



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
INST FÖR KOST- OCH IDROTTSVETENSKAP

The symbolic value of different meals among Thai children in Krabi

Frida Emanuelsson och Lova Molin

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Examination paper:	15 hp
Program:	Health promotion program, nutrition
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Abstract

During the past three decades the food patterns have changed in dramatically in Thailand. At the same time the prevalence of overweight and obesity has increased considerably among children and adolescence. Therefore it is important to have a good preventive work in Thailand. In order to have a good preventive work it is important to know what determines food choices among the population. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess the symbolic value that a number of dishes have for Thai children in the ages of 8-10 in Krabi. The focuses have been on traditional Thai dishes and Western dishes from a social status and ethnical perspective.

The research design was a cross-sectional design, with questionnaires. The result showed that the children ate most of traditional Thai dishes. Simultaneously, the majority of the children associated the Western dishes with the statement luxury food. If seeing luxury food as expensive and delicious food the results indicated that the Western dishes had high social status from a social perspective. The results also showed that the traditional Thai dishes were associated with the statement family food and guest food. This indicates that the ethnicity and Thai traditions are more important than luxury among family and guests. Furthermore, the traditional Thai dishes were associated with the statement everyday food in greater extend than the Western dishes. This indicates that the Western dishes were considered as rarer than the traditional Thai dishes among the respondents. Furthermore, this also indicates that the Western dishes had higher social status than the traditional Thai dishes as rare food have high social status according to the social perspective.



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Sammanfattning

Under de senaste tre decennierna har det skett stora förändringar i den thailändska befolkningens matvanor. Samtidigt har förekomsten av övervikt och fetma ökat dramatiskt. För att stoppa denna utveckling krävs det ett bra förebyggande folkhälsoarbete i Thailand.

Syftet med denna studie var att kartlägga vilket symboliskt värde ett antal maträtter har för thailändska barn i Krabi. Fokus låg på traditionell thailändsk mat i förhållande till västerländsk mat från ett socialt och etniskt perspektiv. I studien användes en tvärsnittsdesign i form av en enkäterundersökning. Resultatet visade att barnen åt mest utav de thailändska maträtterna, samtidigt som majoriteten ansåg att västerländska maträtterna var lyxig mat. Lyxig mat kan i sin tur kopplas samman med mat som är dyr och fin mat, vilket från ett socialt perspektiv är mat med hög social status.

Resultaten visade även att de traditionella thailändska maträtterna var förknippade med familjemat samt mat för gäster. Detta tydde på att etnicitet och thailändska traditioner var viktigare än lyx i samband med familjemåltider och när gäster bjöds på middag. Vidare visade resultatet att de traditionella thailändska rätterna var förknippade med vardagsmat i högre grad än de västerländska rätterna. Därmed visade resultatet att de västerländska rätterna var mer sällsynt förekommande. Vidare tydde även detta på att de västerländska maträtterna hade högre social status då ovanlig mat har hög status ur ett socialt perspektiv.

Preface

This bachelor thesis was written by Frida Emanuelsson and Lova Molin.

The study has been conducted as a Minor Field Stud, financed with a scholarship from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency [Sida]. MFS is a program administrated by the Swedish government agency International Programme Office for Education and Training which promotes academic exchanges and cooperation across borders. The data was collected in Thailand during an eight week visit in spring 2014. This MFS is furthermore an examination thesis on the Helthpromotion program at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Being in Thailand and conducting this study has been an unforgettable experience. Furthermore the completion of our bachelor thesis would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of several individuals.

- First we would like to express our gratitude to our supervisor Christina Berg, who has guided this project from the beginning with valuable advices.
- Much appreciation also goes to our interpreter Freddy Discos Gaynat Fdg who both helped us with linguistic issues, translating and gaining access in the field. And also given practical and cultural advices.
- We also want to thank to all the children and the teachers at the participating schools in Krabi.
- Finally we want to express our gratitude to SIDA and Stockholm University who made this study possible through the MFS scholarship. The MFS scholarship consisted of 25 000 Swedish kronor as well as a two day long field study preparation course.

Gothenburg, May 2014

Division of Labour

The division of tasks during the study has been distributed equally between the writers.

The task	Percentage perform by Frida/Lova
Planing the study	50/50
Litteratur search	50/50
Data Collection	50/50
Analysis	50/50
Writing	50/50
Layout	50/50

Table 1 Shows the distribution of work between the writes in this thesis.

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Introduction

Food choices are important for our health and wellbeing (Gordon, 2007). During the past three decades the food patterns have changed dramatically in Thailand. Thai staples and side dishes are being replaced by dishes containing a higher proportion of saturated fats, meats and sugars. Affiliated with these trends is the selection of foods that requires less time and skill to prepare. Home-made meals are being replaced by ready-to-eat products bought at local markets, food stalls, supermarkets or big department stores (Kosulwat, 2002). In Thailand the prevalence of overweight and obesity among children and adolescents have increased dramatically over the past 20 years (Kosulwat, 2002). These rapid changes in food intake must be carefully observed and must be reversed through appropriate behavior modification along with promotion of appropriate eating practices and physical activities. This emerging nutrition crisis is today a challenge for health and nutrition professionals in Thailand. Therefore it is important to have a good preventive work and control of diet-related chronic disease (Kosulwat, 2002).

In order to understand what determines food choices amongst a population it is important to have knowledge about how people think about food and different type of dishes. For people in general food is something more than just nutrition. Food pattern is a way to communicate and it has significance for our social- and cultural identity. The social environment is one important part in food choices. According to Ogden (2010) food has a social function, such as developing relationships, symbolizing status and creating group identity. Food pattern has a symbolic meaning and difference in food pattern can mark both belonging and exclusion (Ogden, 2010). Ethnical and cultural aspects are also important parts in food choices. This is the kind of dishes that comes from a specific origin such as a place or a tradition and symbolizes group belonging (Sobal and Bisogni, 2009).

This study aims to assess the symbolic value that a number of dishes have for Thai children in in Krabi. A symbol is an object, a picture or an activity that can be interpreted as something else that represents something else. (Palojoki & Janhonen-Abreuquah, 2005). Furthermore, food can be a symbol for status. Andersson (1987) accentuate that people in general choose food that elevates their status and food that their role model eats. Being able to eat the food one's prefer elevates the social status. In societies where people can choose between different foods, cooking methods and serving manner food choices themselves create different status (Counihan, 2012).

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to assess the symbolic value that a number of dishes have for Thai children in the ages of 8-10 in Krabi. The focus will be on the traditional Thai cuisine in relation to Western food from a social and cultural perspective.

Issues

Which dishes are associated with high social status?

Which dishes are associated with cultural and ethnical identity?

Background

The background is divided into two parts. The first part starts with an introduction about the country including basic data about Thailand, the nutrition and health transition in Thailand, and finally describing socioeconomic status and child obesity. The second part includes data about factors influencing food choices.

An introduction to the country

Thailand

Thailand is a developing country located in the Southeast Asian peninsula with an area of 513 115 square kilometers and with a population of 69.9 million in 2012. The country is divided into 75 provinces and is bordered by Burma and Laos in the north, by Laos and Cambodia in the east, by the Gulf of Thailand and Malaysia in the south and by Andaman Sea and Burma in the west. The capital of Thailand is Bangkok with a population of 5.8 million in 2010. (Nationalencyklopedin, 2014). Between 1985 and 1995 Thailand experienced the world's biggest economic growth, in average an increase with 9 percent per year. In 1997 the land went through an economic crisis, but stabilized in 1999. Over the years of 2003 and 2004 the economy once more increased and in year 2000 Thailand had a GNP per capita of 1 954 US dollars (Worldbank, 2013).

Thai culture

The Thai culture is influenced by ancient traditions and religion of Buddhism. In general the Thais are hospitable and generous, but the society is also characterised by a strong social hierarchy. As in most parts of Asia, respect towards ancestors is an important part of the culture and the traditions. Furthermore the royal family and the governance have high social status among the population (Grimes, 2007). Thailand is a monarchy, headed by King Rama IX. The Thai King is respected and admired by many Thais with titles like Phra Chao Yu Hua (Lord Upon our Heads) or Chao Chiwit (Lord of Life) (Aphornsuvan, 2004).

The nutrition and health transition in Thailand

Historically the basis of the Thai kitchen has extremely old roots and has maintained in centuries simultaneously as it has been complemented with other kitchens from abroad. The Thai kitchen has culinary ideas that have reached Thailand across the borders from Malaysia, Laos, Cambodia, Burma and all the way from China. The most important contribution is the chili fruit, which came from South America through Europe in the 1500's. Over centuries, Thailand has been an intermediate landing for businessmen and has incorporated influences from other countries without doing renounce on their own culture or local rituals.

