

The Study of Mon Community Cuisine to Develop Culture Tourism in Ratchaburi Province

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were to 1) explore knowledge and wisdom of Mon community cuisine in Ratchaburi province and transform this wisdom into literature; and 2) develop culture tourism by the wisdom of Mon community cuisine. This qualitative research employed in-depth interview, both individual and group, and a focus group in Mon community of Ban Pong and Potharam districts in Ratchaburi province. The study group was comprised of 45 Mon people in Ban Pong district selected from local people who possess local wisdom of Mon cuisine. The data were analyzed by content analysis technique.

The results of this research revealed that the distinctive wisdom of Mon community cuisine was to use local ingredients seasonally, rich in nutrients and herbal values. Moreover, Mon cuisine is also used as a tool to pay respect to their religion and belief, for example, 'Kao Chae' in ethnic Songkran festival, 'Kao Larm' or bamboo sticky rice in Jong Oh Tan ceremony or 'Kao Tom Look Yon' in Buddhist Lent. In addition, These cuisines were used as medium for youngsters to know one others and to pay respect to elders by allowing juniors to offer 'Kao Chae' to seniors in the family. This tradition created strong bond within family members. According to cuisine recording process, most identical Mon cuisines were curry, for instance, Kaeng Som, red curry, Kaeng Liang, Kaeng Bon, Kaeng Look Sun, Kaeng Ma Tard and Nam Pla Yum. For dessert, there were 'Kanom Pla Kim' and 'Kao Tok Loy Kaew.' Significant festival cuisines were 'Kaw Chae' in Mon ethnic Songkran festival.

Mon community had potential to promote cuisine as culture tourism because they had strong leaders and local chefs who were Thai-Mon national living in Wat Muang area. In order to cultivate and support culture tourism in this province, more emphasis needs to be given to developing Mon cuisine through Songkran festival, creating Mon cultural tourism route and relating Mon cuisine to other tourism activities in the area.

Keywords: Ratchaburi province, Mon cuisine, cultural tourism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Food can be regarded as cultural capital of the nation, and brought to apply, develop, and strengthen its values to owners of such cultures. Moreover, Food is not only one of the Four Requisites—which is vital to subsistence of human being—but food is also regarded as a tangible reflect on many national unique aspects of cultures, including conventions, natures, and wisdoms. In pursuit of food of each ethnic can be referred to as the abundance of bread and butter, experience accumulation of the cooker, natural goodness, food mise en place, and food processing. Each such method is a unique cognitive custom in each community. Inevitably, foods and cultures will appropriately relate to the environment—which cause all human being alive by consuming foods and energies. From ancient times to the present, all matters often involve with working for bread and butter that bring about the creating, learning, testing, and accumulating experiences. The said factors cause “the civilization of food” in each community. Wisdoms in food processing vary in each ethnic group. They depend on what forefathers in such group had observed, created, and applied from the environment; and brought them to cook as foods and inherited to their descendants as heritage. (Aree Thong-kaew. B.E. 2549, p 216)

In tourism industry, foods can also be regarded as cultural intermediary. It is because foods and traveling are definitely impartible. Whenever traveling activity occurs, food consumption activity will be concerned herein. Tourists often ask about local foods in wherever places they reach, especially the famous ones. Therefore, local foods can be enhanced and leveraged its business potential in tourism industry as long as Thailand still supports tourism markets, gains principle income from them, and develops country with such finance.

Ethnic food is one of such local foods, of which has its own uniqueness and potential to be developed in business. (Wannawijak. B.E. 2553, p 29) Since globalization trend brings about the world without borders, man migrates or travels to places freely. From this change, a trend of new cuisine is generated and called “ethnic food”—what its business provides various kinds of regional sources or tastes to consumers. As days go by, this business becomes internationally popular. “Ethnic food” does not only relieve the hungriness, or be served for degustation of food richness; but it can also awaken the memory of displaced people. Such food price can be marked up as odd and rare items for tourists, whom seek for traditional and cultural subsistence in such local

