# Creating “kropkrua” in the kitchen: an ethnography of Thai female chefs in two London Thai restaurants

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**by**

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# Contents

# Abstract

This research explores the experience of Thai female immigrants who are working in the kitchens of Thaitime restaurant at both the Wandsworth and Wimbledon branches. Through analysis of the life stories of the chefs, it is clear that both economic and cultural factors are primary reasons for transnational migration. Isan is the birthplace of seventy percent of the chefs and the region is considered one of the poorest parts of Thailand, with low-income rates and high rates of out-migration. The chefs follow existing gendered role expectations by participating in transnational migration and sending remittances back to their parents. The chefs from Isan mostly immigrate via a spouse visa or work permit, while the chefs from central Thailand mostly start their journey with a student visa.

As an ethnographic study, the primary tool of data collection has been through participant observation of the chefs' working routines. These observations revealed that the kitchens have two parallel dynamics. On one hand, kitchens are operated in terms of commercial restaurant standards. On the other hand, they work in relation to Thai family structures, where chefs in higher positions tend to employ the idealistic stereotype of 'mother'. This is accomplished by performing the maternal role of nurturing children through the act of cooking and feeding. Thaitime kitchens are one of the places where Thai social structures and cultural practices are exercised. However, when the chefs go into the world outside, they continue to limit themselves to places that hold cultural and emotional connections to their homeland. The majority of visits center around accommodations, the Thai temple, ethnic grocery shops, Thai massage shops, and the betting shops.

The ethnography and narratives discussed in this research suggest that Thai female migrants cannot simply be stereotyped as dependent spouses. Rather, their lives are complex and include many different aspects apart from married life. The chefs also participate in the labor market and engage with London's urban setting, constructing social relations, negotiating identities and situating themselves in the context of the United Kingdom.

# Chapter 1 - Introduction

## 1.1 Background of the Topic

According to the 2011 Census report, there were 39,784 Thai-born residents registered in England and a number of Thai associations and communities spread out across the United Kingdom. During the last decade, Thai immigrants had begun to be associated with sex workers in the UK public's collective imagination. The Home Office states that 72 percent of Thai immigrants are women who became naturalized British citizens through marriage. Further, they state that Thailand is one of the most common countries of origin for women trafficked into the UK (Sims, 2007). For this reason, the research presented here tries to challenge such a portrait of Thai female immigrants as a homogeneous vulnerable group. While much of the literature on Thai migration focuses on transnational marriage and sex trafficking (Cohen 2003), this thesis argues that Thai female migrants are indeed active agents who employ strategies to deal with various situations and settings in their everyday lives.

In order to investigate my hypothesis, I conducted research at the Thaitime restaurants in both the Wandsworth and Wimbledon branches. Thai restaurants are valuable settings for Thai expatriates and serve in nearly every aspect of life. There is estimated to be nearly 2,000 Thai restaurants in the UK run by Thai immigrants and these restaurants act not only as a source of income and food but also serve the broader purpose of acting as a social network (Charoensri, 2013). Thaitime is one of the most famous Thai restaurant chains in the area of Southwest London. The business is run by a Thai owner and all of the employees are Thai, including the back-office team, wait staff and chefs. Thus, conducting research here connected me with the world of Thai migrants within the UK.

My interest lies specifically in the female chefs who work in the kitchens of the Thaitime restaurant. While most of the wait staff are students from upper-middle class families, kitchen staff tend to be women from primarily rural areas looking for opportunities which, in their hometowns, would otherwise be inaccessible. In the western context, more than 80 percent of chefs are men (Harris and Patti Giuffre, 2010). Yet, the situation in Thai restaurants in the British context are comparatively different, as many kitchens are run by female chefs. In Thaitime's kitchens, most staff, including head chefs, second chefs, wok chefs, starter chefs and food runners are women, with the exception of dish washers, who are usually Brazilian men. For this reason, Thaitime's kitchen is the specific space in which female immigrants create their livelihoods as well as build their social relations.

In this research, I articulate that gender and gender roles have been involved in every stage of the chefs' migration experience. Gender expectations toward daughters has played a critical role in driving the chefs from their hometown and participating in transnational migration. Gender expectations also contribute to the performance of mothering roles of nurturing children which shape the social relations within the kitchen spaces.

This research aims to explore the holistic experience of Thai female immigrants who work in the kitchens of Thaitime restaurant, including aspects of gender, social and power relations. It is an attempt to present an ethnographic study of the chefs by using anthropological tools such as participant observation and in-depth interviews.

## 1.2 Research Questions

From the preceding, the research questions could be posed:

1) What are the patterns of female transnational migration from Thailand? Are there any underlying shared experiences among them?

2) How do female chefs use strategies to access the power and how do they develop social relations within the kitchen spaces?

3) How do the chefs experience the world outside kitchens and how do they perceive and give meaning to particular places where they usually visit?

## 1.3 Methodology

About four years ago, I started working as a part-time food runner in the kitchens of the Thaitime restaurant chain. Like other Thai students in the UK, I decided to work in a Thai restaurant because the place has a strong "sense of place" for me. It is the place associated with my cultural identity, familiar food and my native language. Soon thereafter, the kitchen introduced me to a new group of friends who brought me into the world of Thai migration. I have since learned the kitchen routines and culture as well as developed relationships with my colleagues. At first, the chefs just knew me as a student who came to work only two to three days per week. Eventually, when I decided to conduct research in this topic, I proposed an idea to them. I inquired their thoughts about me writing my thesis on their migration experiences and their careers as Thai chefs in the UK. Most of my colleagues were willing to participate and encouraged me to conduct this research, and offered their assistance in this endeavor.

I therefore conducted my research in Thaitime kitchens by using participant observation as the main research tool. Data collection took place between 2017 and 2018. According to Spradley (1980), participant observation involves not only observing people and their activities in different social situations, but also interacting with people and engaging in their activities alongside them. Thus, as a participant observer, I took part in community activities by working as a part-time employee. My position as a food runner allowed me to establish good rapport with the chefs, participate in their daily activities and closely observe day-to-day interactions between members of their social group. My main task in the restaurant was to read an order from the printing machine, take the food from wok chefs and send it upstairs via the lift. Sometimes, I helped the chef cut vegetables and, during chaotic periods, if some items ran out, the chefs usually told me to bring more from the storage room or cold room as they could not leave their positions in that period.

However, conducting research in this manner did not mean that I completely became a member of the study group. From my experiences working in a Thai restaurant previously, I always found myself in the medium position between insider and outsider. An ethnographer being an outsider would find themselves studying a group to which they are not a member. However, being an insider is “when researchers conduct research with populations of which they are also members…so that the researcher shares an identity, language, and experiential base with the study participants” (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009 p 57-58). It is true that I share the same ethnic identities and speak the same language of my informants, but it cannot be denied that I did not share similar life experiences with them. This situation left an ambiguous

spatial relationship between me being an insider and an outsider. My status as a student who came to the UK for educational purposes and who lives in private accommodations instead of the upper floors of the restaurants or neighboring area, may have caused me to be considered an outsider. However, participation in the core activities of the group members, such as working and eating together over a long period, also developed a sense of belonging. While the position of an ethnographer has been a topic of debate in the anthropological field, I would argue, as Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) suggest, that the researcher should try to be both, remaining in the margin of the group and combining the outside and inside view in their work.

Apart from participant observation, I set up semi-structured interviews with the chefs of the Thaitime restaurant chain. A semi-structured interview is a form of interview that remains open and allows new ideas to come up during the interview. However, the specific topic, a framework or research theme the researcher wants to explore, should usually be thought about in advance.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with approximately 21 female chefs. In this research, the purpose of interviews is to develop an understanding of Thai female immigrants in the UK. The interview, which lasted between one and two hours, focused on migration experiences and reasons for immigrating to the United Kingdom. Follow-up questions about their attitudes toward the chef career as well as the social relations during work were posed. Informants were encouraged to express themselves in their own terms. All interviews were recorded with permission of the chefs. Lastly, all the names and places in this thesis were changed to pseudonyms for confidentiality reasons.

## 1.4 Research Sites

This research was conducted in two restaurants of the Thaitime chain, which are the Wandsworth and Wimbledon branches:

**Wandsworth Branch**

During the first and longest session, my research was based on ten months of fieldwork in the Wandsworth branch. I started my job in 2016 as a part-time employee without any intention of doing research on the experience. Day by day, I began to notice interesting phenomenon in our restaurant kitchen and this later become the most significant factor that influenced me to start this academic journey. For me, kitchens came to be seen as a transnational space associated with Thai community and culture.

I officially began my fieldwork at Thaitime Wandsworth in 2017. At that time, the kitchen had 11 chefs. This branch is not very busy, when compared with Wimbledon. What makes Wandsworth branch interesting to me is the way Thai migrants come to work, eat and sleep together. The staff accommodations upstairs even has bedrooms and there are about ten staff who live in the building. The tenants are a mixture of chefs and waitresses who work in the Thaitime restaurant chain.

I chose Wandsworth branch as my main field site because there is a strong emotional bond between the chefs and many interesting elements of Thai culture that can be difficult to find in other places. I found that the chefs have close relationship like a family unit, although sometimes they have do have conflicts with each other. During my fieldwork, a number of important events took place: someone got married, someone got British citizenship and someone had to leave the country. These events present a picture of

Thai immigrant life and experiences. However, my fieldwork in Wandsworth had to stop in the end of 2017 since the owner closed the restaurant for renovation and later decided to sell it in 2018.

**Wimbledon Branch**

Since the Wandsworth branch was closed down, most of the chefs were given an offer to work in other branches under the Thaitime restaurant chain. A number of them chose to work at Wimbledon because the location is not far from Wandsworth and I similarly continued my fieldwork in Wimbledon, including continuing to work in the same food runner position. In total, four chefs switched to Wimbledon and everyone continued to work in the same position, except the head chef, Nang, who was assigned to a second chef position since Wimbledon already had a head chef on duty.

The Wimbledon branch is extremely busy all the time, especially in tennis tournament time, which is held one time per year. There are about nine chefs at normal times and up to 12 chefs during the tennis tournament. All of these kitchen staff are women. Since I started working at the Thaitime restaurant chain, I had worked in the Wimbledon branch several times when they needed more staff. Thus, I felt quite familiar with the place and people when I transferred. This situation helped me establish relationships with my key informants and continue my fieldwork without difficulty. In fact, I was surprised that in my first day at the Wimbledon branch, one of my new colleagues introduced herself to me by providing a narrative of her migration route.

## 1.5 Key Informants

According to Payne (2004 p. 12), key informants are "those whose social positions in a research setting give them specialist knowledge about other people, processes or happenings that is more extensive, detailed or privileged than ordinary people, and who are therefore particularly valuable sources of information to a researcher, not least in the early stages of a project." In order to bring out a deep analysis of the key issues, the key informants in this research are 21 female chefs employed by the Thaitime kitchen in the Wandsworth and Wimbledon branches. The age of the chefs range from 33-72 years old. They have various backgrounds which will be provided in greater detail in the next chapter.

