

The Rise of Malaysian Gastrodiplomacy: From Local Cuisine to Global Cuisine

(The Case of Malaysian Kitchen Program in The United Kingdom)

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ABSTRAK

Kampanye "Malaysia Kitchen for The World" dirancang oleh pemerintah Malaysia sebagai bagian dari praktik usaha gastrodiplomasi yang berakar pada diplomasi budaya. Oleh karena itu, tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk melakukan identifikasi dan memberikan analisis detail terhadap implementasi kampanye "Malaysia Kitchen for The World" di Inggris pada tahun 2010 sampai 2015 dengan menggunakan teori-teori studi Hubungan Internasional, yang terdiri dari diplomasi publik, diplomasi budaya dan gastrodiplomasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus menggunakan jurnal, artikel dan buku sebagai sumber sekunder yang diikuti oleh sumber dari MATRADE dan publikasi resmi pemerintahan Malaysia sebagai sumber utama. Temuan dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa masakan Malaysia merupakan elemen penting bagi pemerintah Malaysia untuk mempromosikan kekayaan budaya Malaysia, branding bisnis lokal dan meningkatkan kesadaran global akan makanan Malaysia di ranah internasional, khususnya di kalangan warga negara Inggris.

Kata Kunci: *Malaysia Kitchen for the World, Diplomasi Publik, Diplomasi Budaya, Gastrodiplomasi, Makanan Malaysia*

ABSTRACT

The "Malaysia Kitchen for the World" campaign, designed by the Malaysian government, acts as a practical effort of gastrodiplomacy that is rooted in the sphere of cultural diplomacy. Thus, the purpose of this research is to identify the implementation of the "Malaysia Kitchen for The World" campaign in the United Kingdom between 2010 and 2015 and to provide a detailed analysis using the theories of International Relations which consist of public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and gastrodiplomacy. This study employs a qualitative method with a

case study approach, using secondary sources consisting of journals, articles and books followed by primary sources from MATRADE and Malaysian government official publications. The findings of this research are that Malaysian cuisine is an essential element for the Malaysian government to promote Malaysia's cultural richness, brand local businesses and raise global awareness of Malaysian food in the international arena, particularly among British citizens.

Keywords: *Malaysia Kitchen for The World, Public Diplomacy, Cultural Diplomacy, Gastrodiploamacy, Malaysian cuisine*

1. Introduction

When discussing the richness and wealth of choices available in Malaysia that form their local food, it cannot be separated from their historical background. Malaysian history began with the transmission of Malacca harbor, which started operating as a significant port for commerce throughout Malaysia's bordering countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, China, The Middle East and Indonesia in the early 15th century. It is mentioned as one of the causes of flavorful Malaysian cuisine since multicultural interaction happened within the time frame (Mohd Nazri Abdul Raji, 2017). Hence, the many cultures and ethnicities that illustrate Malaysia as a country are due to its influence by the arrival of traders from Persia, India, Arab, Indonesia, and China that were later based in Malacca as the centre of Inter-Asian trade (Meilink-Roelofs, 1962).

Omar (2018) also specifies that the diverse background each settler, such as Indian, Arabian, Thai, Chinese, Indonesian and Portuguese make up Malaysia's local cuisine formulation. In essence, the cultural assimilation process amongst the native population and foreign settlers in Malaysia during in the 15th century contributed to the development of Malaysian cuisine, in which Malaysian food identity is characterized through either assimilation or adaption of the culinary collection derived from the multi-ethnic population of Malaysia consisting three main ethnicities: Malay, Chinese and Indian (Noriza Ishak M. S., 2019).

Adding colonialism to the historical list, the arrival of European traders who later became part of the colonial government in turn contributed to the formation and development of Malaysian cuisine, including the *Nyonya* cuisine or also known as *Peranakan* cuisine. When Malaysia and Singapore were under British colonial administration in 1785, after the Portuguese conquest of Malacca in 1511 and the Dutch subjection in 1611, some Indians and Chinese were moved to work in rubber plantations while some other Chinese were put to work in tin mines. As the influence of Indian and Chinese workers continues to contribute to the development of Malaysian culture, language, and cuisine, the Chinese and Indian migrants in the 19th and early 20th centuries began to integrate into Malaysian society and continue to become one of the country's majority groups (Omar S. R., 2018).

