

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Journal of Ethnic Foods

journal homepage: <http://journalofethnicfoods.net>

Original article

Historical and contemporary perspectives of the Nyonya food culture in Malaysia



Chien Y. Ng, Shahrim Ab. Karim*

Department of Food Service and Management, Faculty of Food Science and Technology, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 18 February 2016

Received in revised form

23 April 2016

Accepted 2 May 2016

Available online 14 May 2016

Keywords:

Chinese symbolism

globalization

Nyonya cuisine

Peranakans

revival

ABSTRACT

Nyonya cuisine echoes the cultural identity of the Peranakans, who are both Chinese and localized. Despite the fact that the food is much localized, its symbolism remains traditionally Chinese. This paper explores the history, ingredients, and cooking methods crucial in the production of the cuisine, the types of food served for daily consumption, festivities and ancestral worships, as well as their Chinese symbolism. Furthermore, this paper also discusses factors that contributed to the obscurity of the culture and the cuisine after the Second World War. Lastly, the revival of the culture through the immense interest in its cuisine, especially from the 1980s, and the extent of globalization of this cuisine are also examined. Findings reported are expected to highlight the significance of Nyonya cuisine in Malaysia in the past and the present.

© 2016, Korea Food Research Institute. Published by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Food has always been the sustenance of human beings from as long as they can remember. Over time, the primary role of food has evolved into something more complicated. There is a popular adage “you are what you eat,” which explains that the food one eats defines who one is and what one has become [1]. Thus, food is a powerful cultural symbol that represents a person. Most people associate food of their culture with warm memories of their childhood, and thus it becomes a form of comfort in difficult times [1]. The familiarity of the Peranakans with the food of their ancestors and the knowledge that they have discerned from their environment bring Nyonya cuisine to life. The cuisine is a vital creation of the Nyonyas, womenfolk of Peranakan communities fostered by the intermarriage of offspring of Fujian and Guandong seafarers who married native women. The word *Peranakan* is originated from Indonesia or Malaysia and comes with multiple meanings. It signifies *locally born* or *the offspring of intermarriage between a local and a foreigner*.

This article focuses solely on Chinese Peranakan, the largest group of Peranakan in the Malay world, though there are other

kinds of Peranakan such as Jawi Peranakan and Indian Peranakan. At present, this marginalized group of people can be found throughout Malaysia and Singapore with the heartland in Malacca, Singapore, and Penang [2]. This cuisine invented through this hybridized culture is not merely for daily consumption but as a method to nurture family bondage during auspicious celebrations, ceremonies, and ancestral worship. According to Peranakan context, food serves three main functions: as offerings to the deities and ancestors, to seal vows, and as an indicator of social relations—to celebrate marriages and the many seasons and festivals [3]. Despite the fact that the Peranakans have adopted many elements of local culture into their ways of life, the symbolism of their food remains Chinese. Tan [4] explained the connection between Nyonya cuisine and Chinese symbolism through three principles, namely, color symbolism, symbolism by linguistic association, and symbolism by physical association.

Nyonya cuisine or Peranakan cuisine is the creation that arises from cultural borrowing and cultural innovation through contact with local ingredients and non-Chinese principles of food preparation [5]. Chinese cultural principles are applied in the local environment by the Peranakans, as a result of which some principles are modified and new ones are made [5]. Hall [6] summarized the cuisine as one that combines Chinese cooking techniques and ingredients with Malaysian and Indonesian spices and flavors [6]. Moreover, the cuisine is influenced by Thai, Indian, Dutch, Portuguese, and English techniques. This cuisine owes its existence to early Chinese immigrants who found that the local food did not suit

* Corresponding author. Department of Food Service and Management, Faculty of Food Science and Technology, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.

E-mail address: shahrimkarim2@gmail.com (S. Ab. Karim).

their taste buds [7]. As they were also unable to cook the food of their homeland due to the unavailability of the ingredients, they tried to produce their own food with local materials [7].

Initially formulated in the kitchen, the dominion of the Peranakan womenfolk, the cuisine is famous for its painstaking and lengthy preparations that can take up to days. In the mid-19th century, their wealth plummeted with the loss of their exalted status after Japanese occupation and Malayan independence and their culture experienced a steep decline. However, there is a revival of interest in the forgotten culture in the mid-80s with the surging number of Nyonya cookbooks and restaurants. At the same time, the food has become globalized thanks to the Peranakan diaspora. Ethnic restaurants selling Nyonya fare overseas help the natives to reconnect with their mother country though the familiarity of the food that they served. For other patrons, consuming food of a different ethnic will be a novel experience and a culinary adventure [1].

Nyonya food can be divided into three categories [5]: The first is traditional Chinese (Hokkien) food with some alteration [8], the second is Malay-style dishes [5,9], and last but not the least are the innovated foods [5]. In addition, the Nyonyas are famous for their colorful and delightful *kuehs* (cakes or sweets). Nevertheless, Nyonya food of Malacca, Penang, and Singapore are not thoroughly alike. According to Ong [10], Penang dishes are influenced by Thai cuisine due to their close proximity to Thailand with the addition of South Indian tastes. This factor gives the cuisine a significant sweet–sour or tangy taste [8]. By contrast, Malacca and Singapore fares are much inspired by Portuguese and Indonesian cuisines. Therefore, the southern dishes are usually sweeter and less spicy than those made by their northern counterparts as they employ a generous amount of coconut milk [11] and Malay spices such as coriander and cumin.

2. Historical perspectives

2.1. The birth of Nyonya cuisine

The inventive Peranakans altered the traditional Chinese food bought from China due to the limited availability of main ingredients and to suit the local palates [6]. By also mingling the dissimilar cooking methods, they created the exotic Nyonya cuisine [6]—one of the most enduring components of their distinctive culture. The Peranakans are localized Chinese, a distinct ethnic group with its own unique customs developed from the blending of Malaysian and Chinese cultures [6]. The arbitrary term is an Indonesian/Malay word with multiple meanings. They can mean *locally born* or *the offspring of intermarriage between a local and a foreigner*. The Peranakan communities of today live in tropical Southeast Asian locales, mainly in Malacca, Penang, and Singapore [6]. There is also quite a large community of Peranakans in Klang Valley, Selangor, Malaysia [2]. Nonetheless, many Peranakans in Singapore are Christians unlike their counterparts in Malacca [12], and are therefore more Westernized in mannerisms [13]. Because of the different processes of nation building between Singapore and Malaysia, there are considerable differences between the Peranakans in Singapore and those in Malacca [12] and Penang.

The Peranakans were descendants of the male seafarers who sailed from Southern China to the *Nusantara* (Malay Archipelago). Most of them are of Hokkien ancestry because they came from Southern Fujian (Min Nan) Province, although there are also a small number of people who are of Teochew or Cantonese descent [14] from Guangdong. The word *Min* is a short form in Chinese for the province of Fujian and *Nan* means south. However, outside of China, Min Nan people addressed themselves as Hokkien in their own dialect [15]. Tan [16] remarked that Chinese men from southern

provinces frequently migrated overseas and their numbers peaked in the middle of the 19th century.

As these first-generation Chinese immigrants were unaccompanied by their women, who were not legally allowed to leave China [17], they intermarried with the Siamese and Burmese women who lived in these ports, and also with the indigenous non-Muslim women of Acehnese, Javanese, Balinese, and Batak descents [18,19]. The intermarriages were motivated by the fact that these women were good housekeepers and saleswomen, keeping the business running when they went on a business trip to China [16]. The menfolk partially adopted Malay customs so that they could blend into the local communities [14]. The migration of Chinese women only truly began toward the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century.

The first striking Chinese settlements on the islands of Malay Archipelago were believed to exist from as early as the 13th century. In 1436, the secretary of Chinese eunuch Cheng Ho named Fein Sin testified the presence of some people of Chinese descent living in that area [16]. Therefore, it is rather appropriate to date the history of Chinese settlements in Malaysia after the founding of Malacca sultanate (approximately 1400) [16]. Malacca, a pivotal hub of commerce and maritime powerhouse that linked Europe to Asia and gave its name to the world's busiest shipping routes, the Straits of Malacca [20], was the home to the first and largest Chinese settlement in peninsular Malay [8]. Despite the scant written sources available and some oral history, Tan Chee Beng, a scholar with unrivalled knowledge on Peranakan, managed to obtain records that indicate that the Peranakan communities became distinct from their forebears as early as the 15th century. During this period, the people also settled in coastal areas of Java and Sumatra [17]. In the 19th century, the Peranakans from Malacca settled in Amoy Street and Telok Ayer Street, the first Peranakans enclaves in the bustling major trading ports of Singapore after the East India Company leased out the land there for sale. Besides Singapore, some also moved to Penang during the British colonial expansion [10].

“Baba” is a general ethnic term for the Chinese males and females who were born in the Straits Settlements in contrast to the China-born immigrants in the 19th century [21]. According to Tan [21], the concept of Baba is quite complicated as the label has dissimilar meanings over time and each individual interprets them differently. It is a Malay honorific title, possibly derived from Sanskrit or Persian, which means grandfather or father to show respect and affection for a gentleman of advanced years [14,19]. The Peranakans also addressed themselves as *Straits-born*, an English word, which indicates their local-born status. This practice continues even today to a small extent [21]. “King’s Chinese” was another term used by the Peranakans communities, which were among the earliest Anglicized Chinese when they became prominent in Malacca and Singapore due to their allegiance to the British Crown [14,22]. By contrast, the popular address for the womenfolk, that is, *Nyonya*, is a Javanese loan honorific word from the Dutch word *nona* (grandma) and it means *foreign married madam*. The term might also come from Portuguese *nona* or *nonha*. The latter was known throughout the colonies of the ancient Portuguese world like Goa and Macau, whereby it was used to address a native girl married to a European. Besides, it may be connected to the Portuguese term *dona* meaning *woman* [19]. There are also claims that *Nyonya* is derived from the term *nonya*, a word of endearment for Malay women that is similar to *auntie* [6].

The intermarriages between the immigrants and indigenous women were pivotal during the early expansion of the unique culture [23]. Therefore, the social phenomenon is not a biological fact of *mixed blood* [23]. It is important to note that the Peranakans today are identified by virtue of their culture and self-identification

and not because they are of mixed blood. The intermarriages lasted for basically one generation, and for hundreds of years the Peranakans preferred endogamous marriage whereby they married exclusively among their own [2]. Wee [19] also mentioned about Peranakan families who sent their sons to study in China and these young men brought back Chinese wives upon their return. They later married Chinese migrants whose population surged in the 19th century as no Peranakans will allow their children to marry Malays who were Muslims [16]. Although these localized Chinese accepted and adopted various aspects of Malay life such as dress, food, and leisure pursuits, they never embraced Islam. They remained as fervent Taoists, Buddhists, and Confucianists [22].

The *lingua franca* of the Peranakans is indeed distinct from the two dominant languages which they are hailed from, that is, the Malay language and Hokkien dialect. There is a notable distinction between the language spoken by the northern and southern Peranakans in terms of the proportion of Malay and Hokkien words used [24]. Penang Peranakans speak Baba Hokkien, a localized version of Hokkien. The language is predominantly Hokkien, a southern Chinese dialect with a pronounced Malay slang in terms of borrowed Malay words and expressions [24]. By contrast, the Peranakans of Malacca and Singapore speak Baba Malay and also English [16]. Baba Malay or Patois Malay is a creolized Malay language [17] enhanced with Hokkien words [14]. The contemporary use of this distinctive language only applies to the older generation [14] as the younger generation mainly speak only Mandarin and English.

