

# Identity of Cultural Food: A Case Study of Traditional Mon Cuisine in Bangkok, Thailand

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**Abstract**—This research aims to identify traditional Mon cuisines as well as gather and classify traditional cuisines of Mon communities in Bangkok. The studying of this research is used by methodology of the quantitative research. Using the questionnaire as the method in collecting information from sampling totally amount of 450 persons analyzed via frequency, percentage and mean value. The results showed that a variety of traditional Mon cuisines of Bangkok could split into 6 categories of meat diet with 54 items and 6 categories of desserts with 19 items.

**Keywords**—Cultural identity, traditional food, Mon cuisine, Thailand.

## I. INTRODUCTION

ONE predominant topic that reappears in cultural identity argument is instability and transformation of cultural forms in transnational space. As a result of global transactions, cultural forms in today's world are primarily fragmented and overlapping, possessing no static boundaries, structures, or regularities [1]. Globalization produces the postmodern condition in which plurality, deformation, reformation, and blending challenge the concept of a singular culture bounded to a place or a group [2]. At present, migration has contributed to the richness in diversity of cultures, ethnicities and races especially in developing countries. The contact between cultures following these transnational flows has resulted in the widespread exchange and transformation of cultural forms [3].

Traditional foods are an expression of culture, history and lifestyle. The food, consumed by people over a long period of time, play an significant role in establishing local identity, culture, and custom, and they transfer cultural heritage from generation to generation [4], [5]. It is a comprehensive cultural model comprising farming, ritual practices, age-old skills, culinary techniques and ancestral community customs and manners. Traditional foods are made possible by collective participation in the entire traditional food chain: from planting and harvesting to cooking and eating. The basis of the system is founded on local plants and animals. Their knowledge and techniques express community identity, reinforce social bonds, and build stronger local, regional and national identities [6]. In addition, traditional foods are key elements for the dietary patterns in different countries and consequently are important to accurately estimate population dietary intakes. However, this information is missing from most current national food composition databases [7].

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The Mon is considered to be one of the earliest peoples in mainland South-East Asia. They were already exposed to Theravada Buddhism more than thousand years before the arrival of the Thai and Burmese in the area, and their culture was influential on other culture in the region. Many evidences believed that Mon earlier immigration to Thailand in began as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Due to a mutual enemy in the Burmese military, coupled with relative similarity in culture (particularly in the observance of Theravada Buddhism), Mon adjustment to Thai society was generally smooth [8]. More recent migration movements to Thailand appeared in the years following 1948, after the civil war and the subsequent installation of military dictatorship in Myanmar. Today, the vast majority of the Mon population lives in Myanmar. The exact population size is uncertain, due to high rates of assimilation, particularly in Myanmar, but many researchers have estimated there to be over one million Mons. Thailand has the second-largest population of Mons (Fig. 1). This amount is also difficult to assume due to the assimilation of many Mons who are indistinguishable culturally and phenotypically from Thais as well as the illegality and illegibility of recent Mon migrants, many of whom, like other migrants from Myanmar, are undocumented [9], [10]. Even though the Mon in Thailand have been integrated into an economic market system and have adopted many aspects of Thai mainstream society, preparation and consumption of traditional food is a practice that can help to achieve Mon cultural identity [11].



Fig. 1 The clothing of Mon women with author in the middle

One of the most efficient ways to get preliminary insights into the concept underlying traditional food is by means of

qualitative research techniques, especially by using questionnaires method for evaluation. The method is a set of questions for gathering information from individuals usually include demographic questions such as sex, race, age, education, and where the participant works or lives. This technique is helpful in gathering information that is unique to individuals, especially attitudes or knowledge.

This paper presents the preliminary study context, introduces and identity of traditional Mon dishes in Bangkok of Thailand.

## II. METHODOLOGY

Surveys were conducted in Bangkok, as the district is one of a few remaining areas with a sizeable Mon-speaking community in Thailand. The main methods have been participant-observation, interviews and content and discourse analysis. During the preliminary phase, a food survey was conducted and checklists disseminated among Mon communities in Bangkok to identify common foods in everyday consumption via self-administered questionnaires. The next phase of the research dealt with a discussion of traditional Mon food and its ingredients, cooking methods, and consumption. The data collection was gathered by distributing the instrument directly to the target respondents.