## 1.6 Preview of the Chapters

I begin in Chapter 1 with my research motivations, which developed during the time that I working as part-time employee in Thaitime kitchen. The life history of my colleagues as well as social relations in the kitchen continues to motivate me to conduct this research.

In Chapter 2, I review relevant theories and literatures which share perspective on Thai female migration, perspectives of food in anthropology and ethnographies of kitchen laborers, in order to reflect significant gaps in existing literature.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the cultural and economic background of Northeastern Thailand (Isan), as seventy percent of the chefs originally came from there. I suggest that the decision of Isan women to immigrate is strongly related to household characteristics. I also summarize the three broad streams of migration routes of the chefs, which are via work permit, marriage migration and independent migration as students.

In Chapter 4, I illustrate how daily work practices and social interactions play out in the context of Thaitime kitchens. I suggest that the Thai family structure is a critical foundation of social relations in the

kitchen space. The chefs think of themselves as relatives and kin, even though they are not kin and no biological relations can be traced between them. In the Thaitime kitchens, the feeling of relatedness can be achieved through the practice of sharing food that is cooked by the head chefs from the same pot.

In Chapter 5, I expand my research to the other places outside the restaurant kitchens. I analyze the most significant places the chefs usually visit in their free time such as their accommodations, the Thai Temple, ethnic grocery shops, the Thai massage shops, and the betting shops. The central consideration here was how the chefs' experiences influence the places they frequent and how their sense of belonging develops through everyday activities.

In the final chapter, I conclude my research and revisit the key arguments of this thesis. I finish the chapter with suggestions that Thai female migrants cannot simply be stereotyped as dependent spouses. On the contrary, their lives are complex and include many different aspects.

# Chapter 2 - Literature Review

To justify and situate this ethnographic research, a review of relevant theories and literature are divided into three parts. First, an overview of Thai migration and attempt to place this work in the context of the anthropology of immigration and migration. Second, an examination of the previous research on ethnographies of kitchen laborers and perspectives of food in anthropology. Finally, a summarized review of the relevant literature, to demonstrate the theoretical model and methodological precepts of this study and address any significant gaps in existing literature.

## 2.1 Perspectives on Thai Female Migration and The Anthropology of Migration

Over the past two decades, anthropologists have attempted to explain the movement of people across borders through modernization theory, dependency theory and transnational theory. Based on modernization theory, migration was perceived as a social phenomenon whereby people relocate from the traditional countryside to the modern city in order to serve the labor market (Kearney, 1995). Modernization theory emphasizes the rational and progressive economic decisions made in response to differences in land, labor and capital between where migrants live and the locale to which people choose to migrate (Ibid, p. 102). In opposition to modernization theory, scholars of dependency theory argue that migration does not cause economic progression, instead it is a response to the capitalist system, influenced by colonialism, causing an imbalance within the international division of labor as well as power inequality (Horevitz, 2009).

Trade agreements between first-world and third-world countries cause international migration and raise public and academic concerns about migration in both sending and receiving countries. This phenomenon made anthropologists shift away from theories about the “old immigration” to a “new immigration”. Anthropologists such as Schiller, Basch and Blanc (1995) clarify “new immigration” as a social phenomenon which makes “borders” obsolete. Human movement in the globalization era creates the new experience of “transcending” borders, since migrants “maintain strong, enduring ties to their homelands even as they are incorporated into countries of resettlement and calls into question conventional assumptions about the direction and impacts of international migration” (Levitt, DeWind, & Vertovec, 2003, p. 565). Several concepts have been used by anthropologists to explain dimensions of migration behavior, as Deleuze and Guattari (1972) introduce the term, “deterritorialized,” to reflect a weakening of ties between culture and place, as well as the term “transnationalism,” which can be defined as “a process by which migrants, through their daily life activities and social, economic, and political relations, create social fields that cross national boundaries” (cite from Schiller, Basch and Blanc, 1995: p 22).

Similarly, Appadurai (1996) suggests that, in the contemporary world, ethnic groups are no longer fixed to specific territories, as ethnic groups migrate, regroup in new locations and reconfigure their ethnic ‘projects’ beyond national boundaries. In this way, the field of anthropology has been challenged by the realities of globalization, since the field traditionally emphasized rich and descriptive analysis of a specific place (Appadurai, 1996: p 191). Apart from Appadurai’s framework, Anderson's (1991) theory of “imagined communities” also intertwines with a contemporary context of transnational migration. Anderson (1991) states, that a nation is "an imagined political community…it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Ibid, 1991 pp. 6–7). Thus, the members of the community might never know each of the other members face-to-face yet they share

common cultures which make them feel belonging to the same nation. This concept became an important theoretical framework to the study of transnational migration because it can help explain the processes of place making, collective identities and connection with home community while living in new environment.

Many anthropologists who focus their interest on this field tend to explore how migration creates meaning in lives or how cultural forces are impacted by migration. For example, the ethnographic studies on migration in Western Europe and North America of Reed-Danahay and Brettell (2008) or the study of Turkish migration in Germany of White (1997). Although anthropologists have a main theoretical contribution to the study of immigration, migration studies should be considered in the terms of an interdisciplinary field which include the culture system, gender norms and social status. In the following section, attention is given to gender, the aspect most closely connected to my research. This research focuses on gender aspects because the prevalence of Thai migration is higher among women, as more that 70 percent of Thai immigrants are female (Sims, 2008). Moreover, the idea or stereotype of the female migrant as a person who is dependent on a partner, piqued my interest.

Anthropologists who study female migration highlight the role of women's contribution to economic, political and social life. As women join the labor force, they greatly impact not only the economic success of their families but also the "political economy" of their households (Pessar, 2003). The movement of women across borders, to work in the labor market, challenges an archaic understanding of a "gender barrier" by changing their gender role performance from within the home to the broader space beyond national boundaries. This phenomenon has become a topic of interest in social science fields such as in Pessar's model of the "gendered geography of power," which focuses on the role of gender in "multiple spatial, social, and cultural scales (e.g., the body, the family, the state, gender hegemonies, and counter-hegemonies) across national and transnational terrains" (Ibid, 2003, p. 94).

I found that Reda's (2012) research connects the chefs' experience with the whole picture and improves the understanding on rural–urban migration, while also resonating with the literatures mentioned above. She studied 2,000 rural households from three provinces in Northeastern of Thailand, or "Isan", namely Buriram, Nakhon Phanom, and Ubon Ratchathani. All three provinces were considered as the "poverty pocket" of Thailand, where income from agriculture and natural resources is less than from other income sources including non-farm wage employment, self-employment and remittances. This suggests that migration is an important component of the livelihood strategies of these households.

While Reda's work focuses on the whole picture of rural–urban migration, some researchers focus their interest specifically on female migration. The literature about transnational wives by Sunanta and Angeles (2013), Tosakul (2007) and Hambeek (1994) agree that the main motivation for Thai women to marry foreign men was poverty. Remittances from them reduce family debt and severity of poverty, as well as indirectly stimulate economic activity.

This situation can be explained through the work of Thompson (2018), as he analyzes the role of "*farang*," or "western," men in reproducing Isan matrilineal family and kinship relationships as well as providing material and financial contributions as in-marrying sons-in-law. By interviewing *farang*-Isan couples and their relatives, Thompson found that since agricultural income declines, extended family households in rural Thailand have heavily depended on a remittance economy. Thus, foreigners who enter

into relationships with Isan women become an important source of remittances that provide economic resources to Isan women's families and stimulate the wider rural economy as well.

Research has flourished on transnational marriages between Thai women and men from European countries over the last decades. A number of them highlight the representation of the 'Thai bride' as domestic helpers, sex workers and, sometimes in the context of "trafficking" for sexual exploitation. In *"Foreigners' wives: Cross-cultural marriage of rural Thai women in Isan, Thailand"*, Pomsema (2015 p. 11) suggests that in the past, Thai women who lived together with foreign men were perceived as 'rent wives' or 'prostitutes' rather than 'good wives'. However, Thai society currently understands cross-cultural marriage as a pathway to wealth and comfort. This is also reflected in Pomsema's research, as she found that the majority of parents in a village in Roi-Et province did not want to have sons. They preferred to have daughters because when the daughters grew up, they could be married off to *farang* men and then the families would become rich. In addition, the girls in this village agreed with their parents and wanted to marry *farang* men instead of planning to study and get a good job in the future.

Negative stereotypes of Thai women are also present in Esara's research. She provides a history of Thailand's sex industry and explains why Thai women who date or marry westerners are often presumed to be sex workers and labeled as prostitutes. These women are also often presumed to be of northern or northeastern origins, based on the significant number of women from those areas who sought livelihoods as sex workers since the Vietnam War. It was also common for soldiers to 'rent' Thai women to be their live-in sexual partners and housekeepers. This kind of stigmatization still persists, especially when global discourses recognize Thailand as the largest supplier of commercial sexual services.

Apart from economic reasons, Charoensri (2013) points out that social norms and gendered obligations are also an important factor of international migration. Thai female migrants' lives can be presented in two main parts. The first part relates to their status as English wives and marriage migration. The second emphasizes the role of a "good daughter," which provides them respectability from their community in Thailand. Thai women who emigrate abroad, not only try to increase family income but also refund their parents for the cost of raising them. The popularity of cross-cultural marriage comes from the idea that foreign husbands can improve the quality of life, financial status and social status their families. Angeles and Sunanta (2009) raise a similar point by analyzing how local village norms and gendered obligations within Isan families and communities are associated with the rapid growth of transnational marriages. They suggest that women with foreign husbands often use their acquired wealth to fulfill the values, expectations and functions demanded of Isan daughters. These demanding duties include taking care of parents and natal families' financial needs, lending and giving money to extended kin and extending support to the village and the community-as-family in the form of donations and sponsorships of festive or religious events.

In *The Migration of Thai Women to Germany,* Chantavanich (2001) reveals that although, in fact, not all Thai female migrants were satisfied with their lives after emigration because of language and cultural barriers, they try to send positive news back to Thailand, giving an impression that they are successful. Additionally, with large remittances sent back to their families, migrants are admired by neighbors in their home country and became influential for other Thai women to follow the same migration route.

In a different point of view, the anthropological thesis of Suksomboon (2009) on *Thai Migrant Women in the Netherlands* suggests that the modern concept of an individual's choice and 'romantic love', as well

as other socio-cultural factors, also play a significant role in driving Thai brides to marry and relocate. The importance of love in cross-cultural relationships is also the main debate in Pananakhonsab's (2016) book *Love and Intimacy in Online Cross-Cultural Relationships.* By challenging assumptions that economic opportunities are the main motivation of Thai women to use intermarriage dating sites to find partners from relatively wealthy countries, the book shows that the technology of the internet offers new ways of searching for and developing relationships, as well as maintaining love and intimacy with western men across distance and time. Piayura (2012) studies the lives of Thai women (from many different parts of Thailand, including Bangkok) who married British men in London. She found that most of the informants married their British husbands with love as their primary reason and economics as their secondary reason. Although all of the women she studied face problems of cultural differences, none regretted marrying a *farang* and all agreed that *farang* husbands are responsible and faithful and made them feel the value of their bodies and sexuality more than Thai men.

