

Exploring Malay's Traditional Kuih in Motion Graphics Application

Nur Aliaa Arina Nor Hairim¹, *Inda Murni Hairul Anuar², Sharkawi Che Din³
^{1,2,3}Faculty of Art & Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor Branch, Puncak Alam Campus, Malaysia.

aliaaarina24@gmail.com¹, indamurni@uitm.edu.my², *sharkawi237@uitm.edu.my³
*Corresponding author

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ABSTRACT

Malay traditional kuih represents an important aspect of Malaysia's cultural heritage, embodying historical, social, and aesthetic values that have been passed down through generations. However, the increasing influence of globalisation and digital media has shifted younger generations' preferences toward modern and global food trends, placing traditional delicacies at risk of cultural neglect. This study explores the potential of motion graphics usage, as a contemporary visual medium to reintroduce and preserve the cultural significance of Malay traditional kuih. This research examines the cultural role of kuih across social classes, compares Malaysian dessert consumption practices with those of other cultures, and investigates the changing relationship between youth and traditional food practices. Zakaria Ali's theory of Malay aesthetics was chosen as a theoretical framework to guide the visual representation of kuih, ensuring that elements used are maintained in the design process. With a motion graphics approach, this research contributes to the discourse on digital cultural preservation by demonstrating how modern visual media can function as an effective tool for enhancing cultural awareness, appreciation, and continuity among contemporary audiences.

Keywords: Malaysian Traditional kuih, Cultural preservation, Motion graphics, Visual design



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1 INTRODUCTION

Food has long been regarded as one of the most important needs in our life. Then, these foods have been upgraded to match with the lifestyle of each country as an expressive form of culture, reflecting the history, identity, and shared values of a community. Across the world, traditional cuisines have embodied generations of knowledge, artistry, and social meaning that connect people not only to their heritage but also to one another. As societies continue to modernise, many of the traditional foods are at risk of fading away under the influence of globalisation and changing lifestyles such as the influence of the media. This also applied to Malaysia's sweet delicacies or what we called as *kuih*. Malay traditional *kuih* holds a deep cultural and historical significance within Malaysian society. These *kuih* are known not only for their rich taste and texture but also for their vibrant colours, intricate shapes, and symbolic meanings that reflect the creativity and heritage of the Malay people. However, a lot of people are becoming more familiar with modern desserts or trendy foods rather than the traditional treats that once shaped local culture (Hamzah et al., 2015). This situation highlights the need to reintroduce the beauty of Malay *kuih* through creative and modern approaches that can attract these younger audiences.

In today's digital era, the media plays a powerful role in shaping people's perceptions, lifestyles, and preferences. With the rapid growth of social media platforms, the influence of how individuals

could discover, consume, and appreciate cultural content is also changing due to the trends that often overshadow traditional values and practices. As a result, many generations are more drawn to global aesthetics and modern cuisines than to the traditional foods that once defined their cultural identity (Neufeld-Wall, 2023). These generations love the sense of belonging and sharing its beauty with the world via social media. They enjoy expressing their identity online and take pride in showing others what makes their feeds unique. By making the visual more appealing and contemporary, it can attract the attention of younger audiences and also encourage them to reconnect with their roots. It not only increases awareness but also fosters a sense of appreciation and pride among the new generation. This approach transforms cultural preservation into an interactive experience that aligns with modern visual preferences while maintaining the authenticity of the tradition. Another possible approach is through motion graphics, which is one of the many modern visual media that efficiently capture the attention of a younger audience. However, this innovation also presents its own risk such as cultural misrepresentation towards the *kuih*. According to (Khairulah et al., 2023), oversimplifying or altering the visual elements of *kuih* for entertainment or aesthetic appeal can distort its cultural meaning. This project, therefore, will explore how responsible usage of motion graphics can revive interest in traditional Malay kuih while maintaining the accurate cultural essence and heritage value of kuih.