The *Peranakan* cuisine was born from the combination of cooking ingredients and techniques adapted by Chinese migrants who married Malaysian local women who resided around the ports and indigenous women of Acehnese, Javanese, Balinese and Batak ethnicities originally from Indonesia (Karim C. Y., 2016). Thus, the mixture of all the afore-mentioned cultures in cooking ingredients and techniques between began to form a new set of cooking habits and tastes due to its process of adaption and acculturation through inter-racial marriages (Youri Oh N. F., 2019). Further explained by Karim (2016) and Youri Oh (2019), the famous *ayam buah keluak*, Penang *asam laksa*, *ayam pongteh*, *achar*, fish head curry and prawn chili paste are examples of *Peranakan* cuisine.

Supported by the research of Youri Oh (2019), *laksa*, the well-known dish of Peranakan cuisine, is the dominant food that can be distinguished by its taste, given the geographical proximity of each bordering country. Penang laksa, also known as *Asam Laksa* (Figure 1), uses mainly chili, herbs, shrimp paste, lime, galangal and tamarind which produce a sour and tangy flavor, shows clear evident that it bears a Thai influence. Meanwhile, Malaccan laksa, also known as curry laksa, is a curry-like noodle soup cooked with authentic Malaysian herbs such as curry leaves, cumin, chicken and/or prawns, fish balls, fried tofu, belachan, chili, and added with Indonesian influence, which comes in the form of coconut milk that gives sweeter flavor.



Figure 1 *Asam Laksa* (Bake with Paws, 2017)

Therefore, the Singaporean and Malaccan *laksa* usually appear to be sweeter and less spicy than Penang laksa (Karim C. Y., 2016). By identifying the dish by the name of its origin, for example, Penang *laksa* or rice noodle soup that originates from Penang state, it preserves the authentic ingredients and spices from the region (Naili Nahar, 2018).

Moreover, Omar (2018) and Nazri Abdul Raji (2017) further explain that the Islamic conduct and halal practice regarding the consumption of halal food in Malaysia are the persistent legacy of Arabian traders that arrived in Malacca around 1400-1511, during the era of Melaka Sultanate. The high movement of trade activities with other Muslim communities such as those from Indonesia and The Middle East also involved preserving the halal and Islamic practice.

Malaysian cuisine may already be familiar to UK residents, giving the image of Malaysia as a culturally diverse, vibrant, and enthusiastic country with a unique cuisine. The government puts emphasis on expanding its gastrodiploamacy act through Malaysian restaurants and raising more awareness of Malaysian cuisine in The United Kingdom. For example, by serving home-cooked style Malaysian food, Laksamania Restaurant in London contributes to the presentation of Malaysian cuisine to Londoners with their signature dish, *laksa*, one of the *Peranakan* food (Figure 1.3). Through trial and error in discovering and expanding his own personal Laksa taste, Malaysian chef Danny Tan presents his laksa dishes to residents of London and beyond.

While attempting to reach out to potential customers, advertising and marketing efforts are put by Laksamania Restaurant in order to achieve the desired results: raising awareness of Malaysian cuisine. In addition, they regularly communicate with fans through cuisine posts and story videos on *laksa* history on the official Instagram account of "Laksamania.". With primarily five-star reviews on *TripAdvisor*, Laksamania Restaurant is said to embody Malaysian taste authentically and yet able to appeal to local palates. Furthermore, the ratings include a service evaluation:

"One of the friendliest eateries we've visited is Laksamania.

Dare I say it, the service was impeccable. We were made to feel at ease by each waitress and waiter."

Indeed, by producing and serving Malaysian cuisine and being courteous, they serve as informal "Malaysian ambassadors," representing Malaysia in multiple markets worldwide (Jalis M. H., 2016).