In the early times, the Peranakans were seafarers who traded between the ports of Southeast Asia and those of southern China [14,25]. They also served as the general intermediaries (compradores) between the local people and the European powers, namely, the Portuguese and the Dutch, when they colonized Malacca [14] for its maritime importance [20]. The mid-18th to mid-19th century, which coincided with the British rule in the Straits Settlements, was thought to be the heydays of the Peranakans [26]. During this period, the Peranakans owned businesses involving opium, nutmeg, liquor cargoes, pepper, and gambier cultivation; commodity trading; and property development as well as tin mining [25,26].

Because of their previous experiences and close relations with the Malay community, including the royal Malay courts, the Peranakans became valued people of the last colonial power, which colonized the whole of Malaya—the British [14]. Besides acting as middlemen for European banks, the East India Company, and big trading corporations, some were also appointed as Kapitan China who bonded the Chinese community with the British [25]. Apart from joining the government bureaucracy, some Peranakans became prosperous merchants and professionals [17]. As they were blessed with the advantage to mingle with different cultures, the Peranakans were basically trilingual, having the ability to communicate in Chinese, Malay, and English.

From the 19th to early 20th century, the Peranakan merchants formed an impressive number of companies in various dealings, including shipping, entrepôt trading, tin mining, rubber planting, coconut oil and rice milling, insurance, coolie trade, and revenue farms [19,27]. As their companies were set against a milieu of colonial and indigenous supremacies, they nurtured affiliation with both parties through diverse methods. The Peranakans were able to bond with the British because of their willingness to embrace English education and culture in addition to their early working experiences with them. Most elite Peranakans were English educated toward the end of 19th until mid-20th century, having been sent to English mission schools [19] and even to England to further their studies [19,22,26].

In the name of survival, they extolled anything British, imitating their fashion and architecture as well as indulging in their favorite

entertainments such as horse riding, dancing, playing cricket, and reading English classics. As for the lands that were untouched by this foreign influence, goodwill between these resourceful traders with indigenous powers was established through the provision of financial assistance and consultation and more often than not, marriage [27]. Apart from that, their businesses were further solidified by forming partnership with business elites of other descents (Armenian, German, etc.), carrying out philanthropic work by building temples and cemeteries, and founding clan Kongsis and secret societies [27]. They had an upper hand over the Chinese immigrants who arrived later as they possessed rudimentary English as well as being familiar with the European trading ways thanks to their frequent dealings with the English.

2.2. The womenfolk as active agents

Nyonya cuisine is an embodiment of the best of home cooking. In the past, the Peranakans adhered to rigid Chinese patriarchal customs [9], and therefore, the territory of womenfolk was confined to the house and especially the kitchen. It is a place where they spent a great part of their lives as they did not enjoy the privilege of getting an education. The kitchen was fondly known as *perut rumah* or stomach of the house as the life and activity of the household revolves around it [3]. According to Florence Tan, a professional chef from Malacca, the fusion cuisine was created from the kitchen of Peranakans, although there is no written record of the importance of Nyonya cuisine on Malaysia's culinary art [28].

The development of the labor-intensive Nyonya cuisine was encouraged by the fact that excellent cooking is the cardinal touchstone of a *good woman* as stated by Tan [5,9]. This perception drove the Nyonyas to become meticulous cooks who diligently worked to achieve perfection in their dishes in every aspect, from preparing to presenting the dishes. They were so obsessive with their labor of love that a good gossip in the kitchen was shunned upon [29]. However, the quest for perfection was possible in those days as Peranakans had enough wealth to allow them to employ servants and to channel all their energy into mastering the arts [29]. Bibik, a formidable older Nyonya with an exceptional knowledge in culinary arts, was also employed to tutor young Nyonyas in the craft. The young women were expected to be adept in cooking and embroidery if they were seeking a good marriage [30]. From a very young age, they were commandeered by the matriarch to help in the kitchen, grinding spices, preparing *sambal belachan* (chili with shrimp paste), and chopping vegetables before being given the freedom to cook on their own.

Lee [2] explained that the cooking capability of a Nyonya could be judged in the olden days based on the tempo with which she crushed the *rempah* (spices) to make *sambal belachan* with *batu lesong/tumbok* (mortar and pestle). There was also an old tale whereby a potential mother-in-law would listen to the sound of a maiden's pounding when she was looking for a potential bride for her son, as the beating noise connoted the amount of attention the maiden put into her cooking [9]. Likewise, examining a maiden's dishes can tell a person how well she was taught [31]. Choo [32] believed that observations and constant practice were the only pivotal tools in learning the complex art that takes years to acquire. The recipes and ways of creating the cuisine were a closely guarded secret and they were passed down from mother to daughter [28].

3. Nyonya food culture

3.1. Nyonya cuisine

Food is one of the key rudiments of culture and presents possibilities for dissemination of numerous cultural contents [33].

Nyonya cuisine, also called “Peranakan cuisine,” is the product of cultural borrowing and cultural innovation through exposure to local sources of food such as ingredients and principles of food preparation, which are non-Chinese [5]. Chinese cultural principles are used artistically in local environment by the Peranakans whereby some principles are changed and in the process, some novel ones are made [5]. Hall [6] summarized the cuisine as one that unites Chinese cooking techniques and ingredients, such as wok frying and pork, with Malaysian and Indonesian spices and flavors, such as tamarind, ginger, and lemongrass [6]. Nevertheless, one must not forget that the elusive cuisine also had influences from Thailand, India, Holland, Portugal, and England. This cuisine owes its existence to early Chinese immigrants who tried the local food but found them unsuitable for their tastes [7]. They were unable to cook the food of their native country due to the unavailability of the ingredients, and so they tried to produce their food with local materials [7].

Familiarity with local ingredients as well as the indigenous cooking fundamentals allowed the Peranakans to adapt Chinese food to the native surroundings. Through cultural borrowing and cultural innovation [5,9], the Nyonias concocted a distinctive cuisine, with predominantly spicy and piquant flavors. This enriched cuisine is fondly known as “Nyonya food” among the Peranakans as it was the creation of their womenfolk [9], who are constantly in charge of the meticulous and elaborate preparations of Nyonya dishes [34]. However, Tan [9] made it apparent that the consumption of pork will always draw a solid line between Nyonya and Malay cuisine no matter what the extent of localization is. Similarly, Tan [9] explained that Nyonya cuisine can be easily distinguished from the cuisine of mainstream Chinese based on the usage of local non-Chinese ingredients in its preparation.

The ingredients used by Nyonias are comparable with those used by the Malays. Lee [2] and Tan [5] emphasized the extensive use of pungent roots, namely, *kunyit* (turmeric), *galangal* (a subtle mustard-scented root similar to ginger), *lengkuas* (greater galangal), and ordinary ginger, as well as aromatic leaves, namely, *daon kesum* (laksa leaves), *daon kadok* (betel leaves/wild pepper leaves), *daon cekok* (galangal leaves), *daon ketumbar* (coriander leaves), *daon lemo perot* (kaffir/leprous lime leaves), *daon pandan* (screw-pine leaves), *daon pudina* (mint leaves), and *daon kari* (curry leaves) [5]. Nyonias also utilized spices such as *bunga chingkeh* (cloves), *kayu manis* (cinnamon), *buah pelaga* (cardamom), *jintan puteh* (cumin), *bunga lawang* (star anise), and *buah pala* (nutmeg) [2].

A prominent spice in both Nyonya and Malay cuisines is chili, which can be used in both fresh and dried forms [5,6]. In addition, fragrant plant stems such as *serai* (lemon grass), flower buds such as *bunga kantan* (torch ginger buds), as well as fruits, nuts, and seeds, specifically *buah keras* (candle nuts), *buah keluak* (a large black nut), *asam Jawa* (tamarind), and *ketumbar* (coriander seeds) are commonly used [5]. Starchy foods, namely, *ubi kayu* (tapioca), *ubi keledok* (sweet potato), *ubi keladi* (yam), and *beras pulut* (glutinous rice) are frequently used in making the exquisite *kuehs* (Nyonya cakes). Other notable ingredients used are curry powder, *suntan* (coconut milk), *belachan* (a pungent paste made from dried *gerangau*, tiny shrimp-like crustaceans), dried prawns, lime juice, *gula melaka* (palm sugar), and spring onion. The Peranakans adapted to the tropical heat by using heavy spices to preserve their meats [32].

Dried ingredients derived from Chinese culture are black mushrooms, fungus such as *bok jee* (wood ears), *kim chiam* (lily buds), *taukee* (soybean sticks), fish maws, *tanghoon* (glass noodles), *beehoon* (rice vermicelli), and different varieties of seasonings such as *tauchio/taucheo* (salted soybean paste) and *tichio* (sweet sauce) [2,5,6,8,35,36]. Tan [8] underscored the fact that Peranakans use less *tauyy* (dark soya sauce), a condiment favored in Chinese

cooking, and add more salt into their dishes. The Nyonias also creatively incorporate fruits and vegetables into their dishes such as *jantung pisang* (banana flower), *angka muda* (young jackfruit), *daun keledok* (sweet potato leaves), and *belimbing buloh* (cucumber tree) [11]. The Peranakans trust in the innate qualities of food as the Chinese, which has the nature of hot and cold. For example, the Peranakans consider certain vegetables such as *kangkong* (water spinach), cucumber, and *ketola* (loofah) as *cooling*; star fruit and young coconut water are thought to be *extremely cooling* [5]. A high intake of such cooling items were thought to weaken the knees. By contrast, fruits such as *durian*, *rambutan*, and *langsar* are *warming*, and thus one must drink a lot of water and even bath after consuming these fruits [5].

Nyonya food can be divided into three categories [5]. The first is traditional Chinese (Hokkien) food with some alteration by the Peranakans, namely, *ayam tim* (stewed chicken) and *ayam sio* (roast chicken) [5] and *itik sio* (roast duck) [8]. *Itik sio* and *ayam sio*, the latter also known as *ayam panggang* or *ayam roast*, are cooked by marinating the meat over a small fire until it becomes golden brown [5,8]. These names are a unique combination of Malay and Hokkien terms. *Itik* and *ayam* are Malay words for duck and chicken, respectively, whereas *sio* means roasted in Hokkien [8]. Apart from the aforementioned foods, the origin of the food of this category can be traced through their Hokkien name [3]: *sek bak* (braised pork), *jiu hoo char* (jicama and cuttlefish stir fry with lettuce wrap), *chap chye* (mixed vegetable stew) [9,37]. The Hokkien influence can also be recognized in the soup and fish dishes of the Peranakans [5], such as *kiam chye ark th'ng* (salted mustard duck soup) and *heepow/hee pioh* soup (fish bladder soup or fish maw soup or fish bladder soup) [5].

