

FOOD CULTURE ACCULTURATION OF MARTABAK CUISINE ORIGINALLY FROM INDIA TO INDONESIA

Angelina Rianti^a

^a Mahasiswa Jurusan Teknologi Pangan Universitas Surya Jakarta

Abstract

Martabak is a popular street food snack that is easy and widely found in the countries of India, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia. Martabak was first introduced in India, precisely in the region of Kerala. Martabak is an appetizer, side dish or some kind of snack. Indian traders and people who migrate to other countries bring and introduce martabak and become as a process of acculturation of food culture. Martabak itself introduced from India as a dish of stuffed fried bread with topping like meat and vegetables with main ingredient of eggs. In Indonesia, the culture of martabak food is adjusted and modified to form a new sweet martabak textured like pancake that has a thicker texture than savoury martabak. In Saudi Arabia, martabak is also known as two types which are sweet and savoury and often referred as "mutabbaq", while in Malaysia, sweet type of martabak known as "apam balik".

Key word : acculturation, culture, martabak

Abstract

Martabak adalah jajanan populer yang mudah dan banyak ditemukan di negara India, Indonesia, Arab Saudi, dan Malaysia. Awal mulanya martabak diperkenalkan di negara India, tepatnya di wilayah Kerala. Makanan ini diperkenalkan sebagai hidangan pembuka, hidangan sampingan, atau sejenis kudapan. Para pedagang dan warga India yang bermigrasi ke negara lain membawa dan memperkenalkan hidangan ini dan menjadi sebuah proses akulturasi budaya pangan. Martabak sendiri diperkenalkan dari India sebagai sajian roti goreng yang diberi isian seperti daging dan sayur dan bahan utama telur. Di Indonesia, budaya pangan martabak disesuaikan dan dimodifikasi hingga terbentuknya martabak manis seperti panekuk yang memiliki tekstur lebih tebal dari martabak asin. Di Arab Saudi, martabak juga dikenal dua jenis, yaitu manis dan asin yang sering disebut sebagai "mutabbaq", sedangkan di Malaysia, martabak berjenis manis dikenal dengan "apam balik".

Key word : akulturasi, budaya, martabak

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has very diverse range of culinary which are rich in cultural heritage and very valuable. One of the most popular culinary found in Indonesia is street food. Mostly, common types of popular and high demand street food are fried dishes (Kraig and Sen 2013), such as martabak. Acculturation is a process of cultural fusion which a person or group from original culture comes to adopt practices and values of newly adopted culture, while still retaining their own distinct culture (Kittler, Sucher, and Nelms 2017). Martabak is a culinary result of cultural acculturation from India brought to Indonesia and other countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Malaysia. Savoury martabak with egg as its main ingredient is the original martabak from Indian culture. Another type of martabak is sweet martabak. It was first introduced by an Indonesian, precisely by the residents on the Bangka island, Indonesia.

There were many culture stories behind one type of food, sadly, it is unfortunate that in nowadays food culture is no longer excavated and developed. Culture plays an important role in building identity for both people and certain areas. Although martabak is not Indonesia's staple food, it has an important cultural background to develop. National food culture comes from its cultural valuable stories behind (Kraig and Sen 2013). Therefore, the aims of this study are to explore food culture acculturation, especially in martabak cuisine from India to Indonesia, Saudia Arabia, and Malaysia, also to develop different ways of serving and cooking martabak.

CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF MARTABAK

Early martabak in India

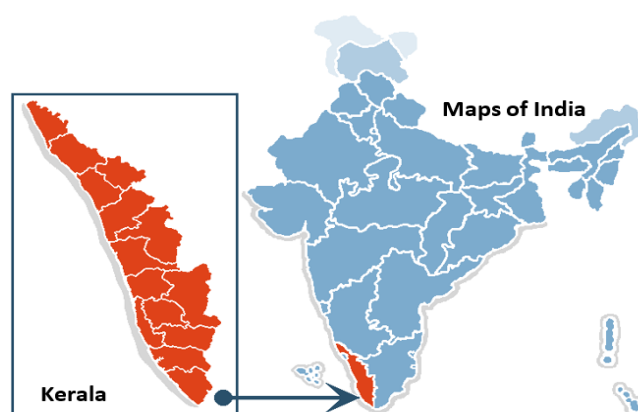


Figure 1, Location of Kerala state in India. Source: wikiwand.com

Martabak is a very popular and easy to find street food in India. It first started from Kerala state (Figure 1). The kind of martabak known in India is a savory martabak. It was called by Indians as “mutabar”, with “muta” means egg, whilst the “bar” means paratha bread (Figure 2), one of India's traditional bread (Lonely Planet Food 2012). It means martabak is a dish made from egg with outer layer of a bread. Oftentimes, martabak sold in India are served with curry sauce with flavorful and spiced taste. Curry was originated from Indian people. The common feature is a complex combination of spices or herbs, usually including fresh or dried hot chilies. Most of Indian restaurants both in India or any other countries serve curry as a companion sauce. The yellow colour of curry is present because of the tumeric which responsible for its colour (Sen 2004).



