



# CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

*in*

# MALAYSIAN TOURISM

*Editors*

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*Contemporary Issues in Malaysian Tourism* is a book that aims to present a new and refreshing approach to the study of tourism. It highlights significant issues in the Malaysian context, ranging from tourism education to e-tourism, as well as challenges in sustaining tourism destinations and managing hospitality operations during the recent Covid-19 pandemic. As the scope of the content is wide-ranging, this book provides an overview of how Malaysia's tourism industry operates and would benefit destination managers, marketers, policymakers and other stakeholders. Divided into three sections, this book is a collection of both empirical and theoretical research, covering several topics such as community-based ecotourism, Islamic tourism, sports tourism, food tourism and green tourism. It is suitable for students, academicians, and practitioners alike as it introduces key ideas and presents several perspectives on how stakeholders in the industry understand the issues, the challenges being faced, and the necessary measures taken to meet the ever-growing demand for travelling.



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## 9 Continuity in Traditional Food Practices of the Senoi Tribe: The Role of Knowledge Transmission

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### Introduction

Ethnic diversity is a form of social complexity in today's world. Each ethnicity has its own cultural beliefs and social practices that portray its identity and tradition, particularly in various unique treasures of natural heritage, arts, culture, and traditional food. Today, people consume food to express their appreciation towards different cultures (Kwon, 2015). Malaysia is blessed with a wide array of its ethnic food such as Malay, Chinese, Indian, and other minority ethnicities, including the Orang Asli (Rahman et al., 2018). In fact, in Malaysia, the cuisine of these three major races is often mentioned and studied by different scholars. Othman et al. (2009) argued that the flourishing of ethnic-based culinary of particular tourism has aided very much in revealing the various ethnic cultures being practiced. Traditional food has a distinguishing feature or features that differentiates it from other similar products in the same category, such as the use of "traditional ingredients" (raw materials of primary products) or "traditional composition" or "traditional type of production and processing method".

Nevertheless, the food preparation and cooking methods of the Orang Asli have not been widely explored. According to Yahaya and Yahaya (2014), the Orang Asli's cooking techniques are different from other ethnicities because they still use traditional methods such as cooking food in bamboo over wooden stoves. The most common food preparation of the Orang Asli includes roasting and grilling, frying, simmering (*gulai*), and boiling.

However, only the Orang Asli are known for their traditional food; while, the local community and tourists are not familiar with their unique and diverse cuisine. A previous study by Dhanapal et al. (2018) discovered that 91.8 percent of the Semai Orang Asli households in Perak, Malaysia use liquefied petroleum gas as their cooking fuel, and the remaining 8.2 percent use firewood. They cook meat or flesh food primarily in bamboo or by smoking the meat. Orang Asli cooking features forest and local ingredients and often reflects the need to preserve food for future shortages. These elements are interpreted to produce various traditional food, which has distinguished them as unique from the other races within the country (Yahaya, 2014).

Apart from displaying their mastery of cooking and preparing traditional food, this community still practices their culinary skills today to preserve their cultural heritage. The issue of preserving traditional food can be encouraged and protected by the local community if this traditional food practices is passed down by the older generation to the younger generation (Nor et al., 2012). In accordance with this, Mohd Sharif et al. (2016) stated that it is crucial to preserve the food practices of each ethnic group because it symbolizes their heritage, trademark, and culture. Consequently, according to Trichopoulou et al. (2007), the continuity of the culinary, cultural heritage of a nation must be well-preserved as it has immense potential in influencing tourist interest.

### The Orang Asli Ethnicity

Orang Asli is the term used to explain the original people or first people (Masron et al., 2013). Consistent with Act 134, Aboriginal Peoples Act 1954 under the Aboriginal people Ordinance No. 3, was changed after a review in 1974. Orang Asli is described as any person of whom the father is a member of the Orang Asli tribe, who speaks Orang Asli language and follows the way of life, ideals, and traditions of the Orang Asli which includes the descendants

through the person (Jabatan Kemajuan Orang Asli Malaysia [JAKOA], 2018). In Malaysia, there are 18 ethnic subgroups of Orang Asli, divided into three primary tribal groups, namely the Senoi, Negrito (Semang), and Proto Malay (Aboriginal Malay). They are estimated to number around 215,000 people, or 0.7 percent of Peninsular Malaysia's population (International workgroup for Indigenous Affairs, 2019). The Negrito tribe (3%) represents a minor portion of the Orang Asli population in Peninsular Malaysia, while the Senoi tribe (55%) is the largest, followed by the Proto Malay (42%) (JAKOA, 2018). The Jahai subtribe is one of six Negrito subtribes specifically located in Northeast Perak and West Kelantan. The lives of the Orang Asli are closely related to nature's elements, mainly the flora and fauna in Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah and Sarawak (Gan et al., 2020). Skinner et al. (2020) revealed that the critical determinant of indigenous meals is derived from varieties of the Orang Asli food, educational sharing, and procurement practices. Thus, conventional ingredients refer to harvested, hunted, fished, or farmed ingredients from the Orang Asli, including animal products and various species of plant foods.