Most of the literature about Thai female migration relates to the topic of cross-cultural marriage and marriage migration. Only the article of Kitcharoen (2007) provides an insightful examination of female workers' daily lives. This research describes the ethnographic study that she conducted among women wait staff in a Thai restaurant named "Jasmine" in the UK. The article analyses a pattern of female transnational migration from the countryside of Thailand and points out that the waitresses who contributed to this study shared a strong sense of responsibility to provide their family with income.

From reviewing literature about anthropological perspectives on female immigration and transnational communities, it can be seen that, although there are some studies about Thai wives in European countries such as England, Germany and Netherlands, most of the literature tends to view Thai women migrants in terms of passive economic dependence on their European husbands. However, according to the situation in Thai restaurant kitchens, it can be seen that female chefs are hardworking, making money by themselves and sending their own money to their families, rather than relying on their husbands for income. The literature focuses studies on economic factors which drive Thai women to marry and move to create relationships with their partners. However, I found that there are very rare studies examining the role of women immigrants outside the household that connect them with a specific professional career. My research attempts to study Thai immigration to the UK, which is not limited to marriage immigration but rather contributes to a broader perspective by investigating particular spaces, such as restaurant kitchens.

## 2.2 Ethnographies of Kitchen Labor and the Perspective of Food in Anthropology

My research is about Thai women who work in restaurant kitchens. However, it is not focused directly to food by itself. Rather, I attempt to examine how the chefs develop social relations, negotiate with power relations, handle their gender roles. In other word, the chefs use food, cooking and eating activities to build meaningful relationships in their workplace. The everyday life of the chefs usually relates with food since they enter the restaurant doors in the morning and stay until the end of the day. Thus, literatures about food in anthropology are a key insight to understanding social life, culture and power relations.

Although anthropologists have been studying food as part of rituals or daily life since the emergence of the anthropological field, food has become a central point of ethnographic studies through the groundbreaking work of Douglas, Harris, Goody and Mintz (Klein and Watson, 2016). Due to anthropologists' study of food from different perspectives and the vastness of food studies in the

anthropological field, I select a subset of this literature that highlights the connection of food with power and kin relations.

Mintz is regarded as the "father of food anthropology." His book *Sweetness and Power (1985)* examines the production and consumption of sugar, showing how sugar developed from a rare foreign luxury to a common ingredient in the modern kitchen and discloses how interwoven sugar's origins are with slavery, as it was a "slave" crop grown in Europe's tropical colonies. Mintz links sugar with the establishment of empire, exploitative labor conditions, capitalism and industry. An ethnographic work of Holmes (1975), is another good example of important anthropological work related to food and power. Holmes explores how indigenous Oaxacan migrants live, labor, suffer, and treat their physical ailments in food production. He points out that while Oaxacan migrants cultivate vegetables and fruit for Americans in order to allow them to be healthy, they themselves have to work under such difficult circumstances that their own health suffers greatly. In effect, immigrant farm workers sacrifice their own health to help others have access to good food.

While Mintz and Holmes use food to reveal the power of the West on colonized people and migrants, food can also be an important key in the establishment and maintenance of power relations. In the paper *"Nurturance and Reciprocity in Thai Studies*," Van Esterik explores the practice of "*liang*," the Thai term for providing food or eating together, in various social contexts. She suggests that *liang* incorporates a broad range of rules of reciprocity and should be understood as an arena for negotiating and displaying power and hierarchy. For example, when *liang* is used to refer to raising children, a daughter and son have to pay the debt owed to mothers for provision of breast milk by caring for her parents in her old age. Patrons also use food as a means of attracting and holding followers, because a person cannot turn against or fail to support anyone who has provided them with food. Thus, *liang* remains key to social interactions because it is embraced in deeper and more enduring values than those motivating commodity exchange.

The concept of food in anthropology is not stand alone and is often linked with other theories such as gender and kinship. Based on ethnographic field work on the island of Langkawi, Carsten (1995 p. 223) connects food with kinship theory, as she states that "the core substance of kinship in local perceptions is blood, and the major contribution to blood is food. Blood is always mutable and fluid-as is kinship itself". According to Carsten, Malay people become complete persons, that is, kin, through the process of eating together and living together in houses. Janowski and Kerlogue (2007) presents the similar point of view that, in Southeast Asian societies, food has an important role in establishing and structuring social and kin relations, particularly at the household level. This book has eleven chapters covering different societies in Southeast Asia, in which all chapters agree that food is relevant to the construction of kinship in two ways: through sharing food and through feeding.

There are several ethnographic works supporting this argument such as "*No substance, no kinship? Procreation, Performativity and Temanambondro parent/child relations"* of Thomas (1999) and "*Equivalence, personhood and relationality: Processes of relatedness among the Hoti of Venezuelan Guiana"* of Storrie (2003). Such literatures are argued to support the 'nurture kinship' perspective by asserting that kin relations can be constructed through the performance of nurturing such as feeding and sharing substances, rather than through blood ties.

This perspective draws a significant parallel with my research on the way in which food is one important basis for the construction of social relations that can be compared with kin ties among the chefs. In

Thaitime kitchens, the chefs shared food from common pots and defined themselves as being part of a family where the head chefs are regarded as mothers. Thus, these literatures provide an understanding of how kinship can be manipulated through the ways in which food is produced and consumed.

Moving from traditional societies to globalization, there is a growing body of research on Thai restaurants in cosmopolitan cities under the field of culinary tourism, such as the work of Molz (2004), Sunanta (2005) and Chi and Jackson (2011). This research analyzes how Thai food has become internationalized and has reached a global audience in cosmopolitan cities around the world. By following a form of cultural commodity, Thai food and Thai cuisine not only depends on the food itself but also on the ability of the restaurants to perform 'Thai culture' in representing its national image in foods, décor of the restaurant and appearance of restaurant staff. The "authentic" Thai food must be cooked by Thai chefs and served by Thai staff presented in an exotic atmosphere. The restaurants are designed and decorated with a Thai cultural and aesthetic emphasis and the atmosphere in the restaurant can represent the culture by displaying classic Thai paintings, craft art, silk curtains and photo scenery of places in Thailand. Most Thai restaurants also play Thai music while customers wait for traditional Thai-dressed waiters serving food in wooden bowls and using banana leaves to decorate their dishes. Thus, customers who eat in Thai restaurants not only fulfill their food needs but can also have an experience closer to Thailand without having to visit directly.

Although this research is based in the United States and Taiwan, these articles are a good resource because they draw parallels with Thai restaurants in the UK, particularly the existence of Thai restaurants as a cultural commodity. While literatures in culinary tourism demonstrate how Thai restaurants were established for western consumers in the world market, I found that these literatures hardly mention Thai people who work in the kitchen in from other perspectives apart from a mere measure of authenticity.

Anthropologists view food and foodways as tools with which to understand individual cultures and societies, especially when they are situated in the context of global and historical flows and connections. Ethnography, the methodology used by anthropologists and by some other social scientists, relies on a holistic and empathetic approach based on lived experiences among the people being studied. Jayaraman (2013)'s book explores the lives of restaurant workers in America's big cities, while Stephenson (2012) selected restaurant kitchens in the northeast of England as a study site. Both ethnographies take a similar perspective, perceiving kitchen areas as undesired spaces and representing kitchen workers in term of vulnerable groups who face unfair working conditions and play subordinate roles in providing services to other people.

While rare, there are researchers who present kitchen staff in terms of active agents. For example, Shigihara's (2014) *A Professional Back Place: An Ethnography of Restaurant Workers* suggests that the kitchen staff negotiated and justified their stigmatized jobs, choices, behaviors and occupational identities by assigning instrumental, functional and practical value to their employment. In *Culture, Identity, and Belonging in the "Culinary Underbelly,"* Palmer, Cooper and Burns (2010) focus their research on celebrity chefs and head chefs in Michelin-starred restaurants and suggest that these chefs defined their jobs as sacred work, and this influenced their occupational identity.

While a number of Thai-born residents in England work as kitchen staff, there is no existing literature focusing on this topic. Thus, this research will fulfill the gap in the literature, as it will examine the daily routines of female chefs who work in ethnic restaurants to find out how kitchen spaces influence their

self-perception and how female immigrants develop themselves in their professional careers within the UK context.

## 2.3 Conclusion

In the contemporary world, ethnic groups are no longer fixed within specific territories, as they migrate, regroup in new locations and reconfigure their ethnic 'projects' beyond national boundaries. A number of studies use anthropological methods, such as participant observation and in-depth interviews, to explore how immigrants make meaning of their lives, encounter structural pressures and deal with economic and cultural forces. There is some ethnographic research about Thai female immigrants in Europe conducted by Thai researchers, as nowadays an increasing number of European men are married to Thai wives and it is becoming more common for Thai women to marry and to move across a border. From reviewing existing literature, it can be seen that most literature studies Thai women immigrants in relation to their status as European wives and marriage-based migrants and examines how they adapt themselves in western cultures and create relationships with partners. Most Thai-born residents in England work as a kitchen staff. However, I found that there is no existing literature examining the role of women immigrants outside the household and connecting them with specific professional careers.

My research is thus an attempt to study Thai immigrants which is not limited to marriage immigration in the British households, but presents a broader perspective by investigating particular spaces in order to see how Thai immigrants engage with the places, develop social relations, access power and live their everyday lives inside and outside the restaurant kitchens. Although anthropologists have many theoretical contributions to the study of migration, I agree that migration studies should be considered as an interdisciplinary field which is able to tie together many different aspects of the complex migration processes.

This dissertation has made a contribution through the intersection of various topics. The study of Thai food and Thai cuisine overseas will contribute to a better and deeper understanding of existing Thai restaurants in the UK. On one hand, Thai restaurants are subject to British taste and the resulting food adaptations become a cultural commodity. On the other hand, it is obvious in my research that the chefs cook separate food for Thai restaurant staff, which is based on their preference for food to have a similar taste to what they used to eat in Thailand. While consumption and representation of Thai food in western countries has been studied by many researchers, the importance of the identities and agency of the restaurant staff who produce the food has been overlooked. This research thus approaches food from the migrant's point of view as I explore how important food is to the chefs in term of identity, as a key to power and as a core substance of kinship.

