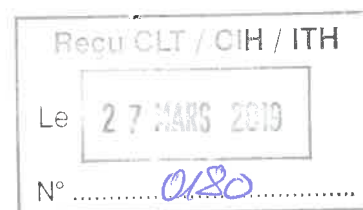


## Inclusion of Element in Inventory



### Identification of Element

Hawker culture was first identified through inputs from various stakeholders involved in developing the inventory of intangible cultural heritage. This included preliminary research started in November 2016 and conducted by a team of researchers led by an anthropologist based in Singapore, to gather insights from a sample group of hawkers.

From November 2016 to September 2017, 8 focus group discussions involving community groups, practitioners, food-related stakeholders and non-governmental organisations comprising diverse mix of genders, ages and profiles were held to seek feedback and inputs on the intangible cultural heritage inventory. These suggestions were taken into consideration for the development of the inventory. The Heritage Advisory Panel, comprising interdisciplinary academia and heritage practitioners, was consulted on the items to be included in the inventory, before the launch of the inventory in April 2018.

From April to July 2018, the element was further defined and supplemented through 8 focus group discussions involving more than 140 diverse stakeholders, where participants mentioned key themes of multiculturalism, accessibility and inclusiveness related to hawker culture.

In addition, there has also been ongoing public contributions made by hawkers through the online inventory to share on the significance and meaning of hawker culture.

### Update of Inventory

The inventory is updated once a year by the National Heritage Board (NHB), developed with involvement of community groups, researchers and public contributions. The inventory is promoted through various platforms, including social media, to encourage contributions. The yearly update may include addition of elements, and a review of existing information on the inventory.

Focus group discussions were held to seek views of elements that could be included on the inventory. This is followed by further research and verification by NHB, with a final review by the Heritage Advisory Panel of experts which advises on tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

The following screenshots demonstrate how the nominated element is included into the Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Singapore, accessible through the following links:

- Online inventory:  
<https://www.roots.sg/ich>
- Inventory page on nominated element:  
<https://roots.sg/learn/resources/ich/hawker-culture>

# INVENTORY OF INTANGIBLE CULTURE HERITAGE

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## INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Intangible Cultural Heritage includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants. There are six Intangible Cultural Heritage categories.

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Knowledge and Practices concerning Nature and Universe



Oral Traditions and Expressions



Performing Arts



Food Heritage



Traditional Craftsmanship

## ICH HIGHLIGHTS



Malay Poetic Forms



Pilgrimage to Kusu Island



Wayang Kulit

## SHARE WITH US

To help us grow the inventory, we would like to invite you to review the intangible cultural heritage elements in the inventory and identify additional elements to be included into the inventory.

We would also like to seek your assistance to contribute information and other resources (including articles, photographs, videos, contacts of practitioners etc.) to existing elements in the inventory.

CONTRIBUTE TO ICH INVENTORY



## UPCOMING ELEMENTS

Check out the variety of elements we are preparing for you! Coming soon in April 2019.

VIEW UPCOMING ELEMENTS



## HAWKER CULTURE

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A Chinese hawker preparing yong tau fu at Taman Jurong Food Centre

Category: [Social Practices, Rituals and Festive Events](#), [Traditional Craftsmanship](#), [Food Heritage](#)

## Hawker Culture

### Introduction

Hawker culture, involving the practice of dining and mingling at hawkers centres over food prepared by hawkers, is an integral part of the Singapore way of life.

Evolved from street food culture, hawkers and hawker centres have become markers of Singapore as a multicultural city-state. During the formative years of Singapore's independence, hawkers and local communities, with the assistance of the government, came together to develop hawker centres, providing stable livelihoods for hawkers and affordable meals for the population. Today, hawker centres across Singapore continue to serve the needs of diverse communities in residential, recreational and business districts.

Hawker culture is enabled by hawkers in Singapore, who hold the culinary practices associated with food dishes prepared at hawker centres. The food reflects the multicultural make-up of Singapore, comprising mainly Chinese, Malay and Indian as well as various other cultures. Hawkers in Singapore take inspiration from the confluence of cultures, experimenting and adapting dishes to local tastes and context, reflecting a living food heritage through generations. Iconic hawker food include *rojak* (local salad dish), *laksa* (spicy soup noodle dish), *satay* (skewered meat), *roti prata* (flat bread with stretched dough and ghee), chicken rice, *char kway teow* (stir-fried flat noodles) and many other dishes.

Hawker centres serve as "community dining rooms" where people from diverse backgrounds share the experience of dining over breakfast, lunch and dinner. One can see freshly prepared food at the hawker stalls and hear multi-lingual exchanges made over meals in a lively atmosphere. A typical hawker centre comprises numerous food and drink stalls, and a common seating area. Dining at a hawker centre is a quintessentially Singaporean experience, allowing one to experience a wide variety of multicultural food and drinks at affordable prices. It is common for people and even strangers to eat and interact at the same table regardless of religious or dietary differences.

## Geographic Location

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There are over 110 hawker centres spread across Singapore. Most hawker centres are located within neighbourhood centres of public housing estates, serving as important communal spaces. There are also hawker centres situated in business and recreational districts, where people work and play.

Similar food practices and food centres can be found in neighbouring countries and internationally, each having their respective context, cultural influences, and socio-cultural functions.

## Communities Involved

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Hawker culture in Singapore is shared by those who prepare hawker food and those who dine and mingle over hawker food in hawker centres.

Hawkers in Singapore include both men and women who have equal opportunities in practising the trade. Some of the oldest hawkers today have started their practice since the 1960s. Many of them specialise in one particular dish, refining the recipe over the years. They may transmit their recipes, knowledge and skills to younger family members or apprentices.

Community organisations, NGOs, educational institutions, private and public sectors are also involved in safeguarding efforts.

The population in Singapore, regardless of background, continue to dine at hawker centres through generations.

## Associated Social and Cultural Practices

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Serving as community dining spaces where friends and families gather, interact and bond over their shared love for food, hawker centres function as vibrant communal spaces that promote social cohesion based on shared experiences. As a public space that embraces people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds to meet and dine together, hawker centres are social spaces in the dense urban landscape that strengthen social fabric and foster peaceful relations, maintaining cultural and community interactions.

With hawker food being both safe and affordable, many families eat at hawker centres on a frequent basis. Families, friends, co-workers gather at hawker centres for breakfast, lunch or dinner and chat over *kopi* (local coffee). It is common for Singaporeans who return home from overseas to visit hawker centres to savour their favourite hawker food.

In addition, hawker centres embraces people from all walks of life and allows for people from different socio-economic backgrounds to meet and mingle over the shared love for hawker food. It provides wide-ranging opportunities to people, including providing an avenue for gaining livelihood, and as an accessible open space for affordable meals.

### Experience of Practitioners

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A family of hawkers who prepare a range of food including *char kway teow* share on their experience as hawkers, and their hopes on transmitting hawker culture to the next generation.



### Viability and Outlook

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With Singapore's economic growth over the years since its independence and diverse job opportunities across different sectors, there are challenges in attracting the younger generation to join the trade. At the same time, there are many hawkers who are joining the trade, as well as third and fourth generation hawkers carrying on their family businesses. Many young hawkers have also come up with innovative dishes to appeal to the tastes of the younger generation, demonstrating their creativity through new culinary creations. Some hawkers have elaborate stall fronts to appeal to the diverse groups of people visiting hawker centres.

### References

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**Reference No.:** ICH-050

**Date of Inclusion:** Apr 2018; Updated Mar 2019