attractions. Besides, ethnic food is also a subsidiary of business evocation in various fields such like in hospitality industry. In some countries, ethnic food becomes a national symbol—which is well known all over the world—and an effective tool to gain more advantages in business competitions. For example, ethnic food concept of South Korea helps create more opportunities to their trade affairs and simultaneously becomes a communication instrument to the world—by introducing Kimchee, their thousand-year-old local piccalilli. Kimchee is a crucial factor for implementing symbolic capitals of South Korea in other countries. “Kimchee” has been launched and named for many products for building up the brand awareness and brand preference. Those tactics finally attract the consumers to be maniacal to all South Korean brands, which do not only appear in food items, but also in cosmetics, attires, electronic gadgets, and tourist attractions such as “Kimchee Land” etc.

From both concepts of Aggregate Economics development together with cultures of cuisines in aspects of wisdom accomplishment and cultural intermediary, these led the researcher’s desire to study wisdoms of the Mon cuisine in Ratchaburi province. The outcome of study can be applied to add more values to the tourism industry of the country and also implemented to restore and reserve the Mon recipes. These need to be inherited to current and future Thai society, whom is now staying among the globalization trends and fashions of western cultures. There are research methods, findings, and recommendations in this study that shall be regarded in the following.

II. SCOPE OF THE STUDY RESEARCH METHOD

The study of wisdoms of the Mon cuisine in Ratchaburi province for leveraging itself to tourism industry was emphasized on qualitative method by collecting and studying its cognitive customs and wisdoms. The researcher collected data by these methods including in-depth interview, participant observation, and group discussion. The objective of such collecting data method was to harvest more techniques or secrets of the cuisine, experience its unique identities, and seek for opportunity to leverage and take it into the tourism business. The scope of the study was the Thai-Mon community, Ban Pong and Potharam district, Ratchburi province. The reason of the fact that research had selected to study this area because they have seriously reserved their own traditions, customs, and cultures as unique heritages of the Mon community—which was evidently established since Ayudhya period.

III. STUDY RESULTS

1. Thai people of Mon descent was originally inherited from Mongoloid ethnic group living in the lower region in Myanmar—where was named as “Ramannadesa” or Rmen country. Mon people had been called as Rmen, Monle, and Talaing. Ramannadesa had been the most succeeding country in this Southeast Asian region; after the intrusion and spread of Myanmar, Ramannadesa became tributary state of Myanmar. The name and emblems of Ramannadesa were finally wiped out off the history. In B.E. 2127, it was the first time that the Mon people decided to evacuate to Siam territory, and they also did many times after that until Myanmar started to battle with United Kingdom of Britain in B.E. 2367. (Somporn O-charoen. B.E. 2541, pp 45-47) Once these Thai people of Mon descent settled down in Siam country, they remained themselves conducting their own customs, traditions, and wisdoms of their beliefs, cultures, dialects, dressings and cuisines—especially cultures in daily meals and festive foods.

2. Distinctiveness of Mon community cuisine in Ratchaburi province was emerged by the accumulation of studies and experiences on well selecting the existing and surrounding resources in the Mon’s living. They initiated and repetitively improved their wisdoms of cuisine from generation to generation. It was a local wisdom of selection for their foods. Since each dish was cooked and processed differently, it thus became unique. In addition, the appearance and taste were diverse in each location. By all means, the said ethnic foods of Mon community definitely reflected the affluence of natural resources in each location. More than that, ethnic foods also demonstrated beliefs, traditions, and wisdoms of initiating and processing methods. The researcher categorized the Thai-Mon cuisine of Ratchaburi province into 2 majorities according to the objectives of creation, which were daily meals and festive foods.

2.1 For daily meals, the Thai-Mon people in Ratchaburi province mainly consumed the round shape rice with side dishes such as spicy soup. Normally, such side dishes were not complicated to cook and easy to be ready for serving. Their ingredients were always found in the community area and not cooked with fat compounds such as (1) Sour Red Soup with Chinese Date, Morning Glory and Taro (2) Spicy Assorted Vegetable Soup with Special Red Hot Basil and (3) Spicy Soup with Grilled Fish and Local Fruit. The recipes and processes of ethnic cuisine in Thai-Mon community were inherited to their descendants verbally. It was hardly discovered any solid evidences such as cook books. The folks learned how to cook and improved their dishes by trying to use each part of the local plant to be the ingredient in their daily meals

such as the stem, leave, root, petal or seed whatsoever. Each part of the plant was not only highly nutritious, but also well nourishing to human body, just like herbs and spices. Furthermore, the folks were able to have the selected ingredients seasonally.

