

FOOD INTAKE IN MALAYSIAN CULTURE AND SOCIETY: FOCUS ON THE YOUNGER GENERATION

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Abstract

This paper examines the culture of food intake among the young generation in Malaysia. The relationship between culture and food, S & T and food, health and food, religion and food, are examined such that it leads to a comprehensive survey of the factors which influence the pattern of food intake of contemporary Malaysian society. The cultural influence of the three major races in West Malaysia, i.e. the Malays, Chinese and Indians on food production and consumption, and their mutual influence, are also examined, together with the influence of modern trends in food intake. Discussions include the varied ways of food preparation, ingredients, etiquette, the relationship of food with the pattern of livelihood, traditional food and its distinctiveness, the influence of foreign culture in food intake, and eventually the pattern of contemporary food intake in today's society.

In order to determine the food intake habits of the younger generation in Malaysia, a comparative study was carried out. Case study involving respondents below the age of 30 was carried out. Comparison was made on their consumption of traditional and fast food which provides an initial picture of the generation's food intake habit. Traditional food intake consists of rice, meat / fish dishes, vegetables, and fruits, while fast (modern) food include fried chicken, pizza, french fries, doughnut, kebab, and burgers. The study shows a new trend in the food intake habits of the younger generation.

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1.0 Introduction

Food intake is one focus of which was discussed by previous researchers. According to Sorre⁴ to study the diet it is necessary not only to analyze the sources of food, but should also review how it is prepared. This view was supported by Granier⁵, the food is not the food alone, but it must also be viewed in terms of its relationship with the environment. Therefore, it is exactly like what is presented by Rozin⁶, the factors that determine the provision of food in society depends on the natural resources and the kinds of spices that are available.

Next, according to Fieldhouse⁷, culture is a major driver of determining types of food we eat and based on Rao⁸, culture is not static. In addition to maintaining the tradition it has developed mechanisms for change. So eating habits also change with time due to ecological and economic changes. In fact, according to him the change is due to the availability of materials, food innovation and diffusion effects from mixing with other nations.

Developments in science and technology occur rapidly, especially in the field of food science and technology. Various technologies are utilized to produce high quality of food. This situation is strengthened by a combination of various disciplines related to engineering, biology, chemistry, microbiology and others which can produce a variety of new food as well as improving the quality of existing food .

Awareness of quality foods intake is due to the attitudes of society itself. Among the factors involved is a high educational background. Other factors that encourage

⁴ Sorre, M. *The geography of diet*. In Wagner, P.L. & Mikesell, M.W.(Eds). Reading in cultural geography. Chicago:University of Chicago Press. 1962. pp. 445-464

⁵ Graniers, J.B. *Methods and perspectives in geography*. Translated Bray, J. New York: Longman. 1976. pp. 8

⁶ Rozin, P. *Human food selection: The interaction of biology, culture and individual experience*. In Baker, L. (ed). The psychobiology of human food selection. AVI, Westport. 1982. pp. 225-252.

⁷ Fieldhouse, P. *Food and nutrition. Customs and culture*. London: Chapman & Hall. 1985.

⁸ Rao, M.S.A. Conservatism and change in food habits among the migrants in India: A study in gatrodynamics. In Khare, R.S. & Rao, M.S.A. *Food, society and culture: Aspects in South Asian food systems*. Durham: Carolina Academic Press. 1986. pp. 121-140

people to take good and nutritious food is that they have a good level of income and this is the power that enables them to choose foods that are required or in other words they have the power to choose and buy.

Food preparation is a heritage that is descended from one generation to another generation.⁹ This is a privilege of every race in Malaysia. The question is whether it still stands to this day. The pressure of modern culture through such fast food is an issue that should be taken into account. How to combine efforts between tradition and modernity in the food industry is a challenge and a more specific study should be done.

Fast food menu such as pizza, burgers and fried chicken and traditional food menu such as rice and fish dishes allows young people more choice to choose their most favourite food. Fast-food consumption relationship and how it affects the traditional pattern of food intake is further discussed in this paper.