2. Malaysian Gastro Diplomacy Through "Malaysia Kitchen for the World" Campaign

At the end of 2006, the government proposed a unique project to promote the country's cuisine (9th Malaysian Plan 2006-2010). The government introduced the Malaysia Kitchen Program through the Economic Planning Unit (EPU), as the Ministry of Tourism of Malaysia (MTPB) is entirely responsible for promoting and supporting the country through a series of instruments such as the flora, fauna, and heritage destinations as attractions. However, what can be more appealing to the foreign visitors is the usage of national cuisine that creates more traveling excitement towards Malaysia. It is also going in line with the statement of the Director-General in the Malaysian Tourism Department that the image of a "gastronomy paradise" is what Malaysia wished to be perceived.

"Because it enhances the visitor's experience, food has become a valuable tourism commodity for our country. We are confident in our ability to attract visitors to our coastlines and offer them a taste of Malaysia, which is "Malaysia, Truly Asia" flavor." (Mohd Hairi Jalis M. I., 2009)

However, in 2010, the government launched the "*Malaysia Kitchen for The World*" replacing the Malaysia Kitchen Program (MKP), focusing on four markets: the United Kingdom, the United States, China, and New Zealand by sending Malaysian gastro diplomats to events and food festivals such as night markets in influential cities such as Los Angeles, New York, and London as well as investing in international Malaysian restaurants to achieve the multi-cultural and vibrant country image (Diplomacy, 2015). The shifting administration in 2009 of the MKP from Tourism Malaysia (MTPB) to Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE) happened due to the suspicion about the use of MYR130 million worth of investment by the officials in MKP, which resulted in minimum progress (Jalis M. H., 2016).

As viewed by Awang (2013) and Zhang (2015), gastrodiploamacy is a practice under public diplomacy and applicable to any soft power scale, where soft power rises as a nation's tool to create cross-cultural awareness. Thus, gastrodiploamacy can be practiced in broader representations and skills – through state and non-state actors. Hence, while implementing the "*Malaysia Kitchen for The World*" campaign, it describes the role of state and non-state actors as the main drivers: MATRADE as an agency that is under the patronage of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) and EXIM Bank Malaysia, which facilitates and runs the campaign, was established under Ministry of Finance (MOF) (Jalis M. H., 2016).

2.1 Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE)

According to Jalis (2016), the government has attempted to shift the focus from tourism attraction to business and trading with the support of MITI. Thus, the government has added another marketing tactic by introducing Malaysian agricultural commodities and food products as part of Malaysian cuisine identity awareness in order to increase demand for Malaysian cuisine and food products through the Malaysia Kitchen series of events and restaurant chains. The strategies are well aligned with MITI's strategies and policies.

Measures will be undertaken to enhance the competitiveness of and exports of Malaysian foods:
- Developing a specific theme for recipe-based ethnic food products; such as 'Malaysia The Taste of Asia' and 'Malaysia – The Truly Asian Kitchen'; - Developing programs with Tourism Malaysia to promote Malaysian food overseas; - Enhancing the role of MATRADE in promoting agro-based products; - Promoting the establishment of Malaysian food outlets and restaurants overseas.

Figure 2. Resource Based Industry MITI Chapter 14 (Ministry of International Trade and Industry, n.d)

Food processing companies will be encouraged to expand and diversify their product range in the targeted growth areas:
- Convenience foods, with a focus on the growing niche market for ethnic foods; - Functional foods, focusing on developing products using Malaysian traditional herbs; - Food ingredients; and - Halal foods.