1.1 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to define and explore the varieties of Malay traditional *kuih* by highlighting their unique characteristics, ingredients, and cultural significance. This study also proposes and develops a motion graphics design that creatively showcases these traditional delicacies such as the integration of AR. This study aims to engage the younger audiences who are already aware of the use of digital media to appreciate and understand the cultural value of Malay *kuih*.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Class Consumption

The perception and value of Malay traditional *kuih* can differ across social classes, reflecting how culture is experienced within various socioeconomic backgrounds. Among the lower and the middle-class societies that we know as B40 and M40, *kuih* has long been regarded as an accessible and affordable everyday food, commonly found in markets, roadside stalls, and home kitchens. It carries emotional familiarity and is tied to family traditions, festive gatherings, and community bonding. In contrast, the higher-income groups known as T20, may encounter *kuih* more often in curated or commercialised settings such as cafés, boutique bakeries, or hotel buffets, where traditional recipes are reinterpreted into modern or premium versions. These class-based differences influence how *kuih* is appreciated whether as a humble cultural staple, a nostalgic comfort food, or a refined culinary product. Understanding these varying perspectives is important, as it highlights how cultural heritage adapts and transforms across social strata while still holding significance for all Malaysians. (Zulkifali et al., 2025)

2.2 Consumption Practice in Other Countries

Different cultures have distinct practices surrounding dessert consumption, reflecting on their social norms, traditions, and daily routines. In Western cultures, desserts are commonly eaten after the main meal, serving as a sweet conclusion to lunch or dinner. They also have a strong tradition of “tea-time” or “afternoon tea,” where pastries, cakes, and sweets are enjoyed as a leisurely break. In Japan, desserts are often lighter and less sugary, typically consumed during tea ceremonies or as seasonal treats that emphasise aesthetics and natural flavors. Japanese sweets or known as *wagashi* are closely tied to the cultural rituals, festivals, and the appreciation of seasons.

In contrast, Malaysian dessert culture especially within the Malay community treats *kuih* as an anytime food rather than something reserved strictly for after meals. *Kuih* is often enjoyed during breakfast, evening tea (*minum petang*), festive events, and communal gatherings. This flexibility shows how *kuih* functions not only as a snack or dessert but also as a cultural symbol that fits naturally into various parts of Malaysian daily life. Understanding these differences highlights how dessert culture is shaped by social routines and emphasises the unique position of *kuih* in Malaysia's multicultural food identity (Zulkifali et al., 2025)

Furthermore, the dessert consumption practices across Southeast Asia exhibit notable similarities with Malaysia such as Indonesia and Thailand, due to shared cultural roots and long-standing regional interactions. According to the research in Budaya Serumpun has demonstrated that many traditional *kuih* varieties are found across these neighbouring countries with similar ingredients, preparation methods, and occasions for consumption (Isam et al., 2021). Some of the ingredients are known to be glutinous rice, coconut milk, palm sugar, and pandan, which is the common ingredient you could find.

2.3 Gastronomy Cultivation and Preparation

The cultivation and preparation of Malay traditional *kuih* are closely influenced by environmental factors, particularly the equatorial climate shared by Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia. The warm and humid climate supports the growth of key ingredients commonly used in traditional *kuih*, including coconut, pandan, cassava, banana, and glutinous rice. These locally available resources shape not only the flavours and textures of *kuih* but also reflect the community's adaptation to nature and sustainable food practices (Isam et al., 2021).

Ingredients such as coconut milk are widely used due to the abundance of coconut trees in equatorial regions, contributing to the rich and creamy taste characteristic of many traditional *kuih*. Similarly, cassava and glutinous rice are staple crops that thrive in tropical climates, making them accessible and affordable ingredients for daily food preparation. The use of banana leaves as natural food wrappers further demonstrates an environmentally conscious practice, serving both functional and aesthetic purposes by enhancing aroma while reducing waste. These ingredient choices are also commonly found in traditional desserts across Thailand and Indonesia, indicating a shared gastronomic heritage within the region (Isam et al., 2021).

The preparation of traditional *kuih* often involves a lengthy and detailed process. It begins with the selection of raw ingredients, followed by careful preparation, cooking, and presentation. This culinary knowledge is traditionally passed down through generations, particularly from grandmothers or mothers to younger family members through hands-on practice rather than formal documentation. Such methods of knowledge transmission highlight the role of *kuih*-making as not only a culinary activity but also a cultural practice that preserves heritage, skills, and familial bonds within the community.