In this case, research was carried out in three Mon communities, Bang Kadi, Lad Krabang and Nongjok, in Bangkok (Fig. 2), Thailand from January 2015 to April 2015. In this preliminary study, about 450 respondents were being surveyed. The survey participants included all Mon residents such as political and social leaders, political and social activists, students, workers.

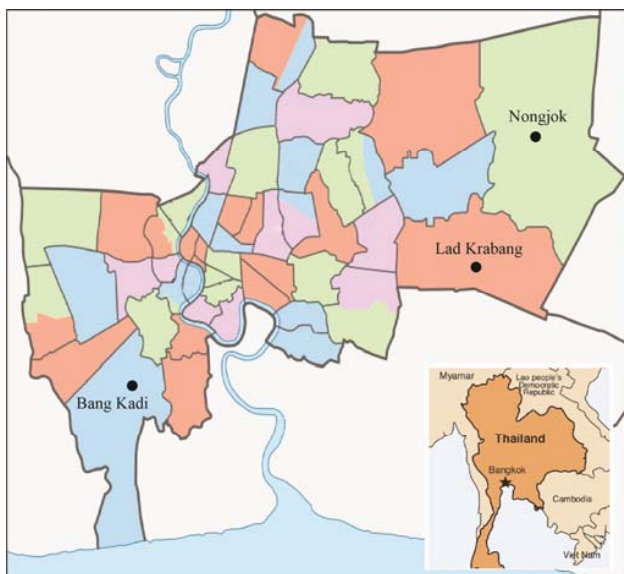


Fig. 2 Location of three Mon communities, Bang Kadi, Lad Krabang and Nongjok, in Bangkok

## III. RESULTS

Predominantly, the majority of the respondents were female in all communities. Most of the respondents were self-employed. Besides, the respondents mostly stayed in all Mon community from 21-30 years (Table I).

TABLE I  
COMMON DATA

Common data	Bang Kadi		Lad Krabang		Nongjok	
	Amount	%	Amount	%	Amount	%
	(n=147)		(n=252)		(n=51)	
<b>1. Gender</b>						
Male	68	46.26	113	44.84	21	41.18
Female	79	53.74	139	55.16	30	58.82
<b>2. Age</b>						
20-29	25	17.01	22	8.73	4	7.84
30-39	42	28.57	53	21.03	3	5.88
40-49	45	30.61	60	23.81	13	25.49
50-59	29	19.73	48	19.05	14	27.45
> 60	6	4.08	69	27.38	17	33.33
<b>3. Occupation</b>						
Business Owner	2	1.36	4	1.59	0	0.00
Government Serve	23	15.65	12	4.76	2	3.92
Government employee	2	1.36	3	1.19	0	0.00
Company employee	11	7.48	22	8.73	4	7.84
Merchants	37	25.17	41	16.27	15	29.41
Self-employed	51	34.69	68	26.98	15	29.41
Housewife	13	8.84	58	23.02	9	17.65
Steward	3	2.04	24	9.52	6	11.76
Others	5	3.40	20	7.94	0	0.00
<b>4. Education</b>						
Primary education	45	30.61	139	55.16	32	62.75
Secondary school	19	12.93	53	21.03	16	31.37
High school	31	21.09	18	7.14	2	3.92
Diploma	0	0.00	6	2.38	0	0.00
Bachelor	19	12.93	13	5.16	1	1.96
Master	28	19.05	12	4.76	0	0.00
> Master	4	2.72	11	4.37	0	0.00
No education	1	0.68	0	0.00	0	0.00
<b>5. Living year in Mon community</b>						
0-10	26	17.69	4	1.59	0	0.00
11-20	54	36.73	20	7.94	0	0.00
21-30	39	26.53	55	21.83	5	9.80
31-40	9	6.12	32	12.70	3	5.88
41-50	6	4.08	47	18.65	12	23.53
51-60	9	6.12	48	19.05	14	27.45
61-70	1	0.68	28	11.11	14	27.45
71-80	3	2.04	16	6.35	3	5.88
> 80	0	0.00	2	0.79	0	0.00

The results of the survey pointed out 73 kinds of food, which were then categorized into 6 categories of meat diet with 54 items: curry soups (38 recipes) (Table II), Stir-fried food (2 recipes), Salad (5 recipes), Pastes (5 recipes), Soups (2 recipes), Other (2 recipes) (Table III), and 6 categories of desserts with 19 items: Egg dessert (3 recipes), Stir dessert (2 recipes), Coconut milk dessert (4 recipes), Streamed dessert (4 recipes), Pastry dessert (1 recipes), Syrup dessert (1 recipes) (Table IV).

