



**ELICITING CHEFS' CREATIVITY IN UTILISING MALAYSIAN LOCAL
HERBS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN MALAYSIAN CUISINE**

By

MUHAMMAD REZZA BIN ZAINAL ABIDIN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
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Doctor of Philosophy**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in
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Since 2011, herbal trade has become a new source of economic growth in Malaysia, coinciding with the increase in global demand for herbal products. However, despite its significance, minimal emphasis has been paid to the use of herbs in culinary practices, particularly in creative and innovative culinary creations development. Most of the existing creativity literature explored how creativity enables chefs to survive in a fast-paced industry.

However, there are still substantial misunderstandings about how creative culinary processes unfold. Because of that, the rising trend of modernist cuisine may be a platform to unravel this phenomenon, as it requires a higher level of chefs' creativity to interpret it. Thus, this study investigates the utilisation of Malaysian local herbs (MLH) in modern cuisine development and illuminates chefs' creativity in contemplating the creation of modern Malaysian cuisine (MMC). This study aimed to develop a framework that dynamically conceptualises creative culinary processes by analysing chefs' creativity in fusing local produce into modern products through an inductive qualitative approach, using a multiple-case study design. Twenty-three informants were involved in this study: reputable modern chefs, food and industrial experts, culinary and food service academicians, and local government authorities.

The data were primarily gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participatory observations, interviews with related resources, and focus group discussions to best depict the repertoire and nuances of the creative culinary process of utilising MLH in the creation of MMC. The data was organised and analysed in two phases using the constant comparison analysis: the first phase was to capture the individual dynamic lens of each chef's creative thought process, while the second phase was to analyse and group each informant's

lens into categories that best encapsulate the creative culinary process in the creation of MMC. This was then followed by the cross-case analysis to seek convergent and divergent data across cases and solidify the categories into four unique themes: (1) embodiment of knowledge, (2) challenges of modernising the “orthodox”, (3) acclimatisation of modern cooking techniques and modern technology equipment, and lastly (4) conceptualisation of creativity in MMC.

In essence, this study contributes to three facets. First, it provides empirical evidence that creativity is intentional rather than accidental. It implies that the creative culinary process can be dynamically schematised as a motivating and essential aspect of human life that yields emotional and gratifying rewards for the creator. Second, the integrated creative culinary process model provides a set of steps that can be used to generate ideas and then transform them into creative innovations. It also contributes to the body of knowledge by indicating that such a sequence is a dynamic flow that generates more profound ways for chefs to articulate their creative thought processes. Finally, this study sheds new light on the dynamics that allow the equilibrium between familiarity and novelty in agricultural and creative industries, where products suffer from significant inattention, by revealing the key challenge of developing a modern cultural product that differs deeply from the traditional ones.

In so doing, this study focused on the product level by investigating the main fusing strategies to balance novelty and familiarity. While previous works have mainly underlined the importance of using traditional knowledge to create new products, this study specified the usefulness of new combinations between traditional and cultural elements with modern elements since existing literature has claimed the perils of offshoring for the recombinant of cultural and artistic cuisine innovations.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

MENCUNGKIL KREATIVITI CEF DALAM MENGGUNAKAN HERBA TEMPATAN DALAM PEMBANGUNAN MASAKAN MODEN MALAYSIA

Oleh

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Sejak tahun 2011, perdagangan herba menjadi sumber pertumbuhan ekonomi baharu di Malaysia, bertepatan dengan peningkatan permintaan global terhadap produk herba. Namun begitu, di sebalik kepentingan herba, hanya penekanan yang minimum sahaja diberikan kepada penggunaan herba dalam amalan kulineri, terutamanya dalam pembangunan penciptaan masakan yang kreatif dan inovatif. Kebanyakan literatur kreativiti sedia ada melihat kepada bagaimana kreativiti membolehkan seseorang cef bertahan dalam perkembangan industri masakan yang pantas.

Walau bagaimanapun, masih terdapat salah faham yang ketara tentang bagaimana proses kulineri kreatif berlaku. Oleh kerana itu, peningkatan trend masakan moden mungkin menjadi platform untuk merungkaikan fenomena ini, kerana seseorang cef memerlukan tahap kreativiti yang lebih tinggi untuk menjelaskannya. Justeru, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji penggunaan herba tempatan Malaysia (MLH) dalam pembangunan masakan moden dan mencungkil kreativiti cef dalam penciptaan masakan moden Malaysia (MMC). Matlamat kajian ini juga adalah untuk membangunkan rangka kerja yang mengkonseptualisasikan proses kreatif secara dinamik dengan menganalisis kreativiti cef dalam menggabungkan hasil tempatan ke dalam masakan moden melalui pendekatan kualitatif induktif dengan menggunakan reka bentuk kajian kes. Dua puluh tiga orang informan terlibat dalam kajian ini, iaitu cef moden yang terkenal, pakar makanan dan industri, ahli akademik masakan dan perkhidmatan makanan, serta pihak berkuasa tempatan.

Data dikumpulkan melalui temu bual separa berstruktur, pemerhatian peserta, temu bual dengan sumber berkaitan, serta perbincangan secara fokus kumpulan untuk menggambarkan dengan terbaik keadaan dan perubahan proses

masakan kreatif dengan menggunakan MLH dalam penciptaan MMC. Data yang diperoleh disusun dan dianalisis dalam dua fasa dengan menggunakan analisis perbandingan berterusan. Fasa pertama adalah untuk melihat pendapat dinamik individu pada proses pemikiran kreatif chef, manakala fasa kedua adalah untuk menganalisis dan mengkategorikan setiap pendapat informan ke dalam kategori terbaik yang merangkumi proses masakan kreatif dalam penciptaan MMC. Proses ini kemudiannya diikuti dengan analisis kes silang untuk mencari data yang konvergen dan divergen serta dikukuhkan kategori tersebut kepada empat tema unik, iaitu; (1) penjelmaan pengetahuan, (2) cabaran memodenkan "ortodoks", (3) penyesuaian teknik memasak moden dan peralatan teknologi moden, dan akhir sekali (4) konseptualisasi kreativiti dalam MMC.

Pada asasnya, kajian ini menyumbang kepada tiga aspek. Pertama, kajian ini menyediakan bukti empirikal bahawa kreativiti adalah sesuatu yang disengajakan dan bukannya kebetulan. Ini menunjukkan bahawa proses masakan kreatif boleh dirangka secara dinamik sebagai motivasi dan aspek penting dalam kehidupan manusia yang menghasilkan emosi dan kepuasan kepada penciptanya. Kedua, model integrasi proses masakan kreatif menyediakan suatu set langkah yang boleh digunakan untuk menghasilkan idea dan kemudian menukarkannya menjadi inovasi kreatif. Ia juga menyumbang kepada suatu badan pengetahuan dengan menunjukkan bahawa urutan ini adalah aliran dinamik yang menghasilkan pelbagai cara lebih mendalam kepada chef untuk mengemukakan proses pemikiran kreatif. Akhir sekali, kajian ini memberikan pencerahan baharu tentang dinamik yang membenarkan keseimbangan antara kebiasaan dan kebaruan dalam industri pertanian dan kreatif, di mana produk mengalami ketidakperhatian yang besar, dengan mendedahkan cabaran utama dalam mengembangkan produk budaya moden yang sangat berbeza dengan tradisional.

