

Using Focus Groups to Identify Mon Set Menus of Bang Kadi Community in Bangkok

S. Nitiworakarn

Abstract—In recent years, focus-group discussions, as a resources of qualitative facts collection, have gained popularity amongst practices within social science studies. Despite this popularity, studying qualitative information, particularly focus-group meetings, creates a challenge to most practitioner inspectors. The Mons, also known as Raman is considered to be one of the earliest peoples in mainland South-East Asia and to be found in scattered communities in Thailand, around the central valley and even in Bangkok. The present project responds to the needs identified traditional Mon set menus based on the participation of Bang Kadi community in Bangkok, Thailand. The aim of this study was to generate Mon food set menus based on the participation of the community and to study Mon food in set menus of Bang Kadi population by focus-group interviews and discussions during May to October 2015 of Bang Kadi community in Bangkok, Thailand. Data were collected using (1) focus group discussion between the researcher and 147 people in the community, including community leaders, women of the community and the elderly of the community (2) cooking between the researcher and 22 residents of the community. After the focus group discussion, the results found that Mon set menus of Bang Kadi residents involved of Kang Neng Kua-dit, Kang Luk-yom, Kang Som-Kajaeb, Kangleng Puk-pung, Yum Cha-cam, Pik-pa, Kao-new dek-ha and Num Ma-toom and the ingredients used in cooking are mainly found in local and seasonal regime. Most of foods in set menus are consequent from local wisdom.

Keywords—Focus groups, Mon food, set menus, Bangkok.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE richness of data generated through qualitative study has interested a number of researchers. Qualitative data are collected by observation or through individual or group interviews [1]. Focus group is a method involving the use of in-depth group discussions in which participants are selected since they are a purposive, although not necessarily representative, sampling of a specific population, this group being ‘focused’ on a given topic’. Participants in this type of research are, therefore, selected on the criteria that they would have something to say on the subject, are within the age-range, have similar socio-characteristics and would be comfortable talking to the interviewer and each other. This approach to selection relates to the concept of ‘Applicability’, in which subjects are selected because of their knowledge of the study area [2], [3]. One of the distinct features of focus-group interview is its group dynamics; hence the type and range of data generated through the social communication of the group

Saruda Nitiworakarn is with the Department of Home Economics, Faculty of Science and Technology, Phranakhon Rajabhat University Bangkok, Thailand (phone: 66 2544 8000; e-mail: sarudamam@gmail.com).

are frequently better and deeper than those obtained from one-to-one interviews [4]. Thus, the use of focus groups is a qualitative data collection technique for obtaining data about the thoughts, attitudes, or opinions of small groups of participants regarding a particular subject. Normally, focus groups are small, relatively homogeneous groups that meet with a moderator who facilitates a 30 to 90-minute discussion in a neutral and relaxed environment. An assistant moderator takes written notes of group dynamics and obtains an audio recording of the discussion [5].

Currently, focus group studies are becoming increasingly accepted in many research fields for exploring what individuals believe or feel as well as why they perform in the way they do. They offer a useful process for involving users in cultural identity and strategy development needs assessment, participatory planning and conservation of traditional knowledge and existing society [6]. The main intend is to understand, and explain, the meanings, beliefs and cultures that influence the feelings, attitudes and behaviors of individuals. It is ideally suited for exploring the complexity surrounding traditional acquaintance within the context of lived experience, and in ways encourages the participants to engage positively with the process of the research in particular to identify cultural consume and culinary blueprints [7].

Existing society of human beings almost relies much on the nature of place they settled. Their experience conducts various cultural activities in order to survive. They know how to construct house, to find and decide food, to treat illness and to consume and live daily. These human activities, originally, are provided and prepared by natural resources and forestry. Although the world situation has been changed and host areas become urban areas, people cannot keep away from demand and mutual necessity to the location. This is because environment is whether touchable or untouchable one. Since human beings are essential to rely on and regard with the diversity of the life, they learn both directly and indirectly as well as create, by the time, activities, which are consistent with their need [8], [9].