There are a number of ethnographies of kitchen labor which provide an in-depth perspective of the lives of kitchen labor in the western context and these studies are considerably useful sources in drawing further parallels with Thai restaurants in the UK. However, these studies did not include female chefs as part of their work and tend to perceive restaurant kitchens as the arena of men chefs. In order to fill this research gap, this research examines the daily routines of female chefs who work in ethnic restaurants and looks at how kitchen spaces work in relation to Thai social structures.

# Chapter 3 - From Thailand to the UK

In this chapter, I examine the immigration routes of Thaitime kitchen staff in order to provide the origin of Thai migrations to the UK. This serves to highlight shared experiences among the chefs and motivations which drive women to migrate. I summarize the three broad streams of the chefs' migration routes at Thaitime as: (1) typical migration of the chefs via work permit; (2) marriage migration; and (3) independent migration as students.

During the fieldwork conducted at Thaitime restaurant chain, there were 21 female chefs. The age range of chefs was between thirty and seventy-two years old. Sixty percent of migrations of the kitchen staff in Thaitime restaurant are categorized as marriage migrations, since international marriages mainly take place between western men and Asian women. Twenty percent of the kitchen staff applied for work permits from Thailand and twenty percent of kitchen staff started their migration routes via student visa and later applied for permanent residency.

## 3.1 From Isan to Cross-border Migration

The Kingdom of Thailand is located at the center of the Southeast Asian Indochinese Peninsula, covering a geographical area of 513,000 square kilometers with a population of 69.2 million people. Thailand is divided into four regions, including north, northeastern, central and southern. Each region has its own unique natural topography, historical background, language and culture.

In order to understand why Thai women became involved in the migration process, it is important to understand the social and economic background of northeastern Thailand, as seventy percent of chefs originally came from this area. The northeast, also known as "Isan," is the largest area of Thailand and consists of 20 provinces. The chefs who came from this region refer to themselves as "*khon Isan*," meaning "people of Isan," ethnic Laotians who integrated their identity into the Thai identity. Isan food has elements most in common with Laos and people of Isan habitually speak the Isan language.

In the section below, I will focus on emigration from Isan, as most of the chefs came from this region. Unlike the more fertile areas of Thailand, Isan has a long dry season and much of the land is covered by sparse grasses. Isan encompasses 170,000 square kilometers and contains about one-third of Thailand's population. Because of its economic and geographic disadvantages, Isan has experienced low income, few job opportunities and high rates of out-migration to other parts of Thailand. There seem to be strong push factors from households with lower resource endowments and poor access to social and physical infrastructure to send family members to the Bangkok metropolitan area. Thus, the decision of rural households in the northeast to send family members away for work is strongly related to household characteristics. Anthropologist, Charles Keyes, documented this process by charting the changes in community and village life over several decades (2014, 182–183):

> "(L)iterally millions of people born in rural communities in northeastern Thailand in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries joined the global labour force working not only in Bangkok, but in the Gulf States, Israel, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, and even in Europe and North America…Because Isan villagers have become workers in a global labour system, they can be seen as cosmopolitans not simply as traditional rice farmers, even though most still retain their identity as 'villagers'."

I use Push and Pull Theory to explain the origins, patterns and characteristics of the chefs' mobility. Although from different ideological and theoretical frameworks, approaches such as the theory of modernization and the dependency theory converge in their assumptions regarding migration as a result of push and pull factors. According to this theory, push factors refer to the place of origin that contains life barriers which motivate people to migrate to other areas. Examples of push factors are insufficient job opportunities and insecurity regarding political, social or economic conditions. Pull factors refer to the attractiveness of destination places, which can include job opportunities, better education and improved living conditions (Kline, 2003). By looking at push and pull factors, it is clear that economic and cultural factors are the main factors driving the chefs from their hometown.

**Economic factor**

According to the chefs' narratives, the most significant migration push factors in Isan are rural poverty. The chefs told me that they have to emigrate from their hometowns in order to *"ha ngein,"* which means "make money," in metropolitan areas. I found that the chefs experience similar situations of poverty, which is the consequence of agrarian transition.

The chefs told me that they grew up in agricultural societies, where every household relied on rice cultivation. When they were young, rice crops were planted and harvested by hand with a scythe, based on a small-scale farming system. Although they did not have much money in hand, they used to have enough rice to consume throughout the year. As chef Nang said:

> "I grew up in Sakon Nakhon Province, northeast Thailand. When I was young, most people in my village worked on farms. My family had a rice field which was located one mile away from my house. The rice grew under rainfed conditions and production normally was not much more than household consumption."

Chef Lek also said:

> "My family can be considered as poor among others in my village. My parents did not have their own land, so they worked on other people's farms. They exchanged their labor for uncooked milled rice and a little bit of money. In this way, we had enough rice to survive on for the whole year."

Chef Prew also said:

> "When my grandmother died, my mom got a small plot of land after dividing with her brother and sister. In the cultivation season, exchanging labor between each family was common. We were relatively self-sufficient. We didn't have cash but we had rice in our barn, a henhouse, vegetables in the backyard and fish in the pond".

I noticed that when the chefs spoke about their childhood, they identified themselves as poor with the similar explanation that they did not have money. However, before the agrarian transition, poverty was not yet the main reason for migration. This is because rice produced enough for home consumption and it was possible to sell the surplus in the rest of the year. Besides this, the chefs also told me that people around them knew how to survive in particular environmental conditions. For example, the chefs shared their childhood or teenage experiences of digging up bamboo shoots, fishing in a swamp and finding small crabs in rice fields.

But a significant change occurred over the last four decades, when Thailand witnessed significant social and economic development, moving from a low-income country to an upper income country. The country's gross domestic product (GDP) is estimated by the World Bank to have an average growth of 3.5 percent over 2005-2015, driven by recovering exports, improving farming and increasing rice production (Subhadrabandhu et al., 1996). Angeles and Sunanta (2009) view this agrarian transition and transnational migration in the Thai context as mutually constitutive social phenomena. As a result, village life has been transformed in the past four decades as Thailand has increasingly participated in global capitalism and shifted away from small-scale to industrialized agriculture.

The Thai government invested in irrigation, infrastructure and other pro-rice projects. New technologies have also pushed up the entry cost of rice farming. This is aided by state laws forcing banks to provide cheap credit to the agricultural sector and by providing its own credit through the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Co-operatives (BAAC) (Leturque and Wiggins, 2011). Farmers who already had large scale operations or could afford all the new chemicals, rice species and tractors benefited greatly, while the average peasants became indebted to the bank and were unable to hold on to their land and had to finally become a manual laborers on the farms of others (Phongpaichit, 1995). As chef Pui said:

> "When I turned 17, my family had a financial crisis. We had mortgaged our land, as we needed a budget to buy fertilizer and a water pump. New rice species were different from the traditional ones. It gave much more yield but it was so vulnerable and needed chemical fertilizer".

Chef Nu shared similar experience:

> "In order to increase production, my father invested the money to the 'iron buffalo.' In the first period it had a lot of advantages: it maximized productivity, saved time… saved labor. So, we decided to buy the second one and the third one after that".

"Iron buffalo" is multi-purpose farm tractor which replaced real buffalo which were used for farming in the past. "Iron buffalo" is a special piece of equipment that helps famers reduce the time and labor demand in rice production. However, the machine also requires gasoline, spare parts and maintenance costs. While improvements in technologies have pushed up the entry cost of rice farming, the outcome is unpredictable as it depends on uncontrollable factors, such as quality agricultural produce, markets prices and natural disasters. In many cases, the chefs told me that they invested all of their money to run their farms, but the quality of the rice and the market price did not meet expectations. This situation made it difficult for them to survive, as regarded in this story from chef Ple:

> "I remember the day my father came back home from the village meeting and said our area would get good rain in the year. So we rented more land and expanded our rice field. Unexpectedly, we experienced insect infestation which destroyed a lot of rice grain in that year".

Apart from that, the improvement of technology made the chefs unable to rely only on their agricultural income. As Barnaud (2006 p 159) explains, "the availability of electric power led to the increasing use of cash for exchanges and the creation of new basic needs regarding household equipment and consumer goods such as motorbike, radio sets and refrigerators". When rural households were unable to meet their basic needs from farming income, a number of women decided to migrate. As chef Fah said:

> "In that period, there was something bigger than 'poverty.' This was because we already poor since I was born, but in that moment we are also indebted."

Many chefs explained that the obligation to pay the debt is the main reason that pushed them away from their hometowns to join service and manufacturing sectors in metropolitan cities. They left to find jobs in factories, restaurants, bars, or as domestic helpers and vendors.

While most of migrants moved within the country, a number of migrants decided to move across the border in order to search for work and to live abroad. In these cases, metropolitan cities such as Bangkok, Pattaya and Phuket were a point of departure where the chefs found an opportunity for international migration. Many chefs met their European partners while working in tourist places. Some of them worked at restaurant chains in Bangkok and were selected as representatives to work abroad when the company expanded their business to other countries. More detail about the migration process will be discussed in the next section.

**Cultural factors**

Although the economic reasons seem to be the main motivation, I argue that cultural factors are also important considerations in women's migration from Thailand to the UK. The decision of a rural household in northeastern Thailand to send family members away for work is strongly related to household characteristics, village norms and religion.

As Thailand is known as a matrilineal society, where lineage is traced through the female side of the family and property is passed down along the same matriline. The term "matrilineal society" is defined by anthropologists as "a society in which females, especially mothers, have the central roles of political leadership, moral authority, and control of property" (Haviland, 1997 p. 579). Phya Anuman Rajadhon (1988), was known as the first Thai anthropologist, explains, "it is the custom for the young man to leave the home of his parents, that is, to marry out of his own home and into his wife's home" (cite from Bowie, 2008 p 139). In Baan Don Village she studied, Bowie described Thai village kinship that:

> "After marriage, a new couple usually lives in the same home as part of an extended household with the wife's parents, siblings, and grandparents. Overtime, the couple may build their own home, residing neolocally in the wife's family compound. Their neighbors are most likely to be members of the wife's matriline." (2008 p 139)

For this reason, matrilocality in Thai families ensures the maintenance of strong matrilineal bonds and makes daughters more attached to their natal families than sons are. Most of the chefs from rural areas grew up in this kind of matrilineal society. When I asked about their family members, I found that the chefs normally included their parents, their sisters' families and other women siblings in the household. Brothers were generally not counted as they had moved to their wives' family after marriage. As Nang said "I never ask anything from my brothers because they have their own families to taking care of." As sons are perceived to be members of their wives' household, the chefs (as daughters) inherit the parental household and commit to caring for their parents.

Based on their stories, the division of labor by gender is clear in the chefs' households. Chef Nu told me that when she was a teenager, her brother went to school and joined in outdoor activity with his friends. She, however, stayed at home and worked closely with her parents. This dynamic creates a tight bond

between parents and daughter. As such, the chefs greatly appreciate what their parents have done for them while bringing them up and taking care of them. This means that even when they are adults, they feel culturally obligated to pay their parents back for their sacrifices. In other words, Thai women are bound with deep reciprocal relationships which they call "*Bunkhun*," which translates roughly to "indebted of kindness."