Dengan berbuat demikian, kajian ini memfokuskan kepada tahap produk dengan melihat strategi penggabungan utama untuk menyeimbangkan kebaruan dan kebiasaan. Sementara literatur terdahulu lebih menekankan kepentingan penggunaan pengetahuan tradisional untuk mencipta produk baharu, kajian ini menyatakan kegunaan gabungan baharu antara elemen tradisional dan budaya dengan elemen moden kerana literatur sedia ada mendakwa bahawa terdapat bahaya dalam penukaran pada rekomposisi inovasi masakan budaya dan seni.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF GLOSSARY

- Acehnese* An ethnic group from Aceh, Indonesia, on the island of Sumatra's northernmost tip. The area has a history of political tension with the Dutch. The majority of Acehnese people are Muslims.
- Archipelago* A large group of islands, or island chain, is a chain, cluster, or collection of islands, or sometimes a sea containing a small number of scattered islands.
- Asam Susur* Also known as Roselle, beetroot, and acidic acid, are plants of the species *Hibiscus sabdariffa* L. Roselle is said to be from India. Still, there is also an opinion that Roselle originated from West Africa. The Roselle plant was first introduced in Malaysia over three centuries ago. The roselle tree can grow from seed or cuttings with heights that can reach up to 3-5 meters and produce flowers most of the year. Roselle flowers are brightly coloured. The flowers or dark calyx are dark red and thicker than normal Hibiscus. The roselle process that can be processed into food is the salute of the flowers (cacao), which taste very sour. These floral salts can be transformed into various food products such as beverages, jams, jellies, sauces, oranges, powders, or roselle sheets. The Roselle leaf and young stems can also be eaten raw as a dish or salad and as a flavour in sauces.
- Asam Laksa* *Asam laksa* is a sour fish-based soup. *Asam* (or *asam jawa*) is the Malay word for tamarind, generally used to fortify the stock with its sour flavour. It is also normal to use "*asam keping*" also known as "*asam gelugor*", which is dried slices of tamarind fruit, for added sourness. Modern Malay spelling is *asam*, although the *assam* is still commonly used. The main ingredients for *asam laksa* incorporate shredded fish, normally *ikan kembung* or mackerel, and finely sliced vegetables, including cucumber, onions, red chillies, pineapple, lettuce, common mint, "*daun kesum*" (Vietnamese mint or *laksa* mint), and ripped-pink *bunga kantan* (ginger buds). *Assam laksa* is typically served with either thick or thin rice noodles (vermicelli) and topped off with "*petis udang*" or "*hae ko*", a thick sweet prawn/shrimp paste.
- Awet Muda* Looking younger than the actual age.
- Ayurveda* An ancient form of alternative medicine which is the traditional system of medicine of India and seeks to treat and integrate body, mind, and spirit using a comprehensive, holistic approach, especially by emphasising diet, herbal

remedies, exercise, meditation, breathing, and physical therapy.

- Belimbing Buluh* A type of local fruit often used to give sour or acidic flavour to food, substituting tamarind or tomato.
- Bouquet-garni* A bundle of herbs and aromatics (such as celery or leeks) tied together with cooking twine and simmered in stock, soups, or sauces to add flavour and aroma.
- Bugis* An ethnic group, the most numerous of South Sulawesi's three main linguistic and ethnic groups in the southwestern province of Sulawesi, Indonesia's third-largest island.
- Bunga Raya* Also known as *Hibiscus*. "*Bunga*" means flower in Malay, while "*raya*" means big or grand. Hibiscus species represent nations. *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis* is Malaysia's national flower, while *Hibiscus syriacus* is the national flower of South Korea. People from around the world have been putting Hibiscus to good use for thousands of years. The well-balanced, mild, berry-like flavour and aroma make the flowers and buds a perfect ingredient for herb teas, sauces, and syrups.
- Bunga Telang* A blue-coloured flower commonly found in Southeast Asia. The flower is used as a natural food colouring. In Malay cooking, an aqueous extract is used to colour glutinous rice for *kuih ketan* (also known as *pulut tai tai* or *pulut tekan* in Peranakan/Nyonya cooking). In Kelantan, east Malaysia, by adding a few buds of this flower in a pot while cooking white rice, a blueish tint is added to the rice served with other side dishes, and the meal is called *nasi kerabu*. In Burmese and Thai cuisines, flowers are dipped in soft batter and fried.
- Cincaluk* A dipping sauce made of fermented small shrimps or krill. It is typically served as a condiment together with chilli, shallot, and lime juice.
- Daun Kaduk* Also known as *wild pepper*. The glossy heart-shaped leaf of a creeper is often featured in local cooking. *Daun kaduk* leaves are sold in bunches and are usually eaten raw. In Thai cuisine, the leaves are used to wrap *miang kham*, a traditional snack; they are also one of *Kaeng khae* curry ingredients in Northern Thailand. The curry is named after the leaves known as *khae* in northern Thailand. It is eaten as part of a salad in Laotian cuisine. In Malay cuisine, it's shredded as *ulam*.
- Daun Kemangi* A herbal plant that originated in Southeast Asia that is planted for its distinctive features, taste and aroma enhancer. *Daun Kemangi* is widely used in Southeast Asian

cuisine, including Thai, Vietnamese, Laos, Malaysia, and Cambodian. The leaves are a typical ingredient in making the infamous Thai green and red curry and can be eaten as a raw *ulam*.

Daun Kesum A herbal plant typically found in Malaysia and a tropical country. This plant is believed to have originated from Southeast Asia, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam. It is used as an aroma enhancer and ingredient for cooking, such as *Asam Laksa*.

Daun Kunyit A leaf of turmeric which holds a strong, pungent aroma and taste. For culinary purposes, turmeric leaves are used in *rendang*, *kerabu*, and meat marination paste to enhance the aroma and flavour.

Daun Pegaga A herbaceous, frost-tender perennial plant in the flowering plant family *Apiaceae* (aromatic family plants). It is native to Asian wetlands. It is used as a medicinal herb and as a culinary vegetable. In Malay cuisine, it is eaten as *ulam* together with *sambal belacan*. Traditional medicine has been used to treat various disorders and minor wounds.

Daun Pudina An aromatic herb whose leaves have a strong, minty, fresh smell and taste that are used to give flavour to food. *Daun pudina* is used for flavouring ice cream, candy, fruit preserves, alcoholic beverages, chewing gum, toothpaste, shampoos, soaps, and skincare products.

Daun Selasih A culinary herb of the family *Lamiaceae* (mints). *Daun selasih* is the most used fresh in recipes. It is generally added at the last moment, as cooking quickly destroys the flavour or can be eaten raw. *Daun selasih* is also one of the main ingredients of Malays *kerabu* dishes.

Fish Head Curry A Singaporean cuisine with mixed Indian and Chinese origins. The head of red snapper (*ikan merah*) is semi-stewed in a mixture of assorted spices and herbs, with various vegetables like okra and eggplants. It is usually served with bread or rice or as a shared meal.

Gaharu A fragrant dark resinous wood used in incense, perfume, and small carvings.

Gajus *Gajus*, or cashew nut, is a kind of fruit tree. Its scientific name is *Anacardium occidentale*. *Gajus* gets its name from its seeded form outside the fruit and is bent like a *macet* (*hulu golok*). It can either be fried or baked and is typically served as a snack in the market. It can also be used for cuisine and cakes. Cashew fruit can be eaten, but the seeds are more marketable. The fruit is soft, has a lot of water, and

is often served as a vegetable. The seeds have hard skin, and the seeds in them have a fat taste like nuts.