TABLE II  
MEAT DIET (1)

Sub Category	Name	Bang Kadi Amount (n=147)	Lad Krabang Amount (n=252)	Nongjok Amount (n=51)	Total	
1. Kang Kua	1. KangPutsa	90	141	50	281	
	2. Kang Bai Makam	133	145	48	326	
	3. Kang Tapo	135	100	26	261	
	4. Kang Fuktong	133	158	44	335	
	5. Kang Supharod	111	160	42	252	
	6. Kang Matad	110	203	49	362	
	2. Kang Ped with coconut milk	1. Kang Kee Lek	114	174	46	334
		2. Kang Nomainengkem	104	107	27	238
		3. Kang Katonhoimalangpu	103	119	25	247
		4. Kang Saibua	119	119	30	268
5. Kang Kuadip		101	149	41	291	
6. Kang Keuawan komapaw		112	81	21	214	
7. Kang Chucipa		107	98	14	219	
8. Kang Neng		110	79	15	204	
9. Panangmu		114	70	16	226	
10. Panag Neng		100	93	19	212	
3. Kang Ped without coconut mild	1. Kang Lukyom	97	151	33	281	
	2. Kang Bon	111	159	43	313	
	3. Kang Huatan	99	72	21	192	
	4. Kang Hoi	97	110	17	224	
	5. Tompae Huatan	97	58	14	224	
	6. Kang Sawangarum	85	58	19	162	
	7. Tum Saparod mu	110	154	47	311	
	8. Kang Khamu Baimadun	113	128	46	287	
	9. Kang Masun	95	144	31	270	
	4. Kang Som	1. KangSom Kajaeb	110	221	45	376
2. KangSom Pakpung		112	140	41	293	
3. Kangsom Pektaemo		99	133	40	272	
4. Kangsom Malako		123	134	22	279	
5. Kangsom Dokcare		122	137	20	279	
6. Kang Kadumpong		112	104	12	228	
5. Kang Leng	1. Kang lengnokala	74	75	36	185	
	2. Kangleng Baikatisod	121	80	33	234	
	3. Kangleng Wunsan	132	162	43	337	
	4. Kangleng Malako	126	110	41	277	
	5. Kangleng Fuktong	127	193	46	366	
	6. KanglengPaslid Baimakamon	104	130	44	278	
	7. Kangleng Pukpun	102	190	46	338	

## IV. DISCUSSION

## A. Traditional Mon Foods

Traditional foods are an important element of cultural heritage and play an important role in local identity and consumer behavior. In addition the traditional foods are very important for rural development and for the sustainability of small and medium sized country [12]. In Thailand, there are many different cultures and each one has its own and distinct dietary habits. Traditional foods include foods that have been consumed locally or regionally for an extensive time period. Methods for the preparation of such foods have been passed down through generations and are now part of the folklore of

the country. There is, however, little documented information about the precise composition of these foods [8].

TABLE III  
MEAT DIET (2)

Category	Name	Bang Kadi Amount (n=147)	Lad Krabang Amount (n=252)	Nongjok Amount (n=51)	Total
1. Stir-fried food	1. Pad Bai Krajaeb	98	108	37	243
	2. Pad Puk Ruam	104	80	12	196
2. Salads	1. Yum Kanunon	97	89	32	218
	2. Yum Tua puk yaw	112	74	16	202
	3. Yum Yai	102	133	18	253
	4. Yum Mamao	122	142	15	279
	5. Yum Cha cam	107	95	30	232
3. Pastes	1. Pa ra Mon	108	201	44	353
	2. Pea ka kean	98	107	38	243
	3. Man pik pa	103	114	43	260
	4. Para Mamaosod	104	140	36	280
	5. Nam pik Ma kam	121	163	43	327
4. Soup	1. Tom Yum Pa	115	115	16	246
	2. Kang Ron	109	127	32	268
5. Other	1. Kaw chae	105	226	41	372
	2. Mee kob	109	175	41	325