2.4 Zakaria Ali's Theory in Malay Aesthetic

Aesthetics, derived from the Greek term *aesthesis*, relates to beauty and the appreciation of artistic expression, encompassing both sensory perception and intellectual interpretation. In the context of Islamic Malay art, aesthetics integrates principles of beauty, function, and material selection in alignment with Islamic values. Artisans employ natural motifs such as foliage, geometric shapes, and fauna, which are stylised and abstracted to convey symbolic meaning in accordance with the concepts of *Jamal* (beauty) and *Jalal* (magnificence) (Sabariah Ahmad Khan, 2016). As in Zakaria Ali's theory in Malay aesthetics, identifies few of the core principles derived from traditional Malay crafts like batik, woodcarving, and architecture that link to the beauty in Islamic values of truth and goodness. These principles emphasise a harmony between form, function, and symbolism in visual arts (Shamsuddeen & Andriana, 2021). It discusses art forms of

the Islamic Malays in Malaysia encapsulating the principles of beauty, function, and materials in line with Islamic values. He inlaid the aesthetic principles into: *Berhalus*, *Berguna*, *Bersatu*, *Berlawan* and *Berlambang*.

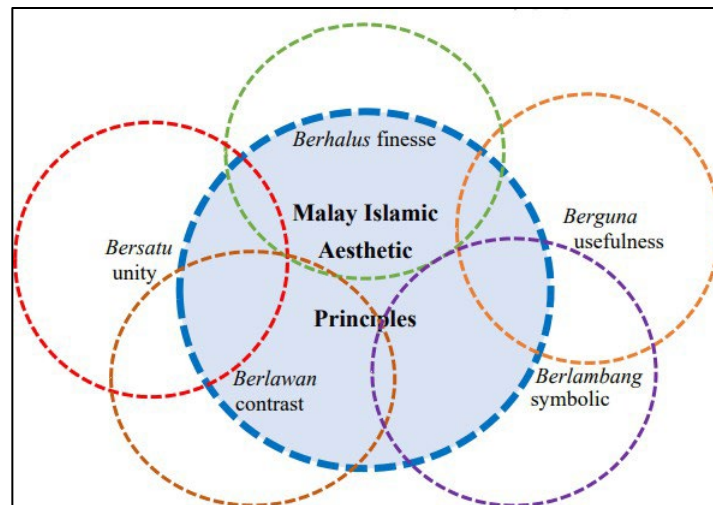


Figure 1 Zakaria Ali's Malay Islamic Aesthetic Principles

From the study by Sabariah Ahmad Khan, 2016, in *Allegorical narratives: redefining the evolution of ornamented aesthetic principles of Langkasukan art of the Malay Peninsula, Malaysia*, was explained each of the principles' roles. *Berhalus* (finesse), construed the delicacy of object art and the chosen idea. The inspiration is derived from nature characterising the formation of the artwork material. *Berguna* (usefulness) refers to the functionality of objects in art to serve the utilitarian purposes in place with aesthetic attributes. *Bersatu* (unity) confers to the integration and unification between form and content in visual arts. This principle enables the composition to be communicated and narrated clearly. *Berlawan* (contrast) is the principle that necessitated the elements of harmonious contrast such as the two opposite elements complementing and conceding for flexibility, harmony and balance in design. Lastly, *Berlambang* (symbolic), as the fifth principle that associates symbolic connotations embedded in the art. It often reveals a meaning to history, culture and archetypal belief.

From the same study, the reader can see that Zakaria Ali's aesthetic principles usually have been used in wood carvings, architectural components, boat design, utensils, jewellery, and many more. These are what we know as the ornaments as accessories. Ornamentation on architecture and the arts are narrations intended as functional devices of the society. It is also identified to suggest decorative emblems serving an allegorical significance with stories or fables that direct the eye for the concentration towards sensational delight and expression of the artistic mind.

Thus, these principles will be refined into the design of kuih following the term of *Berhalus*, *Berguna*, *Bersatu*, *Berlawan* and *Berlambang*. The local intelligence is reflected in the visual design of the traditional kuih where the chosen motif is usually found in the surrounding flora such as; the design of *kuih bahulu* and *bingka bakar* represent mangosteen, *buah melaka* from *buah rotan*. the design square: unity, triangle: and round (Isam et al., 2021).

2.5 Summary

Overall, the reviewed literature demonstrates that Malay traditional kuih holds a deeply rooted cultural identity that continues to evolve across social classes, global influences, and generational changes. While kuih remains a familiar staple among lower- and middle-income communities, its reinterpretation in higher-end settings reveals how cultural food practices adapt to socioeconomic contexts without losing their significance. Comparisons with dessert consumption in other countries