The second is Malay-style dishes, which are *ayam masak buah keluak* (chicken cooked with keluak nuts, an Indonesian-influenced dish), *ikan masak asam* (fish in tamarind juice), *sambal udang* (prawn chili paste) (Fig. 1) [5,9], and *nasi ulam* (herbal rice) (Fig. 2) [2,9,31]. Tan [8] explained that *ayam masak buah keluak* is irrefutably a Malay-style dish due to the usage of *buah keluak*, a black nut with hard shell, which is alien to the Chinese's ears. A similar case can be seen in *ayam goreng lada* (peppered chicken), which uses *buah keras*—another kind of gravy-thickening nut that distinguished the dish from Chinese fares [9]. Another equally spicy dish named *ikan masak asam* is also very local as its main ingredients included *belacan*, *asam Jawa*, *serai*, *kunyit*, and *lengkuas* [9].



Fig. 1. Sambal udang (prawn chili paste). Sambal is a typical Malaysian dish. It is a fusion between Malay and Nyonya cuisines and it is served in most Malaysian households especially during lunch time with hot steamed rice. Its main ingredients are chili paste, red onions, shrimp paste, tamarind juice, and seasoning.



Fig. 2. Nasi ulam Nyonya (herbal rice). Nasi ulam Nyonya is a steamed rice cooked with more than 10 types of Malaysian herbs, dried shrimps and fried onions. It is served with local dishes such as sambal udang, stir fried vegetables and other dishes.

There are also foods innovated by the womenfolk, such as *udang goreng asam* (fried tamarind prawns), *pongteh* (stewed chicken/pork with fermented soybean), *kueh koci* (glutinous rice cake with coconut filling), and *kueh chang Nyonya* (glutinous rice dumplings) [5]. Certain names such as *pongteh*, which is chicken or pork braised with *taucheo*, dark soya sauce, black mushrooms, and potatoes among others [4,5] are uniquely Peranakans as ascertained by Tan [9], although it was also reported that the origin of the term is untraceable. Nonetheless, Tan [9] concluded that *pong* may be the mispronunciation of the Hokkien word *hong* for stewing in soy sauce. The term *teh* is presumed to be derived from the Hokkien word *te* for pig's trotters, as the Hokkiens in Malaysia still stew pork or pig's trotters in soy sauce, although with less preserved soybean paste, sugar, and shallot. Tan [8] revealed that the variation of the dishes can be detected through their names in most cases. The plethora of dishes is generally cooked at a slow speed so that the darkened dishes develop a rich, savory texture [38]. Interestingly, many fares are cooked 1–2 days before grand festivities to allow them to blossom, and thus to make them taste better [39] (Fig. 2).

Besides the main dishes, there are also accompaniments to them in the form of delectable condiments such as *chili chukka* (chili with vinegar), *acar awak* (pickled mixed vegetables), and *sambal belachan* [9,31,39]. *Sambal belachan* is a versatile Malay-style [5] spicy tangy gravy, prepared by mixing fresh chilies and toasted *belachan* [9]. Another shrimp-based substance no less important is the *cin-calok*, which is pungent, sour, and salty. It is naturally mixed with lime juice, chilies as well as shallots and eaten with main dishes such as rice and fried fish [17].

Another prominent dish of the Peranakans is the zesty *laksa*, a thick, freshly made, rice-flour noodles in spicy gravy. Chan [40] proposed that the word is not of Malay origin but is derived from the Hokkien word *luak sha*, which means *spicy sand*. Highlighting the fact that only Chinese, and not Malays, produce the dish, the author pointed out that *laksa* resembles an old Hokkien dish that used ground peanut, which gave a sandy texture to the dish [40]. A much-loved food, Penang *Laksa* (or Penang *asam laksa*) is an exceptional invention, which rises from the combination of Chinese and non-Chinese cooking techniques. It is prepared from minced mackerel fish flesh and a vast array of local components: *serai*, *daon pudina*, *asam* pieces, *daon kesum*, *bunga kantan*, *belachan*, etc. This dish is dissimilar from the more popular curry *laksa* made in Malacca and Johor as well as Thai *laksa* (or Siamese *laksa*) as it does not use coconut milk [5].

According to Ong [10], the Nyonya cuisine of Malacca, Penang, and Singapore possesses heavy Malay and Hokkien influences. Nevertheless, thanks to the rich multicultural diversity of the island,

Penang dishes are tinged with other elements as well. They are influenced by Thai cuisine due to their close proximity to Thailand with addition of South Indian tastes. This factor gives the cuisine a significant sweet-sour or tangy taste [8]. Malacca and Singapore, by contrast, often draw inspirations from Portuguese and Indonesian cuisines. The southern dishes are usually sweeter and less spicy than those made by their northern compatriots with a more generous amount of coconut milk [11] and Malay spices such as coriander and cumin. By contrast, sour ingredients such as *asam Jawa*, hot chilies, fragrant locally grown herbs, and the aromatic *belachan* [9,31] are favored in the northern part of Malaysia. Although the flavors of the singular cuisine are more pronounced than many Chinese food, the fares are not as spicy as Indian or Thai food [38].

Besides the difference in Nyonya dishes in terms of ingredients, another visible dissimilarity is the method of cooking. For example, this can be seen in the preparation of a snack named *otak-otak*, which is a kind of spicy fish custard made of fish fillet, eggs [41], coconut milk, *daon limau purut*, *lengkuas*, *serai*, *kunyit*, and *belachan* to name a few. Wrapped by *daon kaduk*, which gives the dish its unique taste and smell and encased in banana leaves [41,42], *otak-otak* of Penang is steamed to form a custard-like product. By contrast, Malacca's version of *otak-otak* is enclosed in narrow strips of coconut or nipah leaves and is grilled over open charcoal fire, thus producing a rich smoky aroma.

Blessed with the culinary knowledge from two distinguished cultures with traces of influences originating from Dutch, Portuguese, and British cuisines [26], the fastidious Nyonyas managed to fabricate a vast array of delicate, colorful, and flavorful *kuehs* (cakes or sweets), which they are so famous for [41]. These *kuehs*, which are usually steamed but sometimes fried or baked, can be found in street food carts on lanes and alleys [41]. The delicacies are consumed at any time of the day or night, as light breakfast, afternoon snack, or dessert [31,41]. *Kuehs* of Chinese origin are *kueh ku* (red tortoise cake) or *angku kueh* in Hokkien, a red oval pastry made from milled glutinous rice stuffed with *tau sah* (crushed mung beans) or coconut fillings.

Those of Malay origin include *kueh bangkit* (coconut-flavored cookies) [5], *kueh dodol* (sweet toffee-like confection), *kueh karas* (net cake), and *kueh wajik* (palm sugar glutinous rice cakes) [8]. Peranakans claimed *kueh koci*, a famous Penang dessert made of glutinous rice flour and filled with grated coconut and palm sugar before it is wrapped in banana leaves, to be related to them although it is also a popular Malay *kueh* [5]. Other *kuehs* are *pulot*



Fig. 3. Banana steam cake (Nyonya style). A steam cake made from banana, flour, sugar and coconut. This cake is normally served at breakfast time. It is one of the favorites among Malaysians.

tatai (steamed blue glutinous rice cakes), *kueh sarlat* (or *kuih seri muka/gadang galoh*; glutinous rice cakes with pandan custard layer), *kueh koswee* (or *kuih kosui*; steamed palm sugar cakes) [43], *huat kueh* (steamed rice cakes), *kow chan kueh* (or *kuih lapis*; 9-layer steamed cakes) [41], *kueh talam* (steamed tray cake), *kueh tart* (or *kueh tair*; pineapples tarts), *ondeh* (glutinous rice balls with palm sugar), banana steam cake (Fig. 3) and *bubur cha* [31]. *Pulut tatai* is rather similar to *kueh sarlat*, which has two layers [43] (Fig. 3).

In Malaysia, chendol is a popular street food as well. It is offered in restaurants and hawker centers and served as a dessert. Based on the type of sugar used, chendol taste may differ. Besides, freshly squeezed coconut milk is known to provide a better taste to chendol (Fig. 4).

Nyonyas also make extensive use of natural coloring in their cuisine [5]. The blue color is obtained from *bunga telang* (butterfly pea/blue pea flower) [5] by boiling the dried flowers in a pot. This unusual color can be detected in *pulut tatai*, *pulut inti* (glutinous rice cakes with sweet coconut), and *nasi kerabu* (herbed rice). Another popular color green is derived from *pandan serani* leaves, which produce a darker green hue than that provided by the widely grown *pandan* leaves [5]. The countless indigenous sources of food coloring are essential for creating the rich and renowned *Nyonya kuehs* [5]. Despite all these, the convenience of commercial artificial coloring is quickly replacing the use of natural coloring [5].

3.2. Ceremonial food

Food has a special place in Peranakan communities whereby kinship is prized above all other things [25]. It is not just a mean of curbing hunger and getting nutrients into the body but the *joie de vivre* of the creolized Chinese as it forms a bridge to the past and imparts a sense of belonging, bonding them to their families. These localized Chinese presumed that one must never underestimate the power of food for alliances, friendships, and also marriages, as these have been established and destroyed by the distinction of a person's culinary skill [44]. The symbolism of this cuisine remains traditionally Chinese despite its localization [5].

According to the Peranakan context, food serves three main functions [3]: as offerings to the deities and ancestors, to seal vows, and as an indicator of social relations—to celebrate marriages and the many seasons and festivals. Although Malay culture such as food, dress, language, and customs (*adat*) are embraced, keeping certain Chinese traditions, especially their Chinese identity and religion, are still paramount to the Peranakans. In particular, Chinese religion remains a part and parcel Chinese way of life, a relic from an ancient past bought by their ancestors: Taoism and



Fig. 4. Nyonya chendol. A mixture of crushed ice, coconut milk, palm sugar, pandan-flavored chendol (the green ingredient), and nuts.

Buddhism, nature spirit, and ancestors are highly revered by this group. Worshipping *Ti Kong* (God of Heaven) and other deities as well as ancestral worship are part of Taoist rituals.

3.2.1. Birthdays

The early Peranakans did not believe in yearly birthdays. They believed that there were only two days in one's lifetime, which were worth celebrating: 1st month of life (*mua guek*, meaning full moon) and 61st birthday (*tua sae jit*, meaning grand birthday). Nevertheless, these 2 days are still celebrated with much grandeur to date. Month-old babies will have their first haircut and be dressed in fine clothes before they are introduced to their ancestors for the first time, by worshipping at the family altar. In a Malaccan Peranakan family, the father of the newborn child will give out an even number of *kueh ku* and an equal number of *telor merah* (red-dyed hard-boiled eggs), which illustrates bliss and abundance [45]. In addition to these two items, the northern Peranakans also hand out *nasi kunyit* (turmeric rice) and chicken curry [19,45]. The food is distributed after a prayer of thanks to *Ti Kong* and other deities. Shapes of the *kueh ku* distributed will allow the guests to know the sex of the baby: tortoise shape represents a boy, whereas peach shape means a girl [45].