TABLE IV  
DESSERT

Category	Name	Bang Kadi Amount (n=147)	Lad Krabang Amount (n=252)	Nongjok Amount (n=51)	Total
1. Egg dessert	1. Hun tra	68	39	17	124
	2. Tong Yod	136	140	17	293
	3. Med ka noon	137	134	15	286
2. Stir dessert	1. Kao ame	126	182	45	353
	2. Ka ya sard	125	223	45	393
3. Coconut milk dessert	1. Lod chong mod	117	207	50	374
	2. Kaoeka	102	169	38	309
	3. Look jak num kati	114	106	42	262
	4. Kabudtuadum	107	122	25	254
4. Streamed dessert	1. Kaonew dekha	116	155	43	314
	2. Kanom tenmon	116	211	44	371
	3. Kaonew huahok	103	145	44	292
	4. Kanom saibua	110	126	37	273
	5. Kanom doksano	113	128	33	274
	6. Kanom tui fu	112	69	31	212
	7. Kao tom pud	106	134	35	275
5. Pastry dessert	1. Kanom jakyang	119	113	42	274
6. Syrup dessert	1. Look jak cheam	119	108	43	270

The results of this study showed that the Mon of three communities consume two meals a day and rice is the staple food which is served to each person on a separate plate. Traditionally, the Mon ate their food by using their hands. Due to social interaction with members of modernized Thai society, this behavior in food consumption changed and some of the younger generation now prefer to eat with spoons and forks [8]. Moreover, the traditional Mon Food is characterized by an abundance of plant foods such as seasonal and local

vegetables and fresh fruits, for example Matad (*Dillenia indica* L.) and Kajaeb (*Hibiscus sabdariffa* L.) (Fig. 3).

The frequent of traditional Mon food in everyday life is based on curry and prepared by boiling known as “Kang”, which recognized 38 recipes from this study. Generally, fried foods are rare. According to the recent study was reported the nutrition value of Mon foods reveal a high variation in nutrient composition and identified as low in carbohydrate and fat, especially dishes which are based on vegetables, fresh herbs and spices used in Mon cooking such as turmeric, galangal, coriander, lemongrass, and fresh chilies have immune-boosting and disease-fighting power [13], [14].

In addition, many studies indicated that several ingredient of traditional Mon foods, such as Kang Matad and Tom Yum, currently under scientific study for their incredible health benefits [15], [16]. Therefore, traditional Mon cuisine is one of the healthiest foods.



Fig. 3 (A) Matad (*Dillenia indica* L.) (B) Kajaeb (*Hibiscus sabdariffa* L.)

#### B. Implication for Mon Food Conservation

For the creation of traditional foods, local agricultural commodities are generally used as raw materials, contributing to a sustainable environment and employment of rural population. Presently, the combination of healthy and edible aspects is very attractive for the consumers who seek for unusual or extraordinary food experience and different food culture that might not acquire at their home countries and consequently traditional foods could potentially be food tourism. A tourism destination may be popular because of the unique cuisines it served for tourists. This is obviously being observed in the European Country such as France and Italy have their authentic food culture of pizza and pasta sensations [17]. This highlights the necessity for traditional food standardization and protection of origin and quality through appropriate legislation. This is necessary for the producers and consumers, in order to protect the quality and identity of the products.

Investigation and registration of traditional foods contributes to the preservation of important elements of a nation's culinary heritage and culture. This allows future generations, both from the native population and from other countries, to be acquainted with, and to experience traditional foods. Unfortunately, throughout Thailand some traditional foods are threatened with extinction due to altered lifestyles. Therefore, there is a genuine need to study traditional foods to

preserve important elements of Mon culture and, if possible, enrich and improve the diet of the populations across the whole continent.

#### V. CONCLUSION

In summary, this preliminary described registration of Mon traditional foods recognized in Bangkok. The food has been developing and building its own typical cuisine over the centuries, characterized by regional products, such as fresh herbs, various fruits, vegetables, fish and the meat of domestic poultry and cattle. This study indicated that Mon traditional food producers should be aware of the economic benefits and the opportunities for food tourism. The study is highly recommended that the associated government should regulate adequate policies with regard to cultural and heritage practices among food service providers in safeguarding the continuity of those unique and valuable food cultural practices, as well as embarking Mon Heritage Food's magnificent role as a major tourism destination attraction in the future.

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