In general the food means a lot to the population in Thailand as all social gatherings almost always includes something edible (Grimes, 2007).

The origin of the Thai diet begins with the waterborne community. Rice and fish are the major ingredients in the Thai cuisine. Animals from the sea, plants and herbs are still used in a large quantity when preparing meals. Large pieces of meat are rarely used in any dish. The common cooking methods are stewing, grilling and baking. Fresh spices and herbs are common ingredients in almost all Thai dishes. All dishes are eaten with rice, which is a main staple for the Thai population (Kosulwat, 2002). Between different parts of Thailand there are also variations in the food culture. In the north of Thailand the food culture are influenced by the traditions from the south of China and the Burmese kitchen. Furthermore, in the central parts of the food culture are strongly influenced by the Chinese kitchen and the Indian kitchen (Grimes, 2007). However, a transformation in the eating habits can be seen among the population in Thailand, influenced by the Western cuisine. Certain parts of the Western cuisine have reached Asia such as food containing a lot of added sugars, fats and refined carbohydrates (Popkin, 2001).

Thailand has gone through a social and economic transition and the economic structure has moved from agricultural to industrial. At the same time results from several nation-wide surveys shows that the food consumption pattern has changed. Studies indicate that typical Thai staple and side dishes are being replaced by foods containing higher amounts of fats and meats. Affiliated with these trends is the selection of food that requires less time and skill to prepare. Home-made meals are being replaced by ready-to-eat foods bought at local markets, food stalls, supermarkets or big department stores. Simultaneously the prevalence of overweight and the obesity among children and adolescences has increased considerably during the last 20 years (Kosulwat, 2002).

Over the last decades, eating habits and physical inactivity has caused increased mortality rates (Must & Strauss, 1999). The changes in lifestyle among the Thai population have considerably changed the disease pattern in Thailand. It has been a shift from predominantly communicable diseases to noncommunicable diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity. The mortality in infectious diseases has decreased since the 1980s but in the same time diseases of the vascular system has become the leading causes of death (Kosulwat, 2002). This can be explained by the nutrition transition. The nutrition transition accentuates the process that countries undergo when there is a shift from traditional food with

relatively low energy density to a Western diet characterized with a high intake of animal products, salts, saturated fats and sugars (Popkin, 2001). Furthermore the western kitchen includes a lot of meat, butter, fat dairy products, white bread and pastry's (Livsmedelsverket, 2014).

Socioeconomic status and obesity in Thailand

According to The World Health Organization obesity is one of the key indicators for noncommunicable diseases. The prevalence of obesity has been increasing worldwide and affects all classes of socioeconomic status. However, studies have shown that the association between obesity and social economic status varied by population and economic status of the countries. In the developed countries obesity is more common among individuals with lower socioeconomic status than those in the higher socioeconomic group. In developing countries such individuals in the high social economic classes and urban areas are the first to have high prevalence of obesity. At the same time globalization of the fast food and processed food makes the high energy food more accessible in Thailand. Availability of food due to reduction in the cost of food has been implicated as a major driver of increase of the global obesity during the past 2 decades, and Thailand is no exception. A national health examination study showed that the prevalence of obesity increased approximately by 60% during 1991–2004 in Thailand. The increased prevalence was higher in urban than in rural areas in both sexes. The surveys also reported that the distribution of overweight and obesity varied by education level, with significantly higher prevalence in men with high education level, but not in women with low education level (Aekplakorn, Inthawong, Kessomboon, Sangthong, Chariyalertsak, Putwatana, & Taneepanichskul, 2014). Furthermore, results from periodic cross-sectional surveys in primary school shows that the prevalence of overweight and obesity among middle to high-income families was between 25.7% and 27.4%, while in those from middle- to low-income families, it was around 11%. After three years of follow-up, the prevalence of overweight and obesity had increased to 28.1–32.3% and 14.6%, respectively (Kosulwat, 2002).

In 2006 UNICEF and Thailand National Statistical Office made a study about the wellbeing among children and women *The Thailand Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) December 2005 – February 2006*. This study was developed to provide an overview of the situation for children in Thailand. The survey included 43,400 households across the country. The study showed that nearly 9.3 per cent below the age of 5 was underweight. The majority of these children lived in the Northeast and South regions of Thailand and came from households with low socioeconomic statuses. The problem of overweight was 6.9 per cent of all children. In the central region of Bangkok 10 percent was overweight and the prevalence of overweight was more frequent in households with high socioeconomic status in urban areas (UNICEF & Thailand National Statistical Office 2006).

Food choices

Factors influencing children's food choices

Ludvigsen and Scott (2009) argue that children's food preferences are influenced by both learned behavior, social expectations and what type of food children are served at home and in school. Furthermore, social learning factors are one central aspect in children's food choices. Social learning describes the impact of observing other people's behavior on the own behavior. This has been proven in a number of studies. In one research the target children was placed at lunch next to other children who preferred a different vegetable during 4 consecutive days. By the end of the study the children showed a shift in their vegetable preference which persisted at a follow up study several weeks later. Furthermore other studies has shown that overweight girls have been found eating more when sitting with another overweight girl than with one of normal weight (Ogden, 2010). Parental behavior is also central in social learning. For example several studies indicate that adolescents are more likely to eat breakfast if their parents do and that emotional eating is concordant between adolescents and their parents. Studies have also shown that children choose different kinds of food when they were watched by their parents than when they were not (Ogden, 2010).

Finally ethnical and cultural aspects are important part in children's food choices. The ethical food is the kind of dishes that comes from a specific origin such as a place or a tradition and symbolizes group belonging. Sobal and Bisogni (2009) emphasize the ethnical aspect as the most important part in food choices.

Theory of food choice

The challenge of explaining the complexity in food choices has resulted in a number of food choice models. One of the models that clearly illustrate this is the model from Shepherd (1999). According to this model factors influencing food choices can be divided into three groups:

1. Factors related to food
2. The person making the choice
3. The economic and social context in which the choice is made.

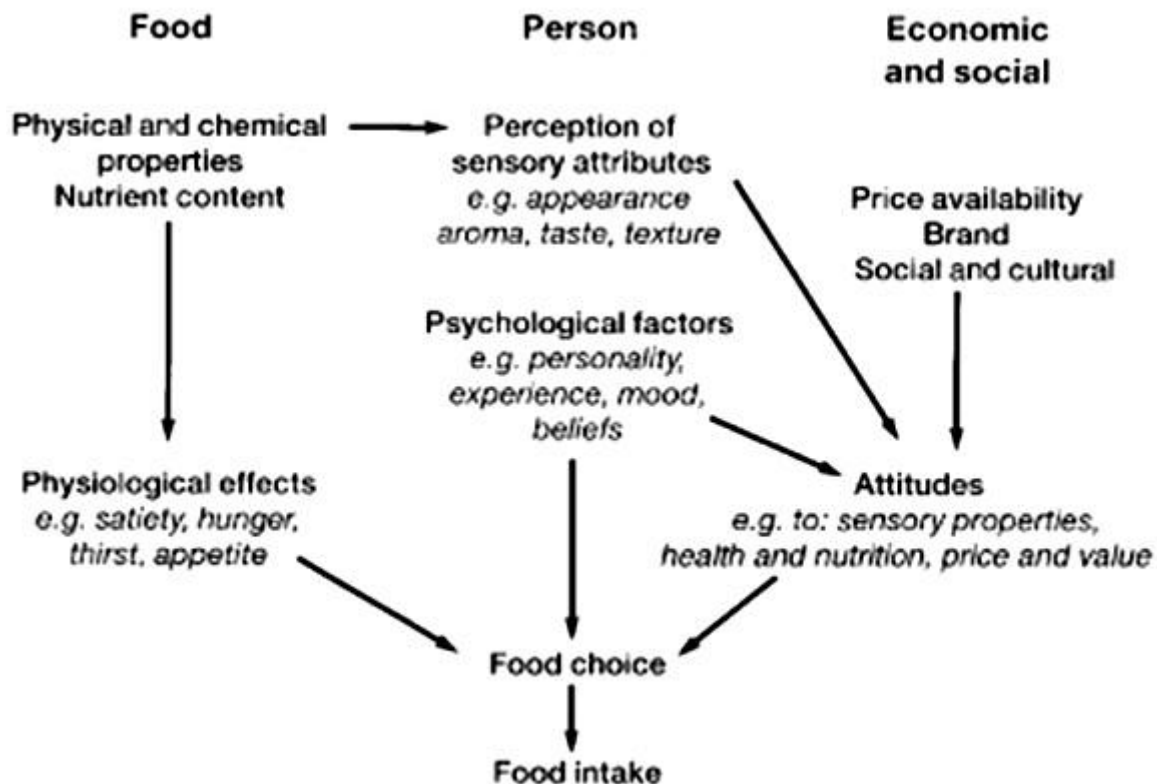


Figure 1. Food choice model by Shepherd (1999), illustrating factors influencing food choices (s 808).