Figure 3. *Food Processing Industry MITI (Ministry of International Trade and Industry Malaysia, n.d)*

According to Jalis (2016), in his research paper titled *"An Analysis of the Integration of Local Cuisine into International Destination Marketing Strategies for Malaysia"*, MITI launched the new MKP promotion in London with the aim of raising global awareness of Malaysian cuisine and restaurants. He confirms:

"The launch of MKP in London could raise public awareness of Malaysian culture and heritage through its diverse range of cooking methods and culinary traditions, resulting in a unique characteristic of a nation." (MATRADE, 23 April 2010)

MATRADE collaborates with EXIM Bank, which is under the Ministry of Finance (MOF), to create Malaysia Kitchen Financing Facility (MKFF)'s whose functions are to provide financial facilities to Malaysian entrepreneurs through MOF-distributed funds for the purpose of;

1. The establishment of a new restaurant in a foreign country;
2. The expansion of an existing restaurant or the formation of new outlets; and
3. The international expansion of a Malaysian food franchise and homegrown food (Malaysia Kitchen Restaurant Programme by MATRADE and EXIM Bank, 2019).

According to *The Star News*, by presenting financial assistance and support through Malaysian government, such as loans worth up to 90% of funding at a low-interest rate of 3% to assist local restaurateurs in opening outlets overseas, the setup priority for 2015 was to have 8,000 Malaysian eateries overseas. Jalis (2016) elaborates further about the terms and conditions before the applicant receives approval. The MKP Units must review applications from restaurant businesses and conduct research towards market studies, covering;

1. Market investigation for Malaysian cuisine demand around area;

2. Laws, provisions, and regulations for establishing a restaurant business in a specific potential area; and
3. The availability of ingredients in surrounding areas..

The EXIM Bank also goes above and beyond to give assistance to restaurateurs with a fresh start by conducting targeted market research. In addition, they continue to keep watching the restaurant's performance even after it has successfully opened. The reason behind all this observation is to ensure that the restaurant owners can survive and repay the loan (Jalis M. H., 2016). As confirmed by the managing director and CEO of EXIM Bank, Datuk Adissaidikin Ali, the loan is only available to Malaysian-owned businesses that meet the eligibility requirements;

1. Malaysian owned and/or controlled companies with a minimum shareholding of 51% either incorporated in Malaysia or in the country of operation;
2. Related working experience of either one (1) year in managing an overseas restaurant or three (3) years locally; and
3. Open to Malaysian-owned franchise.

One of the specifications of the loan is that the restaurant must serve Malaysian food, which is also defined in the terms and conditions sheet as "food that is traditionally and customarily consumed by Malaysians." (Berhad, n.d.).

3. "*Malaysia Kitchen for the World*" Campaign in the United Kingdom as Diplomatic Tools

Since the first premiere of Thailand's initiative with the "Global Thai" campaign to promote their national food abroad in February 2002, termed as "gastrodiplomacy" by The Economist, the use of national cuisine has grown in popularity (Lipscomb, 2019). The sense of gastronomy and diplomacy itself relates to the gastrodiplomacy concept, which is how countries conduct diplomacy through the promotion of national food overseas (Rockower P. S., *Recipes for Gastrodiplomacy*, 2012).

Food has evolved into a "cultural image" that depicts individuals of a region and their culture over the past few years. According to Youri Oh (2019), having traditional cuisine as a cultural product would expose one's identity, such as cooking skills (method and technique), ingredients and eating behavior that distinguish the cuisine. Thus, the analogy of "you are what you eat" will create a sense in mind that food is part of who we are and will define us (Almerico, 2014). As a result, gastronomic culture will reflect and reaffirm societal or individual identities and form national cuisine (Youri Oh N. F., 2019). In this context, Malaysian cuisine identity is defined as a collection of multi-ethnic culinary diversity derived from a blend of Malay, Chinese, and Indian flavors that have been known for their balanced taste of spice, mildness, sourness and sweetness.

As a result, acceptance of cross-cultural assimilation could be inclined to the creation of food identity (Noriza Ishak M. S., 2019).

According to Lipscomb (2019), in favor of the practice of gastrodiploamacy, the state as the primary actor initiates, directs and funds the gastro diploamacy efforts. In this case of "*Malaysia Kitchen for The World*" campaign, MATRADE and MKFF are fully present as Malaysian government initiatives in practicing gastro diploamacy. Adding private entities, enterprises and individuals to the supporting role to maximize the implementation also contributes to the country's gastrodiploamacy exertion. This can be seen in the opening of Malaysian restaurants abroad which involves the restaurant owners, and it also explains the contribution of private entities and enterprises who promote the gastrodiploamacy activities.

