



**DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL HERITAGE
MINISTRY OF TOURISM, ARTS AND CULTURE**

INVENTORY



CATEGORY	:	HERITAGE OBJECT
TYPE	:	INTANGIBLE HERITAGE
HERITAGE OBJECTS	:	MALAYSIAN BREAKFAST CULTURE

1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a socially diverse nation. This social cohesion has led to the existence of various cultural elements that differ from one race to another, but can still be accepted, shared and transferred formally or informally among members of the community. The existence of this culture is the result of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, religious beliefs, time, roles and relationships that have been learned and acquired by society from past generations to the present.

Cultural assimilation is an aspect that is often highlighted in Malaysia's multi-racial or multi-ethnic society. Cultural assimilation refers to the process of cultural exchange and the borrowing of cultural elements between two groups with different traditions. However, the cultural borrowing that occurs does not modify the original culture, or cause the loss of the original culture nor the race or ethnicity that is borrowing those elements.

Cultural borrowing can occur in various aspects because culture is not static and can change according to adaptations in the life of a community. Food culture is one of the forms of cultural assimilation that has taken place in Malaysia. As a cosmopolitan country, Malaysia has a unique potpourri of food culture. Its people not only enjoy each other's wealth of food, but can even share and accept the same taste of food. The borrowing food culture across ethnicities in Malaysia has allowed the community to enjoy the food of other races without any racial sentiment. The assimilation that occurs in the food culture causes Malaysian society to always be open to learning, borrowing and being able to accept the cultural differences that exist, as well as the benefits that exist alongside them.

2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FOOD CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Food not only plays a role in fulfilling physiological needs, but it is also able to form a culture. The emergence of food culture can be influenced by the origins of the food, whether it was the result of invention by the local population, or diplomatic relations, and the arrival or migration of foreign communities.

Food culture refers to the practices, attitudes, beliefs, networks and institutions that surround the process of food production, distribution, and consumption. The existence of this food culture involves relationships, beliefs and experiences related to nutrition that is practiced by members of the community.

Food culture is relative to the community because there is no culture that can exist on its own without the community as its practitioner. Community groups play a role in developing the culture of eating, until it becomes a norm and tradition in life and is practiced jointly among members of the community.

Food culture is practiced through the way of life practiced by people who are members of certain social groups. Usually, this culture differs from one society to another due to factors such as the social system, economic organisation structure, politics, faith and beliefs, customary prohibitions, attitudes, values, experiences, and health, in addition to geographic, climate and surrounding environments. These factors play a role in shaping and patterning the food culture of a society.

The food culture of the Malaysian community was passed down from generation to generation through the socialisation of food in addition to changes in food culture patterns that are coloured by the imperialism of tastes from the West, the Middle East and other countries. Socialisation is a process where an individual learns and accepts the values, attitudes, and skills possessed by society to form his own personality and become a member of that society.

The developmental pattern of a food culture practiced by a community differs from one ethnic group to another. Thus, to review the development of eating culture, it is necessary to look at a society and their interaction with the environment where the food culture exists and was born.

3. MALAYSIAN BREAKFAST CULTURE: DINING EXPERIENCE IN A MULTI-ETHNIC SOCIETY

Eating breakfast is something that has become common in the daily life of the Malaysian people. Starting the day with breakfast is important for health, generating energy for a person's activities throughout the day, enabling them to do activities with vigour and productivity, as well as being able to create a good "mood" throughout the day.

The interpretation of Malaysian Breakfast Culture is related to the practice of eating breakfast, which has become common in daily life and is shared by the multi-ethnic community in Malaysia. The practice of taking this cultural breakfast has developed into a form of tradition that celebrates the diversity of Malaysian culture where members of the community, consisting of various ethnicities, will enjoy and share the same special breakfast food choices together, either at home or on premises that sell food.

Breakfast culture has evolved to become an important component that reflects the identity of Malaysian society. This culture has also become an element of heritage that lives on from the long-standing dietary traditions that have been practiced by the community since previous generations until now, which is highlighted through the consumption of traditional foods that are often eaten by people of various races, such as *Nasi Lemak*, *Roti Canai* and *Teh Tarik*. This traditional breakfast of

choice for Malaysians has played an important role, leading to the existence of Malaysian Breakfast Culture.