Figure 1 shows that physical and chemical factors in the food affect the individually perceived sensory attributes. Depending on personality, experiences, mood and beliefs, these experiences can be interpreted as a pleasant and positive attitude towards the product. The attitude towards food is also affected by socioeconomic factors and the social environment. Furthermore our basic physiological needs such as appetite, hunger and thirst can be so strong that they lead directly to certain food choices (Shepherd, 1999).

Attitudes and food choices

According to the *theory of food choice*, attitudes are one important factor in food choices. (Shepherd, 1999). Attitudes can be affected by trends, fashion, diets in society, food cultures, ethical and ethnic food preferences and body ideals (folkhälsoinstitut, 2010). Moreover, attitudes being formed early in life is often strong and resistant and may be difficult to influence (Angelöw & Jonsson, 1990; Berkowitz, 1974; Bohner & Wanke, 2002). An attitude can be defined as an idea, an assessment or knowledge regarding an attitude object. The object can be anything, such as a thought or an item. The attitude can also be seen as a readiness to act a certain way towards the particular object, in which different components such as thinking, feeling, and intention steer together. An attitude can fulfil different functions such as appreciation, the satisfaction of needs, needs to express values and to defend self-esteem. The knowledge and the attitude a person carries affects actions and behaviours. With

a greater understanding of these components, the information and intervention can be better suited to the specific population based on what they need (Kalyaperumal, 2004).

Attitudes that lead to the attitude object are overall placed into categories like "good" or 'poor'; 'healthy' or 'unhealthy'. This assessment takes place very quickly and based on the categorization, people can choose whether to approach or move away from the object in question (Angelöw & Jonsson, 1990; Bohner & Wanke, 2002). Attitudes are governed very much by who you want to be namely your identity. Most often, it is controlled in turn by the group you belong to or the people that you spend much time with (Socialstyrelsen, 2009). In addition to the individual factors and family influences, the general attitude in the society and in media also influences our thoughts and attitudes. This applies primarily to children and young people whose eating habits are dependent on the school and the surrounding area (Margetts, Martinez, Saba, Holm & Kearney, 1997; Rasmussen, Eriksson, Bokedal & Schäfer Elinder, 2004).

The symbolic value of food

A symbol is an item that represents something else. The symbol can be an object, a picture or an activity. (Palojoki & Janhonen-Abuquah, 2005). According to Ogden, (2010) food has a symbolic meaning and our food pattern can represent social and cultural identity. Food can also be a symbol for status. Andersson (1987) accentuates that people in general choose food that elevates their status and food that their role model eats. Being able to eat the food you prefer elevates your social status. In societies where people can choose between different foods, cooking methods and serving manner food choices themselves create different status (Counihan, 2012). The way people choose to eat establishes a social order in the society. Fischer (1988) has chosen to describe as a hierarchical relationship between people where the individual is placed higher or lower in the society.

Furthermore, food can be understood in terms of a deep underlying structure. Food has a social function, such as developing relationships, symbolizing status and creating group identity. Differences in food pattern can mark both belonging and exclusion. The choice of dishes, ingredients, meal composition, eating order, and temporal appearance during the day provides lots of information about the organization of society. (Ogden, 2010)

Method

In this section the method is described. The first part includes the research design and a description of the preparatory. There is one part explaining the designing of questionnaires, the procedure and the participants. This is followed by analysis and ends with a part that describes the methodological considerations.

Research design

The research design that was used in this study was a cross-sectional design (Bryman 2011). In order to assess the symbolic value of different dishes among the children a photo survey was used. To determine which dishes that would be included in the study a smaller field work in Krabi was performed. When the questionnaires were made, a pilot study was accomplished at one of the schools. After the pilot study the main study was performed in two different schools in four different classes, which included children between 8-10 years. The questionnaires were handed out during school hours and the gathered variables were then analyzed in order to obtain correlations.

Preparatory study

This survey required objectivity about the properties of the supplies in supermarkets, restaurants and street markets. Therefore, a smaller field work in Krabi was performed. One part was to study the menus at various restaurants and to interview the employees at the restaurants regarding what dishes they sold the most. Five open-structured interviews at five different restaurants were performed and one interview with the chef at a school restaurant. The interviews were thoroughly documented and notes were taken for best memory effect (Appendix 1 and 2).

Designing of questionnaires

The questionnaires were constructed with pictures of dishes and written statements in Thai. The questionnaires were divided into two different parts on two different pages. On the first page there were 10 pictures of different dishes and 4 different statements. At the second page there were the same 10 pictures of dishes and 3 sentences (appendix 3 or 4). In the questionnaire the children were told to relate each statement and each sentence with the dish or dishes they thought matched it best.

The words in the questionnaire were constructed with inspiration from Jane Ogden's book *the psychology of eating* (2010). Additionally, the interpreter and teachers at the schools served as sources of inspiration as they knew a lot about Thai culture. Moreover, four different words were selected for the questionnaires.

1. **Luxury food** - Referring to expensive and delicious dishes
2. **Everyday food** – Referring to simple dishes eaten on weekdays

3. **Guest food** - Food prepared for guests that may differ from food prepared for the family during weekdays.
4. **Family food** – A meal that takes place in the home and is eaten in the company of other family members.

Additionally three sentences were included in the questionnaire. The sentences that were chosen was; “what meal would you invite your friends for”, “what meal would you invite the king for” and “which meal do you eat the most”.

The selection of dishes for the pictures was carefully considered as the aim was to represent different kinds of dishes. The dishes that were selected were five Western dishes that were common at Krabi and five traditional Thai dishes (Appendix 4 or 5). The goal was that the pictures would represent different types of dishes in different price ranges. According to the field work at the restaurants the typical Western dishes in general were more expensive than traditional Thai dishes. Furthermore, suggestions from people in the field were considered as well as the results from the field studies at supermarkets, restaurants and street markets. All of the dishes in the questionnaire were then carefully laid up and photographed so that they would represent how they are served in restaurants.

Pilot study

In order to decrease the ambiguity in the questionnaires a pilot study of the questionnaires was performed before the actual research (Bryman, 2011). According to Ejlertsson (2005), a pilot study should be carried out among a population that are similar to the population for de survey as possible. There is no absolute number for how many people that should be included in the pilot study, but in general it is between 10-20 participants (Ejlertsson, 2005).

Therefore, 10 children aged 8-10 and 5 teachers were selected for the pilot study. In respond to the feedback *weekday food* was exchanged for the statement *everyday food*. The reason choosing teachers for the pilot was that they could provide direct feedback and the aim to do the pilot study on the children was to find out if the questionnaire were too complicated for children aged 8-10. The result indicated that the children understood the questionnaires. However, there is still a risk that some of the participants in the study might found the questionnaire harder to understand than the children in the pilot study

Procedure

The study was carried out at two different schools in Krabi and the questionnaires were handed out in four different classes at class time. Before the questionnaires were handed out a letter written in Thai was sent to the children’s parents in order to receive the permission to perform the research (Appendix nr 5). The actual data collection started three days later. Firstly information was given to the children in the classrooms regarding the aim and informing them that it was voluntary to participate. The first question was read out loud by the teacher as a way to ensure that the children understood what to do. Then the questionnaires were handed out to the children. To minimize peer pressure and interpersonal influence, the children were asked not to talk to each other. All informants that agreed to participate and had

got permission from their parents completed their commitment. The response rate was satisfactory.

Participants

The research population chosen for this study was children between 8-10 years living in the province Krabi in Thailand. The optimal way to pick out a sample would have been to do a random sample also called probability samples (Bryman, 2011). However, the time and limitations of this study did not admit this. The selection of schools was made on the basis of accessibility and the type of selection in this study became therefore non-probability samples (Bryman 2011). The questionnaires were handed out to students in two classes at Ban Chong Pil School located at Ao Nang and two classes at Sungtong Vittaya School located at Nuea Khlong in Krabi. The schools had around 1,000 students and the children in these schools came from middle-class to upper middle-class families, according to the teachers. No distinguishing differences were noticed between the schools. 110 questionnaires were distributed and all 110 questionnaires were filled in and collected. The number of usable questionnaires ended at 91 which mean that 19 questionnaires were not fully completed since some questions were not responded to.

Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS program (IBM SPSS Statistics version 21). Univariate analysis was used (Bryman, 2011). After that, the results from the questionnaires were analysed and presented in diagrams. Diagrams are one of the most common methods for describing quantitative data, as they are easy to interpret and easy to understand (Bryman, 2011). Furthermore, calculation of percentages for different dishes in different options was made. For example, all of the dishes that the children associated with luxury food were gather in one diagram and the dishes the children associated with family food in another diagram.

Methodological considerations

The ethical aspects could not be ignored as they are directly related to privacy issues in connection with an investigation (Bryman, 2011). According to Vetenskapsrådet (2011) the informants should be informed that participation is voluntary and they have the right to withdraw their participation at any time. Therefore the participants and the teachers were informed about the aim of the study and that it was voluntary to participate in order to fulfill Furthermore, the participants were ensured that the information they contribute with would only be used for this particular study and not anything else.

The principal and the teachers at each school gave their consent. Additionally, since the children were minors, all children were required to have parental consent to participate (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011). An information letter (appendix nr 5) was therefore sent to the children's parents. Furthermore, all the participants in this research were anonymous. Moreover, the information collected was only used for this study, which leads to even

confidentiality and use requirements were met. Finally all the children were informed about the purpose in order to fulfill the information demand (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011).

Results

In this section the main results will be presented. The results are divided in two parts. First the result from the preparatory study are introduced then the result from the main study.

Preparatory study

This chapter shows the results of the preparatory study. First the results from the restaurants interviews are presented, then the results from the interview with the head chef in the school cafeteria.

Responses from the interviews at the restaurants

Below are the results from the interviews with the employees at the restaurants regarding:

- The Thai dishes the children ordered most of were: *Pad Thai, chicken with cashews and curry dishes.*
- The Western dishes children ordered most of were: *Pizza, Spaghetti and meat sauce, sandwiches and hamburger with French Fries.*
- Dishes representing the Thai kitchen were: *Chicken with cashews, coconut soup, dishes with curry, omelets and noodle dishes like Pad Thai* (appendix 1).

Responses from the interview at the school restaurant

According to the head chef from one of the schools, *omelet with steamed rice, noodle dishes with fried vegetables* and *chicken coconut with rice* were the dishes that the school served the most. Furthermore, the head chef considered these dishes as typical school food dishes (appendix 2), especially omelets with rice.

Main study

This chapter presents the results of the main study. The number of questionnaires analyzed in the results reached ninety-one. Since all respondents were able to choose more than one answer per question, the number of data will be in percentages and the frequency of respondents answer are different among the charts.

What dishes they eat the most of

Figure 1 shows which food the respondents ate the most. The result shows that the respondents ate most *Omelet with rice, chicken cashews with rice and Pad Thai* all traditional Thai dishes. On fourth place came the Western dish, *Pizza*.

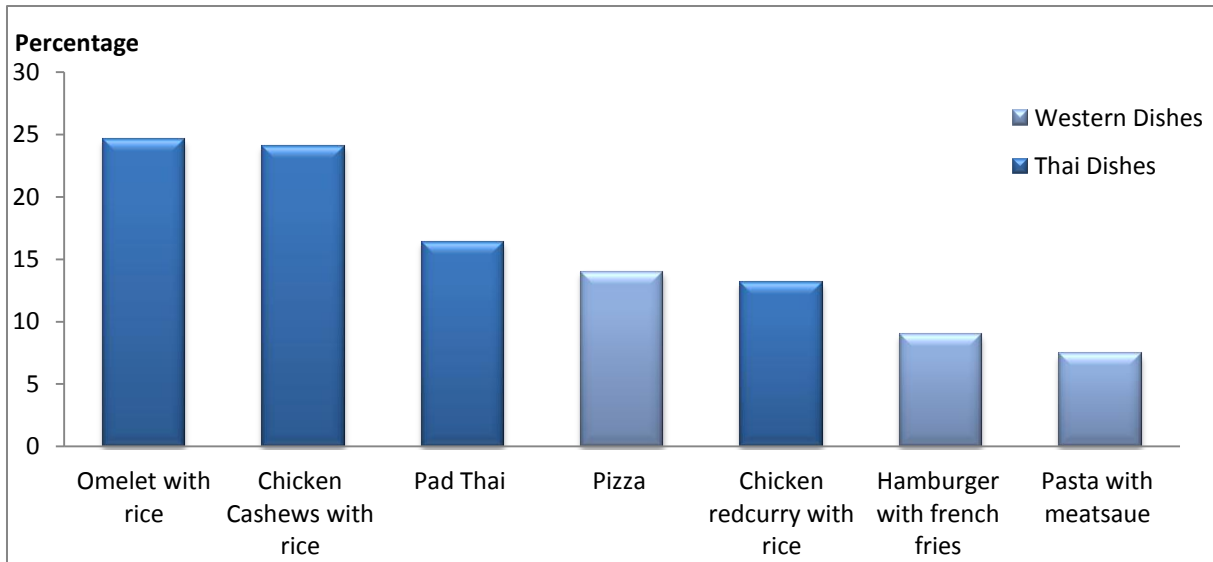


Figure 1. The answer distribution from the respondents regarding which meals they ate the most in per cent (n=122).

Luxury food

Figure 2 show that *Pizza* was strongly associated with *luxury food*. The result also shows that all the Western dishes were associated with luxury food, simultaneously as the traditional Thai dishes were not. Only *Pad Thai* was associated with luxury by a few children.

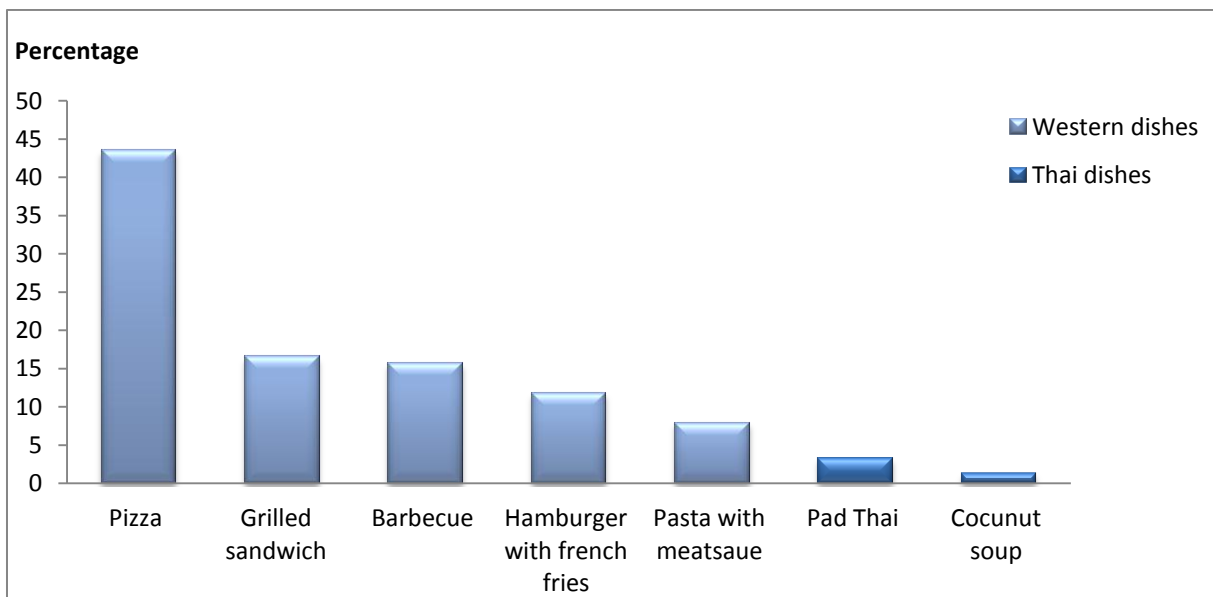


Figure 2. The answer distribution from the respondents regarding which meals they associated with luxury food in per cent (n=152).

Everyday Food

Figure 3 shows strong association between traditional Thai dishes and everyday food. The strongest associations with everyday food were *omelets with rice*, *Pad Thai* and *chicken redcurry with rice*.