The urge to showcase its country's cultural richness in the UK through the "*Malaysia Kitchen for The World*" campaign in 2010 was by equating gastrodiploamacy practice to other tangible materials of national identity such as the national flag and anthem, meaning that national cuisine can be regarded as a powerful and non-spoken way to communicate regional or national symbol identities (Awang, 2013). Hence, it is an attempt to boost Malaysia's image as arranged by the government. It can be seen from the discussion how the Malaysian government tries to practice the use of food as a diplomatic tool to engage intimately with international audiences by consistently working towards the implementation.

The visualization of how Malaysia's gastrodiploamacy practice was implemented in the United Kingdom from 2010 to 2015 will be specified by the author through the table below, which contains specific events and activities that were conducted during the timeframe of "*Malaysia Kitchen for The World*" campaign. The author also focuses on the actors' involvement in specific events and actions, including state and non-state actors that implemented public, cultural and gastrodiploamacy concepts.

Events	Year	Location	Goals	Actors Involved	Actors Comment
Malaysia Kitchen at London Restaurant Festival Market	2010	Old Spitalfields' Market	Promoting the Malaysian food and authentic Malaysian products to the festival visitors	London Restaurant Festival Organizer and Malaysian Restaurant Association UK	Teddy Chen, Malaysian Restaurant Association Chairman "The association is continuing its promotional drive with 21 Malaysian restaurants participating in this year's London Restaurant Festival"
Malaysia Kitchen at the Nottingham Games	2010, 2011	Nottingham University	Supporting the Nottingham Games and creating awareness to the game visitors about Malaysian kitchen campaign	Nottingham Games Organizer, Nottingham University and Trade Commissioner of Malaysia	Raja Badrulnizam, Trade Commissioner of Malaysia "We want to support the games and create awareness and promote about Malaysian kitchen campaign in UK"
Malaysia Kitchen Campus Tour	2010	City University London, London South Bank University, London School of The Arts, University College London, and London School of Economics	Promoting Malaysian food to university students across London	City University London, London South Bank University, London School of The Arts, University College London and London School of Economic	A student at London School of Arts, "I love Malaysian food"

Malaysia Kitchen at MasterChef Live	2010, 2011	London Olympia	Showcasing Malaysian cuisine to the Master Chef participants to get more exposure to MasterChef viewers	MasterChef Live, Malaysian Kitchen Ambassador	Rick Stein, Malaysian Kitchen Ambassador "Master Chef is a good event to partner with Malaysian Kitchen because people that have come to the show will be interested in Malaysian cuisine"
Malaysia Kitchen Regional Tour	2010, 2011, 2014	2010 (Manchester , Birmingham , Norwich, Esher and Beckenham) , 2011(Cardiff , London, Birmingham , Nottingham and Manchester) , 2014 (Liverpool, Birmingham , Bristol, London and Brighton)	2010 (Offering shoppers across UK free samples of Malaysian food to raise awareness about Malaysian cuisine), 2011 (Sharing the delights of authentic Malaysian street food with the British public), 2014 (Cooking demonstration of popular Malaysian dishes to raise the awareness of the people)	2010 (Malay Taste Paste), 2011 and 2014 (Malaysian Kitchen Ambassador)	Norman Musa, Head Chef of Malaysian Regional Tour 2011 "The feedback from the people who tried my food, they liked it and they wanted to go to the restaurant" and May Chong, Chef of Malaysian Regional Tour 2014, "People who have stopped to watch the demonstration have asked about the recipes and taken the recipe cards"

