographia). This group of Chinese was originally from southeastern China. They mostly spoke Hakka, Hokkien, Hainanesem and Cantonese. They were called “Baba Chinese” which referred to those Malaysians of mixed Chinese and Malay ancestors who spoke Malay but remained Chinese in customs, manners, and habit (Thomas Leinbach). This was the beginning point of Chinese influx in Malaya and they kept moving in from time to time. Nowadays, Chinese are the second largest ethnic group of Malaysia as it is shown in the table above.

In the Second World War, the Japanese invaded Malaysia on 8th December 1941 and occupied it area by area in 1942. Japan occupied Malaysia until 1945 when it was defeated. At the end of World War II, the British reoccupied Malaysia and attempted to unite the Malayan states into a united state named the Malayan Union; however, Singapore was excepted because it was a separate crown colony. At the same time Malayan nationalism was gradually growing. The Malayan Communist Party or MCP which was founded in 1930 took their first significant move in 1948 and then the government declared a state of emergency. However, the British parliament promised independence, so communist activity declined after the next year. Eventually, Malaya declared its independence on 31st August 1957 and had Tunku Abdul Rahan as the first prime minister of Malaya (Geographia).

With its long period of colonization, there are many British colonial legacies left to be seen nowadays. Most importantly, many public institutions and customs in Malaysia are inherited and modified from the British systems, for example, education, English language, English Common Law and transportation like roads, railroads and ports. Penang, the focus of our research, still retains many colonial street names such as Queen Street, Beach Street, and Light Street (Wikipedia, “History of Penang”).

The next ethnic group of Malaysia to discuss is Indian Malays, the forth group of people ranked by number of population. Malaysian Indians refer to “people with full or partial Indian descent, who were either born in Malaysia or have gained Malaysian citizenship. They can be considered as Person of Indian Origin (PIO) - people who are not citizens of India but have Indian ancestry, and are citizens of other countries.” (Nandini Balakrishnan). There are

three subgroups of Indians in Malaysia including Tamils, Telugus, and Punjabis. They are Hindus, Islam, and Sikh. More than 86% of them practice Hinduism.

India has a long history on this Malaya land since 100 BC. When they arrived in Kedah for the search of gold, aromatic wood, and spices. They also brought Hinduism and Buddhism, and Indian cultural traditions to the land. The Malay wedding ceremony is an existing example of early Indian influence that rooted in Malaysia. Then, the largest group of Indians migrated to Malaysia in the colonial period. In 1511, the Portuguese government launched a policy which encouraged Indian explorers to bring their spouses who were Christian with them. The next vast wave of Indians flooded into Malaya due to the Straits Settlements that required a lot of Indian workers (Wikipedia, "Malaysian Indians"). Indian labors were brought to Malaya to construct roads, railways, and plantation. Not only labor class, but British government also preferred Indians to work in British colonial government because of their good English. Because of the economic growth in Malaysia, Indians have kept moving to this land from time to time.

Last but not least, Peranakan is another significant ethnic group in Malaysia. Peranakan refers to "a native-born person of mixed local and foreign ancestry" (Britannica, "Peranakan"). There are many subgroups of Peranakans such as Chinese Peranakan, Arabs Peranakan, Dutch Peranakan, Indian and Peranakan. The largest Peranakan group is Chinese Peranakan, so the term Peranakan commonly refers to Chinese Peranakan. They first came to Malaya since 10th century and, since the 15th century, Chinese immigrants kept settling down on this land because of economic difficulties in China. They increased in the large number from time to time and, nowadays, Chinese people became the second biggest ethnic group of Malaysia. Though they had come to this land for centuries, some of them still maintain Chinese customs, culture and art. That can be seen in Chinese Peranakan architectures, costumes, traditions and foods. Nevertheless, although Chinese Peranakan is the majority of Peranakan group of Malaysia, there are other Peranakan groups to study also. For our research, we choose to do a research about Indian Peranakan heritage food in Penang, so Indian Peranakan story is also needed to be mentioned here. Indian Peranakan refers to a native-born person of mixed local and Indian ancestry.

