

## **A taste of the past: Uncovering food histories through Malayan newspapers**

### **Abstract**

Research into local foodways often neglects the unusually rich minefield of data found in newspapers. The digitization of local newspapers offers greater access to this invaluable resource for research into social history. The benefits and challenges of using newspapers in food research, particularly in unveiling the faces and flavours behind local street food, the evolution of particular dishes, their colloquialisation into place names and language are examined in this paper. A local condiment, *belacan* and a snack, *curry puff* as reported in Malayan English papers, are used as case studies to flesh out these issues.

### **Introduction**

Multicultural Singapore has always had a tenuous sense of nationhood but food has served as communal glue sealing the racial divide. Local government agencies have latched onto this and used local cuisine as a rallying point. For example the Ministry of Education, through its National Education curriculum has included heritage food as a subject of study for primary and secondary students to help instill a sense of national pride. Food is also a great money-spinner for both government as well as commercial endeavors. The Singapore Tourism Board Street has glorified street food of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as heritage cuisine at its annual Food Festivals and in specially assigned air-conditioned food centres to attract the tourist dollar. Even private companies from food manufacturers to restaurants purveying Singapore's cuisine, seek information so they can publish short historical accounts of local foods on their packaging or menus to enhance sales.

For some of these reasons, government, commercial and personal enquiries on heritage foods are frequently addressed at the National Library Singapore's reference desk. The Infopedia – an electronic database on Singapore, its people, culture and customs was created by the National Library Singapore as a self-help service for enquiries on Singapore's heritage with content generated by staff including several articles on food. In developing these heritage services, it became apparent that there was a dearth of resources on local foodways.

Even though in recent years there has been a surge in research work into Asian foodways<sup>1</sup>, newspapers do not often feature in these academic publications. For example, in Leong-Salobir's recent publication *Food culture in colonial Asia* (2011), coverage on British Malayan foodways used extensive references such as books, personal interviews, cookbooks and diaries with the obvious exception of newspaper articles.

### **Research into foodways with newspapers**

This paper examines the rich resources uncovered and the challenges faced when using local English newspapers to study details of local foodways. Iconic local foods namely a condiment, *belacan* and a local snack – the *curry puff*<sup>2</sup> - are used as case studies in showing how newspapers reveal new information. The study is based primarily on English Malayan newspapers that have been digitized. Cross-references are made to present day articles which remember, recall and romanticize these food items. The 1920s is taken as a rough starting point, as newspapers began a more active

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<sup>1</sup> These include *Changing Chinese foodways in Asia* (2001); *Food and foodways in Asia: resource, tradition and cooking* (2007); *Chinese food and foodways in Southeast Asia* (2011)

<sup>2</sup> These items have been selected because of several reasons – its pervasive reference in newspapers spanning the period studied and its localized flavours. Although there are many other dishes such as Hainanese chicken rice, *laksa*, *mee siam* etc, their articulation especially in the English newspapers of the interwar period is not extensive.

reporting of local social life and as 20<sup>th</sup> century news articles of heritage dishes reliably point back only as far as this period.

Local newspapers in the National Library holdings were digitized and launched as NewspaperSG, in March 2009<sup>3</sup>. The portal gives access to 29 titles, spanning the publishing years of 1831 to 2009, with more titles expected to be added. These are primarily English-language newspapers but also include Malay, Tamil and Chinese newspapers. Its robust search engine allows for a search into full-text articles, advertisements, published letters and reports<sup>4</sup>.

Complementing the NewspaperSG is the subscription database Factiva which allows access to more current articles including those from Singapore and Malaysia, spanning about three decades of most recent print, from the 1990s to the current year. Research into historical Singapore often requires cross-referencing with Malaysian newspapers where reports, such as foodways of colonial times, would cover the Malayan<sup>5</sup> period when both countries were a single entity. Thus access to Malaysian newspapers such as *The New Straits Times* and *Malay Mail* through Factiva is vital. When studying colonial history, heritage British newspapers online such as *The Times Digital*<sup>6</sup> and *The British Newspaper Archive*<sup>7</sup> may also prove useful in revealing how foods may have travelled with colonials to disparate colonial lands and back home, evolving in shape and taste. Thus, besides the main NewspaperSG portal, all these added newspaper databases were also consulted for this study.