Figure 2, Paratha bread, India's traditional and legendary flat bread. This bread became an inspiration from the beginning of the existence of martabak. Source: indiamarks.com

The spread of martabak from India to Saudi Arabia

The spread of martabak is done by the Indian traders first to Saudi Arabia, precisely in Yemen, which has sizeable Indian population. In Arabic, martabak was called as “mutabbaq or مطبق” (Figure 3) which means “folded” (Holzen, 2014). In Saudi Arabia, martabak is a typical food which usually served when celebrating Eid. Normally, four martabak consisting of 2 savoury martabak and 2 sweet martabak were found during Eid celebration. Savory martabak toppings used were mixture of vegetables, minced tuna, hotdogs, or beef with cheese. On the other hand, toppings for sweet martabak used were banana or whipped cream cheese (Al-Mukthar 2015). Along with time, martabak are served as an appetizer, side dish or snack. It becomes a popular street food commonly found in Saudi Arabia, especially the Tihamah and the Hejaz regions.



Figure 3, Martabak in Saudi Arabia, mutabbaq. Source: tareeka.com

Back to third millennium BC, India and Saudi Arabia were close because of the trade and cultural links which help Saudi Arabia to develop their economy. They first joined in the trade of spices and until now they develop the relationship in regional affairs and trade. Ever since then, India and Saudi Arabia keep in a good relationship. Based on 2016 data, there were 3 million Indians or about a third of Saudi Arabia's total population lived in Saudi Arabia (Parussini and Anand 2016).



Figure 4, Arabic feast. The food was laid out on the floor served on a cloth spread over a carpet. People of Saudi Arabia use right hand or a bread to scoop a food. Source: documama.org

In Saudi Arabia, their traditional flat bread called as “fatir” and “kimaje”. Both of them are flat bread which are used in every meal of Saudi Arabia people as a complementary meal of other dishes (Figure 4). An authentic fatir is made with barley flour and it is baked on a metal pan placed over an open fire (Webb 2000), while kimaje is a flat bread similar to pita which is baked from an oven and served warm (Long 2015).

The spread of martabak from India to Indonesia

Starting from a young man from Lebaksiu, Tegal, Central Java named Ahmad bin Abdul Karim who moved to Semarang city to start a new business in 1930. Then, he met an Indian citizen named Abdullah bin Hasan al-Malibary who is good at cooking and they become good friends. One time Abdullah who came from India was invited to Ahmad hometown and introduced with his sister, and the introduction resulted in a marriage between the two. Abdullah is good at making a dish made from flour called martabak. He started to make martabak more adapted for the tongue of the Javanese who like to eat vegetables more than meats. He made martabak containing vegetables mixed with other ingredients as well as minced meat (Figure 5). Abdullah and his wife then settled in one of the villages named Lebaksiu Kidul in Tegal district and continue to make martabak there (Alamsyah 2008).

Martabak becomes popular and many relatives also neighbors are interested to be taught to make martabak. Moreover, martabak is also often introduced in various events outside the city such as in the night market, as well as special events. In Yogyakarta, Abdullah's partner, Muhammad established a martabak shop with the name of “Martabak Rahayu” and it became a legendary martabak to this day (Murbawono 2009).

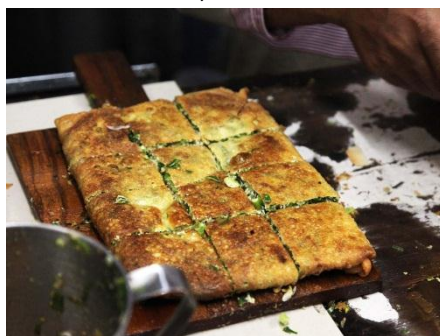


Figure 5, Classic savoury martabak or egg martabak, commonly called as “martabak telur” in Indonesia. Source: seriouseats.com

Savoury martabak in Indonesia not only martabak known as egg martabak. There is also a savoury martabak resembling an egg martabak developed from Kubang area, West Sumatra. It is popular known as Egyptian martabak (Figure 6) (Iskundari 2015). Its Egyptian name is chosen because people of Kubang was mistakenly thought that martabak was introduced in India and Middle East by the Egyptians. Despite from that, until now, it is still referred as Egyptian martabak.