further highlight the uniqueness of kuih in Malaysia as an “*anytime food*,” reflecting its versatility and cultural embeddedness in daily life. However, research also indicates that younger generations are increasingly distancing themselves from traditional practices due to the pervasive influence of digital media and global trends, shaping their identity through online expressions rather than inherited cultural rituals. This shift underscores the urgency of making cultural heritage more engaging and relatable in contemporary formats. Lastly, Zakaria Ali’s principles of Malay aesthetics refinement, contrast, symbolism, functionality, and unity to provide a meaningful foundation for reimagining kuih in visual media without compromising its cultural essence. Collectively, these perspectives support the need for innovative yet respectful approaches, such as motion graphics, to reconnect youth with traditional kuih while preserving the values embedded within Malay aesthetic traditions.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, the non-participant observation method was used to examine the visual appearance, texture, and presentation of Malay traditional *kuih*. This method was chosen as the purpose is to study the kuih visual design and to create a new illustration that is suitable for youth. By direct observation, the researcher analysed the unique characteristics that distinguish each kuih using Zakaria Ali aesthetic theory as references. This includes the colour, texture, and shape of the traditional kuih.

The research also studies how these *kuih* are presented and served in different contexts, such as the modern settings. These reasons are to understand how cultural identity is reflected through visual and sensory elements. Not only that, but this method also allows an in-depth appreciation of the artistic and cultural aspects of Malay *kuih* and provides valuable insight that allows one to represent and preserve the traditional *kuih* in motion graphics design in a more creative way.

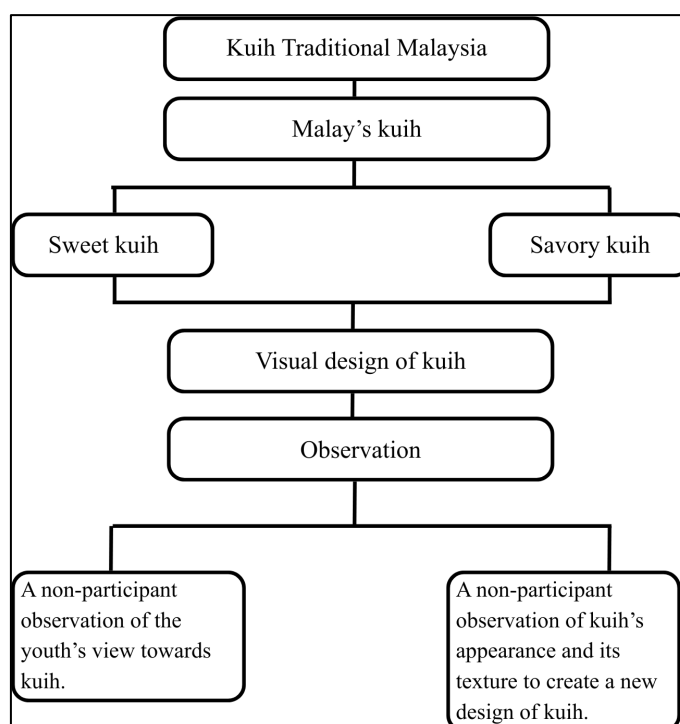


Figure 1 The design research.

4 DATA ANALYSIS OF KUIH

This analysis is a study to plan the *kuih* visual design to create a creative motion and its illustration according to its category of sweet and savoury. The researcher has chosen isometric style

as the illustration style of *kuih*. This reason is to justify that there are not many illustrations of kuih that have an isometric style that can match with the modern art style. Below is the data analysis of the kuih to study its visual design in kuih and make a new art style.

4.1 Sweet Kuih

Table 1 Characteristics of Sweet Kuih

No	Kuih	Shape	Visual	Colour	Ingredients	Cooking Technique
1.	Kuih Tepung Pelita	square or round in small Layered	Glossy, smooth surface Minimalist, traditional presentation	Bottom layer: green Top layer: white	• Rice flour / tapioca flour • Coconut milk • Pandan juice (for green layer) • Sugar • Salt	Steam
2.	Kuih Seri Muka	square or rectangular	Two distinct layers Clean horizontal separation between layers	Bottom layer: white Top layer: green	• Glutinous rice • Coconut milk • Pandan juice (for green custard layer) • Eggs (for custard) • Sugar Salt	Steam
3.	Kuih Talam	square or rectangular	Square or rectangular shape Two-layer composition Soft, jelly-like texture Slightly wobble	Bottom layer: green or brown Top layer: white	• Rice flour / tapioca flour • Coconut milk • Pandan juice (for green layer) or palm sugar (for brown layer) • Sugar • Salt	Steam
4.	Kuih Seri Lapis	rectangular or square	Rectangular or square shape Multiple thin layers Soft, elastic, and smooth surface	Alternating layers of vibrant colours Often found in pink and white.	• Rice flour / tapioca flour • Coconut milk • Sugar • Pandan juice or natural food colouring for layers • Salt	Steam
5.	Kuih Ketayap	cylindrical	Thin crepe-like outer layer Smooth and flexible texture	Outer layer: green Filling: golden brownish	• Rice flour / all-purpose flour • Coconut milk • Pandan juice (for green crepe) • Eggs (optional, for crepe texture) • Grated coconut • Palm sugar / gula melaka • Salt	Cooked on a flat pan
6.	Kuih Onde-onde	Small, round balls Bite-sized and uniform	Smooth and glossy outer surface	Outer: bright green Inside: dark brown Rolled in shredded coconut (white)	• Glutinous rice flour • Pandan juice (for green colour) • Palm sugar / gula melaka (for filling) • Grated coconut (for coating) • Salt	Boiled