### **Trends in food reporting during colonial times**

The local culinary scene and subsequently its reporting experienced a major change when more expatriate women settled in Malaya soon after the First World War<sup>8</sup>. A high marriage rate during World War I resulted in more married expatriate men arriving in Malaya in the 1920s. The war years also encouraged more women to enter the workforce in Europe, a move echoed in Malaya<sup>9</sup>.

With the numbers and the standing of women increasing, local newspapers began reflecting their interests and concerns. Where previously, articles on cooking and food in the newspapers were with reference to the cook employed in the home, by the mid-1930s, there were regular columns in the English dailies for women which targeted their spending power. Thus *The Straits Times* published "The World of Women"<sup>10</sup> in January 1935 which evolved into "A Malayan Bungalow" otherwise known as the "Women's Supplement"<sup>11</sup> while *The Malayan Saturday Post* had "A Woman's Viewpoint". Interestingly, articles featured fancy parties, fashionable wear, strange sights in Malaya (mainly of the local folk) but little on tasting local food or cooking them.

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<sup>3</sup> Data for the digitization of local newspapers and NewspaperSG is taken from Mazelan, Law, Soh, 2012, p.2

<sup>4</sup> For the non-English language searches, only one Malay newspaper, *Berita Harian* and two Chinese newspapers, *Lianhe Zaobao* and *Sin Chew Jit Poh* can be searched using key words. The other language papers can only be browsed using a preview (Mazelan, Law, Soh, 2012, p.2).

<sup>5</sup> "Malaya" is a historical entity which today is made up of Malaysia and Singapore. Although its political boundaries fluctuated, the term is often used with reference to the Peninsula of Malaysia and Singapore under colonial rule, particularly prior to World War II.

<sup>6</sup> A Gale Group subscription based portal of The Times, a key English newspaper, spanning the period from 1785 to 1985.

<sup>7</sup> An ongoing digitization project showcasing the heritage newspapers published in Britain found at the British Library and accessible at <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>. Subscription is required for full access

<sup>8</sup> Butcher, 1979, *The British in Malaya, 1880-1941*, p. 134

<sup>9</sup> Butcher, 1979, *The British in Malaya, 1880-1941* p. 142

<sup>10</sup> This column seemed to have begun on January 10, 1935 with a half page but soon expanded to a full-page.

<sup>11</sup> This continued the weekly Thursday column which was expanded into a four-page supplement first released on January 16, 1936.

On 4 June 1940 *The Singapore Free Press* announced the arrival of Mary Heathcott, possibly the first female journalist in this male-dominated industry<sup>12</sup>. She was known as “an experienced woman journalist who was until a few months ago with the *Evening News* (London)... and brings [with her] the modern Fleet Street touch. There is none of the ‘senseless tittle-tattle and snobbish prattle which most leading London newspapers abolished years ago’”<sup>13</sup>.

Generating more interest in food was a simple institution that became a meeting ground for women from various races and backgrounds – the YWCA (The Young Women’s Christian Association). It was one of the only places where single and married ladies, local and expatriate wives, mothers and working women could come together and sharpen culinary skills. Since the 1920s<sup>14</sup>, the newspapers regularly reported cooking classes, with an increasing number of participants showing interest in Asian cuisine and techniques of cooking. In fact, many attending these classes were Asians.<sup>15</sup> In many of these classes, the YWCA cook book was held up as the main guiding light and it remained revered by generations of local and expatriate women, being republished several times into the 1960s. Newspaper reviews of local cookbooks such as this are a useful gauge of the reception of local flavours by the English-speaking community.

Prior to World War II, however, the European community remained averse to cooking and eating local foods and flavours, encouraged by the conveniences of tinned food and refrigeration and fresh imports of meat and milk from Australia. News of the war in the West and its looming presence in the East saw the “grow more food” campaign begun with several newspaper articles urging readers to grow and cook local vegetables<sup>16</sup>, particularly having experienced the food shortages in the interwar years. By August 1941, broadcast talks entitled “Wartime Cook” were announced in the papers.<sup>17</sup> Internment was possibly the first time many of these Europeans began feeding regularly on rice and local ingredients<sup>18</sup>.

In post-war Singapore, between 1946 and 1948, the government offered cheap meals<sup>19</sup> at the People’s Restaurants serving local dishes such as fried rice and fish curry for a pittance to fend off the escalation of food prices fueled by the black market. At its peak, the People’s Restaurants fed 20,000 a day.<sup>20</sup> A menu for the day was sometimes announced in local English papers.

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<sup>12</sup> Turnbull, 1995 p. 157.