Despite one's achievement, it is only on his/her 61st birthday that he/she is considered to have lived a full life. On this singular day, the patriarchs and matriarchs will be presented with three dishes that are a must. They are *mee suah* (fine rice noodles known as "rice vermicelli"), which are kept as long as possible to signify longevity [26]. It is served in syrup with hard-boiled eggs to rejoice in the fertility for many generations [26] along with *kueh ee* (or *kuih ih*; glutinous rice balls in syrup) to celebrate life's sweetness. After that, there will be the *tok panjang* (a long table for fine dining) feast where the family's repertoire of favorite dishes will be served [19] including *mee sua tau* (vermicelli soup) [46]. During these happy occasions of weddings and birthdays, *sebkak* (braised pork) and *babi masak assam* (tamarind stewed pork) are eaten too. Some families also serve *nasi lemak* (coconut milk rice), *nasi ulam*, *udang goreng asam*, *ikan goreng asam* (fried fish with tamarind paste), and *sambal udang petai* (prawns with stinky beans *sambal*). *Ayam masak buah keluak* is also served, although initially it is a *laok semayang* (ceremonial prayer food), due to its popularity [47]. Sweet desserts, namely *chendol* (a dessert made of coconut milk and rice flour jelly with shaved ice and palm sugar) and *taibak* (red-white rice noodles in syrup) are also present on the *tok panjang* [47].

3.2.2. Weddings

The elaborate wedding ritual of the Peranakans is a mixture of Malay and Chinese cultures, namely, matchmaking, wedding preparations, *sang ee* (or *sang ih*; personal invitation), *Hari Kupas Bawang* (onion peeling day), *Hari Menyambal* (*sambal* cooking day), *Hari Tumbok Tepung* (pounding flour day), *lap chye* (engagement day), and *an ch'ng* (blessing the bridal bed) [13]. *Sang ee* is the day where friends and relatives are officially invited as well as a signal for the official wedding preparations to commence and this event occurs 6 days before the wedding. The term *sang* and *ee* means "to present" and "a herald of matrimonial bliss," respectively [19]. Male relatives will be given red and white *kueh ee*, the red for luck and white for purity.

The roundness of the *kueh ee* represents whole-hearted joy and their sticky nature promises the togetherness of the couple. The sweetness of the syrup soup is to ensure a sweet relationship between the couple [26]. After *sang ee*, there is the *Hari Kupas Bawang*, which is held 2 days later. On this day, friends and relatives will get together to peel onions, garlands, and other spices, which will be used to cook the wedding dishes. The day after, a sweet appetizer is prepared from soybean in spices and it will be handed out to

friends and relatives, along with the sweet rice flour balls in syrup. *Hari Menyambal* begins 3 days before the wedding and many varieties of *sambal* are produced. The day after is the *Hari Tumbok Tepung*, during which rice is milled, sorted, soaked, milled, and lastly pounded in wooden mortars [26].

On the eve of the auspicious day, the family of the bride and bridegroom will host lunch and dinner for their own guests. This occasion is known as *chia lang keh* or banquet for the guests and it is usually held at their respective houses. Lunch is intended for ladies while the men will be invited to dinner. Lunch is served in communal style on *tok panjang*, a long table. By contrast, dinners are more formal and Chinese in style whereby the foods will be served on a circular dining table [19]. According to Gwee [48], there are three categories of dishes served on the *tok panjang*: *laok mangkok* (soups), *laok pinggan besar* (food presented on large plates), and *laok piring* (side dishes as well as appetizers).

On the wedding day, the newlyweds are served with a bowl of red and white *kueh ee*, which signifies sweet blessings [19,26]. The remaining *kueh ee* that have been prepared will be placed under the bridal bed and will not be removed until the 12th day of the wedding. The newlyweds will carry out the *makan choon tok* (eating at the spring table) tradition, which is the first meal in which the couple participate as husband and wife. A spread of 12 types of food will be prepared for the occasion [19]. Some of the wedding dishes are *bakwan kepiting* (crab meat ball soup), *hee ploh* soup, and chicken cooked in various styles: *sambal*, roast or curry [47]. The feast also includes *otak-otak*, *sambal jantung pisang* (banana “heart” salad), and another more economical version *sambal timun* (cucumber salad), whereas the original version has sliced *samchien bak* (pork belly) and even chicken parts [47]. On the 3rd day (*sah jit* or *tiga hari*), the bride, together with some elder Nyonyas will pay a visit to her in-laws. Gifts or foods such as sweet glutinous rice cakes and rice dumplings are exchanged between the two families, which will later be presented to relatives [26].

The finale of the ceremony is known as the *chia ching kay* or *chia che uhm*, a dinner party thrown by the bridegroom for his parents-in-law. All close family members who have assisted the wedding during the past 12 days are also invited to the celebration [19]. *Nasi kebuli* (spicy steamed rice dish) is presented at the closing of the 12-day celebration in Malacca with other fares such as *terong pacheli* (brinjal curry), *kormak* (chicken curry), and *sekbak* [47]. *Nasi kebuli* is a brownish spicy rice adopted from the Malays who borrowed it from the Arabs and is a notable *tok panjang* delicacy served at weddings in Malacca [47]. The Peranakans make stock using *tulang babi* (pork bones) to prepare the rice, which is cooked with a bag of spices that is made up of *kayu manis*, *bunga chingkeh*, and *buah pelaga* [47]. Instead of this piquant rice, *nasi lemak* is served in Singapore [47].

3.2.3. Chinese New Year

The Chinese New Year, which is the 1st day of the year according to the Chinese Lunar Year, is celebrated with much splendor by Peranakan families. On the eve of the festival, they will gather for reunion dinner at their home as such practice is thought to strengthen the family bond. *Chap chye* is normally served on the morning of Chinese New Year to assist digestion after the grand feast the day before. The main ingredient of the dish is cabbage and dried foods such as black mushrooms, *bok jee*, *kim chiam*, *taukee*, and sometimes *tanghoon*. Nyonyas spice the Hokkien dish with sautéed *tautcheo* and garlic, as well as *samchien bak*, prawns, and fish balls [37].

Other main dishes served on the *tok panjang* during the meaningful day are *ayam masak buah keluak*, *ayam panggang*, *hati babi bungkus* (wrapped pig's liver/pork liver balls), *hee pio* soup, *pong tauhu* (tofu ball soup), *bakwan kepiting*, chicken curry, *ngo*

hiang (5-spice flavored minced meat roll), *sambal timun*, and *itek tim* (braised duck soup, known to the Teochews as *kiam chai arp*, salted vegetable duck) [37,39,49]. These myriad fares are accompanied by *sambal belachan*, *chili chuka* (vinegared chilli), and *achar* (spicy mixed vegetable prickles), which will be placed around different parts of the table [39].

For this important celebration, the auspicious *kueh bakol* (*ti kueh* in Hokkien), a sticky caramel-colored cake of Chinese origin wrapped with banana leaves is made [39]. The *kueh bakol* has to have a perfect texture [39] as they are offered to the Kitchen God 1 week before the New Year when he ascends to the heaven to report on a family's behavior to *Ti Kong*, the Jade Emperor [50]. As the emperor will punish or reward the families according to the report he received, the sweet cake functions to seal the mouth of the Kitchen God and to bribe him into giving a pleasant report to the emperor.

Kueh bakol is never served to friends and relatives on the first few days of the New Year as it is removed from the altar only on the 4th day of the New Year when the Kitchen God descends to the Earth [50]. It is served alongside *kueh bangkit* (coconut cookies), *kueh koya* (mung bean cookies), *kueh bengka* (baked tapioca cakes), *kueh belanda* (love letters), *kueh bolu* (similar to French madeleines), and *kueh tart* among others [5,19,39,51]. The cakes and cookies are presented to guests on a sweetmeat tray [51]. The cigar-shaped *kueh belanda*, another sacred offering, is a must in the celebration and its recipe was believed to be handed down to local Indonesians during the Portuguese and Dutch rules [19].

On the 9th day of Chinese New Year, the Peranakans will celebrate *Ti Kong Seh*, which literally means the birthday of the Jade Emperor. The natives of Fujian Province of olden times believed that *Ti Kong* saved them from the wrath of an evil wizard and made offerings of thanksgiving and this tradition continues to this day [52]. It is the most important spring festival for the Hokkien but it is also widely celebrated by the Buddhist and Taoists Chinese in Malaysia. Symbolic *kuehs* and fruits will be placed on the three-tiered altar structure on this special day [52]. Sugarcane plants with leaves and roots uncut will be tied to the left and right of the tall structure and a *kueh bakol* will be placed among plates of mandarin oranges at the foremost position of the altar [52]. Both the plants and sweet cake signify longevity, whereas the oranges epitomize peace and harmony [52]. The chief offerings comprise three cups of Chinese tea and three tiny bowls of *mee sua* in syrup [52].

For good luck, local fruits such as *pisang raja* (the best variety of bananas), pineapple, and *huat kueh* are also presented to the Gods. The sacred *lemoh jari* (Buddha's hand citron) is another essential fruit that is considered to bring blessings. Other traditional steamed cakes offered can include *kueh ku merah*, *kueh pitis*, *kueh ang pao*, and *kueh bantal*, which are all red in color [52]. The well-known oval-shaped *kueh ku merah*, which has the Chinese word for tortoise on it symbolizes longevity as tortoises are believed to live for 100 years or more. *Kueh pitis* is the elongated shape of five Chinese coins placed in a row representing wealth. Meanwhile, *kueh ang pao* and *kueh bantal* (pillow cake) are made of wheat flour without any fillings, signifying good luck or prosperity [52]. All the fruits and cakes on the altar are then consumed by family members for good luck, good health, peace, and harmony throughout the year [52].

Sitting on the altar is also a richly lacquered wooden box in black and gold named *chanap*, whereby three skewers of *bunga chanab* are mounted to the box [52,53]. Lee [53] believed that the old Malaccan Peranakans invented the term *chanap* from the Hokkien term *chien harp* (*chien* refers to candy preserve while *hup* means a box). The “flowers” are deftly carved from fruits, specifically papaya, pineapple, and *lemo keya* (a cherry-like red citrus fruit)

before they are preserved in heavy syrup [52,53]. In olden times, the offerings encompassed sweet-preserved fruit from China: dried red dates, candied winter melon, dried white fungus, dried longans in addition to dried persimmons [53]. Later, the artistic Peranakans fashioned motifs of flowers and birds from papayas and alternating the *bunga chanap* with triangles of pineapple cuts and *lemo kekya* [53]. This candy box, which represents peace and harmony, is typically used for prayers in joyous festivities like Lunar New Year, *Ti Kong she*, and weddings. Nevertheless, it may appear at funerals but without the red flowers on the tip of each skewer to signify mourning [53].

3.2.4. Ancestral worship

Ancestral worship is a manner to honor one's elders through filial piety. In the past, *thia abu* (ancestral hall) was normally devoted to the ancestors of the family. The matriarch of the family, aided by her female kin will run the household and make sure that the altars are attended regardless of whether it is a normal day or a feast day. However, this practice is almost obscure nowadays as many Peranakans have converted to Christianity during the European colonial expansion and the ensuing war [17,50], while other families have ceased to conserve the shrines due to lack of time and money. Although there are still some who uphold the tradition, the offerings have been reduced to a marginal level [50]. Prayers are generally conducted six times a year. They are *Semayang Siki* on death anniversaries of the ancestors, *Semayang Cheng Beng* on All Souls' Day (better known as *Qing Ming* or in Hokkien, *Cheng Beng*), *Semayang Bulan Tuju* on Hungry Ghost festival in the 7th month of Chinese lunar calendar, *Semayang Taon Baru* on the eve of Chinese New Year, and *Semayang Kueh Chang* and *Semayang Tang Chek* on 22nd December to usher Winter Solstice Festival.