2.0 The influence of culture on eating practices of the three main races in Malaysia.

There are several criteria used by the three main races in Malaysia in determining food intake in terms of its history. It is summarized in Table 1.0.

Table 1.0: History of food intake practices of Malay, Chinese and Indians.

Criteria	Malay	Chinese	Indian
Basic principles of food intake	Influence by Al-Quran -The concept of halal, haram. -The concept of	Influence by <i>Yinshih</i> (food and beverages) - <i>Fan-ts' ai</i> Cereals -	Influenced by <i>Ayurveda</i> - <i>Ushna</i> (hot food) - <i>Tampu</i> (cold food) - <i>sama</i> (neutral

⁹ Ratana Sananmuang. *Food preferences of Thai adolescents and their mothers' attitudes and knowledge about foods and nutrition* Tesis (Ph.D.). Oregon State University. 1992.

	heat, cold and wind -Eat when hungry -Not eat (for a harmonious element in the body)	vegetables and meat -The concept of five elements	food) -Eat two times a day -Tridosha-pitta, kappa, vayu -The concept of five elements -taboo -Vegetarian (harmonious element in the body)
Ingredients in food	Depending on the material in the food resources available in the environment. Fishermen, fish Peasant-agricultural products	North-more oily South-Szechwan and Hunan, were used for chili powder Kiangsu and Chekiang-emphasize freshness. Cantonese-sweet	North-milk South-rice West-sweet East-grain -Cooking by caste.
cooking techniques	Using the pot soil, pan, natural materials like bamboo, leaves, wood, shell, Palas leaves, banana leaves.	Using a wok, pot soil, natural materials like bamboo, leaves, wood	Using the pot soil, pan, banana leaf.
meal	Festive meals, marriages, births, shaving the crown, <i>bertindik</i> ceremony, the baby down the land, circumcision, death, gratitude.	New Year's celebrations, lanterns, dragon boats month, the day the oldest, marriage, birth, commemorate the spirit, death.	Religious ceremonies, celebrations, births, pierce, death.
Food and culture	Glutinous rice in yellow-Thanks giving. betel leaves-entertain guests Raw materials associated with men- Cooking food-associated with female	cake basket-increasing status shark fish- more income cake roll-prosperous life Fruit orange-gold Ball in the sup-consolidation in the family.	Milk or Ghee -light sources Candy-goodness

After the occurrence of interaction between ethnic groups for centuries, there are many choices of food, whether traditional or modern. Even the food in Malaysia is considered unique and special. Scenario that allows people prefer the wide variety of food is actually proving that people in this country is through a new cultural era. The openness to try food other than one's own, while adhering to the basic values such as religion, influenced the type of food that is accepted by the community.

3.0 Eating habits of young generation

To determine dietary patterns practiced by the youth, research has been conducted among those aged below thirty. The reason is that they are born when the fast food has been established in Malaysia. Furthermore, they are the people who are directly exposed to fast food and traditional food. The study involving 1432 respondents. It consists of 889 Malays, 372 Chinese, 146 Indians and 25 were other races.

Traditional food intake consists of rice, meat / fish dishes, vegetables, and fruits, while fast (modern) foods include fried chicken, pizza, French Fries, doughnut, kebab, and Burgers.

