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Malaysian Foodways: Acculturation/assimilation towards authenticity sustainability among diasporic community

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Abstract

Maintenance of traditional foodways through the authenticity is one of the elements related to the preservation of group identity. Nevertheless, the topic of authenticity sustainability has been relatively neglected in cultural studies until recently. Authenticity is widely evoked in the analysis of antiques, art objects and certain kinds of tourism, but not in discussion of ethnic foods. Authenticity of foods is questionable with the existence of the acculturation and assimilation in the immigrants' cuisine particularly among Malay diasporic community in UK in order to prepare their “home” traditional foods. Therefore, some empirical evidence on this issue needs to be explored.

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Keywords: Malaysian foodways; acculturation and assimilation; authenticity sustainability; Malay diasporic community

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1. Introduction

Migrating to a new country often results in a variety of social and economic challenges, often reflected in foodways. In immigrant perspective, foodways play a significant role in the story both as a conduit to memory and loss and as a daily practice of routine sustenance and the reproduction of tradition and community. The dish or product name conveys the authenticity by association to geographic place, to a time as well as to an ethnic tradition (Bessiere, 1998). Central to the food authenticity dimension are ingredients, locally sourced and unique (Groves, 2001, Moio et al., 2004 and Sims, 2009).

The concept of authenticity is central to almost all present-day research on quality food and many of other studies of consumer culture. Food authenticity, Abarca (2004) argues, can be reduced to two determinants: the authenticity of the cook and the authenticity of the process. What binds the process is the foodstuffs production, which for Kuznesof et al. (1997) represents the situational factors? The authenticity of production process is elevated by its methods simplicity and naturalness (Groves, 2001, Hughes, 1995 and Johnston and Baumann, 2010) and on the other being reflected in the small-scale or non-commercial characteristics of the producing organisation (Carroll and Torfason, 2011 and Johnston and Baumann, 2010). The integrity of the cook too implies authenticity (Beer, 2008) as do celebrity status or product endorsement (Johnston & Baumann, 2010).

On authenticity, Heldke (2003) argues that food is a medium that allows an immediately authentic relationship with a culture or tradition. Therefore, foods are important in connecting peoples and are a cultural showcase. Nevertheless, not many scholars focus on how acculturation and assimilation affect the traditional ethnic foods and foodways towards the authenticity sustainability. Acculturation is a process of learning, practice and customs of a culture which acquiring the capability to function within the dominant culture while retaining one's original culture (Cleveland et al., 2009; Ishak, Zahari, Sharif, & Muhammad, 2012; Lee, 2006; Matsunaga, Hecht, Elek, & Ndiaye, 2010; Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001).

Besides that, assimilation occurs when individuals reject their minority culture and adopt the cultural norms of the dominant or host culture (Jamal, 1998; Mukherji, 2005). It creates new food identity as its hallmarks stamp out the originality of minor ethnic food by the dominant ones or alteration in the consumption of the minor ethnic food in a new cultural environment without phase-out the original identity. Adaptation occurred when cultures can coexist within a given environment, retaining some (if not all) of their original/minority-cultural heritage while functioning within and acquiring the traits corresponding to the larger host/mainstream culture in which scholar debated that food adaptation would be one of the important process of formation of food identity (Cleveland et al., 2009; Ishak et al., 2012; Sharif et al., 2012).

In the context of this study, Malay diasporic community in United Kingdom are believed to be adjusted and adapted through the foodways (preparation and consumption) of their current place with the addition of problems in getting the traditional or original ingredients and other sources. Based on this notion, it is also raising a critical question to what extent the acculturation and assimilation affect the authenticity of Malay traditional foods prepared by the diasporic community.

In other words, do the cultural traditions remains intact practices by the Malay diasporic community in different place, are the current foodways practices influenced by the acculturation and assimilation and how the foodways practices influenced the authenticity sustainability of Malay traditional food? In this sense, how the foodways, consisted of preparation (ingredients, equipments, method of cooking) and consumption (consume and serving) are practices among the community, as well as how acculturation and assimilation (adaptation process) influence sustainability of the authentic elements of food prepared by them have not been widely researched.

To date, there are a proliferation of studies looking at an ethnic identity formation, cultural identity, food identity formation and the relationship between acculturation, foodways and acceptance towards the process of food identity formation. However, there is still a limited investigation by particularly looking at the affect of acculturation and assimilation on foodways specifically Malay traditional food and its foodways towards authenticity sustainability and this warrant further exploration or investigation.

Therefore, this research seeks to describe the process of foodways among the diasporic community, how the acculturation and assimilation influence their foodways practices and how the foodways affect the authenticity sustainability. In other words, this study is to reveal the process of foodways (preparation and consumption) among

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