On feast days or special occasions, the Peranakans will offer *laok semayang* to their ancestors. The altar will be covered with red cloth and food offerings will be placed on it, with lighting candles and burning joss sticks. In the kitchen, there will be an altar dedicated to the Kitchen God [26]. According to Tan [50], there are 12 kinds of essential *laok semayang*, namely, *itek tim*, *ayam buah keluak*, *kari ayam* (chicken curry), *pong tauhu* (bean curd balls in a soup flavored with *taucheo*, or fermented soybean paste), *babi pong teh* or *babi chin* (stewed pig's trotters or pork belly in *taucheo*), *cha tih* (stir-fried pig's lungs), *hati babi bungkus*, *kuah perot babi* (pig's stomach soup), *chap chye/chap chai*, *itek sio*, *bakwan kepiting*, and lastly *sop perot kambing* (goat's stomach soup). There are innumerable dishes cooked from all parts of a pig because old Hokkien customs dictated that the pig for offering must be whole and complete with its internal organs [50]. Despite the aforesaid dishes, the ceremonial foods may differ among the Peranakan families [50].

When worshipping ancestors on special occasions, a few whole raw cabbage leaves are arranged in a big bowl to form a receptacle and the cooked *chap chye* will be poured into it without any cooked cabbage. With the addition of cabbage, carrot, and *bakwan* (pork balls), the ritually significant dish *chap chye* is renamed as *chap chye chin*, with the added Hokkien term *chin* meaning close relationship, especially among family members [9]. Cabbage symbolizes unity as it is known as *pau chye* to the Malaysian and Singaporean Hokkiens, and *pau* means *to surround*. After the rituals, the raw cabbage in the bowl is sliced and boiled with the cooked *chap chye* before serving [9]. The dish can be made as an offering to a Buddhist deity like the Goddess of Mercy. One of the ingredients, *kim chiam* or dried lily buds, are always tied in pairs before cooking for such practice, and signifies "togetherness" or family harmony [9].

The darkish *babi pongteh* is also associated with ancestral worship [47]. It is an essential item of offering on death anniversaries, Hungry Ghost Festival during the 7th Chinese month, and All Souls' Day [5]. Although the sacrificial dish can be cooked for daily

consumption, it is not suitable for auspicious festivities such as a weddings and birthdays [5,9,48]. *Babi chin*, also known as *bah chin*, is another variation of *babi pongteh* but without the use of *ketumbar* in its production [5]. Tan [4] suggested that the term *chin* may carry the meaning of unity, as used in *chap chye chin*.

Ayam pongteh or *ayam chin*, which uses chicken instead of pork is sometimes served to replace *babi pongteh* and *babi chin*. *Kuah perot babi* or its Hokkien name *tee toh tng* is made by cooking pieces of pig's stomach or intestines in peppery broth embellished with Ginkgo nuts [4]. Another dish of pork is *chabe*, probably derived from the Hokkien word *chia-bah*, which means lean meat. As with many Nyonya dishes, the lean pork is cooked with *taucheo*, ginger, and garlic [4]. Unlike the Chinese, Peranakans seldom offer seafood to the ancestors, except for dried cuttlefish. Despite the rarity of fish dishes, an example worthy of mention is *ikan haruan masak lemak kuning*, a Malay dish in which *haruan*, a local Malaysian carp, is cooked in coconut milk and turmeric [4].

A total of eight appetizers are conventionally presented. These are chosen from a range of pickles as well as from drier-cooked dishes. The list of pickled vegetables encompasses *achar timun* (pickled cucumber), *achar chilli hijau* (pickled green chilies), *achar chilli merah* (pickled red chilies), *achar lobak merah* (pickled carrots), *luak chai* (pickled mustard greens), *lobak manis* (pickled white radish), and *chukka alia* (ginger vinegar) [4,50]. The drier fares can be made up of *udang goreng asam*, fried *ikan tenggiri* (mackerel), Chinese-style *suana char lapcheong* (leeks fried with Chinese sausage), and *tauhu char* (fried bean curd) [4,50]. *Char mee* or fried yellow noodle is also another notable offering as it symbolizes longevity [4].

A Peranakan funeral is a grand affair and can last from 1 week to 1 month and blue color is closely related with this occasion. Therefore, it is not surprising that the *kuehs* distributed during the event were blue and white in color served in porcelain with blue–white motifs. Besides, *Nyonya mee* is also distributed during funeral wakes [47]. The last postdeath ritual is *Bikin dua taon* (2nd-year rite), which is somewhat inferior to *Bikin satu taon* (1st-year rite) as it lacks grandeur with the absence of religious specialist but with more offerings [4]. Besides the aforementioned dishes, the most crucial offering, however, is the *sam seng* (Hokkien terms, meaning three sacrificial meats) placed in the center of the front row facing the worshippers.

It comprises a piece of blanched pork arranged in the center, flanked on its left by a whole steamed duck, and on its right by a whole steamed chicken with the head and feet of both birds being intact [50]. As neatness is always a priority to the Nyonyas, the feet are tucked properly into the body of the birds [50]. According to Tan [4], the pork cut should be a chunk of pig's leg as an indication that the offering is made by the deceased's son. The head of a pig is offered by married daughters and their husbands only in the 1st-year rite. Nevertheless, the more common version of pork is 0.31 meters long and 0.05 meters thick of *samchien bak* [50]. Apart from the three meat dishes, different households may also add dissimilar toppings on the chicken or pork and other accompaniments such as a round piece of dried noodle, a piece of *ju hi kering* (dried cuttlefish), a piece of fried fish, steamed crab, or even a plate of fowl's gizzard, liver, and heart [4,50].

Various *kuehs* and fruits are also served on the offering table. As the ceremony marks the end of mourning, red *kueh ku* is allowed to be presented. Apart from the red *kueh ku* as well as its brighter variants, black *ku* is also dished out and even more frequently during the Hungry Ghost Festival. According to Tan [4], the black color is extracted from ramie plant (*rami* in Malay). Four pieces of mooncakes are offered if the Mid-Autumn Festival is approaching [4]. Imported fruits such as oranges and apples are common favorites as the bright color of oranges as well as its Chinese name

depict wealth, good luck, and prosperity, whereas the Chinese word of apple *ping* is homonymous with the word for peace [4].

Sugarcanes and combs of *pisang raja* ("king" bananas) served alongside the *sam seng* are also symbolic to the Peranakans. The sweetness and the length of the sugarcane are used by the Peranakans to represent a sweet and long life. In the case of *pisang raja*, *raja* means king in Malay, which translates as *ong* in Hokkien, also signifying prosperity. Further, *Cheng Beng* or All Souls' Day, which falls on the 3rd month of the lunar calendar and usually coincides with April, is also a very important day to the Peranakans. It is a day to remember and honor one's ancestors at altars and grave site, which is an indication of filial piety [54]. After giving thanks and seeking blessings from the ancestors at the grave site, the whole family will enjoy the foods, which signify reunion with the ancestors [54].

3.2.5. Dragon Boat Festival

To commemorate the Dragon Boat Festival (also known as *Kuih Chang Festival*), which is observed on the 5th day of the 5th month on the lunar calendar, the Peranakans will spend time to make dumplings. Unlike those made by the Chinese, Nyonya *chang* or *kueh chang manis* (sweet dumpling) is sweeter and less salty due to the presence of preserved winter melon strips and soybean paste, which are very Chinese ingredients [9,26]. The filling in Nyonya dumplings is similar to those made by the Chinese Hokkiens, and is usually finely chopped pork, giving its popular name *bah chang* (pork dumpling).

The dumpling has also another equivalent name, which is *kuih chang bah*. The Hokkien terms *chang* and *bah* refer to the dumpling and meat, respectively [9]. Before the dumpling is wrapped in *daun pandan* [19], it is seasoned with *ketumbar*, a crucial ingredient in South Asian and Malay cooking, which makes it distinctively Peranakan [9]. The Nyonyas also make the plain and meatless *kuih chang abu* (ash dumpling), which is dipped in melted *gula Melaka*. The yellowish tint of the dumpling is obtained from *kee*, an ash solution made from burning dried, grounded durian skin [9,26]. The *kee* is used by the Nyonyas to replace the lye solution used in those made by non-Peranakans [9]. Sometimes, parts of the *kuih chang* are stained with blue dye, which is extracted from dried *bunga telang* [19].

3.3. Culinary Eclipse

The halcyon age of the Peranakans was believed to span for almost a century, between 1830 and 1920. Nevertheless, their glory and affluence persisted into the 1940s until before the Japanese invasion into Malaya and Singapore during the Second World War [13]. These loyal British people could not bring themselves to support the Japanese, and hence, they parted with their heirlooms to gain monies for survival. The brief conflict also spelled the demise of Peranakan supremacy in the Straits Settlements, as many Peranakan menfolk were executed by the Japanese in the Sook Ching massacre. To protect the virtues of the young Nyonyas who had lost their male family members and fortunes, the women were forced to marry non-Peranakans. The long tradition was broken up, and thus began the dilution of the culture and the dwindling numbers of community [13].

Although it was widely claimed that the war caused the downfall of the Peranakans, Yusof et al [13] argued that the decline of their wealth and status had already begun during the Great Depression when tin and rubber became valueless and they lost much of the wealth they amassed, although they managed to recover their wealth later. Later on, there was the First World War, which greatly affected the country's economy. The paralyzed economy compounded by the obligation of the Peranakans to make

donation to support their colonial master bankrupted some families [13].

After the Second World War, the Peranakans regained some of their wealth but not their privileges [13]. They lost colonial British support with the ensuing Malayan independence. With the British retreating from Malaya's political scene, they lost their influence and their massive wealth [26] as the younger generation squandered away their inheritance. Traditional Peranakan families began to open up and became more tolerant to changes [13]. The belief that women should not work was eliminated. Some families abandoned the Chinese religion that was once so deeply rooted in their way of life; and with the passing of the elderly individuals, there was a gradual rise in the numbers of Peranakans who embraced Christianity in the hope of finding strength through the Gospel during the difficult period [13].

Simplification of some elaborate customs was evident, especially with respect to the 12-day wedding rituals. The ceremonies were paid by selling off the estates of their ancestors in accordance with their will, but as the estates had been liquidated, the funds were no longer available and the opportunity for such gatherings and feasts no longer existed [3]. All these events took place in a short span of 20 years [13]. As the political justification for their separate existence disappeared, the Peranakans were left to express themselves through nonthreatening manifestations of their culture such as food, attire, and architecture. Such expressions are harder to sustain as it requires *esprit de corps* of the group [55].

The independence of Malaysia and Singapore significantly weakened the special privileges of the Peranakans as well as their sense of identity. The decision of Malaysian and Singaporean governments to classify their citizens into the rigid Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Others categorization further obscured the heterogeneity of the society [56]. Peranakans in Singapore are stereotyped as Chinese minority and are labeled as such in identification cards. They also study Mandarin Chinese as second language in schools [25]. Their counterpart in Malaysia is required to master the Malay language. In the 21st century, the Peranakans of Malaysia and Singapore face the dilemma of declining traditions, a fading dialect, and the mounting number of mixed marriages.