2.2 For festive foods, the Thai-Mon people in Ratchaburi province traditionally have worshiped Theravada Buddhism for ages; it might be regarded since the Sudhammavadi Kingdom—or Thaton, the first kingdom of the Mons. That was why they strictly behaved and followed what had been scripted in Buddhist doctrines. On Buddhist Sabbath days, they would undoubtedly prepare themselves for making a well merit at their religious places. (Suporn O-charoen. B.E. 2541, p 260) It was said that all of Mon villagers in 3 districts—namely Song Kanong, Klong Kuai, and Ban Muang—would go for making merits at Buddhist temples for at least twice a year. Those were on Songkran days and Buddhist Lent days. Since these folks wholeheartedly worshipped Buddhist doctrines, they all would neatly cook the special dishes in these festivals and offer them to monks and their beloved on the coming occasions such as (1) ‘Khao Chae—Steamed Rice in Scented and Cooled Water—on Songkran days’, (2) ‘Khao Larm—Roasted Glutinous Rice with Coconut Milk in Bamboo Joints—in Jong O Taan Festival (warming monks in winter season)’, and (3) ‘Khao Tom Look Yorn—Steamed Glutinous Rice with Coconut Milk in Pandanus Package—on the commencement and ending of Buddhist Lent days’ etc.

3. Methods of leveraging the Mon cuisine into the tourism industry in Ratchaburi province are as the followings.

3.1 It is recommended to add Mon cuisine activities in the Traveling plan on Songkran days by tasting Khao Chae of the Mon recipes. It is because this Songkrab festival was very important to the folks herein. Songkran festival is regarded as the New Year festival in Suvarnabhumi region. Thai people of Mon descent strongly believe that on April 13th, the World Guardian Spirits will be back to the heaven; during 14th and 15th, and there will not have any spirits to protect the world. On April 15th, the new coming World Guardian Spirits will be in charge of protecting the world, these Thai-Mon folks decided to build the spirit shrine and auspicious foods for welcoming them. Traditionally, on April 12th, Thai-Mon people are required to clean their own houses for welcoming the guests and relatives and prepare Khao Chae and its side dishes for serving, including Ga Jia (Grounded and Sweetened Anchovy), Yam Kanun On (Thai Dressed Salad with Jackfruit), Yam Ma-Muang (Thai Dressed Salad with Raw Mango), Pak-Kard Waan (Sweetened Lettuce), Paad Guay-Tiew (Stir-Fried Noodles), Kapi Tord (Deep-Fried Shrimp Paste Ball), and Kra-Tiem Dorng Paad Khai (Stir-Fried Reserved Garlic with Eggs). Every

portion that is needed to stir-fry will be added with pure and fresh coconut milk. This is for better and the most scrumptious taste. Galamae—Caramel with Coconut Milk in Thai-Mon Style—is served as dessert. Normally, in the mornings on 13th, 14th, and 15th of April, everyone has to get up better early for Khao Chae and its side dishes mise en place, then, pack and deliver those foods to temples both in their community and neighboring communities. Khao Chae is especially aromatic of jasmine or fragrant candles and delicately appointed into China wares or creative Pandanus bowls. The ones who are accounted for delivering foods are both male and female adolescents. After they offer their foods to the monks, they then have their breakfasts and deliver the rest prepared foods to their elderly relatives. This is for express their good wishes towards kindness of their relatives. They may have conversations and teachings to each other for building up more loving sensations and respects. During 16th to 18th, the folks will give the alms in the early morning and participate the Bang Sugul ceremony at 1400 hrs—of which the folks will lay a yellowish robe as an offering to a monk at a memorial ceremony of funeral. Later, they will sprinkle the fresh and aromatic water onto the Buddha Image sculptures and the mortuary urns of their beloved ones, especially their forefathers. While sprinkling such water, they traditionally ask for some wishing returns. Advantages of uniqueness of Thai-Mon Songkran festival together with the long Thai New Year holidays are combined as the key factors for promoting the creative cultural activities such as the Mon Khao Chae festive in Songkran. This can be called as an alternative for tourists or even Thai people for selecting it as a program in their holidays.