- Inai* *Inai*, or botanical name *Lawsonia inermis*, is a kind of flowering tree in which the leaves are used to colour the human body's skin, hair, nails, and leather goods (e.g., bags, sacks, and sleeves) as well as dyes for fabrics.
- Kacang Botor* Also known as winged bean or Goa bean. In Malays culture, *kacang botor* is typically devoured as *ulam* accompanied by *sambal belacan*.
- Kerabu* A kind of salad with vegetables, fruit and sometimes meat or seafood. *Kerabu* is considered native by some cultures as they invent the recipe based on native ingredients of cultures.
- Kerisik* A smooth-grounded coconut paste which is sweet, nutty, and creamy in flavor. *Kerisik* is widely used in dishes such as *kerabu* and *rendang*.
- Lauk* Dishes or foods consisted of meat, fish, poultry, or seafood. *Lauk* is prepared in a particular way to be eaten with rice and some other condiments or dipping sauces.
- Malay Archipelago* A group of islands in the Indian and Pacific Oceans between Southeast Asia and Australia. They are claimed as the largest group of islands globally, including over 17000 Indonesian islands, about 7000 islands of the Philippines, and Papua New Guinea.
- Mee Kari* An Asian delicacy which is usually made up of thin yellow noodles or/and strings of thin *mee-hoon* (rice vermicelli) with thick, spicy, and aromatic coconut milk-infused curry broth, topped with an array choice of dried tofu, cuttlefish, chicken, egg, mint leaves, and cockle and served with chilli *sambal* aside.
- Mengkudu* A type of fruit that originated from Southeast Asia. Also known as *noni* or scientifically *Morinda citrifolia*. The fruit is a compound fruit; the young ones are shiny green and have dots; when they are old, they are white with black spots. Traditionally, the people of Aceh used *noni* fruit as a vegetable and salad. The leaves are also used as one of the traditional food ingredients, which often appears as a mandatory *iftar* (breakfasting) menu.
- Nasi Kerabu* A blue-coloured rice served with fresh herbs, salted egg, fish crackers, spiced sauce, and deep-fried turmeric-coated fish.

- Nasi Ulam* Is a Southeast Asian steamed rice dish mixed with various herbs, especially the leaves of *pegaga* (*Centella asiatica*), often replaced with *kemangi* (lemon basil), vegetables, and spices and accompanied with different side dishes. This dish features Malay cuisine with many variations and is commonly found in Indonesia, Malaysia, and southern Thailand. However, *nasi ulam* in Malaysia consists of cold boiled rice mixed with shredded herbs such as *daun kaduk* (wild pepper leaf), *pucuk gajus* (cashew leaf shoots), onions, etc. *Kerisik* and other spices are also added. Sometimes shredded fried fish is mixed in. This version is common in northwest Peninsular Malaysia. A type of *nasi ulam* in northeast Peninsular Malaysia, where the rice is dyed blue, is called *nasi kerabu*.
- Peria* Also known as frog fry, *peria* is considered s the most bitter vegetable in the world. It does not taste very pleasant and is often eaten when still raw. However, this fruit can also be eaten when cooked and is reddish-brown or orange. Raw seeds are white, but they become red when cooked. This *peria* is also used as a *sambal* sauce in southern India or tanned with onions and tomato spices and fried.
- Pucuk Putat* Also known as *pucuk gajus*, a young shoot leaf derived from the cashew tree, is typically consumed raw along with *sambal belacan*, *budu*, or *cencaluk* in a Malay tradition.
- Rotan* *Rotan* leaves have long hooks to facilitate the trees to climb to other trees. There is a strong commercial rattan from the rattan tree trunk, which has an incredible length (often several hundred feet) and uniform diameter. *Rotan* or rattan is used for sticks (for example, Melaka rattan) or cut in to make rattan wickers, baskets, and chairs. Resin from rattan fruit is commercially known as “dragon blood” and is believed to have medicinal properties by Greek, Romans, and Arabs.
- Sambal Belacan* *Sambal Belacan* is a hot-fiery sauce or paste typically made from a mixture of a variety of chilli peppers with secondary ingredients such as shrimp paste, garlic, shallot, palm sugar, and lime juice.
- Santalum* A small tropical tree and is the most commonly knAuthor’s source of sandalwood. It is native to India, Indonesia, and the Malay Archipelago. Certain cultures place great significance on their aromatic and medicinal qualities. It is also considered sacred in some religions and is used in different religious traditions.
- Sirih* Also known as *Piper betle*, the leaf has a structure that looks like the *Kaduk* leaf. It is significant in Malay customs,

especially in traditional Malay weddings and other traditional customs. The Malays use *sirih* as a delivery in the Malay wedding ceremony. It is also used in conjunction with someone in the process of curing the patient.

Ulam

A traditional salad produced from fresh leaves, vegetables or fruits which can be eaten raw or soaked in hot water. It is commonly eaten with special traditional sauces such as *cinjalok* or *sambal belacan*. It is recognised as a popular vegetable condiment in traditional village cultures.

Ulam Raja

An edible herb and its common names include *kenikir* (Indonesia) or *ulam raja* ("the King's salad" in Malaysia). In Indonesian cuisine and Malay cuisine, the leaves of this plant are used for salad, and it is usually served with *sambal belacan*.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FRIM	Forest Research Institute of Malaysia
MARDI	Malaysia Agricultural Research and Development Institute
MCT	Modern Cooking Techniques
MLH	Malaysian Local Herbs
MMC	Modern Malaysian Cuisine
MOTAC	Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Cultures
MTE	Modern Technology Equipment
NNC	New Nordic Cuisines
R&D	Research and Development
PCA	Professional Culinaire Association of Malaysia
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chapter Overview

The introduction of this study entitled “Eliciting Chefs’ Creativity in Utilising Malaysian Local Herbs in the Development of Modern Malaysian Cuisine” begins with an overview of the research background. This section exemplifies the application of local herbs in each ethnic cooking practice in Malaysia, the wave and impact of modernisation on the food and beverages (F&B) sector, and the rise of modernist cuisine, which is positively linked with chefs’ creativity in developing and innovating new cuisines. In particular, this study constitutes a new domain with a largely understudied potential of local herbs in the realm of culinary practices. Its essence is highlighted in the problem statement, along with the research questions, followed by the significance of the study from two diverse perspectives, practical and academic, in the last section of this chapter.

1.2 Background of the Study

Malaysian cuisine presents an array of local gastronomic inventions that represent the cultural diversity and uniqueness of the national cultural heritage. If there is one thing Malaysians are most proud of, it is undoubtedly the food. Malaysia is a paradise and utopia for food lovers, and Malaysians generally appreciate their multicultural society’s unique gastronomic heritage. The food makes Malaysia unique; it takes advantage of the plethora of natural resources and ingredients available more than in any other Asian country. Chronologically, Malaysian gastronomy was derived from various sources of ingredients and cultures representing different types of regional cuisines. Sharif and Nor (2016) explained the norm of ingredients as forms of recipes that contribute to the specific characteristics and flavours of cuisines. Henceforth, in the most basic doctrine, food has frequently been credited with offering a good vantage point for observing globalisation among societies, cultures, and places (Civitello, 2011; Toussaint-Samat, 2009; Yoshino, 2010). The diversity of cultures constructed within Malaysian society ranges from Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Eurasian to the various indigenous groups of the peninsula and North Borneo. Each culture has dramatically influenced Malaysian cuisine. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020), Malaysian residents are divided along ethnic lines, with 69.1% considered as *Bumiputera* or *Bumiputra* (literally meaning “sons of the soil”) who are characterised in the constitution as Muslims who practice the Malay custom and culture. Meanwhile, 23.0% of the population are Chinese descendants, whereas those of Indian origin account for 6.9% of the population and 1% of the indigenous group (“Original People” or “*Orang Asa*”, referring to the minorities of indigenous people who live in both *Peninsular* (West) and East Malaysia. In addition, in the eastern regions of Malaysia of Sarawak, Sabah, and Labuan, the *Bumiputera* includes all the indigenous groups mentioned in Article 161A of the Federal Constitution, such as Malay,

Dayak, Melanau (including Iban, Bidayuh, and Orang Ulu), Bajau, Kazadan Dusun, and other minorities indigenous groups (Nicholas, 2004).