4. SOCIAL FUNCTIONS AND CULTURAL MEANING IN MALAYSIAN BREAKFAST CULTURE

The practice of Malaysian Breakfast Culture has taken place widely in all corners of the state, from rural areas to cities, in different spaces and atmospheres. The Malaysian Breakfast Culture started among family members through the preparation of food by mothers for other family members. This culture later developed when many premises began selling breakfast foods, such as roadside stalls, eateries, restaurants and hotels, which were opened all over the place, and also acted as a meeting place between different races.

The existence of Malaysian Breakfast Culture has gone beyond existing social relations among a multi-ethnic community. The practice of this food culture has caused social interaction within the community. Specifically, this culture has led to the existence of a space for the community to socialise in the morning. In the practice of Malaysian Breakfast Culture, it has become a commonly-seen scenario, its people from various socio-economic backgrounds can gather and socialise while enjoying traditional breakfast foods. In this meeting ground, they have shared the same tastes for food, even though they were born from different backgrounds.

In addition, the practice of Malaysian Breakfast Culture also contributes to the strengthening of social function and unity among the Malaysian people. The practicality of this food culture has enabled its people to accept each other and respect the cultural differences that exist, regardless of ethnicity. The acceptance and sharing of Malaysian Breakfast Culture among the community has also become the basis for the development of social capital that can strengthen the spirit of belonging and harmony within Malaysia's multi-ethnic community. Food culture, which has become a way of life in this society, is also able to build a sense of togetherness, understanding, respect, friendship and the spirit of being Malaysians.

The diversity of interactions between society and culture that has occurred over hundreds of years has created original Malaysian breakfast dishes that are shared and accepted by all communities. Thus, there are some foods that have been seen to play a significant role in fostering racial unity in Malaysia. Among them are *Nasi Lemak*, *Roti Canai* and *Teh Tarik*, which are also traditional foods in Malaysian Breakfast Culture.

The preparation and consumption of breakfast foods, such as *Nasi Lemak*, *Roti Canai* and *Teh Tarik*, although originally practiced by certain ethnic groups, are now loved by all regardless of ethnic background. *Nasi Lemak*, which has long been

synonymous with the traditional Malay breakfast, has been accepted and has become a favourite of Chinese and Indians. Not to be left out, the combination of Roti Canai and Teh Tarik is also enjoyed by the multi-ethnic community. The scenario that happened in Malaysia's Breakfast Culture shows that food has become an important element that influences the development of society's culture in Malaysia, in addition to acting as a link between the social cohesion of various ethnic communities.

In addition, foods that play a role in this culture has long been a "signature" that symbolises Malaysia's identity, especially to tourists from abroad. This menu is not only easily available in Malaysia, but is also known, sold and promoted abroad as a traditional Malaysian breakfast dishes.

The national recognition that has been given to *Nasi Lemak*, *Roti Canai* and *Teh Tarik*, as National Heritage Foods under the National Heritage Act 2005 (Act 645), also proves that these breakfast foods are important to the history and socio-cultural development of Malaysian society.

The practice of Malaysian Breakfast Culture has highlighted the harmony of people's lives, as they practice tolerance, unity, mutual respect and adaptability to the eating cultures of communities of different races. This culture has had a great impact on the social relations of the community and reflects the internal strength of Malaysia as a multi-racial country, where the community can live life in a harmonious atmosphere.

5. SAFEGUARDING OF MALAYSIAN BREAKFAST CULTURE

Various parties and community members have played an important role to safeguard and protect Malaysian Breakfast Culture. The development of Malaysian Breakfast Culture has been influenced by the direct involvement of all members of the community who act as its practitioners. The spread and development of this culture has taken place among multi-ethnic communities consisting of Malays, Chinese, Indians, as well as other ethnic groups throughout Malaysia without any boundaries related to gender or age.

The safeguarding of Malaysian Breakfast Culture has been actively carried out by carriers or practitioners who may consist of men or women among individuals and family members; local communities who act as customers or buyers of food; food experts; food associations; chefs; academics; NGOs, as well as food operators including street stall operators, restaurants, hotels, and so on.

The continuation of knowledge and skills about Malaysian Breakfast Culture has been spread by older generations to younger generations through various

approaches. Among the methods that have been used include passing on the knowledge and skills of this culture informally through direct learning from family members, or formally through educational platforms. This effort is done to ensure that this food culture can be kept alive and safeguard by a community of practitioners.