The chefs strongly feel that it is their responsibility to take care of their elderly parents. Many chefs, like Nang, Mai, Lek and Fah told me that they grew up in a tough environment and their parents are the primary individuals who helped them get through the challenges. As Fah (Wok chef, age 39) said:

> "It is hard to eat well when you are poor. When I was young, my family didn't have much food to eat. So, my mother let me eat first and she ate [what was left] later… So, what my parents did for me, I must do in return."

The culture of gender in Thailand has also been dominated by Theravada Buddhism, which believes that only males can become monks and enter into the religious world. Women, in contrast, tend to be specialized to non-religious activities, such as trade and other economic activities (Keyes, 1984). As Clausen (2004 p 48) points out to the relation between Thai female labor migrants and Buddhist tradition:

> "Daughters are usually the ones to take care of the parents [while] the sons could go to the monkhood to pay debt of gratitude to their parents. But the girls cannot be a monk."

For this reason, the chefs take their duty as daughters serious and make their own decision to migrate. They confirmed this by stating that the reasons they migrated included wanting to improve their families' well-being by sending remittances to their parents, as they believe that doing so is the best practice to show their gratitude to their parents.

Therefore, gender obligation and expectations, which remain strong in rural life, are an important reason for migration. While most migrations for this purpose are intranational, a number of migrants decided to move internationally in order to search for work, study or live abroad with their marriage partners. During the last 30 years, there has been a steady increase in the numbers of Thai women immigrating to Europe. In 2005, IOM reported that there were around 150,000 Thai women residing in Europe (Huguet and Punpuing 2005) and there were 39,784 Thai-born residents in England (Sims, 2007). City and overseas migration are viewed as avenues for upward social and economic mobility. Rural to urban migration within Thailand has been an option for young women and men from farming families. Women have an advantage over men in overseas migration prospects, with marriages to foreign nationals promising both mobility and modernity (Angeles and Sunanta, 2009).

For the chefs, marriage with foreign men or work abroad is the way to fulfill the traditional roles as nurturers of their families. As Angeles and Sunanta (2009) suggest, "*mia farangs*," or "wives of westerners," are also able to renegotiate the terms of their daughterly duties through three mechanisms. First, through their long absences from the villages or permanent residence abroad, they are able to pass on their duties to other siblings or hired surrogates. Second, their new forms of cultural capital bring new skills, literacy, and information to their families. Third, new sources of income result in upward social mobility for their natal families at home and provide them with resources that, when invested productively, enable them to become less dependent on regular remittances.

The dutiful daughter concept plays a significant role in the (re) production of transnational migration. The chefs follow existing gendered role expectations by taking care of aging parents financially. They use material such as houses, farmland size and expensive commodities to measure their success. As Chef Ying said, "If I did not come to the UK, I could not afford my parents' expenses. But now I have money to pay for everything they need, including a house, land and last year I even bought a new car for them."

## 3.2 How the Chefs Immigrate

**Part 1: immigration route via work permit**

Since the Fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1982-1987), Thailand has promoted and administered the export of its labor to many countries around the world to reduce unemployment and to attempt to resolve the problem of poverty at home. Since then, working abroad has become a well-known phenomenon in Thailand. Almost 1.5 million Thai people have migrated internationally and a majority of them are considered to be low-skilled migrants and their employment is expected to be temporary. Female contract workers, for example, are concentrated in the household and commercial service sectors. The popularity of Thai cuisine in the UK has also created a space for Thai women workers and immigrants (Sciortino and Punpuing, 2009). According to the national development plan, the chefs have choices to migrate internationally from Thailand to service sector jobs in the UK. There are four chefs at Thaitime who immigrated to the UK through this route, including: Nang, Jai, Nu, and Pim.

These chefs told me that their intention to work abroad was influenced by former migrants in their village. When the post-migrants visit home, they give inspiration to other people. By saving money from working for a year, they can enhance their own beauty and purchase modern home appliances. This sophisticated image attracted and inspired the chefs to move across the border. As one of my key informants, Chef Nu, mentioned:

> "One of my relatives had gone to work in a Thai restaurant in the UK. Every time she came back home for holiday she usually brought new accessories and gave some money to her parents. I can remember that it was so exciting that her house had a washing machine while everyone in the village had to wash their clothes by hand."

Chef Pim also mentioned:

> "Everyone in my community knows that working abroad is well paid and I believed that was true because when my friend visited me during her vacations, she looked so pretty in modern clothes and she had a lot of expensive stuff."

Chef Jai mentioned:

> "I have a very close friend who got married and lives in the UK. When I saw her picture, I really want to be there too. It seemed like she has a lot of things to do… a lot of places to go. So, I applied for working visa to the UK."

The former migrants provided useful information and became the chefs' inspiration at the same time. Those who had the potential and interest to move then asked for information about the process to migrate

and work in England. The chefs use the word "*nai naa*" to define a social group or person who connects prospective migrants in Thailand with restaurant owners in the UK or elsewhere. The word "*nai naa*" can be used in a broader context but in most cases it means social network of friends, kin or village members who persuaded and assisted them to work in the UK. These people are sometimes former migrants themselves or an intermediary who introduces the chefs to former migrants. When a restaurant owner needs more staff, they will ask their current staff to introduce someone from their hometown who might be interested. The current staff then spread the message among their social networks in Thailand. The selection criteria is thus usually based on personal relationships between the current staff and candidate. In many cases, the chosen one is relative or close friend who has a good relationship with the current staff. As chef Pim mentioned:

> "My close friend in the village worked abroad since she was a teenager. One day she gave me a call and asked me to find someone to work with her in the same restaurant. Instead of looking for someone else, I proposed myself to work there with her."

Chef Nu also mentioned:

> "My cousin visited home during her holiday. I came to ask her about the job… and she said her restaurant was fully staff at the moment. So she asked another friend who worked in a big restaurant chain. Luckily, there was one position available and my cousin suggested what I should do step by step."

Interactions among social networks between former migrants and the homeland make further migration easier by providing useful information and reducing the costs and risks of moving. The personal relations which connect former migrants in the UK to prospective migrants in Thailand increase the probability of international migration.

Cross border journeys and working in foreign countries is perceived as risky for women, thus the chefs told me that they migrated to live with people who were regarded as close ties and who they had a high level of trust in. They engaged with other Thai migrants to access accommodation, jobs and the many other resources they needed. As a result, the chefs told me that they felt "*wang jai*," which means "secure," to travel abroad as they knew a group of familiar people in the destination. These social networks provide a different degree of accessibility, accountability, intimacy and confidentiality. As chef Nu, said:

> "I would not have been brave enough to go abroad if my cousin was not waiting for me here. She made me feel safe and secure during immigration process."

In rare cases, some people use a recruitment process with an agency in Thailand because they cannot find available positions through their social network; which was the case for chef Jai. If a pre-migrant uses services from an agency, they have to pay an agency fee depending on the type of services provided. The agency then helps applicants complete pre-requisite paperwork and facilitates safe passage to destinations in England and other countries.

Some chefs, like Nang, migrate as a representative staff from Thailand to join a kitchen team in the UK. When Nang was in Thailand, she worked as a chef in a big restaurant chain. After that, the company expanded the business to other countries around the world and moved her to Taiwan. Nang and her Thai

husband worked together in the same kitchen for more than 10 years there. But when Nang had an unplanned pregnancy when she was in Taiwan, she returned to Thailand and stayed there until she gave birth to her son. As soon as she recovered, Nang returned to work in Taiwan, leaving her son with her mother. After continuing to work for one year, the company moved Nang and her husband to another branch in the UK. Both of them moved to the UK under the company's work permit and the company provided accommodations and legal status to them.

> "I used to move around a lot from one restaurant to another according to my company's decision. Staying under the contract has both advantages and disadvantages. The good things are that the company provides us an accommodation, meals and healthcare coverage. The bad thing is that I have to do whatever my boss wants me to do and move wherever they want me to be."

Chef Nang had been working with her previous company until the restaurant was closed down. Then she applied to the job at the Thaitime chain. In the UK, the chefs usually stay in their workplaces for a long time as they arrive with a work permit visa (Tier-2). Even after they have changed from having a tier 2 visa to having permanent residency, female workers do not move as freely as male workers do, because women's opportunities are more limited in chef careers in western culture. However, working in the Thai restaurant kitchen allows women to create spaces and negotiate power.

After newcomers work in England for a while, they will become experienced migrant workers within established social networks and begin to offer help to other people in their villages, for example, introducing them to jobs in the UK.

Once a year, the chefs return home with mass-market commodities and beautiful clothes. By saving money from working the whole year, they can enhance their own beauty and modernity. This sophisticated image attracts the younger generation and inspires them to move across the border.

**Part 2: immigration route via marriage**

The gender imbalance conveyed by the 2001 Census – 78 per cent of Thais in the UK are women – gives rise to a popular perception of the Thai population: Thai women are migrating to be wives of British men. According to the fieldwork data of this research, 13 chefs, or sixty percent of the kitchen staff, in Thaitime restaurant are categorized into marriage migration, since international marriages mainly take place between western men and Asian women.

The evolution of Thai-western marriage migration has significantly contributed to the growth of the Thai tourism industry. Tourism became a major economic contributor to the Kingdom of Thailand, as the numbers of foreign visitors has grown from 336,000 foreigner in 1967 to 32.59 million in 2016 (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2017). As an important, popular and long-standing destination for mass tourism, Thailand has many infrastructural facilities to promote cross-border connections and networks that support large inflows of mobile foreign people and capital. Thailand's development is increasingly dependent on the tourism and service sectors providing for foreigners from wealthier countries (see Sunanta 2020). For more than forty years, mass tourism has transformed numerous cities and regions to cater to foreign tastes and tourists. Cities like Pattaya, Bangkok, Phuket, Koh Samui, Hua Hin and Chiang Mai have been attracting travellers for decades with a variety of eateries and shops, luxury resorts and water sports. These cities also have large numbers of Thai women from rural areas across the country who

migrated to work in service industry jobs, such as in massage shops, as bar girls, or in Thai restaurants. These places later became the starting point of migration stories.

The chefs who came across the border as marriage migrants told me that their cross-cultural relationships were established during their partners' short vacation visits, which then resulted in marriage and family life. As the story of chef Lek illustrates:

> "I met my husband in Pattaya. He took a vacation in Thailand with some friends. We met in the hotel lobby where I worked as a receptionist. During that time, he stayed in the hotel and always kept looking at me without saying anything. One day, he walked up to me and asked me out on a date. We went out for dinner and spent some time getting to know each other for two weeks. After that we had long-distance relationship for six months. Then I moved to the UK."