Historically, Malaysian cuisine has been passed down from one generation to another. The creativity of Malaysians in diversifying their local produce manifests in an assortment of exciting recipes. Thus, given the historical background of Malaysia, it is considered an epitome to claim that the northern part of Malaysia, such as Kedah, Perlis, and Kelantan, has many influences from Thailand in terms of the style of cuisines as these states are situated at the border of the neighbour country (Hutton, 2005; Leong & Karim, 2015). In a similar vein, Terengganu and Pahang, which share the border with Kelantan, also have Thai influences in their cuisine. The extensive use of tamarind, lime, sour carambola (*belimbing buluh*), and chillies are typical in Thailand and northern Malaysian cuisines for the intense flavour of sour and spicy (Hutton, 2005; Leong & Karim, 2015). Meanwhile, fresh herbs such as Vietnamese basil (*daun kesum*), pandanus leaf, and Thai basil (*daun kemanggi*) are commonly used to add an authentic taste to northern cuisines (Hutton, 2005; Yoshino, 2010).

Conceivably, the utilisation of herbs in daily life has been observed for hundreds of years (Zakaria, 2015). Herbs are categorised in different ways, depending on the context for which the term is used. Anthropologically, the botanical acronym of “herbs” is commonly denoted as small plants with delicate stems containing minimal woody tissues (Embuscado, 2015; Peter, 2006; Samy, Sugumaran, & Lee, 2004). However, from the culinary lens, herbs can be depicted as the edible part of plants traditionally used to enhance the flavour or aroma of food (Clemenson, 2018; Kains, 2018; Reed, 2016; Robbers & Tyler, 2000). Local herbs are traditionally cultivated and produced locally in the country or region (Ohiokpehai, 2009; Trobe, 2001). The terminology “local” is closely associated with tradition and nature and thus reflects the identity of a native and culture (Dusselier, 2009; Gatten, 2016). Few studies have demonstrated that local ingredients and traditional food preparation are integral to the identity of regional foods and, by extension, the people who consume them (see Cawley et al., 2002; Duram & Cawley, 2012; Hamzah et al., 2013; Hein & Watts, 2010; Miele & Murdoch, 2002; Sonnino & Marsden, 2006).

Malaysia is one of the most significant contributors to the world's biodiversity. According to the Convention on Biological Diversity (2016), Malaysia ranks 12th internationally and 4th in Asia as a bio-diversified country. Most of the world's plant species stay obscure and hidden, yet an expected 400,000 species are believed to exist. Most of these are found in the tropical rainforest, with the Southeast Asian rainforests being home to 6,500 therapeutic or medicinal plant species (Reed, 2016). Geographically, Malaysia lies on the equator and receives significant rainfall, with 58.1% covered with tropical rainforests in the last century (Samy et al., 2004). As a result, temperatures are high year-round, providing the perfect condition for overflowing plant life (Hirschman & Swee-Hock, 2006). Malaysia's diversity of plant life is among the most noteworthy in the world. More than 2,000 herb species have a high potential for commercialisation in Malaysia (BERNAMA, 2019; Samy et al., 2004). The local herb market is expected to

expand by 15% a year, from RM17 billion (USD 4.1 billion) in 2013 to around RM32 billion (USD 7.6 billion) by 2020 (BLOOMBERG, 2019). This shows local herbs' potential growth and contribution to the economy. All these natural resources, which are promptly accessible in this country, allow the variation and creation of a vast array of astonishing delicacies.

However, in Malaysia, the utilisation of Malaysian local herbs (MLH), particularly in fine dining practices, is still at a laggard point (Abidin et al., 2020a). This unfortunate situation has created a stiff perception among Malaysians that the local herbs used in local dishes are considered native and traditional. In other words, the perceived value of MLH has only been portrayed in local or traditional dishes, which pins such limitations to the herbs' potential. The most common local herbs found in Malaysian cuisines as well as other Southeast Asian cuisines include curry leaf, lemongrass, garlic, tamarind, bamboo shoot, shallots, coriander leaf, turmeric, lime leaf, galangal, scallion, and onions (Raji, Ab Karim, Ishak, & Arshad, 2017). Furthermore, in food consumption, Samy et al. (2004) denoted that some herbs are typically eaten raw in many countries, especially in Southeast Asia. In Malaysia, these herbs are called *ulam*, served on plates of mixed greens or salads in traditional Malay meals. These herbs are devoured raw or blanched in hot water to expel any latex properties. They are typically dipped in a special spicy shrimp-based homemade sauce known as *sambal belacan* to enhance the taste.

The diverse use of herbs differs in every culture (Hutton, 2005) and symbolises distinctive flavours that portray different cultures through cooking (i.e., oregano represents the Italian region, and bay leaves roots for America). In Malaysia, each ethnic group has its way of transforming nature's bounty, which may return slathered with herbs and spices. For instance, in Malay cooking, herbs' most apparent use is in herbal rice or gastronomically known as *nasi kerabu*¹. The extensive use of herbs is also practised in Chinese cooking. Herbs such as galangal, turmeric, lemongrass, ginger-torch flower, or *bunga kantan* are considered essential in making the famous *mee kar*².

On the other hand, the Indian cuisine in Malaysia is inspired by or adapted from India. The vast majority of the Indian population in Malaysia came mainly from Tamil ethnic descendants of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka (Hutton, 2005). Therefore, aromatic herbs such as curry, coriander, and mint leaves are considered the principal in Malaysia's typical Indian cuisines. This can be seen in the process of making fish head curry, a special delicacy where the head of a fish (usually *ikan merah* or red snapper) is braised in thick, spicy curry gravy with a variety of vegetables such as okras, tomatoes, and brinjals.

¹ A blue-coloured rice classically eaten with dried fish or fried chicken, crackers, pickles, *sambal*, and other salads. The blue shade of the rice is derived from the petals of butterfly-pea flowers (*Clitoria ternatea*) or *bunga telang* in an overnight soaking process to get the essential colour.

² Yellow noodles served with spicy curry broth fortified with herbs and coconut milk and accompanied with assorted seafood, vegetables, herbs and with homemade *sambal* served on the side.

Practically, herbs are used at the beginning of the cooking process to enhance the aroma of the curry.