“A people without a country” is denominate for Mon realm described by Halliday [10], one of the most famous researchers in Mon study. The Mon, also known as Raman, is to be found in scattered communities in Thailand, mainly around the central valley and even in Bangkok [11]. Mon people are a respected minority with an ancient past. They are the remnant of the earliest-known civilization in Southeast Asia more than a thousand years before the arrival of the Thais and the Burmese in the area. In the past, Mon people suffered a destiny; in 1757 they were immigrations from Myanmar into

Thailand in the second half of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century. No exact statistics are available for the number of Mons in Thailand but recently observation show that Mon people are living in Thailand about 100,000 people [12], [13]. Actually, Mon people appear dissimilar from Thais. Women no longer in their early main wear their hair in a bun at the back of the head, and regularly cover their heads, both in and outside the house, with a strip of cloth or toweling in the form of a turban. They also have, obviously before marriage, a preference for very bright and often clashing colors in their dress. Mon dietary has no restrictions and their food is related to Thai food. They rarely drink tea or coffee in their houses, mostly because they seem to consider it an unnecessary luxury [10], [11].

The sociology of food consumption mostly looks into whether the social patterns of food consumption are shaped by the 'structure' of society, or whether they are shaped actively by the actions of the 'agents' or members of the society. In particular, sociological research pertinent to food consumption has dealt with determination of interrelationships between food and cultures [13]. Food set menus is traditional consume particular in Asian society. This paper is, therefore, based on an exploration in a cultural community of Mon people in Bangkok. It aims to identify traditional Mon food set menus, describe its ingredient, and illuminate selected aspects of food consumption behaviour.

II. METHODOLOGY

The focus groups conducted by Bang Kadi community in Bangkok, Thailand. The research procedure was divided into two main phases. During the first phase, a food survey was conducted and checklists disseminated among 147 respondents in Bang Kadi community to identify common foods in everyday consumption from January 2015 to April 2015. The survey participants included all Mon residents such as political and social leaders, political and social activists, students, workers [15]. The results of the survey pointed out 79 kinds of food, which were then categorized into six groups of meat diet with 54 items: curry soups (38 recipes), Stir-fried food (2 recipes), Salad (5 recipes), Pastes (5 recipes), Soups (2 recipes), Other (2 recipes), and six group of dessert 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) [14].

The second phase of the research dealt with a discussion of traditional Mon food and its ingredients, cooking methods, and consumption. In this phase, 22 residents, who normally did the cooking for the households, were invited to participate in a focus group discussion. During the process of discussion, the 8 recipes selected in the survey were presented and the cooks agreed to use these as representative for traditional Mon food menus as all of these dishes (1) were cooked and consumed in Myanmar prior to their migration to Thailand, (2) had been consumed for several generations, and (3) were still often prepared. The dietary ingredients of cooking were then recorded to present the standard recipes for this research [15].



Fig. 1 Focus groups participation for Mon food set identity of Bang Kadi Community, Bangkok Thailand

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Food realizes as an indicator of cultural identity has long been noted within anthropological study on social classification, suggesting that food consumption practices are seemingly unequivocal demonstrates of cultural difference [14]. Many recent investigations on food systems have shown there has been a steady interchange between cultures in relation to food consumption. Journey, trade, technology and mobilized have mainly considered as a key factors exchange of consumption practices. This brings into difficulty in term of cultural food identity [8]. With the focus group methodology, this study found that the common of traditional Mon food in everyday life is based on curry and prepared by boiling. Commonly, fried menu is very rare [14], [15]. Representative traditional Mon set menus showed in Fig. 2. The details of ingredients are presented in Table I.

The current frame of focus groups is not difficult to understand. Several reports on the use of this technique cite the relatively low cost as well as the rapidity with which a focus group report can be obtained and apparently flexible [2], [5]. Even, the definition of traditional Mon food is tied to the concept of origin. In the intergenerational framework, the respondents diverged on the sorts of reference points that they use in constructing their understandings of the origins of Mon cuisines. In this study focus group methodology from the target population, under the direction of facilitator (moderator) converse subjects of significance for this study. It is basically a qualitative method in which the moderator, with the assist of programmed guidelines, stimulates free conversation among the participants on the subject of cultural Mon food set investigation. The order in which the subjects are covered is flexible, but generally the discussion starts with more general issues and slowly flows into more precise ones. For example, interviews covered questions related to the role of traditions in homemade cooking. These data reveal a source of discrepancies between the generations. The friction that emerged from the information related to the demands of everyday life and how they become projected onto practices

that sustain tradition. At the end, a few inquiring questions are sometimes asked to reveal more in-depth data or to elucidate earlier statements or responses.