With the explosion of internet usage, I note that some chefs chat with their partners via online dating websites or social media at first, then meet later when the partner vacations to Thailand. Chef Mai met her husband from on an online dating website. She joined this website to meet new people in European countries, following one of her friends' recommendations. She explained that while working in Bangkok, she had a friend who usually hung out with foreigners and it was fun to join their parties or short trips, as she mentioned:

> "At that time, I liked to go out with people from different cultural backgrounds. Then, my friend introduced me to one of her friends from Canada and I found myself having way more fun when we were together. I never had this much fun with any previous Thai boyfriends, but with him it was quite different."

Chef Mai and her Canadian boyfriend broke up after staying in a relationship for a while. However, she never turned her interest back to Thai men again. Thus, her friend recommended Miss Mai to join a dating application which helped her find new relationships with foreigners.

According to the chefs' narratives, long distance relationships between them and partners were common, an in fact were the primary form of relationships during the first year. After constant communication across borders, through chat apps and holiday encounters, the sets of partners decided to get married and live together. The wedding ceremony was commonly arranged in the Thai village, among the wives' relatives in a traditional Thai style and the picture from the wedding day must be kept as an important part of the visa application. After the visa was approved, the chefs gained the legal right to international mobility, work and residence in the UK, as well as access to social welfare. They live and share a home with their partner, based on the men's home origin. It must be noted that the age and staying period of marriage migrants varies considerably. Since I conducted my fieldwork, I have met a group of young chefs who just married and settled down in the UK, such as chef Amorn and Mamiew, as well as senior chefs who have been married for more than 10 years, such as chef Ple and Jung.

Similar to the chefs who arrived in the UK with work permit visas, many individuals were provided opportunities by female friends and kin to follow suit and meet and marry a man in their western destination. Over time, these feedbacks produced distinctive but increasing numbers of Thai women who married and moved to specific locations to join their family, friends and co-villagers in western countries. For example, the anthropological documentary, '*Heartbound: a different type of love story*' of Sine

Plambech's (2008), explores how Thai women in the small northern region of Jutland, Denmark helped women from their villages in Thailand marry Danish men and create a network of Thai/Danish married couples.

Much of the literature about marriage migration, such as that of Sunanta (2013), Tosakul (2007), Hambeek (1994) and Charoensri (2013), agree that the main motivation for Thai women to marry foreign men was poverty and their best chance of escaping poverty is to seek relationships with western men who can offer financial security. There are a number of works about Thai marriage migrants in Europe highlighting the representation of the 'Thai bride' as domestic helpers, sex workers and victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Pomsema (2015 p. 11) suggests that in the past, Thai women who lived together with foreign men were perceived as 'rent wives' or 'prostitutes' rather than 'good wives.' However, Thai society currently understands cross-cultural marriage as a way to wealth and comfort. Many Thai women consider partnering with a westerner as a worthwhile strategy to achieve a better life and gain social and spatial mobility for themselves and their families. For villagers, these women offer "possibilities of intimate interracial relationships and travel to exotic destinations. Regular village visits of women migrants with money to spend and donate become real-life advertisements promoting novel desires and possibilities, including the biological reproduction of beautiful mixed-race children, especially children fathered by Caucasian men" (Angeles and Sunanta 2009 p 125).

Nevertheless, this research has a different result from the above literatures, as many chefs, including Lek, Amorn and Ja, state that they did not expect to receive a significant amount of money from their partner. The chefs make their own choices to marry with "*farang kee nok,*" the slang word which means "white men from a poor social and economic background," because they believed they have the agency to work in the UK and send remittances home themselves. As Ja said:

> "I always knew that my husband was not rich. When we met in Thailand, he was a backpacker and stayed in a cheap hostel and didn't have much money in his pocket. I always made jokes with my mother that I was married with a *farang kee nok.*"

This was similar to chef Amorn, who told to me:

> "It is a false belief that all foreigners are rich and they are willing to give you their money. However, I still want to marry a British person because I want a visa to work here and send money back to my family."

However, long-term relationships between Thai women and British men, cannot avoid language barriers. Many of the Thaitime chefs mentioned that they are sometimes frustrated by the language barriers they face, especially when they try to express their opinions and convey a feeling to their husbands. As chef Mai said:

> "Sometimes, it makes me feel very bad when I am not to be able to understand what my husband says. Many times, we have miscommunications, especially when discuss sensitive issues."

Chef Pui echoed this challenge:

> "When my husband and my stepson watch television and talk to each other, I frequently don't understand subtle jokes and it makes me feel excluded."

One of the biggest difficulties in dealing with cross-cultural relationships is language issues. Even though, the English language is part of the basic education curriculum in Thailand, the students rarely have an opportunity to practice, causing the Thai women from this study to express having lacking English communication skills. Some of them can understand what foreigners say and are able to keep a very basic conversation going. However, since tourism is a big industry in Thailand, most Thais who work at tourist attractions or in big cities learn how to speak English and practice it with foreigners, at least to the level of basic conversation.

These experiences are highly individualized. Some chefs, like chefs Jung, who works full-time at the Richmond branch and part-time at Wimbledon when the kitchen is short-handed, do not perceive language as a problem. Chef Jung does not see communicating with her British husband as a problem, although she is not fluent in English. I have met her husband on two occasions and he said hello to me in Thai. I asked chef Jung "can your husband speak Thai?" She explained to me that she teaches him some basic Thai conversation skills and she is also working to improve her English skills. Among the chefs in the Thaitime chain, I have noticed that Jung's English skills are outstanding and strong enough to deal with bank officers and doctors by herself. Chef Jung explained her efforts to me:

> "It is a challenge for both of us to communicate because we both speak different languages. However, as a way to discover and convey emotions, it is my pleasure to learn the English and culture so we can understand each other and so I can make a better future for myself."

From the informal conversations with the key informants, I learned that a number of chefs who married foreigners raised domestic violence as an issue of concern. In many cases, I found that married life after moving across borders did not end happily. Domestic violence is often a hidden topic that the chefs never discuss with someone who they do not trust since the UK partners control their legal status. These conversations revealed that marriage-based migrants are sometimes stuck in their relationships and fear that they will be sent back to Thailand if they live separately from their partners.

Marriage migrants are new to the country, language and institutional mechanisms in the UK. Living without support from family and having a limited social network of Thai native speakers makes causes many migrants to lack emotional support. Thus, having people around with similar interests or similar problems can help relieve feelings of loneliness.

The chefs told me that they are more likely to be looked down on by their husbands and their families if they are unemployed or become housewives. In order to find meaningful social networks and create spaces outside their homes, marriage migrants in this study made a choice to work in the kitchen of a Thai restaurant. While they do have employment outside the home, I found that the chefs work hard both inside and outside their households. They take care of their husbands and children (for those who have children), provide food, do the dishes and do the laundry. More importantly, most of the chefs financially help their partners by paying a portion of the bills, as they prefer not to completely rely on their partners. Chef Ple, Ja, and Mai stated that they split the rent and other expenses down the middle with their husbands. Other chefs said they do not need to pay for the rent but are responsible for household expenses and food items the cost of which is almost equivalent to the rent price. As chef Mai explained:

> "My husband pays the rent but the responsibility of all household expenses are on me. I try to pay as much as I can because I live in his house and in his country and I rely on him for my visa."

Similarly, chef Ple explained:

> "We both go out to work and split all our expenses fifty-fifty. This is because my husband's salary cannot cover everything, especially considering expenses related to our children."

Of the participants in this study using the marriage route, chef Mamiew is the only one who does not need to pay the bills. This is because her husband already had his own house and was already receiving a high salary when they got married. However, this condition does put pressure on chef Mamiew to take good care of her husband. Sometimes, she expressed to her colleagues that she feels weak and subservient in the relationship. For this reason, most chefs try to share household expenses in order to balance power and protect themselves from negative stereotypes of 'Thai brides,' which promote a negative image of Thai women who live with foreign men as 'rent wives' or 'gold diggers' rather than 'good wives.' Thus, working hard, saving money for families in Thailand and sharing expenses are strategies many women use to not become solely reliant on their partners.

**Part 3: immigration route via student visa**

Historically, only the Thai elite had opportunities for cultural engagement by travelling to the west, studying in western elite schools and universities and speaking European languages (Statham et al., 2020). There is a long history of elite Thais traveling to study in the UK; most notably, King Rama VI of Thailand attended the Royal Military Academy of Sandhurst and Oxford University at the turn of the 20th century.

Since then, as the economy in Thailand has grown, so has the proportion of Thai overseas students. Annually, about 5,000 Thai overseas students are given visas to enter the UK. The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office has attributed this growing demand to study the English language in the UK as "driven by more internationally oriented parental aspirations." As Jon from Thai-UK.org explained, independent schools and British universities have been a popular choice for the sons of wealthy Thais, and increasingly so for daughters. For the 2005-2006 school year, approximately 62 percent of student visas in the UK to Thai students were issued to women (Sim, 2008).

However, mass tourism and cultural globalization processes importing western ideas and values mean that access and connections to the west have been 'democratized' in the sense that today they are no longer the privilege of the elite but now open to all classes (Statham et al., 2020). As the most commonly spoken language in the world, knowing English opens up job and employment opportunities in labor markets.

Of the chefs at Thaitime, twenty percent started their journey to the UK with a student visa and applied for another visa after the end of their courses. Most chefs stated that they decided to study in the UK because they wanted to be fluent in English and gain life experiences. As English is an international language that is required for high-level job positions, the chefs expect that being able to speak English fluently will liberate them from social stresses and raise their career positions as well as social status. As Rath said, "I worked as general administrator in a big company for two years and watched many colleagues who spoke English fluently get promoted. So I decided to quit my job and apply for language courses." Vikarn also supported this point by saying "it is very obvious that, in our society, those who study abroad are more socially accepted than those who do not. If you can improve your language abilities, you can improve your employment opportunities."

I noticed that the chefs in this group held bachelor degrees and had worked in Thailand for a couple years before they arrived in the UK. These people categorized themselves as from “middle class” families, like Ming who said:

> “Both my parents used to work in government organizations. Now, they've retired and get money from pensions. Although I am not from an upper-class family, we are not poor. So, my family is between the rich and the poor”.

Similarly, Rath said “I can’t say I am a rich person, but when I wanted to take an English course, my family could afford it.” The chefs who came to the UK with a student visa are now aged between 35 and 45 years old. At that time of their migration, there were many language schools providing basic English courses with affordable fees. However, to apply for a student visa, applicants are required to show they have enough money to live and study in addition to taking a basic language test. Thus, it can be assumed that the chefs who met the immigration criteria are above the poverty line. The exception is Miss Mena, who has different story:

> “When I was in the second year of my undergraduate degree, I didn’t have enough budget to continue my studies. I had a friend of a friend who worked in a Thai restaurant so I applied for a cheap language course in Manchester and came here to work with her. During that time, I borrowed money from everyone I know to come here.”