As the world becomes more revolutionised, the phenomenon of globalisation has had a significant impact on food systems worldwide (Kennedy et al., 2004). Hence, the urge for modernisation is a revolt (Reardon & Timmer, 2012). Modernisation has instigated a substantial change in human civilisations and has been considered a global trend since the eighteenth century. It incorporates considerable growth and transformation from traditional to modern politics, economies, societies, culture, human development, and local habitat protection (Marsh, 2014; Sharif et al., 2016; Vogel, 2008). Besides that, cultural and creative products must satisfy consumers, requiring a combination of “familiarity to understand what they are offered, and novelty to enjoy it” (Lampel, Shamsie, & Lant, 2005, p. 292). In this sense, the development of new products results from an effort to search for and recombine elements that simultaneously give legitimacy, acceptance, and distinctiveness (Lampel et al., 2000; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001). The impact may have influenced local herbs’ applications and menu development in the food service industry (Aziz & Pawi, 2016). Until the late 1980s, fine-dining restaurants that showcase high-end cuisines using local herbs and ingredients were scarce in Malaysia. Local herbs were typically showcased and used in local dishes, which were commonly available in roadside hawker stalls. Devastatingly, most well-recognised restaurants or hotels refused to serve local dishes in their establishments. Ergo, the attention on local herbs then seemed to be at its lowest point. However, with the culinary revolution, Folch (2008) and Osborn (2014) proposed that food modernisation has positive effects in rearranging and abridging the preparation of meals. In this notion, socio-demographic factors such as urbanisation overhauls, increased purchasing power, and food consumption patterns have modernised food ingredients (Baines & Seal, 2012). Consequently, many home cooks and even highly-trained chefs have become progressively susceptible to grasping modernisation and utilising modern components in their cooking practice and application (Sharif et al., 2016), which suggests that modernisation is becoming adaptable and adjustable in daily life.

In recent times, a new range of technologies and techniques have become more acceptable and applicable in professional kitchens. Hence, in the current trend known as modernist cuisine, the influence of these new applications is highly associated with and is pioneered by the luxury end sector or fine-dining restaurants (Myhrvold et al., 2011b). In defining the acronym of modernist cuisine, Myhrvold, Young, and Bilet (2011a) portrayed that “...modernist cuisine is a combination of ingredient, creativity, art, technique, and modern technology in the creation of a modern constructed plated dishes” (p. 56). The authors described that the techniques involve equipment and technologies that use precise and accurate time and temperature sensors to quantify cooking techniques with high precision (Myhrvold et al., 2011b). In so doing, these radical modernisation changes may be regarded as an opportunity for the chefs to fully utilise their creativity to bring out the potential of MLH in modern cuisines development. Furthermore, Cousins, O’Gorman, and Stierand (2010) stressed that modern cuisine development was positively associated with the chef’s

creativity and skill. The authors' voices are in line with recent studies whereby results showed that both creativity and skill of the chefs are essential fundamentals in developing creative cuisines (Lee, Blum, Miao, & Tomas, 2019; Lee, 2018; Lee, Blum, Miao, & Tomas, 2020; Peng et al., 2013). Henceforth, having greater insight into chefs' creative minds would yield more constructive information about new cooking developments.

1.3 Problem Statement

Hitherto, there exists friction in applying MLH, particularly in culinary practices. The strain is deemed the focal point of the Malaysian government's Primary Entry Point Project for the country's Agriculture National Key Economy Areas, which only focuses on (i) pharmaceutical products; (ii) research and development (R&D) in medicinal studies; (iii) therapeutic products development; and (iv) bio-pesticides³. Numerous studies have explored the extensive use of MLH in food nutritional compounds (Embuscado, 2015; Ranilla, Kwon, Apostolidis, & Shetty, 2010; Vallverdú-Queralt et al., 2014). Others, on the other hand, studied the applications of MLH in medicinal practices and herbs knowledge management (Bachok et al., 2014; Kaefer & Milner, 2008; Kim Sooi & Lean Keng, 2013; Rastogi et al., 2016; Sahri & Harun, 2012; Seetaloo et al., 2019). However, these past research works neglect the role of MLH, which is underutilised in modern cooking practices, leaving a gap in culinary management as studies of this issue in the literature is limited. Scholars (Abidin et al., 2020a, 2022; Aziz, 2017; Aziz & Pawi, 2016) supported this view by claiming that today's utilisation of MLH in modern cooking practices is seemingly at the lowest point. Henceforth, it is noteworthy to explore the potential and application of MLH in modern cuisine development to make cuisines more recognisable globally. To capitalise on this gap, the present study directs its focus on exploring chefs' creativity by employing a qualitative approach.

Chefs, "the soul of the restaurant", can be classified as culinary artists (Hornig & Lee, 2006). The chef is the central character of any full-service restaurant, unlike street cuisine and guesthouses available since antiquity offers a menu with different options that go beyond meeting the physiological need to eat. This extensive list of items allows people to eat what they want. The menu is designed to seduce, instigate taste, and encourage a willingness to try new flavours. Although their skills and expertise can be developed and tested through their culinary creations and certification, their creativity is difficult to quantify using easily identifiable tools and measures. According to Peterson and Birg (1988), chefs are similar to commercial artists who develop their creations within time constraints. To reach the highest level of culinary excellence, chefs require intense levels of dedication and professionalism in order to spark their creativity (Pratten, 2003b).

With the competition among restaurants for "stomach share" nearing Game of Thrones intensity levels, chefs are flexing

³ Initial Program Booklet NKEA EPP1, 2011 Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based Industries

their creative muscles even harder to capture their share of customer dollars. But pushing the edges of culinary creativity will only take you so far when it comes to attracting new guests and can actually force you over the cliff if you are not careful. Innovation—the ability to harness new ideas and make them work for your restaurant, is creativity’s true partner. Chefs love to concoct edgy menu items that represent our creative drive on the plate, but if that menu item does not represent the restaurant’s brand, is too complex for the kitchen to pull off consistently, or does not meet goals for food cost and margin, then it doesn’t belong on the menu. Period. That is why menu innovation has to ride shotgun with creativity (Haerle, 2019:1).

The above statement rhetorically emphasises the critical role of creativity in the culinary industry. Furthermore, the culinary revolution of *nouvelle cuisine*, which reinvented the food industry in the 1970s, was underpinned by creativity (Gillespie, 1994; Horng & Lee, 2006 cited in Robinson, 2011: 36). Horng and Lee (2009) observed that culinary creativity is a skill-oriented discipline, which they claim is essential to elevate the culinary profession’s status. Unlike creativity in general, Chossat and Gergaud (2003) characterised culinary creativity as the refinement of classical or traditional culinary art, implying that culinary creativity does not originate entirely from new ideas (Horng & Hu, 2008: 376). This exemplifies one of culinary creativity’s distinguishing characteristics.

Nevertheless, in the past, chefs have been strictly conditioned by the culinary apprenticeship tradition to create new dishes freely. Chefs once saw the advent of scientific methods as an adversary in their kitchen. Most of them were “unduly attached to their beliefs, traditions, practices, culinary superstitions, and old wives’ tales or folklore persisted for a long time” (Kurti & This, 1994, p.66). However, the rivalries in the culinary field have become fiercer, and today, many restaurants are striving to offer more on the table to attract more customers. Moreover, we live in an “experience economy”, where consumers become more aggressive in seeking out experiences that intrigue, innovate, and inspire (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). As the sector is becoming increasingly competitive, chefs are constantly pressured to produce new dishes and menus that attract consumers who seek outstanding gastronomical experiences. Hence, they are expected to create a unique and distinct dining experience beyond offering quality products. Kudrowitz, Oxborough, Choi, and Stover (2014) and Pang (2017) denote that chefs play an important role in showcasing every ingredient’s potential. That said, chefs must design products with creative appeal and aesthetically develop a style and identity that is distinctive enough to be recognised as their own (DeSoucey, 2016; Lee et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020; Leschziner, 2015). In another sense, chefs can be hypothetically postulated as “designers” who play with innovation and transformation of ingredients as well as the capability to adapt their skills to the current technologies and modern techniques (Klauser, 2007; Murphy & Smith, 2009; Stierand, Dörfler, & Macbryde, 2014; Stierand, Dörfler, & Sadler-Smith, 2015). This aesthetical view is supported by Fraser and

Lyon (2018), who claimed that in professional practice, new kitchen technologies and techniques have perpetually constricted chefs.