Figure 6, Kubang martabak or better known as Egyptian martabak. Source: foody.id

Egyptian martabak is larger in size and it is made of ingredients that are almost similar to egg martabak in general. The difference is only in the stuffed meat that is used in Egyptian martabak is cuts of beef rendang. Another uniqueness that distinguishes the flavors of both is the oil used. Egg martabak use palm oil to fry, while Egyptian martabak use margarine or animal fat. To complement the sauce used, both types of martabak are served with a vinegar sauce with a spicy-acid taste (DetikFood 2014).

Egyptian martabak was introduced by a man named Haji Yusri Darwis (†), or called as Hayuda. He is from Kubang, West Sumatra. In 1971, he opened a store called "Martabak Egypt Kubang", but at the time of registering the patent the word "Egypt" should not be used because it is the name of the country, so the name of his shop changed to "Martabak Kubang Hayuda" (National Geography 2014).

Another typical martabak india existing and legendary in Indonesia is martabak HAR. HAR is an abbreviation of the founder's name, Haji Abdul Rozak. This martabak was introduced in the area of Palembang fifteen years ago. Haji Abdul Rozak is a Indian born who married to Palembang, Indonesia woman. He carried over the food culture from India along with him as he moved to Indonesia. Martabak HAR served with curry sauce like the original India's martabak (Figure 7) (TransMedia 2009).



Figure 7, Legendary martabak HAR, popular in Palembang, West Sumatra, Indonesia. Source: viva.co.id

However, there is also other types of martabak known in Indonesia, which is a sweet martabak (Figure 8). It is first introduced in the region of Bangka. Historically, it was created in the late 19th century by Chinese descendants who settled on the island of Bangka. Martabak Bangka is called Hok Lo Pan or Hok Lo cake. There are various names of sweet martabak, some called it with

“Martabak Bandung” or “Martabak Terang Bulan”. Martabak Bandung history is started when martabak was made by the Bangka people Koh Cen who settled in Semarang. He sells sweet martabak on Jalan Gajah Mada, adjacent to a Hakka (Khek) people named Moi Yan who sells noodle named “Mie Bandung”, which is very in demand and popular back then. To follow its popular name, then Koh Cen made sweet martabak and also called it “Martabak Bandung”. People of Yogyakarta and East Java have martabak round-shaped like full moon, so they called it “Martabak Terang Bulan” (Femina 2014). Not only in Indonesia, sweet martabak is also well-known in neighbor countries, Malaysia with is named as “Apam Balik” (Malaysia Pancake Co 2013).



Figure 8, Sweet martabak in Indonesia. These martabak can be filled with various of topping combinations. Source: asianfoodchannel.com

The spread of martabak from India to Malaysia

Martabak food culture is also developing in malaysia country. The culture is brought back by the Indian traders who settled there. The term Indian Muslim traders in Malaysia is “mamaks”. They first arrived in Malaysia during the 19th century, doing business in trading. They are Malaysians of Tamil Muslim origin, whose forefathers mostly migrated from South India to the Malay Peninsula and various locations in Southeast Asia centuries ago. They are regarded as part of the Malaysian Indian community. The word “mamaks” is from the Tamil term for maternal uncle. Oftentimes, they open street food stalls and sell some kind of snack, for example martabak (Figure 9).



Figure 9, One of Mamak stall which selling Indian pan fried martabak. Source: wikipedia.org



Figure 10, Types of martabak in Malaysia, well known as “apam balik”. Source: themalaymailonline.com

Sweet martabak was also popular in Malaysia. They often called it as “apam balik” (Figure 10). It is a type of pancake common in Southeast Asia. It is a traditional Hokkien Chinese snack, known as Min-Jian-Kue in Fujian, China, and was introduced by the Hokkien in Penang, which is then called as Ban-Jian-Kue (Lonely Planet 2010). It was made with peanut filling and the outer texture can be crispy and thin or thicker and soft (Roufs & Roufs 2014).

Different ways of serving martabak

In India, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, martabak were consumed with a curry sauce (Figure 11). Another ways to serve it, in Indonesia savoury martabak is more often found with a mixture of soy sauce mixed with tamarind and a little vinegar with pickled cucumber and chili (Figure 12).