There are some kinds of Peranakan that are not named after the country where their ancestor came from; for example, Chitty and Jawi Peranakan. Chitty means a distinctive group of Tamil, Indian people found in Melaka and Singapore (Wikipedia, "Chitty"). They are also known as the Indian Peranakans, but have a specific name of their ancestry's state. Next, Jawi Peranakan is the term is used to refer to "locally born, Malay-speaking Muslims of mixed Indian and Malay ancestry". Jawi Peranakan ancestry included other South Asians, from northern India and Pakistan. "Jawi" is an Arabic word to denote Southeast Asia (Wikipedia, "Jawi Peranakan"). Jawi Peranakans still maintained their cultural identity which can be found in architectures, costumes, and foods.

History of Penang

Penang is a place that exactly reflect the diverse cultures of Asia, history and traditions. It is located in the Strait of Malacca and became the crossroads of great civilizations, a melting pot of east. Therefore, traders who came from Europe, the Middle East, India, China, Thailand and Burma brought their own culture to Penang. One of the main reasons merchants used Penang on their route is because of the monsoon. The Strait of Malacca is exactly on the crossing of two monsoon periods. They could not set sail until the winds were favorable. (<http://www.aroundpenangtips.com/penang-heritage-culture/penang-history.php>)

This island began in 1786 by Captain Francis Light. In 1805, Penang was uplifted from a colonial status to that of a Residency. A new Governor, the honourable Philip Dundas was appointed into office. After that, under the British administration in India, the Straits Settlements comprising the states of Malacca, Singapore and Penang was formed. Penang became its capital but in 1935 Singapore took over as capital of the Straits Settlements.

At the end of the 19th century, rich deposits of tin from neighbouring state and relentless demands of the Industrial Revolution in Britain saw Penang enjoying a trade boom. This also includes trading of rubber, nutmeg, clove, sugar, coconut and pepper. In time, Penang's expansion attracted immigrants from various parts of the world, especially those

from Europe, China and India. European planters and Chinese towkays (business leaders) made their money in the plantations and mines in other northern states but built their mansions in George Town and sent their children to school here.

After World War II, Penang enjoyed peace and prosperity. As Malaya became the world's biggest producer of tin and rubber, the Penang harbour became one of the busiest in the region. However, the free port status was revoked in 1969. By then, Penang was entering a new age, as a major hub for electronics manufacturing. The wealth generated from the free trade zones make Penang one of the economic crown jewels of Malaysia. Today, however, the island faces stiff competition from newer economies such as China and India.

Today Penang is one of the most urbanised places in Malaysia. At the same time, it is aware of its historical significance. The inner city of George Town, along with Malacca, are presently under consideration as possible Unesco World Heritage Site.

(<http://www.wonderfulmalaysia.com/history-penang-island-malaysia.htm>)



Image 2 : The map of Penang

(<https://www.katpegimana.com/destinations/malaysia/warm-hugs-in-penang/attachment/penang-map/>)

George Town

George Town, the capital of Penang, is named after the British King George III. It has been added to the UNESCO World Heritage List on 7 of July 2008 because of the outstanding cultural heritage concluding of 12,000 old buildings, shophouses, churches,

mosques, government offices and monuments. The city is located at the northeast side of the island and has, suburbs included, about 550,000 inhabitants. This town has developed over 500 years of trading and cultural exchanges between East and West in the Straits of Malacca. The influences of Asia and Europe have endowed this city with a specific multicultural heritage that is both tangible and intangible. Featuring many residential and commercial buildings, Georgetown represents the British era from the end of the 18th century. These are the most complete surviving historic city centres on the Straits of Malacca with a multi-cultural living heritage originating from the trade routes from Great Britain and Europe through the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent and the Malay Archipelago to China. George Town bears testimony to a living multi-cultural heritage and tradition of Asia, where the many religions and cultures met and coexisted. They reflect the coming together of cultural elements from the Malay Archipelago, India and China with those of Europe, to create a unique architecture, culture and townscape. (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1223>)



Image 3: George Town

(<http://diveprice.com/what-to-do-in-georgetown-in-penang/>)