<sup>13</sup> (Free Press news feature, (4 June 1940), *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, p. 3). Unfortunately, though Heathcott could have potentially reported on more feminine aspects of life, her columns focused on the usual political and social events of life in Malaya, with just a softer touch to the reports. There was no analysis of local cuisine, talk of servants or recipes.

<sup>14</sup> One of the earliest reports of a cooking class held by the YWCA, was for the Girl Guides dated February 17, 1921 (Singapore Girl Guides. (17 February 1921). *The Straits Times*, p. 8). The report seemed to indicate that classes were already regularly held for these Girls

<sup>15</sup> Photographs of a cookery class in the late 1930s show that the women studying the craft were primarily Chinese, with the report indicating only 6 out of the 22 attending were European (Learn to be a cook of many dishes. (24 August, 1939), *The Straits Times*, p. 5).

<sup>16</sup> Granted the main targets for the “grow more food” campaigns were local farmers, but there are articles that appeal to the Malayan to venture growing his own food such as Vegetables and “Grow More Food” Campaign, (12 February 1940), *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, p. 5 and Changkol For Victory, *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, (10 August 1940), p. 4

<sup>17</sup> Broadcast talks on wartime cooking, (15 August 1941), *The Straits Times*, p. 12

<sup>18</sup> Peet, 2011, pp. 67-68

<sup>19</sup> Priced at 35 cents initially then reduced to 15 cents so it was more accessible to the poor. (Meals offered at 15 cents. (12 October 1946), *The Singapore Free Press*, p. 5).

<sup>20</sup> T. F. Hwang takes you down memory lane. (9 March 1974), *The Straits Times*, p. 12

The *Malaya Tribune*, a newspaper started in 1914 and targeting the Asiatic readers, is credited with training local journalists, particularly in the 1930s<sup>21</sup>. These men were to anchor the increasingly localized English newspapers in post-war Singapore. Thus the flavours of local cuisine began to take center stage in food columns, with greater details given of ingredients, preparations and consumption particularly through the food columnists of the 1970s and 1980s such as Violet Oon, Lee Geok Boi and Paik Choo who reinforced the romanticisation of the dishes of the 1950s and 1960s as they reminisced over the food they grew up with.

In delineating this brief history, researching newspapers proved to be an exercise in data mining. Print and online sources served as a guide, providing keywords, dates and concepts for finding critical information in newspapers which further expanded on known facts. For example, *Dateline Singapore* (1995), the well-known publication on the history of the main daily, *The Straits Times*, only gives a single mention of Mary Heathcott, the first female Malayan journalist, whereas newspaper articles reflect both her writing and her journalistic journeys, giving a stronger profile picture of the person. Commemorative books have been published of the YWCA and the many editions of its cookbooks are readily available at the National Library. However, newspaper articles are essential to fully appreciate the impact of YWCA cooking classes and its cookbook had on the expatriate and local communities. Sometimes, a mother lode of data is struck and little known gems revealed. This includes summaries of the pre-war broadcast talks on food and cooking as well as the post-war reports of the People's Restaurant, both of which are barely reflected in print sources and likely forgotten. Naturally there are known gaps in newspaper publishing, such as the period of the Japanese Occupation during World War II, when the English dailies were taken over by the Japanese and used as a tool for propaganda. Resources such as biographies, diaries, primary documentation are required here to fill the gaps.

### **Iconic flavours of Singapore**

#### **Belacan**

*Belacan* is an ancient condiment peculiar to the region with parallels in Myanmar (*ngape*), Indonesia (*terasi*, *petis*), Philippines (*bagoong*), Thailand (*kapi*) and China (*hae ko*). Though strongly rooted in Southeast Asian culture, it is believed that the colonial Portuguese brought this pungent concoction to the region since similar dishes associated with a fermented seafood paste similar to the *belacan* are found in Goa and Macau where the Portuguese had for centuries been colonial masters.

The black, pungent *belacan* is manufactured through a crude process of fermenting tiny shrimp or krill, which includes salting, sunning, foot-pounding and slow rotting. The resulting cake of *belacan* is thinly sliced, toasted then added to flavour meats, enhance curries, gravies and stews, add an edge to chili sauces or eaten in its plain liquid form with rice or vegetables. Without *belacan*, a dish will lack its unique Malayan flavour.

