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Review article

Lemang (Rice bamboo) as a representative of typical Malay food in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Traditional food as foods typical of the region is one of the cultural elements in various regions of Indonesia. The food is very closely related to customs, indicating that it is very characteristic of each region and ethnicity. Indonesia consists of various ethnic groups. Ethnic Malay is one of the dominant tribe in Indonesia. Malay is spread throughout Indonesia, especially in Sumatra and Borneo. Malay has influenced Indonesia's culture in terms of food. *Lemang* is a traditional Malay delicacy, which has become a part of Indonesia's culture. Several regions in Indonesia use *lemang* for traditional ceremonies, such as Bengkulu, Jambi, West Sumatra, North Sumatra, and South Borneo. Each region has a different variation, function, and manner of presentation of *lemang* but same method of cooking. Local residents use the traditional method to cook *lemang* using open fire. This method has been passed down from ancestors and has a social value. Cooking *lemang* by the traditional method involves family members and neighbors so that it can improve kinship. By using the traditional method, local residents can reduce the operational cost. However, the traditional method needs longer cooking time and the quality of products is not uniform due to difficulty in controlling heat. Therefore, researchers have developed new methods of cooking *lemang* to get uniform quality and to reduce the cooking time. The new methods involve the use of *lemang* oven and stainless steel mold. Cooking *lemang* in an oven and replacing bamboo stalk with stainless steel mold can reportedly reduce the cooking time with the same quality as that obtained using the traditional method.

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1. Introduction

Indonesia is a country with a blend of various tribes. The official national motto of Indonesia is "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika". It is translated as "Unity in Diversity". This motto describes the unity of Indonesia, which consists of diverse tribes, religions, and languages. Indonesia's ethnic groups comprise local tribes and foreign tribes. One of the foreign tribe dominant in Indonesia is ethnic Malay. Based on the data from the central statistical agency (2010), the population of Malay tribe was 5,365,399 (2%) [1].

Around 1,500 years ago, Malays migrated from South Central Asia to some areas in the world, such as Malaysia, Sumatra, and Borneo (Fig. 1). They entered the areas pass through strait and sea. Malays tend to stay near coastal and river areas for the ease of fishing and trading [2]. Malay culture was first deployed in Sriwijaya's kingdom from 7th century to 14th century, and their language

became the official language [3]. In 1,400, Malacca reached the peak of their glory and took over the crown of Sriwijaya kingdom. Malacca's power was recognized by Sumatra, Borneo, and some nearby islands [2]. Thus, it became the center of Malay [4].

Typical Malay food that exists until now indicates that Malay have entered the Indonesian island. Rice bamboo or better known as *lemang* is one of the typical Malay food that exists in Sumatra, Borneo, Sulawesi, and several other areas in Indonesia. *Lemang* is a Malay food made of glutinous rice and coconut milk that is cooked inside the bamboo stalk. This review will describe the culture of *lemang* in Sumatra, such as Bengkulu, Jambi, Batak tribe, West Sumatra, North Sumatra and Borneo, especially South Borneo.

2. Perspective from several regions about Lemang

2.1. Bengkulu

In this area, *lemang* is a part of the wedding for Serawai tribe. The wedding procedure consists of several stages. First is the

