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## The Knowledge of Food Heritage Identity in Klang Valley, Malaysia

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### Abstract

Classical and traditional food was closely associate with food heritage has become a significant role in the life of society and also to an individual. A study examines how far Malaysian knows about their food heritage identity. A total of 500 respondents located in Klang Valley participate in this study. Findings showed that food heritage been defined as traditional food. There is a significant relationship between genders with the definition of food heritage; the association of food heritage questions. Overall finding revealed that respondent understand the definition, the criteria's and type of traditional food associated with food heritage.

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**Keywords:** Food heritage; identity; traditional food; knowledge

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## 1. Introduction

Food is signified as markers for identity regardless of geographical, social and political differences separating the populations. It is a contested medium that establishes national boundaries and identities, in particular, nations such as in the European Union (EU) (DeSoucey, 2010). Takaki (2012) deduced that food identity ostensibly contributes to prosperity, international identification and reputation of a country and positive influence on the economy. In other words, without common identity, a nation will have an ambiguous and conflicting identity due to lack of consensus which creates an adverse image and effects on the social integration within a country (Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2011). In many multi-cultural countries, to have a commonly accepted food identity to represent the image of a nation is important especially in term of tradition and authenticity. The rise of population, massive development, and consumerism in many parts of the globe has an impact on the environment, natural resources, and society. Due to these events, people are experiencing external pressures on their culture and tradition, including the threat of losing their food heritage or identity. In these gastronomic interactions, a region's heritage foods form a valuable 'blueprint' of its people, whereby food represents not only physical need, but also local culture and custom (Alonso & Krajsic, 2013).

Nowadays everyone talks about, traditional, authenticity, heritage, sustaining food, and it seems like everybody concerned with this issue (Hamzah, Karim, Othman, Hamzah, & Muhammad, 2015). Thus, this study aim to investigate the knowledge on food heritage from the public (Malaysian) point of view in order to get some ideas of what Malaysian food heritage identity means to them which differ 'us' from 'the other'.

## 2. Literature review

Countries such as Singapore (Henderson, 2014), Taiwan (Hui-tun, 2010), Vietnam (Avieli, 2013), Kenya (Mugalavai, Kiama, & Omutimba, 2012), Swahili (Rolingher, 2009) and Croatia (Fox, 2007) have been highlighted having issues in identifying identity of their own food. There are many factors like social, cultural, political and economic aspects influenced the formation of the national food identity. Similar to other nations, Malaysia also experiences the necessity of having its food identity when sharing food and cultural background are becoming a central issue among neighboring countries. According to Chong (2012), each country is becoming more determined to defend and safeguard their cultural food as a heritage, as it forms the core identity of the country. For example, Singapore promotes gastronomic tourism and insistently proclaims that some of the common Chinese, Indian, Malay and Peranakan foods as their iconic dishes and heritage (Chaney & Ryan, 2012).

The significance of these issues can be seen clearly in the statement of the former Commissioner of the Department of National Heritage, Professor Emeritus Datuk Zuraina Majid, who stated that identity is essential to any nation. It portrays the culture and the people (Bedi, 2012). These incidences have opened the Malaysians eyes, particularly the government, on the importance of having our own cultural identity, especially the traditional cuisine (Lim, 2012), although sharing the fundamental basis cannot be avoided.

### 2.1. Overview on food heritage

Matta (2013) cited Bessiere and Tibere in defining food heritage as a set of material and immaterial elements of food cultures, that been considered as shared legacy or a common good. This food heritage includes agricultural products, ingredients, dishes, techniques, recipes and food traditions. It includes table manners, the symbolic dimension of food and in its more material aspects, cooking artifacts and the table setting: utensils, dishware. In Ramli, Zahari, Ishak, and Sharif (2013), food heritage has been clarified broadly by several researchers on the topics of food heritage which are related to agricultural place and history, origin of the food products (i.e. breed fruits, vegetables and livestock related to regional climate and suitability) and in terms of food production of local produce. In Malaysian perspective, it has been associated closely with classical and traditional foods that are continuously prepared and consumed by all generations without major alteration in the original flavors. Food heritage has been reflected from environmental history, belief, and ideology and food technology of society in an era. While in Wahid, Mohamed, and Sirat (2009) stated from former Commissioner of Heritage, Prof. Datuk Zuraina Majid categorized heritage foods in two categories. The first category refers to synonymous or common

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