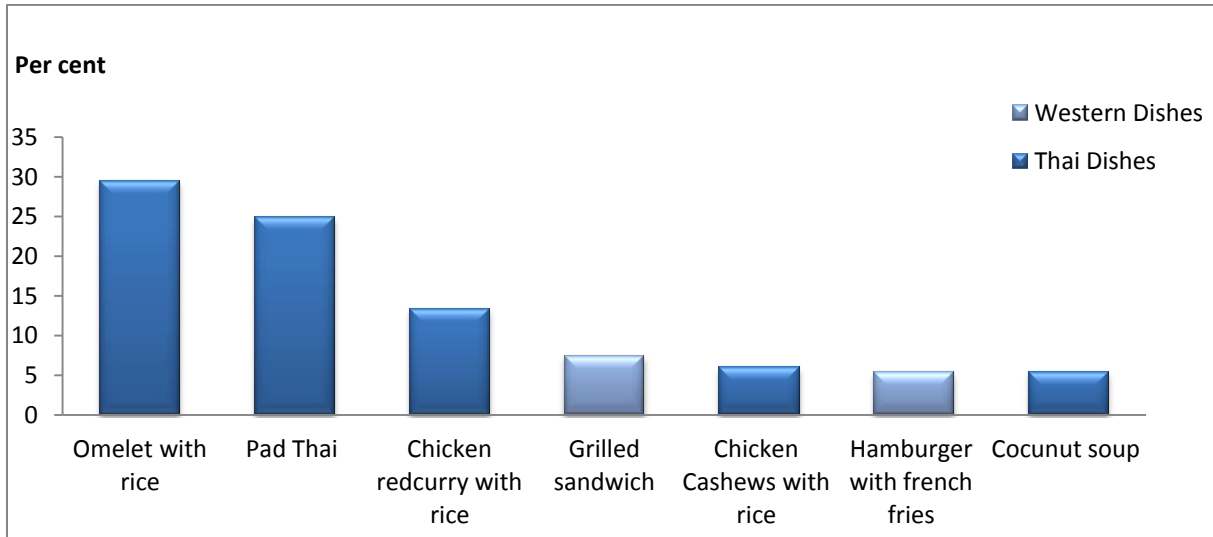


Figure 3. The answer distribution from the respondents regarding which meals they associated with everyday food in per cent (n=149).

Family food

Figure 4 shows that the *chicken with cashews* and *hamburger with French Fries* were associated with family food. Furthermore, the children associated booth traditional Thai food and Western food with family food.

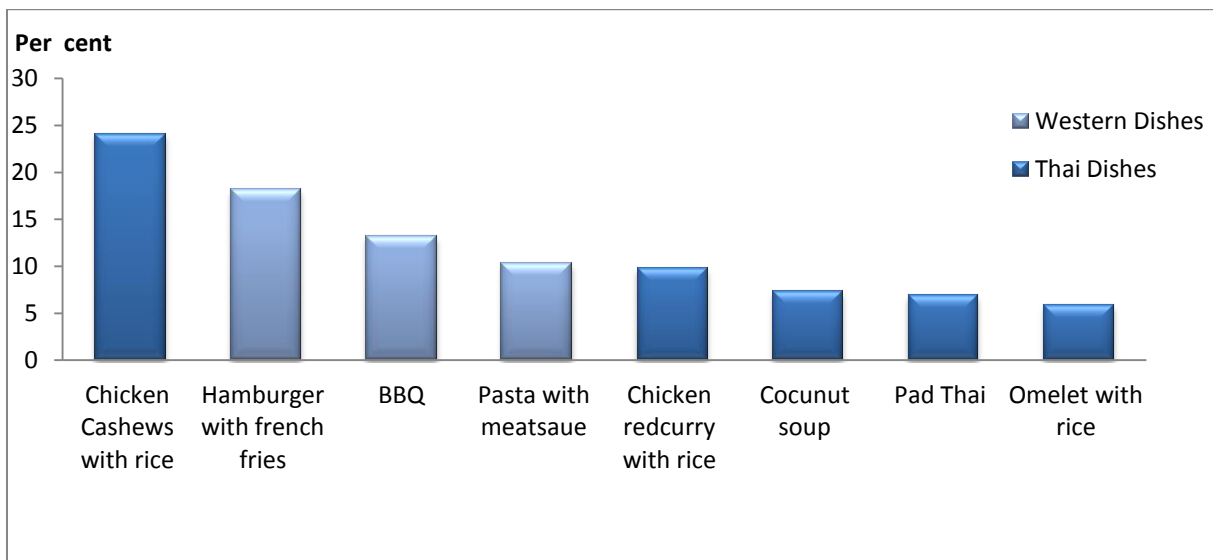


Figure 4. The answer distribution from the respondents regarding which meals they associated with family food in per cent (n=204).

Guest Food

Figure 5 shows that the *chicken redcurry with rice* and *coconut soup* were strongly associated with guest food, booth traditional Thai dishes. Furthermore *spaghetti with meat sauce* and the *barbeque meal* were also associated with guest food. Only one of the 110 children associated the omelet with rise as guest food.

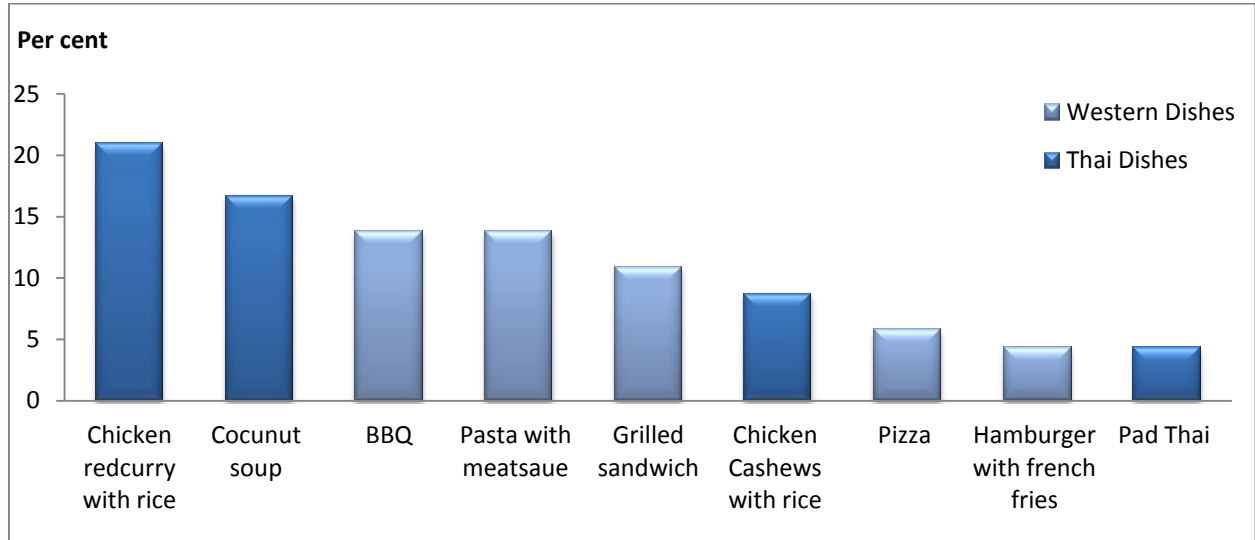


Figure 5. The answer distribution from the respondents regarding which meals they associated with guest food in per cent (n=138).

Dishes to invite the friends for

Figure 6 shows the result of which meal the respondents would invite their friends for. The table shows that the traditional Western dishes was associated with meals when friends come over for dinner. Most association had *pizza*, *hamburger with French Fries* and *barbeque meal*. Some respondents would invite there friends for the traditional Thai dish *Pad Thai*.

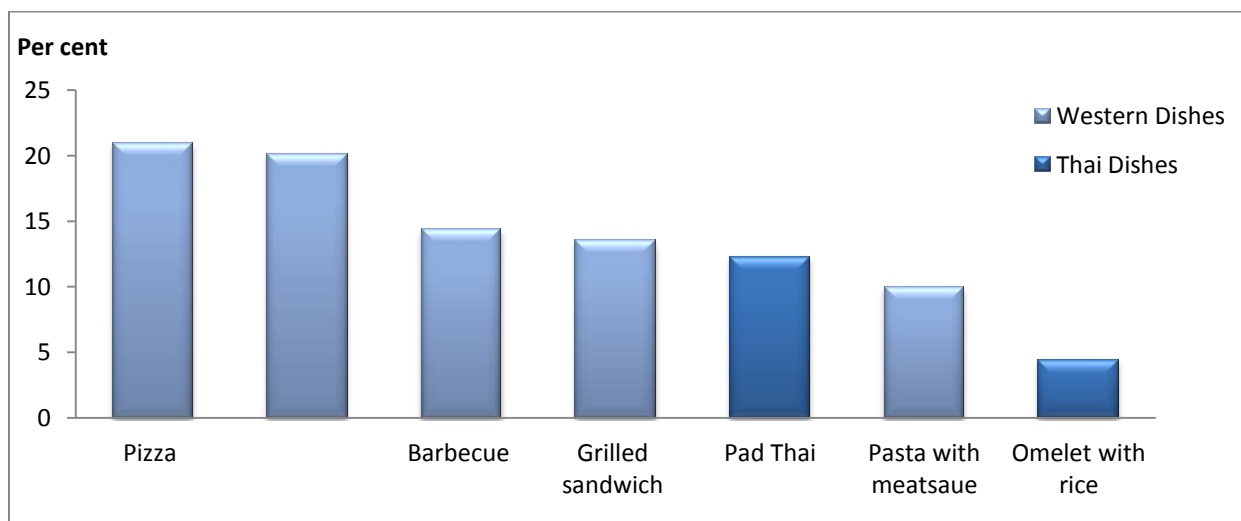


Figure 6. The answer distribution from the respondents regarding which meals they would invite their friends for in per cent (n=229).