The ingredient is not only pervasive in flavouring local food, but newspapers reveal it was an overpowering olfactory presence, particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when Singapore had several of its own *belacan* factories by the coast. Its noxious smell both deterred the European expatriate and drew his attention to it. *Belacan* is thus one of the few local food items published about in English newspapers, almost always because of its potent smells. An 1891 letter by "One with a sensitive nose", complaining about the nefarious effusions from a government licensed *belacan* factory along Tanjong Rhu, a coastal health getaway in colonial Singapore, described that "The odour of *blachang* is peculiarly Asiatic, there is nothing in Europe to contend with it; it is ghastly, penetrating and abominable... if a tired city man happens to land at "Sandy Point" to reach

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<sup>21</sup> *Dateline Singapore*, p. 102

Tanjong Katong ... Then a whiff comes from the *blachang* factory that makes his hair stand on end, and fills him with criminal impulses.”<sup>22</sup>

However, newspaper reports, one as early as 1874<sup>23</sup>, indicate that some Europeans had a connoisseur’s appreciation for this foul-smelling ingredient as suggested by its nickname - the Malayan caviar<sup>24</sup> or the Malaccan cheese where its best versions came from.<sup>25</sup> Interest in its flavours was reflected by an enquiry on how to make “*blachan* toast” in the English newspapers in 1901<sup>26</sup> and by the 1920s a greater discernment of its varied use in dishes is seen: “The *balachan* is decidedly a delicious compound. It can be cooked in various ways, fried simply and mixed with chillies, onions, garlic, and aromatic herbs of different kinds with prawns, fish, crabs... The “curry” so well known in this part of the world has got to be flavoured with this condiment without which it will lose much of its palatable taste. *Balacan* is equal to or superior (to some tastes) to any European caviarre... but the taste for it must be acquired. The smell is decidedly objectionable.”<sup>27</sup>

*Belacan* is not only a key ingredient in Chinese, Malay and Eurasian dishes<sup>28</sup>, but newspapers reveal that whole communities were named after it or its raw ingredient, *grago* (*gerago*), or krill. The poor Portuguese Eurasian fishermen of Malacca who dragged nets to catch these tiny shrimps were themselves referred to as *grago*<sup>29</sup>, which otherwise was a term of contempt bandied about the local poor.<sup>30</sup> At the same time *belacan* making was so strongly associated with the Malays that they were often referred to as *belacan*<sup>31</sup>. There is a local saying “Kalau tidak makan *belacan*, bukanlah orang Melayu” [“If you haven’t eaten *belacan*, you are not a Malay”]<sup>32</sup>. The condiment was so much part of the land that communists holed up in Malayan jungles even used it purportedly for the making of bombs<sup>33</sup>. That newspaper articles associate different communities with this condiment show how its production and consumption cut across racial lines even in colonial times.

A challenge in researching a local item is being aware of the multiplicity of variant spellings of colloquial terms. In the case of *belacan* I came across at least five variant spellings - *balachang*, *balacan*, *belachan*, *belacan*, and *blachan*. Thus a keyword search through a newspaper portal must be reiterated multiple times with all known variants. Many of these variant spellings and forms are not immediately known and instead are only chanced upon during the process of the newspaper search.

Besides this, the colonial writer often uses a blanket term for what locally would be discerned as a range of food items. Thus *belacan* may be used when the more liquid *petis* by the Indonesians is referred to. The fermented krill can also be prepared differently resulting in a completely different condiment – the *cincalok*. In some instances, *belacan* is used to refer to fermented fish rather than fermented krill. The researcher needs to discern these variants when reading through newspaper articles to distinguish the actual food items used or referred to.

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<sup>22</sup> The smells of Singapore. (21 July 1891). *Straits Times Weekly Issue*, p. 12

<sup>23</sup> Malacca. (1 August 1874). *The Straits Times*, p. 2

<sup>24</sup> Shukor Rahman. (9 July 1973). Blachan: where it all began. *The Straits Times*, p. 14

<sup>25</sup> ditto

<sup>26</sup> Blachan toast. (24 July 1901). *The Straits Times*, p. 3

<sup>27</sup> Balachan. (29 August 1925). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, p. 11

<sup>28</sup> The belachan trade. (27 September 1924). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, p. 12

<sup>29</sup> Distressful Malacca. (12 May 1910), *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, p. 5

<sup>30</sup> Twentieth century newspaper articles still refer to the more economically established local Eurasians as “grago” though in a less contemptuous fashion.

