

Country report: Malaysia

by Chik Ying Chai

I want to share a few observations about nutrition in my country, Malaysia, and introduce you to some of our humble initiatives and the challenges that we face in our work.

Malaysia is located close to the equatorial line. It has a humid tropical climate, with very few seasonal differences and an average daily temperature between 21 and 32°C all year long. So, we are blessed with a large amount of rain and sunshine throughout the year. This means that water is abundant, and sometimes we even have flooding. This also means that most often, we experience a mood and gesture of expansion – we tend to go outwards and are active in the outer sensory world. Due to this, we can observe that we are easily disconnected from the rhythm of breathing of the earth.

In general, this kind of wet, hot, and humid climate can lead to a low appetite, and so we tend to eat a lot of hot, sweet spices and fried food. Spiciness helps to remove dampness due to water in our body – so, we crave that. And sweetness, spices, and frying stimulate our appetite. But when these become extreme, they can cause high blood pressure, obesity, cancer, and stress. These are the common illnesses in Malaysia.

Malaysia imports more than 60% of the food we consume. As we know, imported food sacrifices quality and nutritional value. The reliance on selected imports is high, and there are many processed foods that cause malnutrition issues as well.

These are some of the nutritional challenges that we face. We can ask ourselves: What does this invite us to look at? How can we really experience the subtle changes of rhythm in nature? Can we do it through the food that we are closely connected to daily? I would like to share some of our humble initiatives in that direction.

One initiative is a community educational program. We invite participants to experience the subtle changes of rhythm in nature and life throughout the year through arts and food. With this, we open our attention to the outer sensory world and are encouraged to take the experience inward. That's what we try to explore. The program that we created was inspired by Rudolf Steiner's *Calendar of the Soul*.

We usually start a program by meditating the verse with eurythmy and painting – not to understand what the verse is about intellectually but, rather, to make a personal life reflection out of it. This helps us to be aware of where we are and not just be pulled by the sensory world and outer forces. Taking this subtle kind of consciousness into other parts of the program, we invite people to do nature and seasonal plant observation. It's not easy to experience these, unless we put lots of sensitivity into it. We also practice seasonal food tasting with the [Aroma Painting](#) that we learned from Jasmin last year.





An important part of the program is the practice, like the Aroma Painting, but also, preparing food together, as community work – for example, making herbal rice. By stirring the herbs in the warm cooked rice, we bring in the light of the grain for smoother digestion. This gives us an experience of the changing life forces, and this is how we relate better to food. We also try to cultivate new forms of community, through truly attentive and warm consciousness in preparation and eating. That way, we develop a feeling of gratitude, and we experience that we are part of nature and part of this community.

We also practice slow, mindful eating and learn the stories of the food's production: Where does the food come from? From which farm, in which region? What's the story of the farmer connected to it?

In the workshops, we always link our experiences to painting and drawing, and we do meditation. We practice deep listening and dialogue work as a way to connect inwardly with the outer experience, through our soul feeling.

What we hope to achieve is that when we consciously pause to observe – to really make a space and a moment for observing – and when we really taste the food and build the relationships with nature and with people from the bottom of our hearts, then love will develop and grow, and we will regain the freedom to understand the deeper meaning of eating.



In this picture, we see the blessing of a meal – this little gesture of blessing that we practice each time we eat together is a beautiful moment of pausing in which we can invite everyone to sense the connection with themselves and with other beings who deliver and give the food stories.

One of the key challenges that we face in Malaysia is that we have very little land that is dedicated to growing food crops, because most of the land is used for industrial crop cultivation – as we all know, Malaysia is known for palm oil production. Those who work very hard with food crops face climate challenges, because there's too much water and rain. Additionally, soils are depleted, and the crops don't grow well.

Another question that we carry is: how can we be conscious and mindful in everyday life, while the outward gesture is constantly pulling at us? We find ourselves having to propose a new way of thinking about food and also find alternatives to all the instant processed food that is so readily available everywhere, especially in the urban living area.

So, this is my humble little attempt to give you a picture of the food and nutrition situation in my country and how we try to face it and give positive impulses to it.



Chik Ying is a gardener, artist, and organizer for different conferences, who works a lot with nutrition.

All photographs by Chen Yee Teh.