Malaysia Kitchen Winter Market and Taste of Winter	2011, 2015	2010 at Westfield and 2015 at Tobacco Docks	2010 (selling Malaysian food and showing cooking demonstration to shoppers in Winter Market), 2014 (promoting Malaysian food and product and performing cooking demonstration)	2010 (Winter Market Organizer, Malaysian High Commissioner, Trade Commissioner of Malaysia), 2015 (Malaysian Kitchen Ambassador)	Datuk Zakaria Sulong, Malaysian High Commissioner, "Westfield is one of the biggest shopping centres in the Europe so hopefully a lot of people take the samples of Malaysian food," and Ping Chomber, Malaysian Chef at Taste of Winter "I think Malaysian cuisine definitely begins to penetrate and it's really working"
Malaysian Kitchen at Tesco	2012	London	Promoting two Malaysian products sold in store- Vits Air Dried Noodles and King Kampong Chili Sauce	Tesco Stores and Television Chef	Celebrity chef Caroline Mi Li "Tesco are now stocking Malaysian products, which is fantastic."
Malaysian Kitchen at Westfield Stanford	2012	Westfield Stratford City	Promoting Malaysian food and products to visitors of 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games.	Malaysian Kitchen Ambassador	N/A

Malaysia Kitchen Spring Market	2014, 2015	London South Bank, between the OXO Tower and Waterloo Bridge	Promoting Malaysian food by selling testers and meals to visitors	London South Bank, Malaysian Kitchen Ambassador	Norman Musa, Malaysian chef, "Want we want to do here is that we want to make a tiny Malaysia"
Malaysian Kitchen at the BBC Good Food Show	2014	NEC Birmingham	Showcasing the flavors and traditions of Malaysian food	BBC Good Food Show	N/A
Malaysia Kitchen at the Commonwealth Games	2014	Glasgow	Bringing a taste of Malaysia to visitors of the Games	Malaysian Kitchen Ambassador	N/A

Figure 4. The Compilation of Malaysian Kitchen Event (2010-2015) (Malaysian Kitchen UK Official YouTube Channel, 2010-2015)

Based on what Rockower has mentioned, this statement helps the author draw a clear line in Malaysian Kitchen's series of events:

"Diplomacy that acts by influencing foreign people's hearts and minds and involving a two-way interaction to meet specific goals is known as gastrodiploamacy." (Rockower P. S., 2012).

In the same way, the complete set-up of Malaysia Kitchen activities reflects Rockower's statement. It means a two-way interaction between the Malaysian government and the British people or between Malaysian and British citizens happens. Several events of Malaysia Kitchen activities (e.g., Malaysia Kitchen at the Nottingham Games and Malaysia Kitchen Winter Market and Taste of Winter) were attended by Malaysian government representatives such as Malaysian Trade Commissioner and Malaysian High Commissioner so they could directly interact with and promote Malaysian food to British people. Fundamentally, such a situation demonstrates a gastrodiploamacy concept of the two-way relations between the government and the people.

Practically, nearly at every event, Malaysian chefs and Malaysian authentic restaurants took part as primary guests to prepare food and showcase the cooking process in front of a live audience of British citizens. Thus, while applying the gastrodiploamacy, such situation is an example of a two-way people-to-people relation.

Moreover, using Zhang's perspective on gastrodiploacy campaign strategies that may come in the form of food events, product marketing, coalition building, education and media relations (Zhang J. , 2015), the author analyzes campaign strategies used by the Malaysian government in the practice of gastrodiploacy. It shows that all those strategies mentioned were used during the implementation of "*Malaysia Kitchen for the World*" campaign in the United Kingdom.

Firstly, one example of a culinary event strategy that is worth mentioning is the Malaysian Kitchen Regional Tour, in which Malaysian Kitchen ambassadors travel from one city to another using food trucks. The culinary event was meant to deliver free samples of Malaysian cuisine and the activities would benefit the Malays in all spheres, because while demonstrating how to prepare popular Malaysian dishes, it promoted Malaysian cuisine and restaurants in audiences' respective cities (Malaysia Kitchen UK, 2010).

Second, in terms of product marketing strategy, one of the events that may be observed through Malaysian Kitchen at Tesco, when Malaysians attempted to sell their food product by partnering and collaborating with Tesco stores, where British citizens often purchase food supplies. As a result, British citizens were able to buy the ingredients to cook Malaysian meals through this partnership with Tesco supermarkets at ease.