Dishes to invite the king for

Figure 7 gives the result of which meal the respondents would invite the king for. The figure shows that the traditional Thai meal *chicken with cashews and rice* were strongly associated with to invite food for the king for. Simultaneously, no one of the respondents would invite the King for omelet. Among the Western dishes *barbeque meal* and *pasta with meat sauce* were associated as meals to invite the king for.

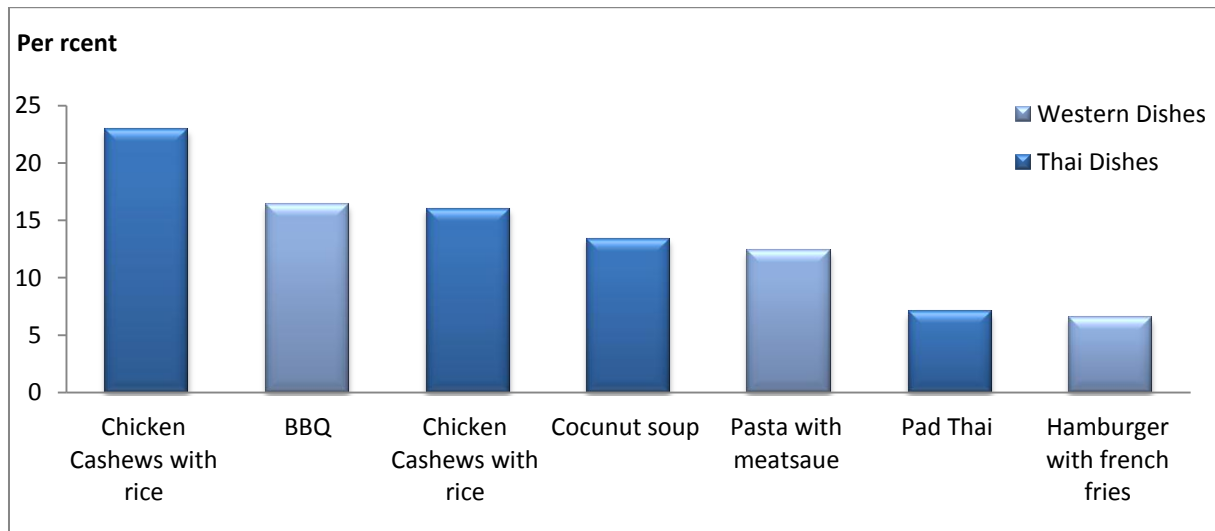


Figure 7. The answer distribution from the respondents regarding which meals they would invite the king for in per cent (n=201).

Distribution between the different statements

Table 8 summarizes the percentage distribution between traditional Thai food and Western food in consideration of all the statements. The result shows that Western food were strongest associated with Luxury food as 95.4 percentages of all respondents considered the Western dishes as luxury food. The remaining 4.4 percentage have associated Thai dishes with luxury food. Furthermore, 79.2 percentages of the respondents associated Thai dishes with everyday food and 20.8 percentages associated Western dishes with everyday food. The statements luxury food, everyday food and food to invite friends for have bigger difference between Thai dishes and western dishes. Family food, guest food and food to invite the king for had all evenly distributed percentages between Thai dishes and Western dishes.

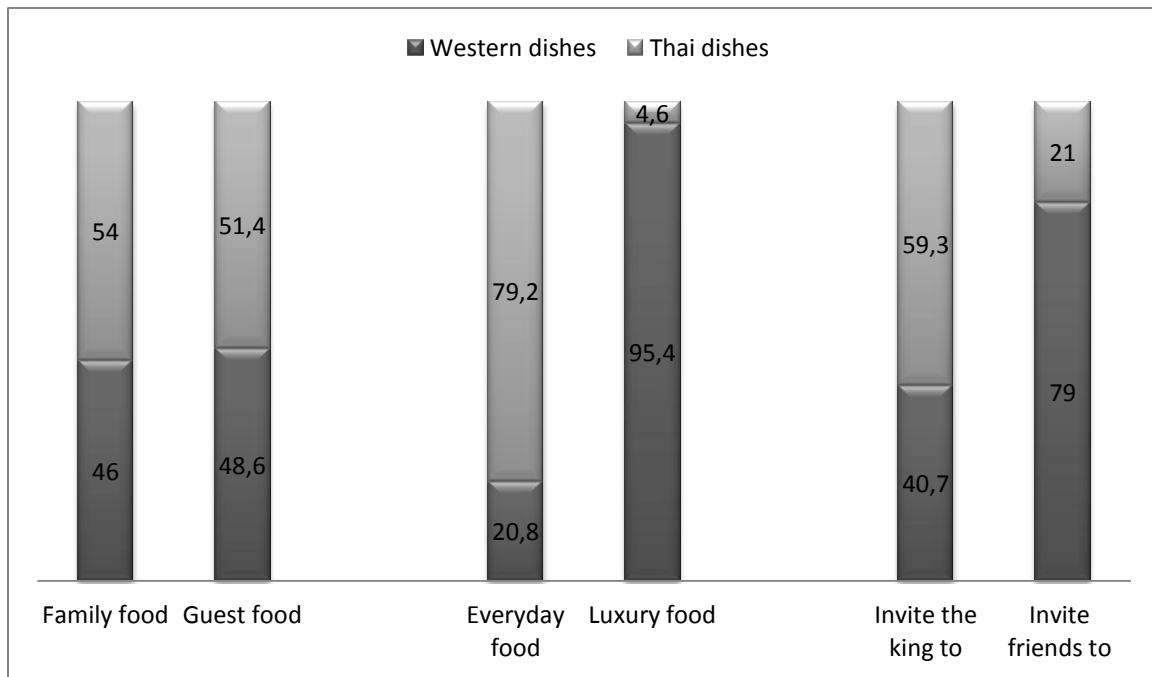


Figure 8. The answer distribution regarding which Thai dishes and Western dishes the respondents associated with a certain value descriptions in per cent. Comparisons: family versus guest food; every day versus luxury food; food to invite the king for versus their friends for.

Discussion

This section is divided into two parts; first the method used in this study has been discussed. Moreover the main results are obtained in the preceding chapter. The first part starts with a discussion of the method and the process within. This is followed by a discussion about the analysis. Finally there is a discussion about validity and reliability. The second part includes a discussion of the result. In the result discussion the result has been discussed from a social and ethnical perspective.

Discussion of method

The purpose of this study was to assess the symbolic value that a number of dishes have for Thai children in Krabi. A quantitative method was chosen in order to cover a larger target group (Bryman, 2011). As the baseline was a quantitative project questionnaires were chosen, as questionnaires can reach out to a larger population (Ejlertsson, 2005). Qualitative methods such as individual interviews and group interviews could probably have contributed increased deeper understanding. However, interviews are often a time consuming method, conducted with a limited number of participants. Therefore, interviews and focus groups are in regular not used in order to quantify data or to generalize results (Bryman, 2011). One disadvantage with the questionnaires was that it reduced the opportunity asking follow up questions. Furthermore, working with humans implies the risk that some of the participants might find the questions harder to understand than others (Stone & Sidel, 2004). To reduce this risk, the

children who needed extra assistance were helped by an interpreter and their teachers when answering the questionnaires.

Participants and drop-out

Ejvegård (2003) considered that the number of participants should not be less than 40 people and the drop-out should not exceed 30%. In total, 120 children were invited to participate in the study, of them 110 children responded the questionnaires. Of this this 110 questionnaires 91 (83%) were correctly filled in which means that they had filled in all the questions. This provides a drop-out on 24% which is reasonable. Furthermore, the number participants and collected data were sufficiently for this study. The population was not selected according to a randomly selection method. Because of the circumstances the selection of schools was made on the basis of accessibility. In a more extensive study a specific random sampling technic would make a generalization more legitimate (Bryman 2011). Furthermore, it would have been an advantage including more schools and classes in the study. However the time limitations did not admit this.