Peranakan Food

Peranakan cuisine is a food which combines Chinese, Malay and other ingredients. The combination of Chinese and Malay is spicy and made by wok techniques. This technique used by Malay-Indonesian communication Peranakan Food is the fusion of best Chinese dishes which are pork, soy sauce and fermented bean curd mixed with Rempah, Malayan sauces consist of coconut milk and tamarind sauce. Peranakan is not Muslim, they use pork as ingredients. The popular Peranakan dishes are pork soup with tamarind sauce, Babemazam and Stay with groundnut and pineapple sauce. For our observation, we focus on Jawi Peranakan food. Jawi Peranakan is a mix food of Malay and Indonesia. Today it is considered as food heritage, People of Jawi Peranakan origin became famed cooks because they are an expert of Art of fusion, blending local spicy herb of Indian Ocean. Jawi Peranakan as Indian usually use spices as ingredient. Therefore, the outstanding of Peranakan food is spicy (th.wikipedia.org). For example Spicy Lamb curry, lamb steamed with spices. The taste of this dish is quite spicy. For our observation we went to Jawi Peranakan restaurant and did interview. From the interview we found that Jawi Peranakan restaurant serve Peranakan Food. This restaurant own by Chief Nurilkarim Razha. The restaurant has lunched business since 2013 for 4 years. Here is the first Peranakan restaurant in Penang. The owner learn recipe from his mother. It is the family recipe from generation to generation about the spice and favor. Moreover, the manager said that the majority client are both local and Tourist. The owner chooses this place as restaurant because it is a meaningful location with the interesting history. The best seller of this restaurant is Jawi banich, laksa, lamb and chicken. People

usually come here at 12.00- 18.30 around 150 to 200 people per day. The manager also said that the peak periods of year are December, public holiday and August.

Image 4: Laksa (<http://www.icookasia.com/have-you-tried-all-these-6-types-of-laksa-in-malaysia/>)



Image 5 : lamb curry

Indian Food

Malaysian Indian cuisine or the cooking of the ethnic Indian communities in Malaysia consists of adaptations of authentic dishes from India. As the vast majority of Malaysia's

Indian are ethnic Tamils who are descendants of the modern Indian state of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka's Northern Province, much of Malaysian Indian cuisine is predominantly South Indian inspired in character and taste. For our observation, we focus on Teh Tarik a drinking which representative food from Indian community. In the rubber plantations after World War II, there was the Teh Tarik that was roasted and sold in drinking stalls by Indian-Muslim immigrants in the Malay Peninsula. After that, the Teh Tarik is considered to be a drinking of Indian-Muslim. However, Choo Bong Chun, the owner of the restaurant and local people in Penang states that actually tea was originated from British who colonized Indian in 18 centuries. The British who settle down in India also bring tea culture with them. Drinking tea spread to Indians. The Indians were sent to Malay for building the bridge and they set up drinking stalls to serve the worker in Malay. The type of tea used, the strong robust flavor is attributed to the use of tea dust. Tea dust was used widely among the Indian Muslim immigrants as it was the cheapest source of tea they could afford on their meager wages. Afterwards, in colonial times, Teh tarik has been well known among people in Malay and become breakfast set with Roti by Malaysian Indian cuisine (theculturetrip.com). Moreover, the outstanding of Teh Tarik which is amused locals and tourists exists in the preparation. The sellers drag long stream of tea from one grass to another grass above their heads without spill. Sometimes, there are competitions and performance of Teh Tarik to show their performance skills in Malaysia. Later, Malaysian government ministry presents the Teh Tarik as a recognized food and become a food and beverage heritage of Malaysia. From the observation, we found that local people eat Teh Tarik and Roti as a breakfast set and The Tarik are served only in Indian restaurant. Teh Tarik as a tea originate from British become popular beverage in British Malayan in Malaysia according to the observation and interview the owner of Indian restaurant. From the interview Sup Hameed Indian restaurant, we found that Shahul Hameed with 56 years old is the owner of this restaurant. The owner of this restaurant has lunched for 30 years and he is the first owner. The unique of this shop is a taste of soup. He learns recipe or soup from his grandfather. He also said that Soup and Teh-tarik is the best seller. The tourists and locals usually order a marthern soup. In terms of the recipe, the owner teaches the workers by himself but he teaches them just the way how to cook or do the tea. About the recipe or the potion of ingredients, he teaches just his family or my son in

nowadays. This restaurant opens at 6.00 am. People come here at the morning and order Roti and Teh Tarik.