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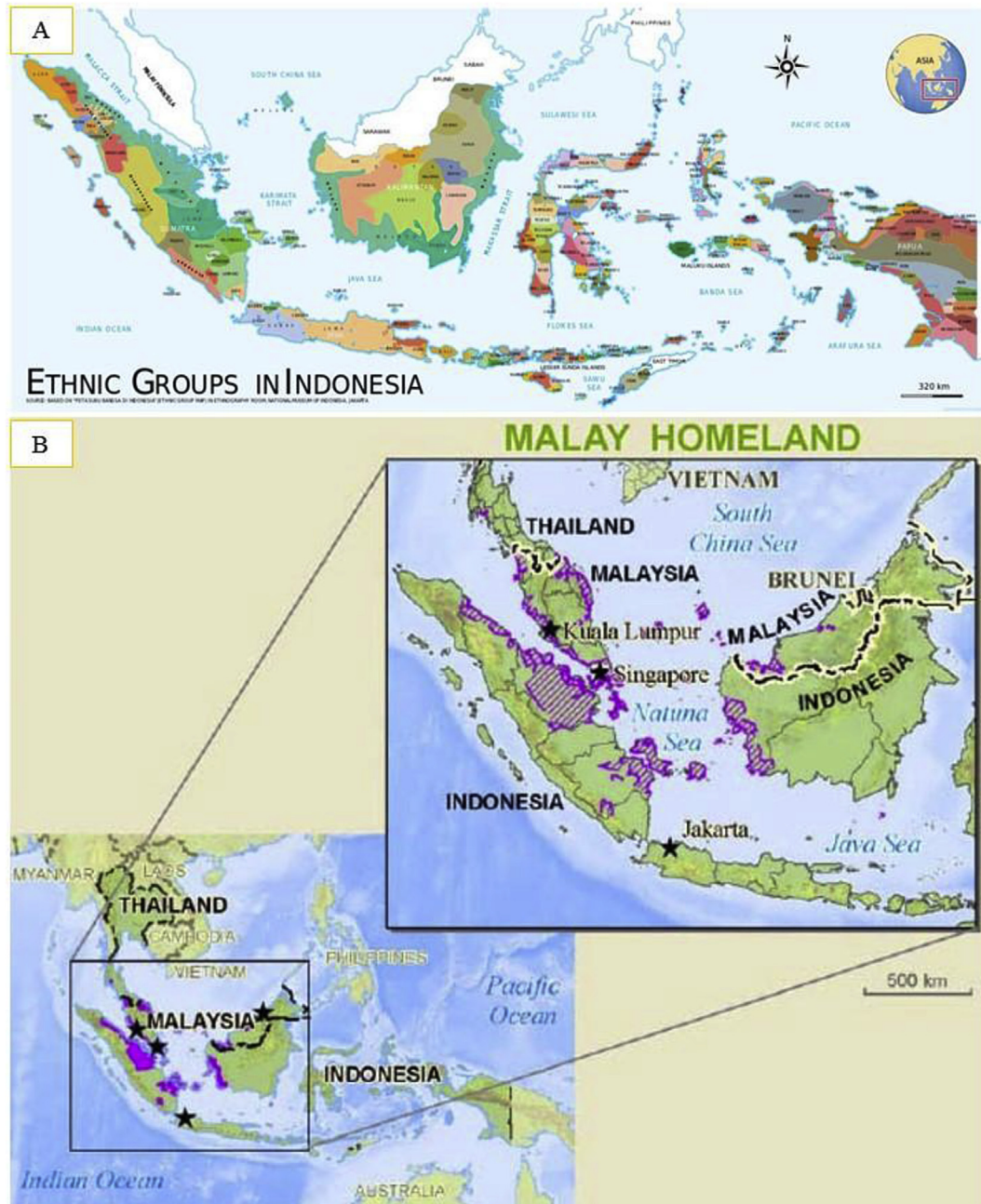


Fig. 1. Ethnolinguistic map of Indonesia. (A) Ethnic groups in Indonesia. (B) Malay homeland. *Note:* *Melayu* is another name for Malay. Source: Based on “peta suku bangsa di Indonesia” at National Museum of Indonesia Jakarta in wikipedia.org, 2010.

acquaintanceship between the woman and the man. The man who wants to get acquainted with the woman should visit her home and get accepted by her parents. If her parents accept him, the parents call their daughter. The woman comes out of her room if she is interested in him. Once the woman and the man accept each other, they get engaged [5].

Engagement is a stage before marriage. Once both the families agree for the wedding, there is a ceremony called Mermadu Rasan. This ceremony means that the man visited the woman and asked about her feelings in front of witnesses. After the agreement regarding the amount of money or anything else between the two families, this ceremony is continued with the implementation of the delivery of money [5].

The last stage of the marriage is another traditional ceremony called Bimbang at Bengkulu. The man and his family visit the

woman's house carrying 30 pieces *lemang*, dowry, and all other things for marriage. Before entering her house, there are a series of rhymes and dances. Then, the marriage contract is initiated [5].

In general, Bengkulu origin people consume *lemang* with *tapai ketan* (fermented glutinous rice), called as “*Lemang Tapai*”, a food delicacy. Farmers, fishermen, employees, everyone can enjoy this delicacy. Adults and children can eat *lemang tapai* (Fig. 2) as well [6].

2.2. Jambi

In Jambi, there's a ceremony for a new born, especially among the Batin tribe, called Nulak Padang Balik. It is a celebration for a happy mother who has just delivered a baby. The ceremony is used to thank the help of a midwife and as an expression of gratitude to those who have helped parturition. In addition, this ceremony is a family's

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