The accessibility selection might influence the results, as economical differences between different schools can influence the outcome. Earlier studies shows that prevalence of overweight and obesity among children and adolescents is more pronounced among children from private schools and urban communities than in those from public schools or rural areas (Kosulwat, 2002). Furthermore, only schools at Krabi were included in the study which also can affect the results, as there are differences in the food culture in different parts of Thailand. Therefore the results cannot be generalized on all children in Thailand. In the north of Thailand the food culture are influenced by the traditions from the south of china and the Burmese kitchen. Furthermore, in the central parts of the food culture are strongly influenced by the Chinese and Indian kitchens (Grimes, 2007). Therefore, in order to revive a truly reliable result, it would have been necessary to include more schools from different parts in Thailand, from booth urban communities, rural areas, public schools and private schools.

The design of the questionnaire

When constructing questionnaires it is important to have well-though questions and answer options (Ejlertsson, 2005). The aim was to make the questionnaires pedagogic for Thai children. Therefore, the questionnaires contained only a few words, some sentences and pictures of food. Moreover, the questionnaires where short and did not require much time and effort from the children to fill in. A questionnaire requiring more time and effort from the participants would have been more difficult to carry out as long questionnaires risks losing the respondents focus (Ejlertsson, 2005). Another advantage with the questionnaires was that they were simple and straightforward, which was helpful since different cultures and languages were involved. The disadvantage with short questionnaire was the limitation of questions. Furthermore, all the statements in the questionnaire were thoroughly analyzed with the aim to get a lot of information from a few questions. The statements and the sentences in the questionnaire were constructed with inspiration from Jane Ogden's book *the psychology of eating*. Moreover, suggestions from people in the field were considered. The idea behind the

words *Luxury food*, *Everyday food*, *Guest food* and *Family food* was that these worlds represent different associations or attitudes regarding different kind of meals (Bryman 2011). According to Ogden (2010), the field work in Krabi and recommendations from people in the field the statement *luxury food* represents expensive food and food with high social status. The opposite of luxury food is *everyday food* that symbolize eaten in weekdays, simple dishes that is easy to prepare. As the ethical and cultural aspect is an important part in food choices (Sobal, & Bisogni 2009) the statements *guest food* and *family food* were included in the questionnaires. *Guest food* is considered as food that is a bit more luxury than the *everyday food*. It is the kind of food that is served on special occasions and cultural feasts. *Family food* represented meals taking place at home eaten in the company of other family members. Furthermore, family food were also chosen with the aim to distinguish social learning factors, as the parents is one important factor affecting children's food choices (Ogden, 2010). Food can likewise be understood in terms of affirming and developing relationships (Ogden, 2010). Therefore it was interesting investigate which meals the children *would you invite the king for* and which meal the children *would invite their friends for*. The meals *to invite the king for* were supposed to represent food with high status that also represents cultural and ethnical identity. Moreover, the dishes *to invite the friends for* were chosen in order to find out with dishes were associated with high status in the context with friends and other children. Finally, the sentence *which dish are you eating the most?* was selected in order to distinguish a pattern in the children's eating habits.

Thai, which was the children's first language, was used in the questionnaire. However, the fact that an interpreter was needed for translating the questionnaires increases the risk that questions and information might not have been correctly understood. On the other hand, the questionnaire was very simple and included pictures. Another disadvantage is the linguistic and discursive differences between Swedish and Thai. For example, the statement *everyday food* might not have the same symbolic meaning in Thailand as in the Western world. Although according to suggestions from people in the field, the interpreter and the pilot study, the statements used in the questionnaires were relevant for this study.

Result discussion

In this section the children's associations to the traditional Thai food and Western food will be discussed based on the results from the questionnaires related to the study's purpose and issues. The results of this study can provide an increased understanding about what determines food choices among children at Krabi. However, the challenge of explaining the complexity in food choices has resulted in a number of food choice models. One of the models that clearly illustrate this is the model from Shepherd (1999). According to this model there are several factors influencing food choices. Food choices can be affected by physical and chemical factors in the food that affect the individually perceived sensory attributes. Food choices are also affected by personality, experience and mood. Furthermore, our basic physiological needs such as appetite, hunger and thirst can be so strong that they lead directly to certain food choices. Finally food choices and attitudes regarding food is affected social and cultural environment (Shepherd, 1999). The focuses in this study have been on the social

and cultural aspects. Consequently the results from this study will be summarized and linked with results from previous studies from the social and cultural point of view.

Food and social status

Ogden (2010) exemplify that social food describes the social function of food such as developing relationships, symbolizing status and creating group identity. Food has a symbolic meaning and differences in food pattern can mark both belonging and exclusion in the society. Furthermore, food can be a symbol for status. According to the social perspective rare, expensive or delicious dishes are associated high social status (Ogden 2010). As shown in figure 2 and figure 8, the majority of the children associated the Western dishes with the statement *luxury food*. Luxury is according to encyclopedia (2014) something expensive and delicious. If seeing luxury food as expensive and delicious food the results indicates that the Western food has high social status from a social perspective. Furthermore, the traditional Thai dishes were associated with the statement *everyday food*. As the majority of the children associated the traditional Thai meals with *everyday food* the results indicates that the Western meals are considered as rarer than the traditional Thai food. This strengthens the fact that the Western dishes have high social status, as rare food is associated with high status according to the social perspective. That the Western dishes have high social status can also be connected with the phenomenon that Kosulwat (2002) raised in his rapport. Kosulwat (2002) describes that eating patterns has shifted from traditional Asian diet to a more Westernized diet and that the phenomenon is more common among inhabitants with higher incomes and high social status (Kosulwat, 2002).

Simultaneously, earlier studies have shown that the prevalence of obesity and social economic status has varied by economic status of the countries. Obesity is more common among individuals with lower socioeconomic status than those in the higher socioeconomic groups in developed countries. In developing countries the pattern is different as people in the high social economic classes and urban areas are the first to have high prevalence of obesity (Aekplakorn, et al. 2014). This can be due to the fact that different type of food has high social status in different countries. The symbolic value of food is influenced by culture. Therefore people's apprehension about food can differ a lot depending on cultural background (Korthals, 2008). Moreover, according to the results of this study *pizza* is associated with luxury. This can be connected with the fact that individuals in the high social economic classes and urban areas are the first to have high prevalence of obesity. An imbalance of energy intake and expenditures are in general, are implicated in the rising of obesity (Aekplakorn, et al. 2014).

Food and ethnicity

From a social perspective food can also create group identity, such as ethnical identity. Ethnical identity can be created through traditional food patterns as the "national dish" or "the family meal" (Ogden, 2010). According to Sobal and Bisogni (2009) the ethnical aspect are the most important aspect in food choices. This is the kind of food that comes from a specific

origin such as a place or a tradition. Furthermore, Ludvigsen and Scott (2009) argued the food preferences are also affected by what the children are served at home. The results show that the traditional Thai dish *chicken with cashew* was associated with the statement family food and the traditional Thai meal *chicken redcurry* was associated with the statement guest food. This indicates that the ethnicity and Thai traditions are more important than luxury among family and guests. That the ethnicity and Thai traditions are important is positive, sense the traditional Thai food is compatible with food reported to confer longevity by promoting good health and prevent the premature onset of chronic disease later in life (Kosulwat, 2002). Simultaneously, the result indicates that the Western meals also were associated with family and guest food. Figure 4 shows that *Hamburger with French fries* was associated with family food and figure 5 shows that the *Barbeque meal* was associated with guest food. This indicates that the traditional Thai dishes are being replaced by Western dishes even in the family context. Moreover, transformations of social fields are a gradual process, which could imply that the food culture in Thailand and in the Thai families could be further transformed into a more Western one as time passes (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002).

Food to developing relationships

Food can likewise be understood in terms of affirming and developing relationships. In particular, food communicates a sense of self, it acts as a medium of communication between individuals and it is central to establishment of status (Ogden, 2010). Therefore it was interesting investigate which dishes the children would invite their friends for and which dishes the children would invite the king for.

Figure 6 show that most of the children would invite their friends for *pizza* and *hamburger with fries*, two Western dishes. Additionally, figure 2 show that *pizza* was a dish the children strongly associated with *luxury food*. As the children want to invite their friends for Western food the results indicates that it exist positive attitudes towards the Western dishes among the children. Attitudes are governed very much by who you want to be namely your identity. Most often, it is controlled in turn by the group you belong to or the people that you spend much time with (Socialstyrelsen, 2009). Furthermore, inviting friends for luxury food can be a way to express social status, as food is a form of communication about individual identity (Ogden, 2010).