I discovered that this choice is quite strategic. Rather than studying in a proper university, the chefs transferred to inexpensive language courses which lack of effective monitoring. The chefs informed me that their schools were located in places with decent transportation connectivity, such as Soho, Brixton, Victoria and Paddington. From the outside, their schools seem to be ordinary flats with a school name posted on the front door. The most popular course which most of chefs have taken is General English. They expressed to me that these schools taught them the basics of the English language and exposed them to classmates from other developing countries such as Brazil, Italy and China.

Similar to other students, the chefs spent much of their time after class working in the kitchen of Thai restaurants. After finishing one course, they continued to other courses until they were entitled to apply for permanent resident visas, which allow them to remain in the UK until becoming naturalized as a British citizen. The story of chef Jeab can be used as an example of this. Chef Jeab began her journey to the UK in 2004 by applying for the General English course at the price of 3,500 pounds per year. During that time, she mostly skipped her classes to work as a kitchen assistant in a Thai restaurant near her house. In this way, she earned 250 pounds per week and was able to earn approximately 12,000 pounds per year. In order to continue her student visa as long as possible, chef Jeab intentionally failed her language test and repeated the same course for many years. This was not Jeab’s original plan but, the decision to continue living in the UK was made after the she worked in a Thai restaurant for a while and had successfully integrated into a group of Thai friends at the restaurant and became satisfied with her income.

The chefs stated that working in a restaurant kitchen was attractive because it enables them to reduce their family’s financial burden and gives them extra money to spend. In addition, they can have authentic Thai food at the restaurant before working and to take away for breakfast or lunch in the next day. After they

developed cooking skills, it was common for them to extend their working day until becoming full-time kitchen staff.

After enjoying working, saving money and socializing with other Thai colleagues, I found that the chefs changed their intention from studying to acquiring permanent residency. Some of them told me that their current income might be higher than the salary they would receive if they had returned to Thailand. As Jeab said, "the degree is not necessary anymore. If I live here [in the UK,] I can do my job and make money without the degree".

In case of Vikarn, after finishing a language course in the UK, she took a diploma course in hotel management. After failing job interviews from several hotels in Southwest London, she decided to work as an assistant manager in the Thai restaurant. Vikarn expressed feeling that she faced discrimination in finding employment in the UK because of a language barrier and her Thai identity. As she states:

> "My English is good enough to communicate, but it is not perfect. They think that you are just Thai, that you are just a woman from an underdeveloped country. For these reasons, they will not select you. Sometimes, I feel depressed and it's difficult to have a job, even when I am qualified."

It is difficult to deny that Thai women in the UK have very limited options for finding employment outside Thai restaurants, especially if they have low qualifications. Initially, Vikarn worked in the kitchen replacing chefs who did not show up for their shifts. However, after more wait staff arrived, she had to work in the kitchen permanently. The chefs often said that the kitchen is the place where you "*kaw ngai oak yak,*" or "enter easily but struggle to leave." This is because the kitchens seem to be places that open the door for Thai migrants who lack job experience and speak limited English. However, the longer they stay, the harder it is for them to change their careers or assimilate into British work culture. The kitchens of these restaurants is the beginning and the end of the Thai migrants' employment story, as once newly arrived immigrants in Britain start working in a Thai kitchen, they continue working in the kitchen until their retirement. For example, Jai (starter chef), spent her whole working life in the kitchen of Thai restaurants, from the age of 35 until now, at the age of 72.

Nevertheless, the acquisition of British citizenship often is a mixture of several routes. For example, chef Rath told me that she first came to the UK with a student visa and spent most of her time after class working in a Thai restaurant. Until Miss Nikkit, the restaurant owner, offered Rath a work permit visa. As a result, Rath has continued working in Thaitime restaurant until today.

It is possible for Thai students to become citizens of the UK. The rules vary depending on different circumstances, but generally anyone who has been a legal resident in the UK for at least five years will have earned the opportunity to apply for citizenship. According to UNHCR (2021), "naturalization" is the legal act or process by which a non-citizen in a country may acquire citizenship or nationality of that country. However, five years ago, the UK Government made an announcement on reforms to the student visa system, which introduced stricter requirements. The Home Office now only grants permission for migrants to stay in the UK if they are full-time students, studying for a minimum of three hours a day in authorized institutions. As a result, there are now fewer Thai students coming to the UK for non-academic purposes.

## 3.3 Remittances

Remittances from female migrants help many of their families escape poverty. It is a commonality among the Thaitime kitchen staff to regularly send money back to their families in Thailand, particularly to parents and children. I found that the chefs generally do not maintain strict control over their remittances, however. Once they receive their salary, it will be used to pay for accommodations (in cases where they are not live-in staff) and a small amount will be kept for spending in their everyday life. All of the remaining money will be distributed to their families through remittances. The table below summarizes the chefs' average remittances in 2017.

| **Employee status** | **Average income/ per month** | **Average amount of remittances/ per month** | **Remittance as Percentage of income** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Full-time chef** | 1,800 pound | 990 pound | 55% |
| **Part-time chef** | 1,280 pound | 653 pound | 51% |

It can be seen that both full-time and part-time chefs sent more than half their incomes back home. Similar to other Thai immigrants in the UK, the chefs transferred money to Thailand by using transfer services from Thai companies like Kapook and AB money. With the slogan "we send money home," these companies buy British Pound currency (£) via card payments or bank transfers and sell this back to Thai Baht, with a favorable exchange rate when compared to high-street banks. In other words, these businesses provide remittance transfers from the UK and send the payments directly to the banks of recipients in Thailand within one day.

In the countryside of Thailand, financial pressure is commonplace and a large number of the elderly and young population is sustained economically by migrant remittances. These remittances play an essential role in supporting family and kinship members and are used to ensure that family members can obtain access to healthcare services (for parents), education services (for children) and other necessities like food, clothing and housing. Remittances are also used to provide an income source for family members who are unemployed or retired. As Lek (second chef) explained, more than half of her income is sent home for daily consumption, health care and children's education because none of her family members in Thailand have an income.

Lek has only one daughter from her previous marriage with a Thai husband. Now, her daughter lives with her grandmother and attends a Catholic school in Sukhothai province as Lek's father passed away when she was young. Although Lek has only one child of her own, she has three nieces, from her sister, who she financially supports as her sister is mentally handicapped. All of these family members live in the same house in Sukhothai and none of them has an income.

> "My mom is too old to work and my father has already passed away. My daughter is still an undergraduate student and my sister has a mental illness, so it is my responsibility to send money back home every month."

Fulfilling daughterly duties in this matrilocal society can extend three to four, even five, generations, as illustrated in the life of Nu. Nu has an "*kropkru yai*," or large extended family, including a father, mother, grandmother, single aunt and cousins. All of her family members built their houses in the same area and work on the same family farm. If their rice is of poor quality, her family will ask her to send money back home. This money is transferred directly to her mother's bank account, who will manage and distribute it to other family members. Correspondingly, in *Families in Thailand: Beliefs and Realities*, Limanonda (1995) states that the most predominant type of household in Thailand is that of the extended family, especially in rural areas. This type of family, often with additional support from relatives and a network of community members, offers emotional comfort, security and nourishment. Thus, it is very common to find that one person is given the responsibility to earn an income for many people of their relatives. In order to demonstrate this, the table below summarizes the number of family members who rely on each chefs' remittances.

Table: Summery of the staffs' personal detail

| **No.** | **Name** | **Position** | **Details of kinship** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | **Partner's nationality** | **A number of children** | | **The number of parents and other family members in Thailand who rely on migrants' remittances** |
| | | | | **Living in the UK** | **Living in Thailand** | |
| 1 | Nang | Head chef | Thai husband (live together in the UK) | 1 | - | 2 (father and mother) |
| 2. | Lek | Second chef | British | - | 1 (with her previous Thai husband) | 4 (mother, daughter, sister and nephews) |
| 3. | Ple | Head chef | | 1 | 2 (with her previous Thai husband) | About 4 people |
| 4. | Nu | Wok chef | British | 2 | 1 (with her previous Thai boyfriend) | About 7 people |
| 5. | Mai | Wok chef | European | 2 (one with previous Thai husband) | - | 1 (mother) |
| 6. | Jai | starter chef | (Passed away) | 2 | - | - |
| 7. | Vikarn | part-time starter | British | - | - | 2 (father and uncle) |
| 8. | Rath | Food Runner | Thai | - | - | - |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9. | Jung | Part-time chef | European | 1 | - | 2 (father and sister) |
| 10. | Pat | Kitchen helper | Thai | - | 1 | 2 (mother, children) |
| 11 | Fah | Wok chef | Thai | - | 1 | 3 |
| 12 | Taptim | Wok chef | Single | - | - | 3 (father, mother and aunt) |
| 13 | Ming | Wok chef | European | - | 1 | 1 (mother) |
| 14 | Armon | Wok chef | British | 2 | - | 3 |
| 15 | Jeab | starter chef | Single | - | - | 2 (father and mother) |
| 16 | Prew | Wok chef | Asian | - | - | |
| 17 | Ying | Wok chef | Thai | - | - | 2 (father and mother) |
| 18 | Pui | starter chef | India | 1 | - | |
| 19 | Mamiew | Wok chef | British | 2 | - | 2 (mother and aunt) |
| 20 | Ja | Food Runner | European | - | 1 | 1 child |
| 21 | Aroon | Kitchen helper | European | - | 3 | 2 (father and child) |

Source: Own data, 2018

In many cases, remittance flows have positive impacts on the education of left-behind children in Thailand. While most of the chefs from rural areas graduated high school, they can support their children to complete bachelor's degrees. The chefs who have school-age children in Thailand expressed wanting to save money for their children's education as they perceive education to be the way to increase opportunities to get a good job and improve quality of life.

In addition, parts of remittances are invested into small business development, such as opening convenience shops, starting-up a local restaurant or investing in agricultural innovation. These family businesses are seen as a way to overcome financial constraints and help raise the standard of living for family members in the long-term, as the story of chef Nu shows. Chef Nu told me that five years ago, she sent money to her mother to open a convenience shop in front of their house. In the beginning, it was a small shop that stocked a range of everyday items and home-grown produce. Her family members who were unemployed lent a hand in stocking shelfs and labelling items. Six months later, the business was continuing on very well so the shop was expanded in size and product range and this became another regular source of income of her family. Of this she said:

> "I'm very proud that my remittances can create jobs for my family members and make them more economically productive."

Transnational migration of women from low-income families to join the global movement of workers responding to labor shortages in wealthier countries from Thailand to the UK has created a new form of 'family.' Once the chefs decided to migrate, they had to leave their families and children behind to take their opportunity. Eight of the chefs in this study share common characteristics of a transnational family, where migrants and their children are geographically separated over an extended period of time.