Peranakans are greatly outnumbered by the Chinese community and their culture is still diluting as the century progresses. The further decrement of their numbers is due to the "intermarriage" between Peranakans and Chinese and their offspring are more inclined to adopt a Chinese identity rather than that of Peranakans [8]. It is believed the large population of Chinese and the social advantage of being one of them caused such tendency to occur. Modernization has also taken a toll on Peranakan cooking. Families tend to become smaller and they live in smaller houses with less spacious kitchens; besides, higher cost of living and working mothers play a part in wiping out the tradition of communal home cooking. The womenfolk have to join the workforce to support the family, and therefore they will be too occupied to learn the tedious Nyonya art of cooking [35]. These conditions also perpetuate the erosion of sense of identity in younger Peranakans [22] and further lead to a dying culture.

The great changes in the culture give a vague look to the future. With the pressure of globalization, people tend to integrate their cultures, turning them into an analogous culture, which can be applied to everyone. Such trend is damaging to the indigenous culture as old practices will be sacrificed if one is to adopt the values of a different nature. Culture is changing at a tremendous speed, and hence it is not surprising if one can detect cultural differences between his or her generation with the previous generation. Aside from the fluidity of culture, education is becoming more accessible to everyone and not just the privileged. Armed with a good education, people are able to choose from a variety of job

opportunities, which require less hardship. Thus, few are willing to learn the labor-intensive art and the art is lost when the elders pass away. The younger generations are also less appreciative of the traditional food compared with the elders due to their different core values as well as exposure to foreign media, which extoll Western cuisine.

4. Contemporary Nyonya food culture

4.1. Rediscovery of Peranakan culture: identity marker, cookbooks, and restaurants

Since the 1980s, the Peranakan culture is starting to gain attention from the public, especially those in Singapore. It is undeniable that the few outstanding cultural markers encountered by the people in their daily lives, especially the conspicuous cuisine and the intricately sewn *kebayas*, have sparked this collective attention and praise. The gradual realization of the prior existence of this great heritage has lent a hand to what many believed to be a “Peranakan Revival” [57]. Cookbooks started to enter the market and their presence is gaining considerable attention in the past 3 decades. They are an indispensable tool in rescuing the heritage from oblivion as they pave a way for cultural reproduction, preservation as well as reinvention.

Thus, it is natural that many Nyonya cookbooks are produced by descendants with Peranakan ancestry [58,59], with many of them being chefs and restaurateurs specializing in Nyonya cuisine. One of the earliest Peranakan cookbooks was *Mrs Lee Cookbook* and the authoress was Mrs Lee Chin Koon, mother of Singapore founding father, Lee Kuan Yew. She documented the “art” of Nyonya cooking as she feared that the cooking will vanish in time due to the ongoing social and cultural changes [32]. Her qualms were spurred by the fact that women spend minimal time on domestic cooking and that the secrets of the cooking are no longer passed to the young [60].

Another equally defining cookbook was written by her sister, Mrs Leong Yee Soo, which is entitled *Singaporean Cooking* and it embodies the cooking of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Eurasians in addition to Peranakan fare [61]. With the flowering number of media and literature, the once closely guarded secrets are made known to the world in an attempt to salvage the heritage. In both Malaysia and Singapore, a considerable amount of culinary literature [9], which aims to stimulate public interest, has graced the shelves in the past 3 decades and mostly in the past 2. Duruz [62] also cited intimacy between neighbors, family bonds, and family-style business relationships, which include employment, as other ways of sharing the cuisine’s secret. There are also innovative cookbooks such as Sylvia Tan’s *Modern Nyonya*, whereby the elaborate dishes are much simplified and thus require shorter preparation time while retaining the richness of the cuisine [63].

In the 1980s and 1990s, the government of Singapore felt the need to preserve the cultural heritage of the country as a part of their nation building project. They realized the importance of creating a national heritage, which its populace can relate to through their shared values. They found the ultimate answer in the Peranakan culture and the latter has since been hailed as the “indigenous” culture of the island that comprises the national heritage of the Singaporeans [55]. Therefore, it is not surprising that the cuisine is declared the indigenous cuisine of the nation [55]. Apart from stimulating a sense of national identity among the people, the coherent national culture can be a source of attraction to international tourists [55].

Around the early 2000s, the renaissance of the culture reached an exponential point. Peranakan-themed publications entered the market in rapid succession on countless other subjects: history,

architecture, porcelain, furniture, dress, jewelry, family genealogies [64], and even in a dictionary. Besides the surging numbers of written materials [65,66], the female-orientated cuisine has transferred from household kitchens to restaurants [67]. Food and eating have become a fashionable business in the modernized age, which is evidenced by fiercely contested markets in about everything associated with food, from books, magazines, and television programs to restaurants [68]. This novel social phenomenon gives an edge to the Peranakans in their bid to use their cuisine to perpetuate their culture.

The fame of the cuisine began in the 1980s with the commercialization of the fare [42]. Initially, the delicacies are sold in *kopi-tiams* (coffee shops), wet markets, hawker centers, “economy rice” stalls, *chu char* places [31], and *pasar malams* (night markets). These establishments cleverly manipulate the cultural richness in Malaysia by fusing Nyonya foods into the repertoire of Malaysian cuisine, selling it alongside Malay, Chinese, and Indian cuisines. Family-run Nyonya restaurants are also fast emerging into the scene, driven by the urge to perpetuate the Peranakans heritage and identity through the cuisine [27]. The colorful *Nyonya kuehs*, *laksa*, *otak-otak*, and *kerabu* are also highly sought-after commodities in major hotels [8,11] and high-end shopping malls. Moreover, a remarkable number of new Nyonya restaurants are escalating in enclaves such as Hereen Street, Jonker Street, Melaka Raya [34], and Tengker in Malacca as well as in Georgetown, Penang—the food capital of Malaysia [69].

Hereen Street and Jonker Street were once two residential enclaves built by the Dutch, whereby the first one was for the rich and the second for the poor. The *Kampung Belanda* (Dutch village) was refurbished by the Peranakans who took possession of the place after the departure of the Dutch [13]. The rise of these establishments marked the transition of Nyonya cuisine into commercialization, thus signifying its change of role—from a main cultural aspect of celebrations and a sign of wealth to a means to propagate a fading culture by the persistent and resourceful Peranakans [70]. On July 8, 2008, Malacca and Georgetown are fortunate to have their names etched on United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s World Heritage List. Such recognition will undoubtedly boost the value of the two towns and encourage more tourist arrivals, which will lead to a rise in businesses should the opportunity be well used.

Quick-paced lifestyle and affluence of consumers, especially those from established societies, are reasons that solidify the position of eateries and restaurants [71]. Foodies who love the food but are reluctant to prepare them due to the time constraints will be drawn to the restaurants that serve the food they enjoy. Consumers are also always pursuing artistic and diverse products and services. Thus, “foreignness” of the culture has become another force that enables foodservice and tourism industry to flourish [55]. Kwon [72] argued that these people tend to seek food that comes with history, which explained the amplified interest in slow food. Ironically, restaurants can, in certain ways, act as a vassal in arousing intense interest in the Peranakan food culture. The dishes they offered may sometimes provide tempting recipe ideas for serious food aficionados who become familiar with the cuisine and try to bring it to ordinary household tables.

Restaurateurs also enhance the image of their restaurants to emphasize the Peranakan heritage and identity by manipulating Peranakan iconography. This included the use of Peranakan names, design characteristics, and incorporation of Peranakan images on the facades of the shops. To capture the allure of the past, restaurateurs use everyday objects once used by the Peranakans such as old wooden doors and window panes, kitchenware, carved teak beds, dining table as well as rustic chairs. Other adornments one might also see are traditional wedding sedan, traditional beadwork,

old batik printing molds as well as old photographs. One can also find antique *object d' arts* such as classic F&N bottles and biscuits in golden-colored metal tong. Some eateries also take the initiatives to create corner-selling souvenirs with Peranakan-related themes [20]. In Singapore, there is even a restaurant featuring a mannequin draped in *baju kebaya* and *sarong* [27]. The fabricated ambience in restaurants is far from being meaningless as the cultural heritage featured is functioned to stage authenticity [73].

Despite all the attempts of food entrepreneurs to authenticate the foods that are delivered in a historically staged environment, there are limitations. Over the years, Nyonya cuisine has undergone cultural continuity [5]. Nevertheless, the latter can only be observed through cultural principles as the content shaped by the principles are always shifting [5]. Tan [5] argued that food is void of a traditional form for it changes with time although it is assumed to possess one. Thus, it is difficult to put an authentic label on food. The term *authenticity* is described by Wang [74] as traditional culture and origin, a sense of the genuine, the real, or the unique. Different people are unlikely to produce the same dishes given the identical recipes, which can be interpreted as cultural principles due to their skills and method of adaptation of the principles [5]. Therefore, the term seems to be far fletched in reality. Robert [75] commented that to label a food as authentic is a challenging decision as culture is always evolving and to fix a food into the authentic category would mean that any change to it will not be welcomed and this would hinder the development of culture.

Besides the variations of food produced by the cultural agents, the “trial-and-error” method usually applied in the Peranakan kitchen in the bygone days is unsuitable for the proliferation of commercial businesses [27], which demand standardization and speed. Moreover, the continuous and inevitable modernization gives rise to on-going inventions of novel technologies, which save time and energy. Therefore, primitive and inconvenient cooking utensils are forsaken to make way for contemporary kitchen tools such as grinders and electric blenders and such incidence can be seen in the replacement of the nonporous granite *batu lesong* (mortar and pestle) [27].

The *batu lesong* was once essential for crushing, pounding, grinding, or pulverizing chilies, garlic, shallots, herbs, and spices to extract their essences and to form different pastes (*rempah*) whereby the latter are integral ingredients in creating Nyonya cuisine [5,26,27,76]. Lye [47] remarked that the juice of chilies does not exude after blending, and therefore, the *sambal* produced from this process will be very different from those produced by pounding where the juice exudes naturally. This argument is supported by Langgat et al [77] who discovered that alteration of cooking style and time of a native food will produce a fairly different taste. The shorter cooking time and simpler way of preparing the dishes will surely make a person think that the quality of food has been altered. By contrast, Lim [26] thought that authenticity is a matter of subjectivity. Nevertheless, some restaurateurs are inclined to employ Peranakan cooks or family members if they have the same ethnicity as the food so that the food served is as close as possible to the authentic label [27].

As previously mentioned, restaurants also have a more prominent role by being cultural ambassadors, which help to entice tourists to the host country. A tourist has not truly savored authentic local experience if he or she has not consumed the cuisine of the natives. Henderson [22] found that Western tourists in Singapore had little knowledge of Peranakans or most of them had not visited Katong district. Nevertheless, a brief exposure of the culture quickly piqued their interest in learning more about the culture as well as paying a visit to Katong to sample its offerings. As long as the tourists continue to be attracted by images of the

Peranakan culture, there will always be a market for this cuisine, regardless of whether it is authentic or modernized.

4.2. The reinvention of Nyonya Cuisine beyond the seas

Nyonya food, an epitome of home cooking is not only borrowed by hawker stalls, food courts, restaurants, etc. within the borders of its country of origin but also by people beyond the boundaries. In the cosmopolitan culinary world, food and culture can rapidly diffuse through the porous borders [78]. Food is a magnificent tool to portray globalization because it emphasizes on the connections between people, cultures, and places [15,79]. As people enter a new territory, they bring along some part of their heritage with them. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Nyonya food journeys beyond Southeast Asia when Peranakans and non-Peranakan Chinese migrate to other countries [60].