Figure 11, Stuffed flat bread with curry sauce originally from India. Through Indian traders, murtabak has spread back to India and to all parts of Asia. Source: hungrygowhere.com



Figure 12, Savoury martabak with special sauce made from soy sauce and pickles or ketchup. Source: borneonews.co.id and umiresep.com

Classic and Traditional Cooking Process of Savoury Martabak

Savoury martabak is made using a shallow frying technique. The main key to result a good crispy martabak is to make its outer layer as thin as possible (Figure 13). The layer is made with a thin stretched wheat dough which is skillfully folded onto an egg and minced filling. The dough itself is consist of a mixture of wheat flour, salt, garlic, and oil. Normally, one regular egg martabak is made of 2 eggs, but customer can add more eggs to achieve a bigger martabak.



Figure 13, Stretching dough for making savoury martabak. Thinner dough results in crispier texture of martabak. Dough is made with high protein wheat flour. Source: seriouseats.com

The making process is through frying in a shallow cast iron pan with hot oil. The fillings of savoury martabak are green onions, another eggs, and meats. Eggs that can be selected are chicken or duck eggs, while cuts of meat can be chicken, beef, or others.



Figure 14, Frying process of martabak. Folding a martabak should be done gently to prevent the dough from crumbling and scattering. Source: <http://www.seriousseats.com>

After the fillings are added into the pan, the next step is folding the dough into a square shaped. The frying process is done until both sides of martabak change color into golden brown (Figure 14). Oftentimes, savoury martabak served with a companion sauce of a mixture of tamarind, chili, salt, brown sugar, and water (Ismani et al. 2016).

CONCLUSION

Martabak is food acculturation result of culture from India to some country like Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia. Traditional martabak from India is a savory martabak which then by some countries are modified according to the preferences of their respective communities. Martabak culture is closely related to the culture of eating bread in India. Cultural acculturation is brought by Indian traders known as mamaks in Malaysia. In Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia, martabak can be divided into two, namely sweet martabak with a thicker texture and soft and savoury martabak which is thin and crunchy.

REFERENCES

- Alamsyah, Y. 2008. *Bangkitnya bisnis kuliner tradisional*. Jakarta: Elex Media Komputindo.
- Al-Mukthar, R. 2015. *Savor true Hijazi taste this Ramadan* Retrieved January 27, 2017, from <http://www.arabnews.com/food-health/news/769936>
- DetikFood. 2014. *Gurih berempah martabak Kubang dari Sumatra Barat*. Retrieved January 27, 2018, from <https://food.detik.com/info-kuliner/d-2738962/gurih-berempah-martabak-kubang-dari-sumatra-barat>
- Femina. 2014, February 2. *Martabak manis alias kue terang bulan*. Retrieved January 26, 2018, from <https://www.femina.co.id/article/martabak-manis-alias-kue-terang-bulan->
- Holzen, H. V., Tham, M., & Holzen, H. V. 2014. *A new approach to Indonesian cooking*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Cuisine.
- Iskundarti, E. 2015. *Resep martabak Kubang khas Padang*. Retrieved January 27, 2018, from www.masakandapurku.com
- Ismani, Y., et al. 2016. *Superlengkan sajian roti, cake, & kue*. Depok: Jatijajar Estate.
- Kittler, P.G., Sucher, K.P., Nelms, M.N. 2017. *Food and Culture (7th ed.)*. Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.
- Kraig, B., Sen, C.T. 2013. *Street food around the world: an encyclopedia of food and culture*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, LLC.
- Lonely Planet Food. 2012. *The world's best street food: where to find it & how to make it*. Lonely Planet. ISBN 9781743216644.

- Long, L. 2015. *Ethnic American Food Today: A Cultural Encyclopedia*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Malaysia Pancake Co. 2013. *Deliciously unique pancakes*. Retrieved January 26, 2018.
- Murbawono, S. 2009. *Monggo mampir*. Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- National Geographic. 2014, March 29. *Martabak Hayuda, bukan martabak Kubang biasa*. Retrieved January 28, 2018, from <http://nationalgeographic.co.id/berita/2014/03/martabak-hayuda-bukan-martabak-kubang-biasa>
- Parassuni, G., & Anand, S. 2018. *Indian Workers Describe Hardship as Thousands Are Stranded in Saudi Arabia*. WSJ. Retrieved 2 February 2018, from <https://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2016/08/04/indian-workers-describe-hardship-as-thousands-are-stranded-in-saudi-arabia/>
- Roufs, T., & Roufs, K. 2014. *Sweet Treats around the World: An Encyclopedia of Food and Culture*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO.
- Sen, C. 2004. *Food culture in India*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- TransMedia. 2009. *100 Tempat Makan Paling Diincar: Nikmati Rasanya, Rasakan Untungnya*. Tangerang: TransMedia.
- Webb, L. 2000. *Multicultural Cookbook of Life-Cycle Celebrations*. Westport, Connecticut: Oryx Press.