### **Food Practice and Knowledge Transmission**

#### **Food Knowledge**

Food knowledge is described as the oral transmission of understanding on how food is generated from one generation to the next through communities and ethnic groups (Robin & Cidro, 2020). Transmission methods include simulations, commentary, hands-on activities, word of mouth, and consuming foods taught to younger generations by the older generation. Food knowledge can be gained in various contexts, including at home and from community members (Kwik, 2008). When each way of life, ethnic

group, or region has its own set of food traditions and practices, the significance of traditional food knowledge and practices, food dishes, as a means of cultural identity becomes clear. Food knowledge, particularly tradition, is required for preserving food traditions for future use and improvement.

#### **Knowledge Transfer**

Knowledge transfer is described as one path, and a centered type of knowledge communication emerges among people, groups, or organizations. The understanding/receiver has cognitive information and can use or apply the knowledge. According to Lestari (2014), traditional foods are foods and beverages commonly consumed by a specific community and have a distinct flavor accepted by the community. Several academic disciplines, including nutritional anthropology, agriculture, human ecology, family studies, culture, society, population health, community development, and education, are included in the theory of traditional food knowledge. By carrying out this research, traditional food knowledge can be viewed from various perspectives to comprehend the numerous implications for the ecosystem health of a community (Kwik, 2008).

In other studies, Mohd Sharif et al. (2014) mentioned several factors influencing the level of traditional food knowledge such as formal learning, informal learning, and social lifestyle. The combination of these perspectives also provide opportunities to develop innovative approaches in appreciating and passing traditional food knowledge for health promotion and community development in specific geographical areas (Kwik, 2008). Traditional food knowledge can be a means of declaring cultural identity, especially for specific cultural groups; transmitting this knowledge may contribute to personal skills related to food security and personal nutrition and improved community capacity (Mohd. Sharif et al., 2014).

### Food Practice Continuity

Food practice continuity is an excellent application of food knowledge that alternates or does not cease over time. Food knowledge transmission demonstrates ingredients, cooking techniques, equipment, cooking abilities, and observed preparation. Ethnic food practices may be continued after gaining knowledge and experience from the cooking knowledge process (Mohd Sharif et al., 2016). Nonetheless, cooking traditional foods is reserved for festive celebrations and special events. It is critical to recognize that culinary traditions and traditional foods disappear simply because the community no longer practices them. Many traditional foods are in danger of extinction as a result of the infiltration of foreign food culture and, more importantly, the failure to teach family recipes to the younger generation.

### Practices

The World Health Organization (WHO) (2019) defined the indigenous people as communities located in specifically focused territories and ascertain themselves as a part of history before modernization ascended into the years. This means that they carry a significant image in terms of their culture, social identity and socio-economic aspect. Food practices is usually a tool of expression by various cultures. According to Kuhnlein et al. (2013), the evolution of indigenous people's cultures and lifestyles is heavily influenced by their long-term relationship with the local ecosystem. This eventually reflects on their food practices which contain great treasures of knowledge within. Kuhnlein et al. (2013) mentioned that within a significant culture of indigenous tribes, the local food is also known as 'traditional food practices.' It embraces some kinds of food, its process, and tools that come from within. Traditional food among indigenous people is understood as food sources that can be accessed locally without purchasing the ingredients. The preparation methods are within their scope of knowledge directly related to their natural environment (Karyadi, 2021).

Modernization is closely linked to the changes within a culture (Gwirtka, 2000) and food practices are sensitive to changes or alteration (Karyadi, 2021; Burges-Watson et al., 2018). It is not only in the food practices, these changes usually happen simultaneously in every aspect, from the selection of the ingredients, to the technology and technique used in food making. Sobal et al. (1998) stated that urbanization comprehensively shaped the creation, handling, and delivery of food. Since most indigenous tribes in Malaysia have started to integrate with existing modernization, it is slowly advancing to create changes, especially in the tribal communities' culture and lifestyle. Their food practices are beginning to bend accordingly to technological advancement and the outcome of scientific research. The globalization of the food produced, in terms of processed food material and instant ingredients, has turned on the lesser practices of local tradition being applied in the food-making process (Kuhnlein et al., 2013).

### Attitude

There are numerous definitions being given to describe what attitude can be in particular situations. Attitudes involving a rational assessment of costs and benefits are generally understood to be formed through individual subjective evaluation and influenced by affective, related beliefs, and emotional responses. Consequently, attitudes relate to a broader worldview and tend to be more stable, is defined as being specific to an object or behavior, while beliefs are more generic (Karyadi, 2021). According to Chaiklin (2011), attitude can be generally divided into two categories, either through psychological or sociological definitions. He further mentioned that the psychological definition of attitude categorized its verbal expressions as behavior produced to make adjustments or repair a situation that demands fairness and justification. Meanwhile, the sociological or social-psychological definition of attitude takes a note of the changes in verbal expressions to act in a specific situation.

## Conclusion

This documented study on the indigenous tribes in Malaysia provides the fundamental basis and platform for other researchers to examine and expand the scope of research further, particularly with regard to indigenous traditional food in Malaysia. In the context of this study, the indigenous or minority groups should not be viewed as a regressive group as they have made significant contributions to the nation. Although their numbers are small, if they are nurtured, educated and provided ongoing assistance, these indigenous or minority groups will thrive in any field, including entrepreneurship, due to their willingness to embrace change. Orang Asli groups should not be marginalised in the country's mainstream development. Based on this study, it is hoped that their traditional food knowledge will be extended to the local community. Through government support, the continuous development process can serve as a catalyst for transforming the human and physical environment for a better quality of life, socio-economically and culturally.

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