<sup>31</sup> A Kelantan Malay on Asiatics. (3 August 1950), *The Straits Times*, p. 6

<sup>32</sup> Abdul Ghani Hamid. (2003, July 17). Belacan dulu, belacan hari ini. *Berita Harian*, p. 9

<sup>33</sup> Red camp where blachan bombs were made. (30 June 1971). *The Straits Times*, p. 19

### **Curry puff**

The *curry puff* is often considered a local invention peculiar to Singapore and Malaysia though Asian variants of it can be found in Thailand and the Philippines. Its origins are clouded, but it is often attributed to a European colonial influence, its pastry having similarities to the Cornish pie or the Portuguese empanada. Its curried meat and potato filling point to an obvious Indian connection.

A scan through digitized British newspapers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century show that the *curry puff* and its indubitable partner, the sausage roll, were often served together in cafes in England, Australia and in India<sup>34</sup>. The filling was often cold curry leftovers which was then “encased in a flakey pastry”<sup>35</sup>, sealed in a triangular shape<sup>36</sup>, then baked. Some of the earliest mention of the *curry puff* in local newspapers was it being served to underprivileged children during charitable Christmas parties in the 1930s.<sup>37</sup> At these annual parties, the *curry puff* was packed along with other colonial goodies such as an apple, a tin of milk, chocolates and cake and given during a day out dodgem car riding at the Great World Amusement Park. The *curry puff* was not merely poor man’s fare as evidenced by the Special Dinner and Dance supper menu at the Adelphi Hotel in 1932 which included the puff alongside Mayonnaise de Saumone, Roast Chicken and Roquefort Cheese<sup>38</sup>.

Polar Café claims to be the first to have popularised the *curry puff* in Singapore. The recipe for the curry filling was supposedly from an Indian chef while the puff pastry came from a British baker<sup>39</sup>, another indication that the puff was a progeny from the marriage between colonial and colonized taste buds. Founded in the mid-1920s by Hong Konger Chan Heng Kee (Hinky), his Westernised café along High Street sold baked snacks and ice-cream which soon became popular with the parliamentarians and lawyers who worked nearby at the Supreme Court and Parliament House. By the 1960s, versions of this baked *curry puff* with its fluffy pastry was being mass manufactured and frozen for sale, and included exotic variations such as the crab *curry puff*<sup>40</sup>. These Western curry puffs were shaped and served as pies, with hot meat and potato fillings in a flaky pastry and eaten in a restaurant setting.

The *curry puffs* that are uniquely Singaporean however are deep fried, crescent shaped and sealed with an intricate twirled crimping. Like the samosa in India which can be made baked or fried, the local *curry puff* is likely to have had two versions spring out of this source – one, a baked *curry puff* offered at Westernised cafes while the other was fried and served as regular streetside fare, especially amongst the Muslims. Drabble’s 1950 caricature of an Indian Muslim *thamby*, Adam Ghat, shows him serving *curry puff* and other streetside delights such as “gluey kaya jam”, “pisang mas” and “Bengali roti buns” along Finlayson Green, to office workers of various races, whether Indian, Malay or Chinese<sup>41</sup>. This Malay version of the *curry puff* – a deep-fried crescent-shaped dough finely crimped which is stuffed with a chili sardine filling and served with a sweet chili dipping sauce – is today known as *epok-epok*.

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<sup>34</sup> These include searches in the British Newspaper Archive as well as the Australian Trove (<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/home>).

<sup>35</sup> House and Home. (1914, May 28), *Hull Daily Mail*, England. Retrieved from the Australian Trove

<sup>36</sup> Particularly “The Women’s Page” (1917, June 8). *The Land*, pp. 10-11. Retrieved from the Australian Trove.

<sup>37</sup> Even into the 1960s, curry puffs seemed to be the norm for Christmas delights in children’s parties (300 children go gay. (20 December 1960). *The Singapore Free Press*, p. 8).

<sup>38</sup> Advertisement – Adelphi Hotel – Special dinner and dance. (22 January 1932). *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942)*, p. 1

<sup>39</sup> Brazil, David. (1991). *Street smart Singapore*. pp. 14-15 Singapore: Times Books International.

<sup>40</sup> Advertisement – Season Confectionery. (1 June 1969). *The Straits Times*, p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> Drabble, Derek. (1950, February 23). A Tamby takes it easy – with a curry puff, *The Straits Times*, p. 12.