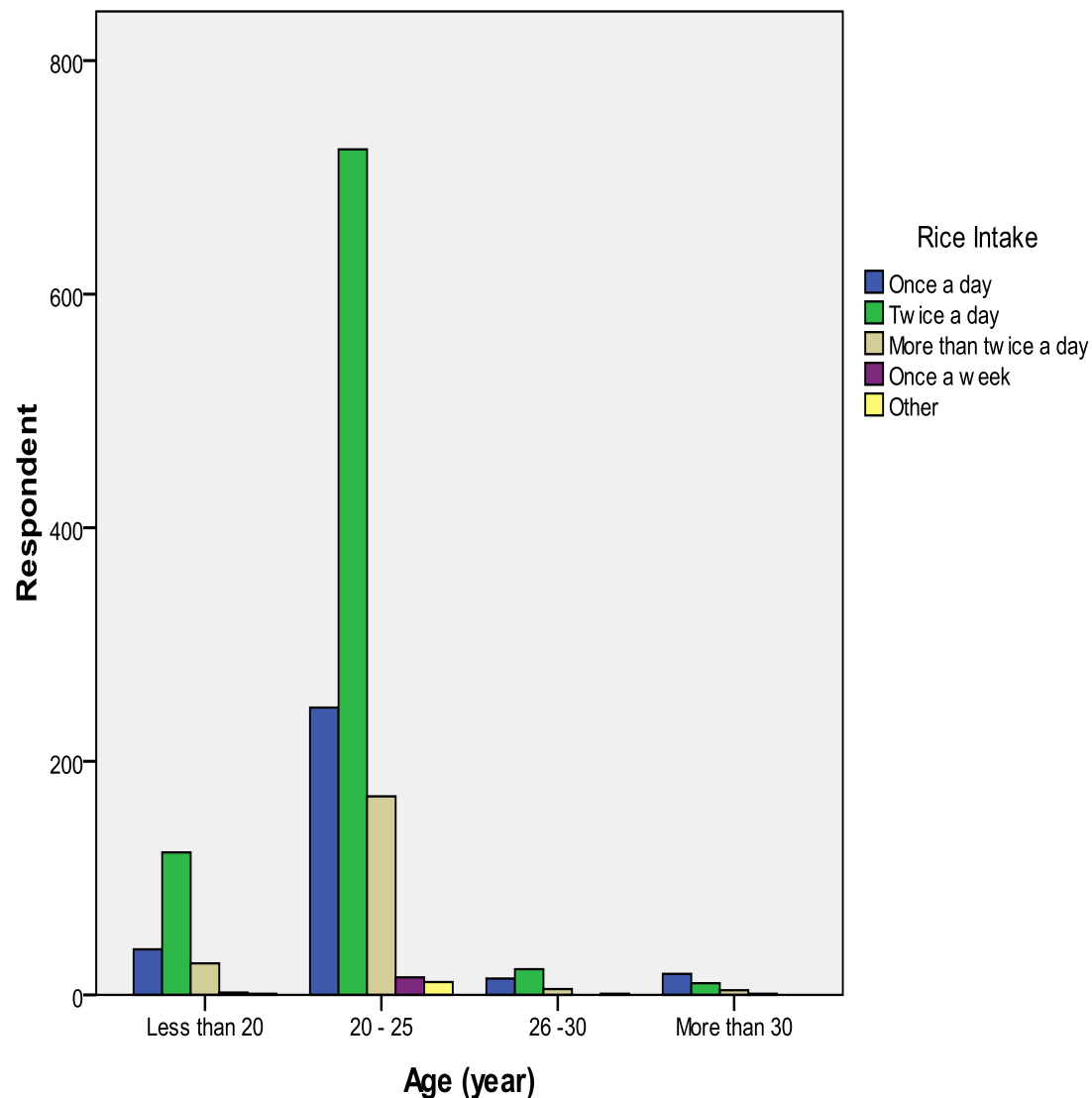
a) Acceptance of Traditional food

Based on the traditional food, only two criteria will be discussed in this paper, rice and side dishes. Based on rice intake, the results showed Kruskal Wallis test was significant [$X^2(3, N = 1432) = 33,193, p < .05$] refers to the frequency of eating rice based on race. Malays and other races such as Khadazan, Iban and others except Chinese and Indians, eat rice more frequently as indicated by the mean rank score of 754.31 and 819.32. There were no significant differences in the frequency of eating rice for the Chinese and Indians. [$Z(3, N = 1432) = -1.181, p > .05$]

Based on the review of the frequency of eating rice as compared with age, it was found that respondents showed eat rice twice a day is preferred for all ages except

for those over 30 years of age choosing to eat rice once a day. This is shown in Figure 1. Cross Tab tests also showed significant difference [$\chi^2 (12, N = 1432) = 28,296, p < .05$] between age and frequency of eating rice.