However, in modern cuisine development, chefs must deal with enormous tension between creative expression, menu susceptibility, and technological advancement (Bouty & Gomez, 2013; Capdevila et al., 2015). These are ill-posed puzzles by their very nature. Past studies have shown that the impact of technology on kitchen practice is not generally seen as benign but has rather been associated with chef attrition rates, changes in occupational culture (i.e., job-hopping), and diminished opportunities for creativity to flourish in the menu development process (Fine, 2008; Fine, 2006; Fraser & Lyon, 2018; Robinson & Barron, 2007; Robinson & Beesley, 2010). On the other hand, despite the long-debated controversy within the chef profession, it has also resulted in a job of low repute, underpaid, and loaded with unattractive work conditions (Ghiselli et al., 2001; Pratten, 2003a), gender inequality (Albors Garrigos et al., 2020; Kiestler, 2016), hostile work environment (Jung & Yoon, 2018; Mathisen et al., 2011; Murray-Gibbons & Gibbons, 2007) with a solid propensity to manifest violent and abusive behaviours (Bloisi & Hoel, 2008; Smith et al., 2021), packed with tedious and repetitive chores (Lee-Ross, 1999; Robinson, Solnet, & Breakey, 2014). These traits, therefore, may result in negative connotations and intimidation for chefs to cultivate and disperse their creativity in developing innovative cuisines. It has been agreed that “true creativity” requires specific moments dedicated to chefs’ thought processes, idea development, and mixing elements from different ingredients in creating new cuisines (Bouty et al., 2015; Bouty & Gomez, 2013). The innuendo was thus elucidated by a French chef and book writer, Edouard Nignon, as he concurs, “a chef should be free to express his own individuality” (Dornenburg & Page, 1996, p. 291).

At present, chefs are striving to navigate their creativity to employ local herbs in modern cuisines, commonly practised in the fine-dining restaurant industry (Feuls, 2018; Messeni Petruzzelli & Savino, 2014). This predicament may be called a “stereotyped culture”. Indeed, most chefs and apprentices in the kitchen are overly exposed and “formatted” to Wayne Gisslen’s *Professional Cooking*, the most admired culinary compendium in every culinary school. Consequently, they are often only mentally oriented and familiar with imported culinary herbs. In this defence, it is prudently fair to assume that the chefs have less knowledge and understanding of MLH, inhibiting their confidence to creatively utilise, modernise, and showcase MLH in their menu because they are more exposed to western culture and technique since the early stage of their career. Regardless, the growing trend in fine-dining restaurants has become a powerful platform for chefs to adequately portray their creativity in modern cuisines development (Roque et al., 2018). Past studies have proved that chefs in fine-dining restaurants perceived creativity and innovation as an apparatus and driving force for breaking so-called traditional cooking cultures by modernising them with modern cooking techniques (Borkenhagen, 2017a, 2017b; Cousins et al., 2010; Peng et al., 2013; Spence & Youssef, 2018). Practically, one of the ways to promote MLH demand is through the creation of modern Malaysian cuisines (MMC). This unique cuisine is typically crafted and served at fine-dining restaurants as it requires highly creative chefs and modern cooking techniques

(MCT) (Borkenhagen, 2017b). Furthermore, the fine-dining sector may be regarded as a getaway for international tourists to experience unique Malaysian gastronomy and local herbs through modern cuisine offerings. Everett (2008) asserted that tourists generally have expectations of foreign and exotic cuisines and the authenticity of tasting local food since food is affordable for tourists to indulge in while visiting (Reynolds, 1993). Gastronomy is considered an increasingly important element of the tourist experience. Research in this area has been conducted in various ways: some more rational or emotional, focusing on analysing relationality and co-creation (Richards, 2021). As illustrated by Grbac and Milohanovic (2008), food products are the essence of “pleasure and an unavoidable element in creating an authentic and unique travelling experience” (p. 83). Pragmatically, this could be a new platform to introduce MLH to the new market segment (as tourists might never have encountered Malaysian unique local herbs before, particularly in MMC) and showcase them to the world as they might share their experiences internationally.

In Malaysia, the contribution of fine-dining restaurants to the country’s economic growth is significantly substantial. According to a report from Euromonitor International (2015), the revenue for full-service restaurants has grown constantly over the decade. From 2008 until 2012, the full-service restaurant subsector recorded a Compound Annual Rate Growth of 3.3%, recording a total revenue of RM15.8 million in 2012, and it was predicted that the full-service restaurant subsector’s revenue would grow incessantly from 2013 to 2017, reaching a total revenue of RM19.4 million from 2017 onwards. Conceptually, fine-dining restaurants can be categorised as a full-service concept primarily because of the restaurants’ full-table service (a form of service in restaurants whereby food and drink are served to the customer) (Spears & Gregoire, 2007). The improvement in revenue shows that the demand for fine-dining restaurants is expanding. Interestingly, a review by Michael (2019) showed that the demand for MMC has been progressively sprouting after the debut of the BETA restaurant that pairs both local and modern ingredients harmoniously by incorporating modern cooking techniques in their own interpretation of “Bird’s Nest”—comprising of a coconut sphere, lychee bits, and water chestnut served on a bed of dry ice (see Figure 1.1). Hence, from a practical perspective, this implies a potential for MMC to flourish in the market.



Figure 1.1 : BETA's interpretation of bird's nest
(Source : Author's source)

However, devastatingly, the application of MLH in fine-dining scenes in Malaysia appears to be declining due to the limited knowledge of chefs of local herbs resulting in them only using common or imported culinary herbs (i.e., bay leaf, thyme, basil, sage, oregano, cilantro, dill, marjoram, to name a few) and ingredients in menu development (Abidin et al., 2020a, 2022; Ali, 2008; Aziz & Pawi, 2016; Fieldhouse, 2014). Accordingly, a balance is required that combines traditional and new elements whose results are inherently uncertain and contradictory (Dacin & Dacin, 2008; Hirsch, 2000). Most fine-dining restaurants in Malaysia are still dominated by the European or Eurasian cooking style, which fabricates imported ingredients in their menus. In a similar vein, Spence (2018) and Aziz (2017) pointed out that one common issue in modern cuisines development nowadays is the vague idea or concept and the absence of customer appeal. This view is supported by Dewakan restaurant executive chef Darren Teoh, in an interview with *TimeOut Magazine*, where he claimed that:

The market prefers to jump from hype to hype. There is no analytical skill for a lot of decisions that we make. And that is why you will not find many people opening restaurants focused on local ingredients. Because "local" is a bad word (Ragavan, 2015).

Thus, there is a stiff challenge for chefs to exploit their creativity to utilise and incorporate MLH in modern menu development, and creativity is a vital essence

for a chef to develop new cuisines (Bouty & Gomez, 2013; Lee et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020; Otero, 2018; Stierand et al., 2009a).