Image 6:Teh Tarik

Malay Food

According to multinational nation in Malay, Malay cuisine are mixed food and influenced by surrounding cultures and countries. For a traditional Malay food, rice is outstanding. Malay cuisine has similarity to surrounding countries in Sumatra region. Moreover, Malay cuisine has been influenced by Chinese, Indian, Thai and many cultures throughout producing history. Many Malay dishes use a rempah the sautéed in oil to season the flavors to form the base of dish as well as sambal an essential accompaniment for most Malay food (en.wikipedia.org).

There are some Malaysian dishes influenced by Javanese or some dishes adapted from Javanese food. It is brought to Malaysians by Javanese immigrants an ethnic group native to the Indonesian island of Java who have been assimilated to Malay community. However, there are different flavors of Javanese which are sweeter flavors as opposed to mainstream Malay cuisine which is predominantly based on the complex and spicy regional cuisines of

Sumatra. The Malay dishes that influenced by Javanese are Ayam penyet ,Bagedil ,Botok botok and Lontong (en. Wikipedia.org)



Image 7: Sambal an essential accompaniment for most Malay food (en.wikipedia.org).



Image 8 : Nasi Lemak (en. Wikipedia.org 2017)

Western Food

In the past from centuries 15 to 19, Malaysia was colonized by many Europeans such as Portuguese, French and British. They leaved the architecture in Penang as port of Malaysia. In terms of food, the western food have less important role in Malaysians. Malaysians do not

consume and adapt western food and recipe as much as other cultures cuisine such as Peranakan, Indian and Malay. From the observation we found that there are few western restaurants in Penang and this kind of food is popular among tourists rather than locals. As we can see from the interview of the owner of western food Bumbledee restaurant found that this restaurant has lunched almost 5 years, before this the owner was somewhere else for 2 years at the nearby restaurant. The reason that the owner run business in this shop is because this building is very nice and the building was built in 1938 so, it is very old and good potential for this place. The menu is mostly western. We have spaghetti, grill fish and chicken, steak and we have also salmon. We also have some local food. He also claims that the customers here are mostly western because in university, there are many local businesses. So, if you want to eat rice, there are many places but when you want to eat western, you have to eat here. Not many western restaurants around here, so you can come here to eat it. The owner decide to sell food in the university because there are many businesses and mostly sell local; rice noodles but there are not many western here. He wants to do the different thing. His target is only western and he does it with high price and high quality. The unique of this shop is the western food but sometimes the guess is Malaysian, So, I have to adapt the food like Malaysian love hot and spicy, so we have to make the food spicier and cannot follow France or Italy because we follow Malaysia. For the recipe, the owner learn recipe himself and he likes to cook. But he study quantity survey in construction and he loves to cook. He learns the recipe from TV, experience and even going oversea, He goes to school and want to try to cook. Moreover, he tries to learn the recipe from TV but nowadays it's easy because of Internet. He tries a lot to learn it.



Image 9 : Spaghetti (http://xn--22c0cyai3bl9ab.blogspot.com/2014/06/blog-post_12.html)

According to our research about Heritage food, we focused on multinational heritage food in Penang because Penang is an important port in the past and then there is a diversity of culture in this city or we can call it melting pot of east. From the findings, we found that there are four types of food in Penang which are Malay food, Peranakan food, Indian food and western food. Moreover, all of these food still has their uniqueness but they can adjust themselves with other cultures easily. As Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said “The traditions they brought along from their ancestors’ homeland are now uniquely adapted and celebrated together by us as a nation. The festivities, faiths and traditions each community brought with them all make up who we are as a nation. A nation that celebrates and embraces diversity,”

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