Third, Malaysian Kitchen at Master Chef Live was one of the events that genuinely represented coalition-building strategy. The collaboration of Malaysian Kitchen with Master Chef Live in the United Kingdom to acquire extra exposure is the example of the strategy. In this situation, viewers and visitors at Master Chef Live were guaranteed to experience and enjoy Malaysian cuisine while watching the Master Chef competition. It was no surprise that Rick Stein, Malaysian Kitchen Ambassador, found Master Chef an excellent event to collaborate with because those who watched and enjoyed the show most likely would be intrigued by Malaysian cuisine (Malaysia Kitchen UK, 2010).

Fourth, the educational strategy which existed in the complete series of activities of Malaysian Kitchen by cooking and presenting Malaysian cuisine directly in front of British visitors and shoppers. Therefore, it would educate the audience to make Malaysian food in a simple yet proper way. For instance, in the case of Malaysian Kitchen Regional Tour 2014, the main agenda was to demonstrate the process of cooking popular Malaysian dishes with a purpose to expanding awareness in the British people. According to Chef of Malaysian Regional Tour 2014, May Chong:

"People who viewed the demonstration specifically asked about the recipes and took the recipe cards with them." (Malaysia Kitchen UK, 2014)

Lastly, Malaysian Kitchen on the BBC Good Food Show is an example of a media relations strategy. Malaysia would market its food at this event, which was

hosted by the largest British media agency. The government also created the Malaysian Kitchen UK website and YouTube channel as a means of documenting every event linked to the "Malaysian Kitchen for The World" Campaign in the UK (Malaysia Kitchen UK, 2014).

The implementation of the "*Malaysian Kitchen for The World*" campaign in the United Kingdom (2010-2015) also had its positive significance, especially in the aspect of nation branding and culinary market expansion. However, considering the fact that this is not a successful criterion for justifying the campaign program, it helps the author analyze to what extent Malaysia's gastrodiploamacy program has benefited the country.

3.1 The Aspect of Nation Branding in Malaysian Kitchen for the World

In accordance with Rockower's "Recipes for Gastrodiploamacy" essay;

"Gastrodiploamacy, promoting a country's gastronomy as cultural diplomacy, has become a more common approach for a country in practicing its public diplomacy and nation branding."
(Rockower P. S., 2012)

This indicates that gastro diplomacy can be used as a tool by a government to improve its nation branding, either to a specific country or globally. For example, in the context of the "*Malaysian Kitchen for The World*" campaign, the author found that it was a tactic for Malaysia to raise awareness of Malaysian culture among British people through food as a critical approach. Thus, to deepen the strategy, Malaysia forms a gastrodiploamacy group of Malaysian Kitchen ambassadors who incredibly act as critical figures, representing the country and introducing national Malaysian cuisine to British people to bolster the country's nation branding strategy in the United Kingdom (Nahar, Karim, Karim, & Ghazali, 2018).

Norman Musa, for example, is a Malaysian chef who served as a gastro diplomat by presenting and promoting Malaysian cuisine during the series of Malaysia Kitchen events. According to Norman Musa, who was also the Head Chef of the Malaysian Regional Tour 2011 and Ning Restaurant:

"People who have tasted my dish have said that they like it and want to visit my restaurant."

The feedback from the audience describes how British people became more aware of Malaysian food after tasting it at Malaysian Kitchen events. In addition, the British also expressed a desire to visit Malaysian restaurants in their respective cities. Aside from that, the strategy as well sought to boost the popularity of Malaysian cuisine in the UK and brand Malaysia as a welcoming and warm country. The same kind of statement was mentioned by Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed as the Minister of International Trade and Industry (MITI) when attending Malaysian Nights 2015.

Mustapa said:

"Our agenda is to brand Malaysia as a friendly and warm country for investment, tourism and education, and to promote Malaysia as an open and helpful country."