Old Chang Kee probably has redefined and popularized what is today considered a traditional Singaporean food. Transforming the Malay *epok-epok* into a popular fast-food snack<sup>42</sup>, this Chinese version is chockfull with mashed potato, egg and chicken and is only mildly curried. The pastry is a rich buttery base that is rolled out with a beer bottle then, each puff is stuffed with the filling - a secret mix of strips of fried chicken stewed in coconut milk, spice and curry. Sealed into a crescent-shaped and nicely crimped dough, the puff is then deep fried to a golden brown<sup>43</sup>. It was Old Chang Kee's move into franchising and distribution regionally in the 1990s, then worldwide soon after, that made this buttery short-crust pastry known as the trademark version of the *curry puff* from Singapore today.

Linda Neo's article<sup>44</sup> details how in the 1980s, Old Chang Kee's founder, Chang Swang Boo, had assistants bring his prepared curry puffs from Albert Street round the corner to MacKenzie Lane where they were fried. Old Chang Kee was thereafter associated with the Rex cinema along MacKenzie Lane and thus its early nickname – Rex *curry puff*. With two other *curry puff* competitors coming on board, MacKenzie Lane soon came to be called *Kali Pup* lane – a play on the Chinese enunciation of *curry puff*<sup>45</sup>. *Kali pup* also became ingrained in the local psyche when the Elvis hairdo of the 1960s became known as the *kali pup* hairstyle<sup>46</sup>, a reference to the turned up fringe which somehow reminded locals of the local spicy favourite.

An internet survey of the *curry puff*, its form and names, helped provide some of the variant terms, descriptions, ingredients and histories. Without this initial online snapshot, the perspective and thus the research on *curry puffs* in newspapers may have been too narrow, possibly leaving out insights of the Malay *epok-epok* or that its colloquial enunciation *kali pup* was used to name streets and hairstyles.

Recognising that this snack had colonial origins and expanding the research to other Commonwealth newspaper databases gleaned useful information of it being served in other British colonial lands. Finding the missing link in the evolution of the *curry puff* as eaten in Western cafes to the deep fried versions popular amongst Singaporeans proved more challenging. The main recourse was to examine more current newspaper articles on the company histories of famed *curry puff* manufacturers – namely Polar Café and Old Chang Kee.

### **Conclusion**

In exploring iconic local dishes, news articles help paint a multi-dimensional picture of local dishes and their consumption through time. For example they reveal that local flavours pervaded dishes across racial communities even in early colonial times as in the case of the condiment *belacan*. Articles also show how a snack such as the *curry puff* may have been prepared differently by various communities.

While newspapers help concretise research in social history studies, finding articles and teasing out relevant ones prove a challenge even with a suitably robust search engine, particularly when researching using colloquial terms. Search strategies are highly dependent on the use of appropriate keywords. For local dishes, however, the terms and spellings were not defined until the 1970s and 1980s when the standardization in local spellings of Malay<sup>47</sup> and Chinese<sup>48</sup> words was enforced.

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<sup>42</sup> Ms Violet Oon says. (17 April 2006). *The Straits Times*, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Neo, Linda. (12 July 1980). Curry puffs from old man Chang in Albert Street. *The Straits Times*, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> Neo, Linda. (12 July 1980). Curry puffs from old man Chang in Albert Street. *The Straits Times*, p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> Stroll down Kali Pup lane. (26 December 1982). *The Straits Times*, p. 16

<sup>46</sup> Lim, Richard. (1997, December 7). The Ah Beng in all of us. *The Straits Times*, p. 2

<sup>47</sup> Malay spelling was standardized in 1975 in Malaysia and in 1979 in Singapore (Abu Bakar, Mardiana. (1988, March 1). Bahasa: focus now on pronunciation. *The Straits Times*, p. 5)

Besides these are the challenges and rewards inherent in researching primary source documents – the tedious reiteration, the need for a wider range of resources in helping to begin or validate a search, but also the chance finding that opens a gateway to new information, the details that bring out the whole social context of a food and the tracing of trends in the making and consumption of foods.

Newspapers thus serve as an indispensable primary source for researching into little before published aspects of foodways whether they are merely interesting facets to famed foods or major insights establishing the origins of local dishes. Newspapers must become a necessary recourse in the research into foodways not only for its insights but with the digitization of newspapers, a deeper, wider, more accurate and immediate search outcome is possible. Something that cannot easily be said for most other forms of primary source documents.

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<sup>48</sup> The Straits Times adopted the Hanyu Pinyin romanised system of Chinese spelling in 1979 (Straits Times goes Pinyin. (1979, March 20). *The Straits Times*, p. 15)



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