7.	Kuih Kaswi or lompong	Usually square or diamond-shaped	Firm yet slightly wobbly structure Smooth and glossy texture	Outer brownish Topped with grated coconut (white)	• Tapioca flour or rice flour • Palm sugar / gula melaka • Water • Salt • Grated coconut (for topping)	Steam
8.	Kuih Puteri Ayu	Small, round, and fluffy cupcakes	Fluffy and soft texture Crown-like coconut on the top. light, airy decorative presentation	Base: green Top: white	• Wheat flour Eggs • Sugar Coconut milk • Grated coconut (for topping) • Baking powder	Steam
9.	Kuih Cara Manis	Small, thick, and round	Slightly domed surface slightly porous texture Crisp edges with soft centre Simple, rustic appearance	Golden brown on top Bottom slightly lighter	• Wheat flour • Eggs Sugar • Coconut milk	Usually baked in a special mould Cooked on low heat

4.2 Savoury Kuih

Table 2 Characteristics of Savoury Kuih

No	Kuih	Shape	Visual	Colour	Ingredients	Cooking Technique
1	Kuih Bakar Berlauk	Square or rectangular, cut into small portions	Slightly dense and firm Slight toasted marks on top Subtle cracks	Brownish outer layer Inside: lighter, slightly golden	• Wheat flour or rice flour • Eggs • Coconut milk • Sugar • Salt • Savory fillings (e.g., minced meat, anchovies, or vegetables)	Baked
2	Kuih Kari Pap	Half-moon / crescent-shaped	Distinct crimped or pleated edges Slight blistering on the crust Handcrafted for the edges	Golden brown	• Wheat flour (for pastry) • Butter or margarine (for flaky pastry) • Eggs (optional, for pastry) • Filling: • curried potatoes, chicken, sardines, or vegetables • Spices: curry powder, onion, garlic, salt	Fried

3	Kuih Cara Berlauk	Small, thick, and round	Golden brown surface Lighter base colour underneath Visible savory topping Smooth yet slightly porous texture	Golden brown on top Bottom slightly lighter	• Wheat flour • Eggs • Coconut milk • Savory fillings (e.g., minced meat, anchovies, or vegetables) • Salt	Usually baked in a special mould Cooked on low heat
4	Pulut Panggang	Rectangular or triangular	Compact and tightly wrapped form Slight charred or toasted marks	White with slightly golden or charred spots Filling: yellowish	• Glutinous rice • Coconut milk • Salt • Filling: grated coconut, dried shrimp, shallots, chili, and spices	Grilled
5	Cucur Badak	Round or oval fritters	Slightly irregular Puffy and thick structure Dense and rustic appearance	Golden brown outside Filling: orange and brownish	• Wheat flour / rice flour (for batter) • Pumpkin / sweet potato (for filling) • Grated coconut • Onion, garlic, chili, salt	Deep-fried
6	Popia Basah	Rolled like a spring roll, soft and slightly sticky. Usually cylindrical	Soft and flexible form Smooth, slightly sticky surface Visible filling	Outer wrapper: pale white Filling: varied colours	• Thin crepe-like wrapper • (wheat flour, water, salt) • Filling: carrots, turnips, bean sprouts, tofu, eggs, shrimp, or meat • Sweet or spicy sauce	Steam
7	Popia Goreng	Rolled like a spring roll, soft and slightly sticky Usually cylindrical	Firm and structured form Crisp and flaky surface texture	Outer wrapper: pale white Filling: varied colours	• Thin crepe-like wrapper • (wheat flour, water, salt) • Filling: carrots, turnips, bean sprouts, tofu, eggs, shrimp, or meat • Sweet or spicy sauce	Deep-fried
8	Kuih Bom inti ikan/ Kuih Paung	Round, ball-shaped	Compact and dense appearance Smooth yet slightly rough exterior Rustic and hearty visual	Golden brown on surface	• Wheat flour / rice flour • Eggs • Coconut milk • Filling: fish, coconut, onion, salt • Salt	Deep-fried
9	Kuih Burger Malaysia	Small, sandwich-like Round bun with filling inside	Soft, fluffy texture on the outer layers Smooth surface with slight grain modern appearance	Bun: light golden brown Filling: brownish	• Bun: wheat flour, yeast, sugar, milk, butter • Filling: minced meat or chicken with spices • Optional: lettuce, cucumber, egg, or sauces	Bun baked until soft and golden Filling cooked separately with spices