Figure 1: Age and Frequency of Taking Rice



On the intake side dishes the results showed that chicken is preferred followed by fish. There are also respondents who did not choose any dish. The reason given is that they adopt a vegetarian. For other dishes, Malay and Chinese respondents said the egg is the most popular dishes, while the Indian respondents selected legumes. This is shown in Table 2. In terms of selection of dishes, Kruskal Wallis test showed that there were significant differences among ethnic groups [$\chi^2 (3, N = 1432) =$

14,719, $p < .05$]. For examples Chinese people like to eat chicken and meat, Indians like shrimp and squid while the Malays like to take fish.

Table 2: The most popular dishes

Type of dish	Percent
Chicken	66.7
Meat	5.1
Shrimp	2.2
Fish	22.8
Squid	1.0
Other	2.1
Total	100.0

b) Acceptance of modern food (fast food)

Based on historical records, A & W restaurants are fast food restaurant first opened in Malaysia. It opened in 1963 in Batu Road (now known as Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman). People who play a lead inclusion A & W franchise is Mr Lie Boff from the United States. Then the A & W drive through was open in 1965 in Petaling Jaya.¹⁰ After that, the researchers found no records indicating the existence of other fast food restaurants are open until the opening of Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant in 1973.

Only two criteria are discussed in relation with all receipts of fast food. That is the place to visit and why they choose that place. A total of ten fast food places have been listed in the study. The results showed three main restaurants visited by the respondents is the Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonalds and Pizza Hut. This is shown in Table 3.

¹⁰ See <http://www.rootbeer.com.my/about-heritage-malaysia.htm>

Table 3: Most frequent fast food restaurant visited

Restaurant	(%)
KFC	54.0
Mc Donald	18.4
Pizza Hut	12.8
Dunya Kebab	0.8
Dunkin Donuts	1.9
Domino Pizza	1.3
Kenny Rogers	3.9
Burger King	2.7
Chicken King	0.4
Delifrance	1.6
Other	1.3

Further studies were conducted to determine why the respondents chose to visit the fast food restaurant. A total of five options were listed, many choices, delicious food, reasonable prices, interesting and quick and easy. In addition, respondents were also given the opportunity to give their own reasons. Results showed that 59.1% prefer that taste causes them visit the restaurant. While other reasons given is the gift offered, and a comfortable place.