3.2 It is recommended to improve tourism routes of tourist destinations on the Mon historical sources by selecting and adding the charming or interesting activities into the former traveling plans; for example, the Nine-Chamber Folklore Museum, Mural Paintings in Wat Kong Ka Ram Temple, Grand Shadow Play at Wat Kanong Temple, and The Mon Folklore Museum of Ban Muang District. Tourists should be invited to have their meals at Ban Muang community. Fine dining with great and tender savors of the Mon Cuisine will be served to them before leaving and heading to visit Wat Yai Nakon Chum Temple. Lastly, they shall observe the Hundred Million Bats in front of the Wat Khao Chong Pran Temple or visit the Lord Buddha's relics at the hilltop of the Wat Khao Chong Pran Temple before going back home. This itinerary is proper prepared for a one-day trip.

IV. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the study, it is found that the dominant wisdoms of Thai people of Mon descent's cuisine are as the following.

1. The wisdom of selecting well ingredients for cooking their own ethnic cuisine. This culinary wisdom of Thai-Mon folks emphasizes on using their existent local resources for cooking foods. Frankly, those local members like the foods because of its comfort to cook or prepare. Such foods are inherited for years via the characteristics of agricultural community. Vegetables for cooking are emerged itself and cultivated by folks in their plough and brought to be food ingredient. Their tastes and odors can be used for seasoning foods; for example, to add more sourness by the peaks of soap pod, the fresh and young tamarind leaves, or the petals of red rosella. This local wisdom of cuisine becomes the traditions, cultures, or even the beliefs of the local people. Some believe that herbs and spices can be used as a medication such as for pregnant women. (Juan Krue-vijjayajarn. B.E. 2541) If any pregnant women require their fetus healthy, those women shall avoid having highly-seasoned or even indigestible foods such as fresh chili, eggplant, dried rice crust, and dried rice ball. After such women deliver their baby and remain by a fire after parturition, they are highly recommended to have Spicy Assorted Vegetable Soup with Special Red Hot Basil. It is for perspiring easily and having more maternal milk for their child. For beverages, they are requested to drink ginger tea or hot ginger ale.

2. Thai people of Mon descent follow their wisdom of having foods. They love having just cooking foods. Portion number is strictly relied on the number of members in family. They avoid having too many foods in a meal. They select and take only green, fresh, and seasonal foods such as having Horse Radish Soup in early winter season. This helps them having sufficient foods for the whole year, gains high nutrition of fresh foods, and protects them from diseases and sickness.

3. Thai people of Mon descent use their culinary wisdom as an intermediary of various cultures such as demonstrating how they worship Lord Buddha's doctrines by Roasting Glutinous Rice with Coconut Milk in Bamboo Joints in Jong O Taan Festival. It is not only the way of warming monks in winter season, but also encouraging the group discussions in their community. Moreover, sharing Khao Chae—Steamed Rice in Scented and Cooled Water—on Songkran days is not only the way of worshipping the gods, but also paying respects and loving sensations to elder relatives in their community.

4. There is a research stating about the wisdom of leveraging the cultural intermediary into tourism industry; it is said that the cost of foods and beverages of a tourist is about 40% of all expenditures during a trip. (Boyne, Williams & Hall. A.C. 2002) On the side of restaurant entrepreneurs, it is found that more than 50% of their net profits are from the coming tourists who have dining in their places. (Graziani, A.C. 2003) More than that, the researcher found that the Destination's Food Image directly effects to the desire of tourists' traveling. Therefore, the Mon Cuisine can be applied and adapted to the tourism of Ratchaburi by demonstrating its dominant of uniqueness and original recipes as the owners of traditions and cultures in the region

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