In light of the aforementioned, it is essential to emphasise MLH in this study, as herbs have been established and used in various cuisines to represent many cultures (Hutton, 2005; Raji et al., 2017). Consequently, if MLH is underutilised in today's cooking practices, their niche and nature's familiarity and exclusivity will likely be outshined by common or imported culinary herbs and gradually diminish in the future. It is also frightening that MLH may one day be extinct. Therefore, one way of rectifying this phenomenon is to depict the chef's creativity in utilising local herbs to their full potential to expose Malaysians and even global audiences to the uniqueness of MLH in a portrayal of *haute cuisine* heights. This may also potentially shatter Malaysians' conception of MLH as native and traditional and only utilised in local dishes. Hence, this qualitative study purposely chose MLH to portray the depth and uniqueness of Malaysian identity and culture, while chefs are harnessed as vessels or artists to metamorphose MLH into such fashionable arts. Simultaneously, it uncovers chefs' underlying creativity in maximising and modernising MLH's potential to its fullest, particularly in developing and compartmentalising their creative thought process in creating modern cuisine to support government initiatives to preserve MLH and encourage the potential use of MLH in modern cooking practises.

1.4 Research Objectives

In a postmodern society characterised by the fluidity of concepts, dealing with food requires a reflection on the transformations of eating. In this scenario, the chefs' work gains more space and importance. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to investigate and illuminate chefs' creativity in utilising MLH in contemplating the creation of MMC. Thus, these sub-objectives are needed to support this primary research's purpose:

- i. To explore the essentialities of knowledge in Malaysian local herbs (MLH) for chefs and their roles in the development of modern Malaysian cuisine (MMC);
- ii. To describe the challenges faced by chefs to creatively utilise Malaysian local herbs (MLH) in the development of modern Malaysian cuisine (MMC);
- iii. To discover the application of modern cooking techniques (MCT) and modern technology equipment (MTE) perceived by the chefs as an aid to creativity in the development of modern Malaysian cuisine (MMC); and
- iv. To conceptualise the ideal concept of chefs' creativity by utilising Malaysian local herbs (MLH) in the development of modern Malaysian cuisine (MMC).

1.5 Research Questions

Referring to the identified problem statement, it can be concluded that Malaysian local herbs (MLH) are underutilised in modern cuisine development. Thus, to support the objectives and direction of this study, the following research questions are formulated:

- i. What is the role of knowledge in Malaysian local herbs (MLH) for chefs and its essentialities in the development of modern Malaysian cuisine (MMC)?
- ii. What are the challenges faced by chefs to utilise Malaysian local herbs (MLH) in developing modern Malaysian cuisine (MMC)?
- iii. How do chefs creatively employ modern cooking techniques (MCT) and modern technology equipment (MTE) in creating modern Malaysian cuisine (MMC)? How are they perceived as an aid to creativity?
- iv. How do chefs conceptualise and arrive at the ideal concept of creativity by utilising Malaysian local herbs (MLH) in the development of modern Malaysian cuisine (MMC)?

1.6 Scope of Study

The development of creativity and innovation in culinary art is a continuous process that brought us the diversity of current food and cuisines. From the nouvelle cuisine in the 1970s to fusion and molecular cuisine, various innovations suggested that culinary creativity is closely integrated with culture, art, science, and technology. Therefore, exploring the proximity and epiphany of the creativity concept as a whole was deemed beyond the scope of the current study. The scope of the study was limited to the revisitation (or rather re-conceptualisation) of a previously developed creative culinary process framework to gain a better understanding of how the chefs nurture and compartmentalise their creative thought processes in utilising, incorporating, and modernising MLH into captivatingly innovative cuisines yet resembled the uniqueness of the Malaysian cultures across multi-sites fine dining restaurant in Kuala Lumpur.

Besides that, exploring the existing creative culinary phenomenon and creativity innate as lived-experienced for a chef as well as the attempt to capture the essence of culinary creativity from aesthetic views, were not part of the current study's objectives. Furthermore, this study was not conducted to describe or explicate the developed framework with the existing frameworks of the creative culinary process found in previous studies that emphasised and tapped on the extrinsic performance of the culinary artists—the chefs. The current study was specifically conducted to scrutinise the chefs' knowledge of MLH and also to obtain a better understanding of the challenges and measures taken by the chefs

to tame the phenomena of the underutilisation of MLH in modern cuisine development. On the same note, this study also seeks the emergence of MCT and MTE as an aid for chefs to fashion MMC creatively. Ultimately, this study aimed to develop a dynamic creative culinary process framework through the hybridised model of Horng and Hu and Amabile's theory for modern chefs to showcase and stimulate their creativity in developing tantalising menus.

Adding to that, the creative culinary process framework in this study was developed for modern fine dining restaurants that practised modern high-end cuisines, specifically focusing on cultural nuances and ingredients (i.e., MLH and MMC). The use of this framework was not meant to be generalised for all restaurant establishments. Considering the exploratory nature of the current study, this study did not employ a large sample of informants and restaurants to measure the efficiency of the developed framework. In particular, the developed framework was only applied to partial segments of the restaurant establishments participating in this study. Feedback from the other "culturally-segmented" restaurants would be beneficial to support the improvements and justify the applicability of the developed framework.

1.7 Significance of Study

1.7.1 Industrial and Managerial Perspectives

From the industrial lens, the findings from this study are beneficial to form the basis of guidelines for major government bodies such as the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Cultures (MOTAC), Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), Forestry Department Peninsular Malaysia, and Malaysia Agriculture Research and Development Institute (MARDI) in developing promotional strategies for extensive uses of MLH in cooking practices throughout the various perspectives from the chefs. This may simultaneously make MLH more recognisable and celebrated locally and internationally. Moreover, Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) announced they were interested in working with agencies to enhance the quality of the herbal product, competitiveness, and the ability to penetrate local and international markets (FRIM, 2018). This demonstrates the real potential of this study to merge with the plan. As such, it would be useful for those agencies to carve out a new market niche for MLH to make them more recognisable in modern cooking and different economic spheres. Furthermore, this study exemplifies the barriers and hustles chefs experience to utilise, incorporate, and modernise MLH in creating MMC and tackle the underlying attributes inside the mind of a creative chef. Hence, this will benefit both chefs and restaurateurs of high-end outlets to elevate the potential of MLH to the top-notch level despite isolating and connoting the "treasured gems" to only traditional dishes.

From a managerial standpoint, this study offers an opportunity to allow restaurateurs to create more prolific and effective environments for chefs to disperse their creativity freely. As sturdy as they may be seen, chefs are nonetheless vulnerable human beings. That said, they need to re-energise, have

time to reflect, and entice the work environment to stimulate fresh and innovative ideas. A restaurant's reputation exerts tremendous pressure on the creativity of chefs. Therefore, it is legally crucial for restaurant managers to cater and design a prolific workplace for chefs to nurture and amplify their creativity. For example, Ferran Adria separated his restaurant spatially and temporally to protect his creative freedom and emancipation from a creativity workshop where he and his team could freely explore and experiment. He shuttered his restaurant for six months of the year to give himself time and space for exploration (Svejenova et al., 2007, 2010). To date, many or most of the world's best chefs employ Andria's creative "laboratory" concept to conceive and test new ideas before implementing some of them in restaurants. Likewise, this study intends to encourage managers and organisations to legitimise different creative patterns and trends, including more spontaneous strategies such as imagination and improvisation, in a creative process that attracts academic attention in fast-changing environments (Liu et al., 2018). While new product development processes need to be organised and standard procedures need to be established to ensure production stability over time, unusual patterns may also be embraced and valued. They can help manage unforeseen situations and more fluid contexts (Weick, 2015). Also, it is noteworthy to take into consideration of the startling outbreak of COVID-19 that has impacted and drained the industry to its lowest boiling point to survive and stay afloat, thereby posing existential threats to the restaurant businesses. Given the substantial impacts of the crisis on the industry, chefs, managers, and the top management are compelled to synthesise the critical assessment of state-of-the-art crisis management (Hartmann & Lussier, 2020; Leta & Chan, 2021), which are the actions and communications that organisations systematically undertake to reduce the likelihood of a crisis, mitigate crisis impact, and re-establish order after a crisis (Bundy et al., 2017; Pearson & Clair, 1998). Henceforth, by adopting this circumstance into a persuasive one, the findings from this may articulate the difficulties encountered during the crisis and contextualise the thoughts expressed by the informants who participate in this study, which would benefit the post-pandemic industry's future direction. Finally, findings from this study may help to reduce barriers to the underutilisation of MLH and foster a culture of culinary innovation.