Table 4: Reasons To Visit Fast Food Restaurants

Features	(%)
Wide range	14.9
Tasty	59.1
Affordable	8.8
Interesting	3.4

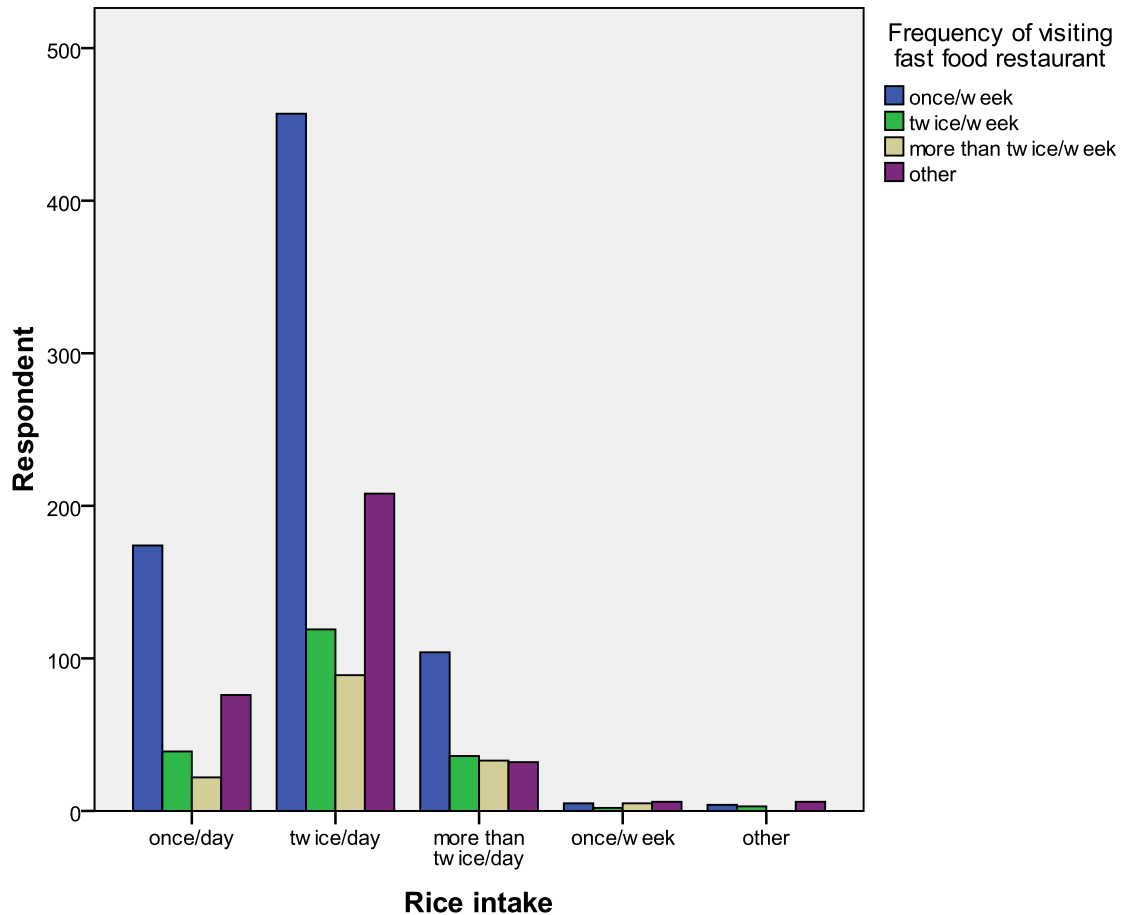
Fast and Easy	11.9
Other	1.0

4.0 Conclusion

Changes in eating culture occur due to various ethnic groups living in the community. What is happening is that the traditional practice of life is flowing in some of the interplay between each other based on similarities needs culture or way of life. Certain legacy remains in accordance with their respective communities according to religious beliefs and ethnicity. Even the flow of food culture has a space to be developed and expanded the practice as well as tribal cultures in relation to food can still be practiced.

Next, a comparison between the pattern of traditional dietary habits and patterns of modern dietary habits shows that acceptance of a new food culture takes a long time. This is evidenced by the acceptance of fast food that lasts for more than 40 years in Malaysia. The study showed that the frequency of eating rice and frequency of visiting fast food restaurants significant [$\chi^2 (12, N = 1420) = 32,775, p < .05$]. In fact, the study also showed that people who eat rice twice a day is the most numerous visitors to go to fast food restaurants, at least once a week. It is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: The frequency of visiting fast food restaurants compared to the frequency of eating rice



The study also showed that respondents' interest to visit the booths of rice and side dishes are 58%, while 42% of respondents want to go to a fast food restaurant when given a choice. Therefore, it can be concluded in accepting a new food, traditional food is not left.

Finally it can be concluded that the acceptance of modern food due to the occurrence of modification in food recipes that use the same basic material. For example, in the traditional menu, which is the preferred dish is the chicken (% 66.7), while in the modern menu, chickens are also preferred. It is proved by a total of 54.0% of respondents chose to go to KFC. The raw material is used by KFC chicken, but it has diversified cooking methods. Such as fried chicken, chicken nuggets, fried chicken wings and others. Even today's fast-food restaurants are also changing its menu that we were also able to buy rice at a fast food restaurant.

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