Fig. 2 Representative of Mon set menu: 1. Kang Neng Kua-dit, 2. Kang Luk-yom, 3. Kang Som-Kajaeb, 4. Kangleng Puk-pun, 5. Yum Cha-cam, 6. Pik-pa, 7. Kao-new dek-ha and 8. Num Ma-toom

area with seasonal regime. Most of foods in set menus are following from local wisdom and believed could defend and treat various symptoms of illness, for example Yum Cha-cam or spicy Cha-cam salads which the name came from mainly ingredient Cha-cam (*Sueda maritime* (L.) Dumort.) or commonly known as seepweed and seablites (Fig. 3) was believed could avoid goiter symptom if regularly consume this menu. In addition, the plant is currently under scientific investigations for its important health benefits [16], [17].



Fig. 3 Cha-cam (*Sueda maritime* (L.) Dumort)

TABLE I
LIST OF INGREDIENTS IN THE MON SET MENUS OF BANG KADI
COMMUNITY

Food Item	Major ingredients
1. Kang Neng Kua-dit	(1) unripe bananas 300 g (2) beef 200 g (3) coconut milk 300 g (4) basil, cayenne pepper for decoration (5) galangal, lemon grass, kaffir lime leaves, Curry ingredient (1) paste 1 tablespoon, (2) garlic 50 g, (3) shallots, 30 g (4) chili 30 g (5) galangal sliced 10 g (6) Lemongrass (7) surface lime slice (8) salt 1 teaspoon.
2. Kang Luk-yom	1) bream fish 500 g (2) 100 g of roasted rice (3) chili 100 grams (4) 10 basil leaves (5) 5 kaffir lime leaves (6), tamarind juice, Curry ingredient (1) 100g bream (2) shrimp paste 1 tablespoon (3) salt 1 teaspoon (4) shallots 50 g (5), 30 g of dried chili (6) sliced galangal 10 g (7) ½ of lime surface.
3. Kang Som-Kajaeb	(1) young tamarind leaves 100 g (2) shallots, 20 g (3) shrimp paste 1 teaspoon (4) okra 100 g (5) grilled fish 100 g (6) shrimp 100 g (7) dried chili 10 g (8) 10 g of salt.
4. Kangleng Puk-pung	(1) malabar fish 200 g (2) grilled gourami fish 100 g (3) shrimp 200 g (4) garlic 30 g (5) shallots 30 g (6) pepper 30 g (7) rice 1 tablespoon (8) salt 1 tablespoon (9) shrimp paste ½ tablespoon.
5. Yum Cha-cam	(1) shrimp 200 g (2) grilled chili 10 g (3), grilled onion 100 g (4) grilled garlic 100 g (5) Cha-cam 300 g (6) roasted peanuts 100 g (7) tamarind juice 50 g (8) 30 g sugar crush (9) coconut cream 200 g (10) salt.
6. Pik-pa	(1) chili 5 g (2) limes 2 (3) onion 30 g (4) grilled gourami fish 100 g (5) shrimp paste 1 tablespoon.
7. Kao-new dek-ha	(1) rice 1 kg (2) roasted black sesame seeds 500 g (3) salt 50 g (4) sugar crush.
8. Num Ma-toom	(1) dried quince 500 g (2) sugar 500 g (3), water 2 liters (4) two aromatic pandan leaves.

IV. CONCLUSION

Focus groups offer a valuable, versatile, interactive, fun and developmentally effective method for use with Mon residences. These focus groups have been the first step in understanding the true gaps that exist in Mon food knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs among Mon populations. Significant efforts are needed to improve the Mon food menus knowledge. Interventions aimed specifically at these knowledge gaps may help improve the health of Bang Kadi community with traditional Mon set menus knowledge. The conclusions indicate that focus-group discussions have considerable potential to enrich social and behavioral research, and suggest that more experimental methodological studies in using the focus-group approach for rapid assessment should be undertaken. The information from these focus groups was used to design a Mon food conservation especially designed to respond to the needs. A key implication for future research, therefore, seems to lie with understanding the Mon nutrition and medicinal property as well as this information would be particularly useful for destinations interested in promoting culinary tourism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author thanks Noparuj Nitiworakarn for assistance during field works and social leaders of Bang Kadi communities, Tawatchapong Monda. This work was supported by the Higher Education Research Promotion and National Research University Project of Thailand 2558A14062001.