In view of this, it directly demonstrates how Malaysia wishes to be perceived by the British people as having those characteristics (Othman, 2015).

One aspect of gastrodiploamacy, according to Zhang, is doing product marketing of their cuisine through the establishment of restaurant chains, promoting trade in relation to food products and services. Essentially, that is precisely what Malaysians did in the United Kingdom to their *"Malaysia Kitchen for The World"* campaign. For instance, in several cases, Malaysian Kitchen activities often showcased their culinary products and service in local market festivals (Zhang J. , 2015). In this case, it was not merely to promote Malaysian national food brands or products; it was also to increase the revenue stream for participating restaurants and chefs. Furthermore, according to MITI official publications, 47 Malaysian restaurants in the UK opened in 2010, which increased to 64 restaurants in 2012. In this case, *"Malaysia Kitchen for the World"* by MATRADE assisted in creating visibility of Malaysian restaurants, which led to an increase in customers and the possible expansion of new licensed Malaysian restaurants.

For example, the Malaysian Kitchen at the London Restaurant Festival Market is a collaboration with the Malaysia Restaurant Association. Teddy Chen, the Association's chairman, stated;

"The continuity of its association promotional drive is strongly linked to 21 authentic Malaysian restaurants at the London Restaurant Festival."

It demonstrated that those restaurants also found a new market for the Malaysian food that they produced. Another example of culinary market expansion can be found in Malaysia Kitchen activities: Malaysia Kitchen at Tesco events where the campaign provided an opportunity to sell and market Malaysian food in one of the largest British supermarket chains.

4. Conclusion

To draw a conclusion, it is clear that cultural aspects, such as national cuisine, can represent a nation globally or in a particular country. Thus, it is what has happened to Malaysia. Through *"Malaysia Kitchen for The World"* campaign in 2010-2015, Malaysia had considered using food as a vital element in promoting Malaysian culture, specifically in the UK that has shared a long journey with Malaysia as one of the targeted countries. Two conclusions can be drawn from the overall analysis of Malaysia's gastrodiploamacy practice in the United Kingdom

through the implementation of the "*Malaysia Kitchen for the World*" campaign from 2010 to 2015.

First, the implementation of Malaysia's gastrodiploamacy practice in the United Kingdom during 2010 – 2015 involved many cultural events related to food and engaged with many stakeholders, both government and non-government actors. Malaysian government through MATRADE and MKFF gave its support as main drivers for the entire campaign, sending top Malaysian chefs as gastro diplomats to demonstrate Malaysian culture through a set of cooking methods to promote Malaysian cuisine to the British. Adding to the essential role of gastro diplomats that act as more than just star chefs, the existence of both Malaysian restaurants and food events in different regions in The UK, including regional tours, campus tours and Malaysian Night Festivals, are seen as a maximum effort implemented by the Malaysian government to showcase its soft power through the element of food.

Second, the use of food to promote a nation's culture. Malaysia has implemented the gastrodiploamacy practice through various events and five multiple strategies consisting of marketing strategy through food and culture promotion. Additionally, the food event strategy was interpreted by carrying various festivals and events to promote Malaysian cuisine and food products. Following the third strategy was a coalition that involved partnering and collaborating with Master Chef Live in the United Kingdom. Media relations strategy included engaging with local media and social media aiming to gain high exposure for the food campaign as seen from the BBC Good Food Show and an education strategy that involved teaching and showcasing Malaysian cuisine to the audiences. All those mentioned gastrodiploamacy strategies have been found by the author during the "*Malaysia Kitchen for the World*" campaign within 2010-2015 in the United Kingdom.

With that being said, it can be concluded from the case of the "*Malaysia Kitchen for the World*" campaign in the United Kingdom from 2010 to 2015 that a gastrodiploamacy campaign is a viable tactic for branding a country's cultural aspect to another country. National cuisine is used to raise foreign awareness in a specific country, and food can be used to accomplish the desired goals. In this sense, national cuisine in gastrodiploamacy practice can serve as a diplomatic tool between countries.

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