

Food Distribution between Rural and Urban Areas and Change of Dietary Habits in Sarawak, Malaysia

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Place of fieldwork: Malaysia

Name: Asumi Imai

Key Words: Food security, Food culture, Sarawak, Food distribution

- Research background

According to the FAO (1996), food security is achieved when “all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” The goal to ensure food security was accepted at the World Food Summit held in 1996.

Malaysia, which relies heavily on imported food, is one of the countries struggling to ensure food security. Malaysia has dealt with food security by implementing various agricultural policies; however, these policies are not working well in Sarawak and Sabah, in contrast to West Malaysia.

- Research purpose and aim

The main purpose of this research is to examine the continuity of food production, food distribution, and food consumption in relation to issues of food security. As the first step, I will focus on food consumption and distribution in interior Sarawak and study how people get their food as well as how restrictions of accessibility influence their dietary habits.

Preparing for the future study, I attended the Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) in Sarawak for language study, which is an important skill for conducting my future research.



Plate 1: Surrounding of longhouse in inland of Bintulu



Plate 2: There are few opportunities to dine on vegetables in a longhouse, as shown in this picture

- Observations and results

During my stay in Sarawak, I had an opportunity to visit the inland longhouse of Bintulu, Sarawak. I could confirm the recent situation of food distribution and consumption in the longhouse of the inland.



Plate 3: Vegetables sold in village of middle part of river



Plate 4: The roads stop in front of this river

People here have to commute for about an hour down the river by boat to buy food at the nearest village located on the middle section of the river. Tubauh, a village in this part, also has difficulty obtaining food because the roads stretched from towns near the coast stop in front of the river in the village. Products such as instant noodles, rice, and canned foods are commonly stored; however, few fresh vegetables can be found in the interior areas.

There are many stores and small markets that sell food in the towns near the

coast. Unfortunately, there are also many health problems, including obesity and diabetes, due to the intake of large amounts of oil and sugar.

Therefore, it is necessary to reconsider the food security of Malaysia not only from the perspective of food production, but also to examine food distribution and consumption processes.



Plate 5: Howker center of Kuching, Sarawak



Plate 6: Pasar (market) in Bintulu, Sarawak

- Implications for future research

My lack of preparation and need for language study before I could begin my research plan is regrettable; however, I sincerely appreciate all the support from The Explorer Program and the people I met in Sarawak. Thanks to their help, I was able to have many precious experiences and gain important knowledge and ideas for future research.



Plate 7: Researchers and staff of



Plate 8: A part of campus of UNIMAS

Reference

FAO. 1996. "World Food Summit 13-17 November 1996 Rome Italy: Rome Declaration on World Food Security" <<http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/w3613e/w3613e00.htm>>. accessed: 2013/11/18.