Immigrants from Malaysia and Singapore open restaurants to sell their traditional food to reconnect them with their homelands and identity. It is widely acknowledged that ethnic restaurants serve natives of their birthplace by providing familiar local food they intensely seek, as food is a representation of their identity [1]. Food is a strong symbol of personal and group identity as it instills a sense of individuality and common membership in a larger bounded group [15]. Besides providing a space for the migrants to dwell in their tradition, the production of Nyonya food in a different setting strengthens cultural continuity. Restaurants can also function as a gathering place for immigrants of the same ethnicity. In a nutshell, restaurants provide familiar food away from their original territory and reproduce the food for the consumption of immigrants in a foreign setting, and thus reinforce their ethnicity [73].

The wave of globalization makes traveling easier and cheaper, and thus cultivates migration. The phenomenon also promotes international trade as well as quick transmission of ethnic food through all possible technologies and media available and turns tourism industries into lucrative businesses. Thus, knowledge on ethnic food can be disseminated without much difficulty. When a food is being “detached” from its place of existence and is “reattached” to a new environment, it is known as ethnic food and its “foreign” quality will give it a novelty status [78]. In a larger context, ethnic food is a cuisine belonging to an ethnic group or a country that is culturally and socially acknowledged by consumers outside the boundaries of the homeland of the food [72]. In a narrower sense, the term encompasses food that is a product of cultural heritage of an ethnic group that has extensive knowledge of the local ingredients.

One popular example of a Peranakan dish that has successfully crossed the borders is *laksa*, a Peranakan signature dish of rice noodle in gravy and *satay*. The *laksa* produced in Katong, an area in Singapore filled with restaurants selling food emblematic of Peranakan home cooking, has undergone modifications due to demands and preferences of the customers [62]. With the dwindling numbers of Peranakans, restaurateurs have to modify the cuisine to cater to a wider audience if the restaurants are to survive despite their attempt to synthesize an authentic Peranakan dining experience [27].

Nyonya food has not only been reinvented in Malaysia and Singapore but also its influence has spread beyond the seas to countries such as Vietnam, Australia, and Hong Kong. The popularity of *laksa* in other regions can be attributed to its dynamic and flexible nature, which allows it to be enjoyed by people of different social backgrounds [80]. As foods travel across borders, *laksa* will be labeled as Malaysian or Singaporean food rather than Peranakan. The generic term indicates that food is generally associated with its original region due to the subtle gustatory dissimilarities between food of different cultures. Therefore, Peranakan food becomes

homogenized with Malay, Chinese, and Indian fare in a Malaysian restaurant operating overseas [32] and is even served besides Thai and Vietnamese cuisine in boutique hotels as Southern Asian fares.

The *laksa* wave in Hong Kong began in the 2000s with the opening of Penang Prawn Noodle Shop, which is followed by two specialized *laksa* noodle shops (Malaymama and Katong Laksa) [73,80]. From then on, the spicy dish has gained an important spot in Hong Kong foodservice industry, ranging from cafes and food courts to five-star hotels. Nonetheless, *laksa* did not achieve immediate fame when it was introduced in 1960s, and from 1970s to 1990s it was only produced by boutique hotels. The *laksa* produced is less spicy and is cooked with a larger amount of coconut milk. It also uses highly localized ingredients and method of presentation to suit the palates and demands of the locals.

The customers are allowed to mix and match the toppings, locally invented soups, and various types of noodles, which are similar to the *cart-noodle* style of Hong Kong [80]. This practice provides convenience for the customers besides being easy to prepare. The mix and match style and ingredients of the foods as well as the decor are far from being authentic. This is because authenticity of restaurants and eateries are staged in a much different way compared with those in Malaysia and Singapore, whereby the cultural markers are endorsements and writings of celebrities or food experts [80]. Thus, the locals depend heavily on these agents to inform them on how to make the right selection of foods. In 2008, Singapore's ready-to-eat *laksa* was introduced into the market of Hong Kong. The meal kit, which contains *laksa* paste, coconut powder, sambal chili, and dried *laksa* leaves, is manufactured for the working middle-class people who want to enjoy the exotic dish in the fast-paced country [80].

Laksa was also presented in Adelaide, an Australian city blessed with a Mediterranean climate, between 1970s and 1980s [60]. According to Duruz [60], one of the earliest pioneers who brought *laksa* to Adelaide was a Hakka woman named Mrs Khut who mastered Nyonya food from her Nyonya neighbor in Malacca and also carried out incessant trials on her own. Duruz [81] also argued that *laksa* is capable of reconnecting people to their childhood memories, homelands, reminisces, and nostalgic outpourings although they do not share the same ethnicity with the food. This is not surprising considering the fact that frequent movement of people across the boundaries has made the meanings of home and identity complex [82]. Moreover, *laksa* is so much in demand in Australia that a Vietnamese restaurant reproduces the dish to meet the expectations of its customers. There is also a Nyonya restaurant in Dong Du, Vietnam [6]. In addition, fusion food can also be created from cultural intersections, through the combination of an immigrant's knowledge of the ethnic food from his homeland and his or her interactions with the people and food in new surroundings [81].

5. Conclusion

Malaysia is a country blessed with a wonderful blend of cultures. The Peranakan culture is exalted as a mark of national concord as it was born out of a unique synthesis of two opposite cultures. Nyonya cuisine, a significant marker of the Peranakans, echoes the cultural identity of the people who are both Chinese and localized. Despite the fact that the food is much localized, its symbolism remains traditionally Chinese. This cuisine, once created by the womenfolk in their kitchen has traveled a long way, from being confined within the Peranakans' borders into cookbooks and restaurants. Its journey across the seas is further assisted by the diaspora of Peranakans and non-Peranakan Chinese. The individuality of the cuisine has generated unwavering interest from food entrepreneurs who see this entity as a means of a profitable

business although Malaysians are still yet to understand the essence of its priceless legacy.

Although the cuisine is receiving surmounting attention, the unique characteristics of the Peranakan culture are degraded with its people being stereotyped as Chinese, a term which is forever linked to Mandarin language [83]. This marginalized group is at the verge of extinction due to its current population of approximately 2,000, which is one fifth of those in Singapore [56]. In the recent years, a greater awareness of this legacy has prompted the government and Peranakan associations to put in efforts in reviving and sustaining the achievements of this elusive community. However, it is still not quite sufficient and the status of the Peranakans is still on the decline.

In the 21st century, each country thrives to reassure its national identity and unique cultural value by focusing on cultural learning to suggest a new prospect for the future. In this trend, the role of food culture is gaining weight as it defines a new code of identity for various ethnicities and countries across the world [84]. In this aspect, the governments of Malaysia and Singapore have acknowledged the unique qualities of the Nyonya culture, and thence, further recognition and promotion may strengthen the chances of its survival [22]. Peranakan culture is much alive in Singapore as Peranakans are considered as indigenous people of the country [20]. The government of Singapore has used the culture as its national identity and has great ambitions to unite its diverse citizens by becoming a "community of communities" and "Asia in One City."

The rich culture of Peranakan merits greater attention and should be cherished and commemorated. Although the importance of research on Nyonya food culture has increased over time, the amount of available resources on Peranakans and their culture in Malaysia is rather limited. Hence, government and associations alike should direct more energy and resources to intensify research and development of this singular culture and its cuisine. Besides increasing awareness of this priceless cultural heritage, it is hoped that such moves will protect and preserve this culture from being extinct in the eyes of the world as far as possible in the age of globalization. Local and states government should join forces to promote this exclusive fare for the benefit of the country's tourism and to follow the footsteps of other countries, which are into gastronomy tourism. There is a vast room for improvement if Nyonya food is to achieve greater heights and recognition around the globe.

Malaysia should emulate the success of its closest neighbor Indonesia, whose restaurants earned worldwide fame with the incorporation of the Balinese factor into their setting [79]. Besides, there is also Thailand, which has also fruitfully globalized its food thanks to the vigorous efforts of the Thai government and the implementation of the Thai Select certification program, which aims to improve the quality of its cuisine [79]. Food tourism is garnering worldwide interest as tourists are hungry for knowledge of the other parts of the world in this globalized age. Food is a tangible entity that has stood through the test of time amidst the disappearing social norms, ceremonies, and rituals. Although ethnic foods have been somewhat commercialized in the course of time, they remain a valuable epithet of the culture, history, and heritage of a nation [77].

Because of this, tourists have tirelessly moved across borders just to gain firsthand experience of local fares of another country, which constitutes a part of cultural tourism. Incorporating this heritage into tourism will help greatly in its preservation. With tourist interest, its chance of survival is brighter as there will be funding to protect and raise awareness about the culture [22]. Through this vehicle, knowledge on the culture can be disseminated throughout the world. Peranakan culture is a remnant of a

glorious past and while extravagant modes of dress and extensive ceremonies are now antiques, the resilient and flexible culture will continue to thrive in one way or another.