1.7.2 Theoretical Perspective

Although numerous studies on local herbs have been carried out, the role and application of MLH in cooking practices, particularly in modern cuisine development, remains unexplored. Hence, an in-depth analysis of this qualitative multiple-case study unequivocally contributes to modern Malaysian food literature through the lens of the manifestation of eight notable and highly creative chefs. The findings shed new light on the current debate on creativity and innovation and explain how different creation patterns unfold. It reflects an initial effort to investigate the assimilation of the agriculture and gastronomy sector's creative culinary process, which is still uncultivated. This study sequentially portrays a process that facilitates chefs' creativity in utilising MLH in MMC development. Existing literature endeavours to harness creativity—in culinary, it is focused on its predictions and precursors (Hornig & Lee, 2009;

Jeou-Shyan & Lee, 2007; Stierand, 2015; Stierand & Lynch, 2008) as well as its consequences (Burrow et al., 2015; Robinson et al., 2014; Robinson & Beesley, 2010). Others conversely viewed creativity as a non-linear narrative (Lee et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020) and the “subjectivism” of lived experiences (Stierand & Dörfler, 2012; Stierand et al., 2009). In comparison, this study argues (or more fittingly proposes) that creativity can be developed into organised patterns—if not linear, then specifically on how the chefs schematise, compartmentalise, and articulate their thought process in developing an innovative cuisine. Fundamentally, this study also adds more paramount significance to the realm of culinary creativity. In this sense, few researchers have explicitly made a position to contend its uniqueness, as existing studies studied culinary creativity as a minor branch of creativity literature (Albors-Garrigos et al., 2013; Lin & Baum, 2016; Pang, 2017; Presenza et al., 2017). Moreover, the findings of this study expand the academic context of culinary creativity for future planning of culinary education as creativity continues to rule as a survival skill in today’s economy and society (Astuty & Suryana, 2018; Das, 2016; Eren & Aydin, 2019; Lorenzen, 2019; Presenza et al., 2017; Wilcoxson & Moore, 2019). Finally, by tackling the phenomenon of underutilisation of MLH in modern cuisines development with the recombinant of culinary creativity from the viewpoints of chefs, this study hopes to magnify some much-needed evidence to “real” culinary creativity as an independent and distinct field for academic exploration and perhaps uplift the value of MLH through MMC development towards international recognition in the nearest future.

1.8 Definition of Key Terminologies

Before proceeding, it is imperative to define and clarify several key terms that are used throughout this study. Each terminology drawn is supported by previous literature and is modified for the relevance of this study.

Herbs

Botanically, herbs denote small plants with delicate stems containing minimal woody tissues (Embuscado, 2015a; Peter, 2006; Samy et al., 2004). From the culinary lens, herbs are the edible part of plants traditionally utilised to enhance and intensify flavour or food aroma (Clemenson, 2018; Hayaloglu & Farkye, 2011; Kains, 2018; Reed, 2016; Robbers & Tyler, 2000).

Malaysian Local Herbs (MLH)

Herbs which are typically cultivated and produced locally in an area concerning the country or region (Ohiokpehai, 2009; Trobe, 2001).

Chef

A trained, professional cook proficient in food preparation who often focuses on a particular cuisine, whose profession requires a specific set of creative thinking

skills to perform a task. A chef is also portrayed as a manager, innovator, artist, and flavour expert in the culinary field (Dornenburg & Page, 1996; Rédei, 2008; Ruhlman, 1999).

Creativity

The creation of new, unique, and interesting ideas that are useful, practical, and suitable for a given circumstance or problem solution. It refers to both the idea generation or problem-solving process and the actual idea or solution (Amabile, 1983).

Culinary creativity

This study takes upon the perspective of chefs' manifestation. Henceforth, it is defined as a generation of thoughts that takes after self-articulations of the chefs' inner states that reflects their personality, knowledge, skills, expertise, and experience (Hornig & Lin, 2009; Jeou-Shyan & Lee, 2007; Lee et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020).

Innovation

The outcome of creativity is the output and benefit from the original creative ideas (Amabile, 1996).

Culinary Innovation

The outcome of culinary creativity which are the outputs and benefits from the original culinary creative ideas—in other words, the final or finished dish/menu (Stierand et al., 2014).

Modern Cooking Techniques (MCT) and Equipment (MTE)

New techniques involve equipment and technologies that use accurate time and temperature sensors to quantify cooking techniques with great precision (Myhrvold et al., 2011b; Spence & Piqueras-Fiszman, 2013).

Modern (ist) Cuisines

A combination of ingredients, creativity, art, technique, and modern technology to create a modern constructed cuisine (Myhrvold et al., 2011a, p. 56).

Modern Malaysian Cuisine (MMC)

A cuisine that evolves classic flavours to a more contemporary palate. It can be lighter and/or come in unexpected forms yet still retain Malaysian culture's

tastes, ingredients, and influences, using modern cooking techniques to revolutionise a new type of cuisine (Abidin et al., 2020b).

1.9 Thesis Organisation

Overall, this thesis consists of six chapters, which are organised as follows:

Chapter 1 introduces the pressing issue of underutilisation of MLH, particularly in the modern cuisine context. A constructivist paradigm was selected to address the research questions and specific objectives of the current study. This chapter also particularised the roles of the chefs as creative vessels to modernise MLH into innovative cuisines. Also, this chapter emphasised the significance of sustaining and elevating the utilisation of MLH through chefs' creativity. The constructivist approach helped to give structure to the overall study, which yielded both theoretical and practical contributions.

Chapter 2 focuses on reviewing the existing literature with regard to the problem statement highlighted in the previous chapter. This chapter elaborates on the etymology of herbs used in different cooking and culture and their significance to this study. It further narrates the culinary and modern cuisine movements. It explains the importance of culinary creativity as a process and the personification of modern chefs as artists in publicising and modernising MLH through the development of MMC. In this chapter, the integrated theory and model are also presented to illustrate the creative process articulated by the chefs in developing modern Malaysian cuisine. A theoretical framework is presented at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 3 describes the research paradigm and selected methodology and procedures for the current study. This chapter also presents the researcher's justifications for trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 discusses the study's findings with respect to the specific objectives. The chapter presents the discussion according to each case.

Chapter 5 dismantles the similarities and differences of each case through the results of a cross-case analysis, which allows for reflection on the data and the development of a broader interpretation of the overall study.

Chapter 6 provides the conclusions and contributions of the study and presents the limitations of the current study and recommendations for future research.

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