That *pizza* was associated as food for friends can also be a consequence from social learning factors that are central in children's food choices (Ogden, 2010). Among the children and in the context with friends *pizza* might be the *right* food to eat. According to action-theoretic science people tend to imitate each other. When a new social norm is coming close to a certain threshold value, small changes can make a big effect. When the threshold value is full the extension will occur explosive (Ahrne, 2007). Moreover, if the Western food is associated as the right kind of food among the children the trends to eat Western food might increase even more in the future.

However, the traditional Thai dish *chicken with cashews* was strongest associated as the food the children *would invite the king for*. This can be owing to the fact that the king is a symbol

for the Thai traditions (Grimes, 2007). In this context ethnicity and Thai culture is more important than luxury. Ogden (2010) emphasize that food should be regarded as the medium through which a range of meanings are communicated. For example, in the same way that different jeans can be fashionable by young people but not by their parents and that an interior design can be understood by adults but not children.

Changes in the Thai society

At the same time, both *family food*, *guest food* and *food to invite the king for* gave mixed results. Western dishes were also associated with these statements. Furthermore, the results from this study agree with Kosulwat, (2002) considering that the food pattern is changing in Thailand. The results from the questionnaires show that 40 % of the children ate more of the Western dishes than traditional Thai dishes, that was included in this study. This indicates that a transformation in food pattern can be seen in the society, influenced by the Western food culture (Kosulwat, 2002). This can also be related to the fact that the globalization of the fast food and processed food makes the high-energy food more accessible in Thailand.

Availability of fast food and reduction in the cost has been implicated as a major driver of increase of the global obesity during the past 2 decades. In low income and middle income countries, individuals in the high social economic status urban areas are the first to have high prevalence of obesity and the prevalence shifts to the lower social economic status as economic growth increases (Aekplakorn, et al. 2014). Furthermore, if the high-energy food is becoming cheaper and more accessible the trends of obesity and changes in eating patterns might become more common in the whole country among the whole population.

These changes in lifestyle among the Thai population can increase the occurrence of noncommunicable diseases (Popkin, 2001). According to Odegaard, Koh, Yuan, Gross and Pereira (2012), Western-style Fast-Food intake is associated with increased risk of developing type 2-diabetes and of mortality in cardiovascular diseases. Furthermore, according to Odegaard et al (2012) the Thai children has already an increased risk of 27 percent developing diabetes and an increased risk of 56 percent for cardiovascular disease if the eating Western fast food twice a week.

Conclusions

This essay has looked at children's attitudes regarding different kind of dishes from different approaches. The data shows three main patterns; firstly the Western dishes were associated with luxury and consequently has a higher social status. Secondly the Western food was the food that the children associated as the right kind of food eating together with their friends. Finally the results indicate that in the family context and in the context the ethical aspects and Thai traditions were more important than luxury. The results also show that the children still eat a lot of traditional Thai food. But, at the same time the results indicates a transformation in food pattern can be seen among the children, influenced by the Western food culture.

Implications

The findings from this study contribute with increased knowledge about Thai children's associations and attitudes regarding traditional Thai food and Western food. With this example from Krabi this essay contribute with an increased understanding regarding the complexity that surrounds children's food choices. This study should be seen as an attempt to reflect the children's perspective as a valuable resource of information when working with improving health in Thailand.

However, there is a need to do more researches about this subject. There are a number of approaches that would be of special interest for future research. One suggestion is to follow children over a longer time period and making observations in all kind of situations. It would also be valuable to carry out similar studies in which children from different backgrounds and areas in Thailand.

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Appendix 1 Interview guide and response

Interview guide

- Which Thai dishes are most popular among Thai children
- Which Western dishes are most popular among Thai children?
- Which Thai dishes would you say represents the Thai kitchen?

Response from the restaurants interviews

Table 1. Summarize the responses about which the most popular Thai dishes are

Restaurant	Which Thai dishes are you selling the most of to Thai children?
A	Pad Thai, Redcurry dishes like Panang or Massang often with chicken.
B	Chicken with cashews and Pad Thai
C	Chicken with cashews and curry dishes.
D	Pad Thai and chicken with cashews
E	Pad Thai and curry dishes.

Table 2. Summarize the responses about which the most popular Western dishes are

Restaurant	Which Western are you selling the most of to Thai children?
A	Pizza and spaghetti and meat sauce, even the sandwich with French fries.
B	Dishes that are served with French fries, or pasta.
C	Hamburger or sandwich with French fries
D	Sandwich and French fries
E	Hamburger and French fries

Table 3. Summarize the response regarding which Thai dishes represents the Thai kitchen

Restaurant	Which Thai dishes would you say represents the Thai kitchen?
A	Chicken with cashews, coconut soup and dishes with curry.
B	Redcurry and chicken and coconut soup.
C	Pad Thai and curry dishes.
D	Redcurry dishes, coconut soup and Noodle dishes.
E	Coconut soup, omelets

Interview guide for the school restaurant

Questions

1. Which food are you serving the most to the students?
2. Is there a dish that is more popular among the children?
3. Can you give an example of three typical school food dishes?

Responses

1. Omelet with steamed rice, noodle dishes and fried vegetables and chicken coconut with rice.
2. Noodle dishes and fried vegetables with steamed rice or chicken with red curry and rice.
3. Noodle soup or fried rice with egg and omelet with steamed rice.

แบบสอบถาม

วาดเส้นจากแต่ละคำที่จะรับประทานอาหารที่คุณคิดว่าเหมาะสมในแต่ละคำ
คุณสามารถเลือกอาหารได้มากเท่าที่คุณต้องการ

อาหารมีความสุข



เนื้อย่างกับมันฝรั่งทอด



ปาเก็ตตี้และซอสเนื้อ



ข้าวต้มไก่และเม็ดมะม่วงหิมพานต์



ซุปรังไก่มะพร้าว



อาหารครอบครัว

อาหารแขก

อาหารในชีวิตประจำวัน

อาหารหรู

แกงเผ็ด



ไข่เจียว



พิซซ่า



ผัดไทย



แซนวิชย่าง



แบบสอบถาม

วาดเส้นจากแต่ละประโยคที่จะรับประทานอาหารที่คุณคิดว่าเหมาะสมกับแต่ละประโยค
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อาหารมีความสุข

เนื้อย่างกับมันฝรั่งทอด

ปาเก็ตตี้และซอสเนื้อ

ข้าวต้มไก่และเม็ดมะม่วงหิมพานต์



ซูปไก่มะพร้าว



สิ่งที่อาหารที่คุณจะเลือกและเสนอราคาภาคสมัครใจหรือไม่

สิ่งที่อาหารที่คุณจะเลือกที่จะเชิญเพื่อนของคุณหรือไม่

ไหนที่คุณกินอาหารบ่อยมากที่สุด

แกงเผ็ด



ไข่เจียว



พิซซ่า



ผัดไทย



แซนวิช



ขอบคุณสำหรับการเข้าร่วม

// Frida and Lova

Questionnaire

Draw a line from each word to the dish that you think suits into each word, you can choose as many dishes as you want.

Hamburger wih french frise



Barbecue meal



Pasta and meatsauce



Chicken wih cashews and rice



Coconut soup with chicken



Redcurry with rice



Family Food
Guest Food
Everydag Food
Luxury Food

Omelet with rice



Pizza



Pad Thai



Grilled sandwich



Questionnaire

Draw a line from each word to the dish that you think suits into each word, you can choose as many dishes as you want.

Hamburger wih french frise



Barbecue meal



Pasta and meatsauce



Chicken wih cashews and rice



Coconut soup with chicken



What dish would you choose and invite the king to?

What dish would you choose to invite your friends to?

Which dish do you eat most frequently?

Redcurry with rice



Omelet with rice



Pizza



Pad Thai



Grilled sandwich



Best regards

// Frida och Lova



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
INST FÖR KOST- OCH IDROTTSVETENSKAP

Hello!

We are two students from Sweden that study Health Promotion Program at the University of Gothenburg. We are in Krabi in order collect data for our bachelor thesis. The purpose with our project is to study the symbolic value of a number of dishes for children between 8 and 10 years in Krabi. The focus will be on the traditional Thai cuisine in relation to Western food. Furthermore we would like to hand out questionnaires to some children during class time at the school. This survey will not take many minutes and will not affect the children's schooling. Moreover, all responses will be anonymous and all the material will be treated confidentially. The result will be compiled into our bachelor thesis.

With this information, we hope you are as excited to take part in this survey as we are. If you do not want your child to participate in this study, please sign the attached counterfoil and return it to the class teacher

Sincerely Frida Emanuelsson and Love Molin.

For questions you can reach us at: Frida xxx@student.gu.se and Promise xxx@student.gu.se-

My child will not participate in the questionnaire survey

The child's name

Signature of parent or guardian