Based on the table, most of the *kuih* chosen are the one that people can find easily at the food stalls. Each of the mentioned *kuih* used a strong visual consistency that reflects their cultural origins and preparation methods. Most *kuih* adopt a square, rectangular, or small rounded shape, indicating structured preparation and ease of portioning for communal consumption. The prevalence of layered visual compositions is especially significant, as these layers are not merely aesthetic but represent balance in flavour and texture. Typically, the bottom layer is denser and darker in colour, while the top layer is lighter, creating a visual hierarchy that mirrors the careful sequencing of ingredients during the steaming process. In terms of colour, green and white dominate the visual identity of the *kuih*.

Ingredient selection also plays a crucial role in shaping the visual characteristics of the *kuih* such as rice flour, glutinous rice flour, tapioca flour, and coconut milk contribute to smooth, glossy, or slightly translucent textures that are visually associated with softness and delicacy. Palm sugar and pandan not only influence taste but also produce natural colour contrasts, such as the golden-brown filling in *kuih ketayap* and *onde-onde*. The use of steaming as the dominant cooking technique preserves moisture and colour integrity, resulting in *kuih* that appear soft, gentle, and visually restrained. This cooking method reinforces the overall aesthetic of sweetness, femininity, and domestic warmth commonly associated with traditional Malay desserts.

In contrast, the savoury *kuih* exhibits bolder visual characteristics influenced by cooking techniques such as frying, baking, and grilling. Shapes in savoury *kuih* tend to be more dynamic and functional, such as half-moon forms in *karipap*, cylindrical rolls in *popia*, and triangular or rectangular forms in *pulut panggang*. These shapes are often designed to encase fillings securely, highlighting practicality and portability, which align with street food and everyday consumption contexts. Colour plays a dominant role in distinguishing savoury *kuih* from their sweet counterparts. Golden brown and darker hues are prevalent, resulting from frying, baking, or grilling processes. These colours signify doneness, richness, and savoury depth, as seen in items such as *cucur badak*, *kuih bom berlauk*, and *burger Malaysia*. The contrast between the outer crust and inner filling creates visual depth and indicates texture variation, enhancing visual appeal and perceived flavour intensity.

The ingredients used in savoury *kuih* further reinforce their visual identity. Wheat flour-based doughs, combined with eggs and coconut milk, produce a firm texture suitable for frying or baking. Fillings composed of minced meat, vegetables, spices, and anchovies introduce varied internal colours, though these are often partially concealed to maintain structural integrity. Wrapping techniques, such as banana leaf usage in *pulut panggang*, add a cultural and visual layer, where slight charring contributes both aroma and visual authenticity. Overall, savoury *kuih* presents a more robust and energetic visual language, reflecting their role as filling, practical foods within Malaysian culinary culture.

CONCLUSION

Kuih is a traditional Malay steamed or baked desserts that hold significant cultural and nutritional value that justify their place in Malaysian heritage cuisine. It is more than just a form of food but as a visual and social expression of heritage, identity, and communal values within Malaysian society. Thus, the Malaysian must hold them tightly and preserve its existence through new generations for the future. However, there are a lot of challenges and obstacles in preserving the *kuih* among youth due to the dominance of modernisation such as global food trends and the influence of digital media. This shift in preference underscores the importance of adopting contemporary approaches that can bridge traditional culture with modern lifestyles.

Through the review of existing literature, it is evident that perceptions of *kuih* vary across social classes and consumption contexts, yet its role as an accessible and culturally embedded food remains consistent. Comparisons with dessert practices in other cultures further emphasise the unique position

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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