Conflicts of interest

All authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

References

- [1] Americo GM. Food and identity: food studies, cultural, and personal identity. *J Int Bus Cult Stud* 2014;8:1–7.
- [2] Lee SK. The Peranakans Baba Nyonya culture: resurgence or disappearance? *Sari* 2008;26:161–70.
- [3] Lee P and Chen J. *Rumah Baba: life in a Peranakan house*. Singapore: National Heritage Board, Singapore History Museum; 1998. p. 185–210.
- [4] Tan CB. Chinese Peranakan food and symbolism in Malaysia. In: *Proceedings of the 5th Symposium on Chinese Dietary Culture*. Taipei (Taiwan): Foundation of Chinese Dietary Culture; 1998. p. 185–210.
- [5] Tan CB. Food and ethnicity with reference to the Chinese in Malaysia. In: Wu DYH and Tan CB, editors. *Changing Chinese foodways in Asia*. New Territories (Hong Kong): Hong Kong University Press; 2001. p. 125–60.
- [6] Hall H. A unique blend: how a surge in the Chinese population influenced Singaporean-Malay cuisine. *Oi Vietnam* October 10, 2013. Metro Advertising Co., Ltd.; Ho Chi Minh (Vietnam).
- [7] Djatinugroho ADM, Destiamand AH and Yana D. Aplikasi motif fauna budaya Peranakans pada tableware menggunakan teknik sgraffito dengan perwana engobe. *Jurnal Tingkat Sarjana bidang Seni rupa dan Desain* 2014;1:1–9 [In Indonesian].
- [8] Tan CB. *The Baba of Melaka*. Petaling Jaya, Selangor (Malaysia): Pelanduk Publications; 1988.
- [9] Tan CB. Nyonya cuisine: Chinese, non-Chinese and the making of a famous cuisine in Southeast Asia. In: Cheung SCH and Tan CB, editors. *Food and foodways in Asia: resource, tradition and cooking*. Oxon (UK): Routledge; 2007. p. 171–82.
- [10] Ong JT. The pearl and the lion. *The Peranakan* 2012;2. The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore):9.
- [11] Sidek N. *Pembudayaan makanan Malaysia*. Sambutan hari makanan sedunia kali ke-25, Kementerian Pertanian dan Industri Asas Tani Malaysia, Putrajaya (Malaysia). Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia): Agriculture Bank of Malaysia; 2005.
- [12] Tan CB. Book reviews. *Asian Ethn* 2000;1:174–6.
- [13] Md Yusof A, Md Razak MI and Mashahadi F. Attentiveness of Baba Nyonya culture among young generations in Malaysia. *Int J Mark Technol* 2014;4: 85–98.
- [14] William R. Peranakans: a unique culture. *Selangor (Malaysia): The Sun*; August 6, 2007.
- [15] Wu YHD and Cheung CHS. The globalization of Chinese food and cuisine: markers and breakers of cultural barriers. In: Cheung SCH and Wu DYH, editors. *The globalization of Chinese food*. Honolulu (HI): University of Hawaii Press; 2002. p. 26–31.
- [16] Tan CB. Intermarriage and the Chinese Peranakan in Southeast Asia. In: Suryadinata L, editor. *Peranakan Chinese in a globalizing Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Chinese Heritage Centre; 2010. p. 27–40.
- [17] East–West Center. *Peranakans Chinese heritage of Southeast Asia [Brochure]*. Honolulu (Hawaii): East-West Center Gallery; 2013.
- [18] Teh CY and Lim YM. An alternative architectural strategy to preserve the living heritage and identity of Penang Hokkien language in Malaysia. *Int J Hum Soc Sci* 2014;4:242–7.
- [19] Wee P. *A Peranakans legacy: the heritage of the Straits Chinese*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish; 2009.
- [20] Ooi C-S and Lai S. Creative heritage: Melaka and its past. In: Lenia M and Richards G, editors. *Creative districts around the world*. Breda (The Netherlands): CELTH/NHTV; 2014. p. 163–70.
- [21] Tan CB. Social-cultural diversities and identities. In: Lee KH and Tan CB, editors. *The Chinese in Malaysia*. Shah Alam, Selangor (Malaysia): Oxford University Press; 2000. p. 37–70.
- [22] Henderson J. Ethnic heritage as a tourist attraction: the Peranakans of Singapore. *Int J Herit Stud* 2003;9:27–44.
- [23] Clammer JR. *Straits Chinese society: studies in the sociology of Baba communities of Malaysia and Singapore*. Singapore: Singapore University Press; 2000.
- [24] Lim BS. Distinctly Peranakan Hokkien. *The Peranakan* 2009;1. The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore):14.
- [25] Low KCP. Leadership, values and the Peranakans. *Int J Bus Soc Sci* 2014;5: 132–4.
- [26] Lim GS. *Gateway to Peranakans culture*. Singapore: Asiapac Books; 2003.
- [27] Wong HS. A taste of the past. In: Cheung SCH and Tan CB, editors. *Food and foodways in Asia: resource, tradition and cooking*. Oxon (UK): Routledge; 2007. p. 115–28.
- [28] Tan F. *Recipes from the Nyonya kitchen cooking*. 4th ed. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Cuisine; 2009.
- [29] Lee GB. *Nonya favourites*. Singapore: Periplus Editions (HK) Ltd; 2001. p. 2–3.
- [30] Lewis HM. *Nyonya culture*. Arizona, Scottsdale (USA): Lewis Micropublishing; 2005.
- [31] Ong H. *Penang Peranakans Cuisine* [Internet]. Penang (Malaysia): Penang State Tourism Development and Culture; 2010. Available from: <http://www.visitpenang.gov.my/portal3/>.
- [32] Choo S. Eating Satay Babi: sensory perception of transnational movement. *J Intercult Stud* 2004;25:203–13.
- [33] Kim SH, Kim MS, Lee MS, Park YS, Lee HJ, Kang SA, Lee HS, Lee KE, Yang HJ, Kim MJ, Lee YE and Kwon DY. Korean diet: characteristics and historical background. *J Ethn Foods* 2016;3:26–31.
- [34] Soon I. Tasty sample of Malacca's past. 4. *Selangor (Malaysia): Sunday Star*; March 2001. p. 2–3.
- [35] Hutton W. *Singapore food*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Cuisine; 2007.
- [36] Lau E. Four on four: soya bean sauce. *The Peranakan* 2010;4. The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore):3.
- [37] Chee L. 50 things quintessentially Peranakan. *The Peranakan* 2015;4. The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore):20–21.
- [38] Lander N. *Home cooking for Singaporeans*. London (UK): Financial Times; July 2014. p. 24.
- [39] Wee S. *Growing up in a Nyonya Kitchen: Singapore recipes from my mother*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Cuisine; 2012.
- [40] Chan M. Singapore food seriously on my mind. *Commentary* 2013;22:56–63.
- [41] Karim S and Halim N. The structure of Penang street food culture in Malaysia. In: Cardoso CDCV, Companion M and Marras SR, editors. *Street food: culture, economy, health and governance*. New York (NY): Routledge; 2014. p. 220.
- [42] Tan CB. Cultural reproduction, local invention and globalization of Southeast Asian Chinese Food. In: Tan CB, editor. *Chinese food and foodways in Southeast Asia and beyond*. Singapore: NUS Press; 2011. p. 23–45.
- [43] Ong JT. Implements from grandma's kitchen. *The Peranakan* 2013;4. The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore):21–24.
- [44] Chee L. Postcards from the kitchen. *The Peranakan* 2012;2. The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore):3.
- [45] Tan K. When the stork arrives. *The Peranakan* 2009;2. The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore):8.
- [46] Tan K. Between heaven and earth. *The Peranakan* 2009;2. The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore):15.
- [47] Lye GT. Whiter tradition or modernity? *The Peranakan* 2013;4. The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore):30–31.
- [48] Gwee THW. Letters to the Editor. *The Peranakan* 2010;2. The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore):2.
- [49] Chan N. Chiak pah boay? (Have you eaten? Suda makan?). *The Peranakan* 2009;1. The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore):20–21.
- [50] Tan K. Cake for the gods. *The Peranakan* 2014;1. The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore):28–29.
- [51] Tan S. Savoury fare. *The Peranakan* 2012;1. The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore):15.
- [52] Tan K. Legends and rituals in Semayang Ti Kong. *The Peranakan* 2012;1. The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore):15.
- [53] Lee YT. A heavenly offering. *The Peranakan* 2013;4. The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore):14–17.
- [54] Ee SS. Ritual practices. *The Peranakan* 2010;2. The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore):5.
- [55] Stokes-Rees E. We need something of our own: Representing ethnicity, diversity and national heritage in Singapore. Paper presented at National Museums in a Global World (NaMu III) Conference. Oslo (Norway): Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo; 2007. p. 21–37.
- [56] Lewis MP, Simons GF and Fennig CD. *Ethnologue: languages of the world*. 18th ed. Dallas (TX): SIL International; 2015.
- [57] Lim BA. *Staging 'peranakan-nese': a cultural history of the Gunong Sayang Association's Wayang Peranakan, 1985–95*. MA Thesis. Singapore: National University of Singapore; 2011.
- [58] Lee CK. *The new Mrs. Lee's cookbook: Nyonya cuisine*. Salt Lake City (UT): Benchmark Books; 2004.
- [59] Teoh D. *Debbie Teoh's favourite recipes*. Singapore: Times Edition; 2014.
- [60] Duruz J. From Malacca to Adelaide: fragments towards a biography of cooking, yearning and *laksa*. In: Cheung SCH and Tan CB, editors. *Food and foodways in Asia: Resource, tradition and cooking*. Oxon (UK): Routledge; 2007. p. 183–98.
- [61] Chee L. Learning to cook in post-independence. *The Peranakan* 2015;4. The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore): The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore):33.
- [62] Duruz J. Tastes of hybrid belonging: following the laksa trail in Katong, Singapore. *Continuum* 2011;25:605–18.
- [63] Chee L. Mouthwateringly modern. *The Peranakan* 2011;3. The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore):28.
- [64] Lau E. 110 in 2010. *The Peranakan* 2010;4. The Peranakan Association Singapore; Raffles City (Singapore):3.
- [65] Oon V. *Her world Peranakan cookbook*. Singapore: Times Periodicals; 1978.
- [66] Tan T. *Straits Chinese cookbook*. Middlesex (UK): Times Books International; 1981.
- [67] Chua BH and Rajah A. Hybridity, ethnicity and food in Singapore. In: Wu DYH and Tan CB, editors. *Changing Chinese foodways in Asia*. New Territories (HK): The Chinese University Press; 2001. p. 161–200.
- [68] Bannerman C. Indigenous food and cookery books: redefining aboriginal cuisine. *J Aust Stud* 2006;30:19–36.

- [69] Yusni A. Examining quality, perceived value and satisfaction of Penang delicacies in predicting tourists' revisit intention. MSc Thesis, Selangor (Malaysia): Universiti Teknologi Mara; 2010. iii–12.
- [70] Luebe D and Hanafi H. Between cultural and commercial: a case study of Nyonya food in Malacca. *J Marit Geopolit Cult* 2014;5:1–2.
- [71] Verbeke W and López GP. Ethnic food attitudes and behaviour among Belgians and Hispanics living in Belgium. *Brit Food J* 2005;107:823–40.
- [72] Kwon DY. What is ethnic food? *J Ethn Foods* 2015;2:1.
- [73] Cheung S and Tan CB. Introduction: food and foodways in Asia. In: Cheung SCH and Tan CB, editors. *Food and foodways in Asia: resource, tradition and cooking*. Oxon (UK): Routledge; 2007. p. 1–9.
- [74] Wang N. Rethinking authenticity in tourism experience. *Ann Tour Res* 1999;26:349–70.
- [75] Robert S. Cooking up stereotypes: the commodification of exotic foods through authenticity labels [Internet]. [cited 2016 May 23]. Available from: forum.bodybuilding.com/attachment.php?attachmentid=3967061&d=1324433829.
- [76] Ee SS. When bibiks pulverized nuts. *The Peranakan* 2010;4:24.
- [77] Langgat J, Md Zahari MS, Yasin MS and Mansur NA. The alteration of Sarawak ethnic natives' food: it's impact to Sarawak state tourism. Paper presented at the 2nd International Conference on Business and Economic Research (2nd ICBER 2011) Proceedings. Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia): Global Research Agency; 2011. p. 685–98.
- [78] Avrela P. Ethnic food: the other in ourselves. In: Sanderson D and Crouch M, editors. *Food: Expressions and impressions*. Oxford (UK): Inter-Disciplinary Press; 2013. p. 45–6.
- [79] Yoshino K. Malaysian cuisine: a case of neglected culinary globalization. In: Farrer J, editor. *Globalization, food, and social identities in the Asia Pacific Region*. Tokyo (Japan): Sophia University Institute of Comparative Culture; 2010.
- [80] Mak VSW. Southern Asian Chinese food in Hong Kong. In: Tan CB, editor. *Chinese food and foodways in Southeast Asia and beyond*. Singapore: NUS Press; 2012. p. 227–33.
- [81] Duruz J. Four dances of the sea: cooking "Asian" as embedded cosmopolitanism. In: Farrer J, editor. *Globalization, food and social identities in the Asia Pacific Region*. Tokyo (Japan): Sophia University Institute of Comparative Culture; 2010.
- [82] Duruz J. Floating food: eating "Asia" in kitchens of the diaspora. *Emot Space Soc* 2010;3:45–9.
- [83] Khor KN. Project Peranakans networks. *Buletin Warisan* September–October 2008. Badan Warisan Malaysia; Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia):8–9.
- [84] Chung HK, Chung KR and Kim HJ. Understanding Korean food culture from Korean paintings. *J Ethn Foods* 2016;3:42–50.