REFERENCES

- [1] R. A. Krueger, and M. A. Casey, *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.2000.

- [2] F. Rabiee, "Focus-group interview and data analysis." *Proceedings of the nutrition society*, Vol. 63, no. 4, pp. 655-660, 2004.
- [3] M. D. Kaplowitz, and P. H. John, "Do focus groups and individual interviews reveal the same information for natural resource valuation?" *Ecological Economics* Vol. 36, no. 2, pp. 237-247, 2001.
- [4] B. Stewart, D. Olson, C. Goody, A. Tinsley, R. Amos, N. Betts, C. Georgiou, S. Hoerr, R. Ivaturi, and J. Voichick, "Converting focus group data on food choices into a quantitative instrument", *Journal of Nutrition Education*, Vol.26 no.1, pp.34-36, 1994
- [5] B. Halkier, "Focus groups as social enactments: integrating interaction and content in the analysis of focus group data," *Qualitative research* Vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 71-89, 2010.
- [6] V. Wibeck, M. A. Dahlgren, and G. Öberg, "Learning in focus groups an analytical dimension for enhancing focus group research", *Qualitative research*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp.249-267, 2007.
- [7] M. E. Khan, M. Anker, B. C. Patel, S. Barge, H. Sadhwani, and R. Kohle, "The use of focus groups in social and behavioural research: some methodological issues", *World Health Stat Q*, Vol. 44, no. 3, pp. 145-149, 1991.
- [8] A. James, "Cooking the Books. Global or Local Identities in Contemporary British Food Cultures?", in David Howes (ed.) *Cross-Cultural Consumption. Global Markets, Local Realities*, London: Routledge, pp. 77-92, 1996.
- [9] M. B. Holstein, M. Waymack, and J. A. Parks, *Ethics, aging, and society: The critical turn*. Springer Publishing Company, 2010.
- [10] R. Halliday, "Immigration of the Mons into Siam" *Journal of the Siam Society*, Vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 1-15, 1913.
- [11] Smithies, M. "Village Mons of Bangkok", *Journal of the Siam Society*, vol. 60, no.1, pp. 307-332, 1972
- [12] R. Tirtosudarmo, "Forced Migration in Southeast Asia: An Introduction." *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, Vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 1-6, 2006.
- [13] A. Trichopoulou, S. Stavroula, and V. Effie, "Traditional foods: a science and society perspective." *Trends in Food Science & Technology*, Vol. 18, no. 8, pp. 420-427, 2007.
- [14] S. Nitiworakarn, "Identity of Cultural Food: A Case Study of Traditional Mon Cuisine in Bangkok, Thailand." *World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology International Journal of Social, Behavioral, Educational, Economic, Business and Industrial Engineering*, Vol 9, No 6, pp. 2060-2063, 2015.
- [15] K. Viwatpanich, "Consumption and Nutritive Values of Traditional Mon Food." *ASEAS-Austrian Journal*, Vol.5, no. 1, pp. 152-160, 2012.
- [16] S. Ullah, A. Bano, S. Girmay S, and G. Tan, "Anticancer, antioxidant and antimicrobial activities of *Suaeda fruticosa* related to its phytochemical screening." *International Journal of Phytomedicine*. Vol. 4, no.2, pp.284-291, 2012.
- [17] H. Padalia and S. Chanda, "Comparative phytochemical analysis of aerial parts of *A. procumbens*, *F. dichotoma*, *S. spontaneum*, *S. nigra* and *T. angustifolia*", *Journal of Pharmacognosy and Phytochemistry*. Vol. 1, no. 4(2). pp. 11-16, 2015.



Saruda Nitiworakarn was graduated Bachelor degree of Home Economics major from Kasetsart University Thailand in 1995 and graduated Master degree major Home Economics from Kasetsart University Thailand in 1998. At present, she is employed as an Asst. Prof. at Home Economics department, Faculty of Science and Technology Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Bangkok.