Most of the chefs said they will try to bring their children to the UK when everything is settled down. However, more than half of the chefs are still not legally qualified to bring family members to the UK. The basic requirement for this is that applicants must demonstrate a gross annual income of at least 18,600 British Pounds. However, most of the chefs have an annual income below this income threshold and sometimes they are paid in cash rather than through paychecks. This condition makes it difficult for the chefs to have evidence about the amount of money they make, even when they work full-time. Some chefs, like chef Lek, asked her British husband to be a sponsor for her daughter. In this way, she can prove that she and her husband together meet the minimum income requirement. However, her daughter's case has failed a long-running legal battle in the court and it causes Lek to suffer.

While they are providing critical financial support to their children in Thailand, the long-distance relationships make the chefs feel lonely and estranged from their own children. All of the chefs discussed efforts to keep in touch with family members in Thailand using the LINE application[1]. The chefs explained that they were separated from their children while their children were still very young and so they primarily get to know each other via telephone calls and LINE. "My children never call me first, unless they want to buy something," is a common comment that I heard from many of the chefs after they hung up the phone.

Migration of parents abroad for working purposes is a considerably important way of generating income and improving a family's well-being. On one hand, parents are often better paid from jobs abroad, providing their children with more financial and educational resources and fostering greater social and school achievement. On the other hand, the absence of the main adult caregiver may be harmful for children's well-being and create a gap between the mother and children. Consequently, children may form emotional attachments with other family members, like grandmothers or aunts, and feel closer to them than their biological mothers. The chefs who left their children in Thailand said that they found it more difficult to mediate and respond to their child's emotions, as children need care, love, support and time from their mothers. During my observation, I noticed that many chefs were not able to resolve their children's psychological problems and instead tended to try to improve situations by offering material things such as smart phones, tablets and brand-name products.

In conclusion, this chapter is an attempt to explain economic and cultural factors that affect the chefs' decisions to participate in transnational migration. I argue that the chefs' decisions to migrate are related to household characteristics and financial considerations, as over the last four decades, most of the chefs' households experienced financial difficulties caused by the agrarian transition. After failing to integrate to industrialized agriculture, many families became indebted to the bank, encouraging the chefs to migrate from their hometown in order to secure better incomes. Although the economic reasons seem to be the main motivation, I argue that social norms and religious beliefs are also important factors contributing to the women's movements. While sons can join the monkhood to pay a debt of gratitude to their parents, the chefs, as women, do not have this option and instead make their own decision to work outside their hometown and send money back to parents as a way to perform their duties as daughters and repay their parents. Thus, they follow existing gendered role expectations by taking care of aging parents in term of economic considerations.

[1] LINE is a popular messaging application in Thailand which allows the user to make free voice calls and messages, similar to WhatsApp and Viber.

There are different connotations between northeastern and central Thailand regarding migration routes. The chefs from Isan (the northeast) mostly migrate via a spouse visa while the chefs from central Thailand tended to start their journey with a student visa. When compared to the urban population of Bangkok, the chefs from Isan have darker skin, come from an agricultural background and tend to be worse off financially. The chefs who travel with work permit visa also have similar backgrounds, although there are less sexual connotations made about them compared to chefs who gained access to the UK based on a marriage. In contrast, the chefs who migrated with a student visa tend to categorize themselves as a "middle class" and attribute their decision to study in the UK to their desire to be fluent in English and gain valuable life experience.

Many existing research studies point out that cross-cultural marriages in Thai society are perceived as a shortcut to wealth and comfort, especially for the women who are impacted by disadvantageous socio-economic status. I found that the chefs are aware of this stereotype and thus make an effort to prove themselves and create their own value by regularly sending remittances to support their family members. This money is used for home construction, household expenses, education, medical fees, agricultural inputs and investments in family businesses. The chefs, as international migrants, are important agents in household economic development and they challenge negative stereotypes about marriage migrants.

It can be seen that the chefs come from different backgrounds, social classes and visa statuses. However, when they left their homeland and began to work together in the kitchen spaces, power relations were rearranged according to kitchens' hierarchy which might not correspond to personal backgrounds in Thailand. In Thaitime kitchens, each chef occupies a certain position in the hierarchy according to their position. This power is also negotiated among the head chefs and other chefs through cooking and nurturing activities, as will be described in the next chapter.

# Chapter 4 - Thaitime Kitchens

My field work was conducted in the two main branches of the chain Thaitime restaurant; Wandsworth and Wimbledon. Thaitime restaurants are one of the most well-known Thai restaurant chains in the UK with numerous awards and accolades. This chain even hosted a meal for the Thai royal family when they visited the UK. The business was founded about 20 years ago by Nikkit, whose passion for cooking drove her to open her first Thai restaurant in Chiswick, which quickly expanded to a chain across 12 locations in the area of Southwest London. During my field work in 2017, the owner scaled down to concentrate on six branches, all of which belong to the same owner and are managed by the same company.

In this chapter, I illustrate how daily work practices and social interactions play out in the context of Thaitime kitchens. According to my participant observation, I found that the kitchens have two parallel dynamics. On one hand, kitchens are operated in terms of commercial restaurant standards. On the other hand, they work in relation to Thai family structures, where I argue that the relationships are constructed around the concept of "*mae*" (motherhood) and "*kropkrua*" (family) in Thai culture.

## 4.1 The Chefs and Kitchen Spaces

The kitchens of both the Wandsworth and Wimbledon branches are located in basements which are restricted to staff only. There are no windows, natural ventilation or sunlight in the kitchen space. The communication between the chefs and waiters is via intercom, which is available in front of the elevator. In front of the kitchen doors, there are signs saying "staff only" below a small porthole window. These kitchen designs make for spaces with limited connection to the outside world, but do strengthen the relationships between staff working in the kitchen.

The kitchens can be entered by narrow staircases which also lead into the staff locker rooms. This is the area where the chefs change their clothes, remove their jewelry and put on their uniforms. Before entering the kitchen door, all chefs must be wearing their white chef uniform and a blue apron. Their hair must be tied properly under a hairnet. As they work in the same building as the head office of the restaurant chain, the chefs' appearance at the Wimbledon branch seems to be under more surveillance and the chefs usually appear neater as a result, while the kitchen environment in Wandsworth is much more relaxed. In both restaurants, the main kitchen areas are divided into three sections, each according to the responsibilities of the chefs; cooking, starters and running. Although kitchen structures were built based on the British standard and style, I found that the chefs connected the existing space with Thai cosmology and have adapted it according to their cultural background.

The cooking sections are regarded as the heart of the kitchen and are occupied by the head chefs and second chefs. Each kitchen has six cooking stoves or, as the chefs call them, *"tao,"* which are located in the center of the kitchen. When the head chef comes to the kitchen in the morning, the first thing they do is light the fire in the *tao* and place woks or pots on the top, in order to protect the fire from the wind. It is important to keep the area in front of the cooking stoves warm so if the *tao* is not in use, the chef will turn down the gas, but they never turn it off until the kitchen closes at the end of the day. This space in front of the stoves is the domain of power of the head chefs. If other chefs want to use one of the *tao*, they must ask permission from the head chefs first. However, the head chefs tend to cook for other people instead of letting them use the *tao* directly. Thai ingredients and seasonings such as pad thai sauce, fish sauce, oyster

sauce, soya sauce and sugar are placed on the rack above the *tao*. Behind the stoves is the preparation counter where all the other ingredients can be found. Chopped vegetables are prepared and stored in boxes and every kind of meat is stocked in the fridge under the counter.

The *tao*

Although cooking in this new setting forces the chefs to adapt themselves, Thai cosmology still has an influence on Thaitime restaurant kitchens. The word *tao* is the same word that is used in traditional Thai kitchens, where the stoves are considered the main part of the cooking area. As Pragattakomol and Taylor (2018 p 142) describe the characteristics and structures of Thai kitchens:

> "At the center of a kitchen was the *Mae Tao Fai* with stoves. Firewood and charcoal was the popular fuel so people needed a space for storing brushwood and charcoal. Smoke and soot from the fuel forced people to set the *Mae Tao Fai* close to windows allowing the smoke to flow out."

"*Mae tao fai*" is a wooden box which contains clay inside that the stoves were set on top of. Thai people built it this way to prevent the fire from spreading on the floor. Inside of *mae tao fai* are the *tao* cooking stoves, which usually had a pot placed on top. Nowadays, many Thai households have changed from using firewood and charcoal to using gas stoves, so it is not necessary to build *mae tao fai*, but this change made use of *tao* became more prominent.

Many researchers on structures of Thai kitchens, such as Pragattakomol and Taylor (2018) as well as Pimwern and Phetsuriya (2014), emphasize the importance of *tao* and *mae tao fai*, as the center of the Thai kitchen. In Thailand, kitchens are separated from the main part of the house in order to prevent smoke and cooking smells from entering the living area. Cooking at *tao* is the responsibility of women, which is emphasized in the construction of the compound-word *mae tao fai,* where the first word, *mae*, means "mother." This reinforces the idea that the kitchen is the area of women, especially women who are mothers. This places women in a powerful position, as illustrated by Sparkes (2007 p 230) who claimed that "women were placed in a central role in the family since it is their cooking and providing food to the various members that defines the family unit rather than the more static concepts of blood

relations." The kitchen has therefore become more than just a space for women to cook, women have also used kitchen space and cooking activities to generate their power.

I found that there is a parallel drawn between women in Thai kitchens and the chefs in Thaitime restaurants. As the people who occupy the *tao*, head chefs are the most powerful people in the kitchen area. When I conducted my research, Nang and Ple took the positions as head chefs of the Thaitime in Wandsworth and Wimbledon. As head chefs, both of them had to use their knowledge and professional cooking experiences to run the whole kitchen and lead the kitchen staff team. Apart from cooking at *tao* for both customers' and staff food, their responsibilities are to control the quality of food and making sure food is produced on time and with good presentation. In addition, head chefs handle the logistics of ordering food from suppliers, managing food stocks, examining health and hygiene procedures and arranging schedules for the kitchen staff.

The Wimbledon branch is the busiest branch in the Thaitime chain, while Wandsworth is in the middle range among the other locations. This creates a different kitchen environment between the two branches. In Wandsworth, head chef Nang appears relaxed and shows a sense of humor most of the time she is in the kitchen. Nang usually expresses a sense of care by offering a helping hand to finish the jobs and shows concern about the personal lives of staff. She started working as the head chef of the Thaitime restaurant about one year ago after previously spending several years in other Thai restaurant kitchens around London. In each place she worked, she was provided opportunities to learn different cooking experiences which made Nang qualified for her role as head chef. In Wimbledon, the role of the head chef as a supervisor is far more visible. Ple has been working with the Thaitime chain for more than six years and has worked her way up from general kitchen assistant to starter chef to wok chef and then to head chef. Apart from her technical skills and outstanding performance, the main reason she was promoted to the head chef position in the busiest branch is because of her strong personality and good relationship with the restaurant owner.

The starter section of the kitchen is on the right side of the kitchen where the deep fryer and grill is situated. This is an independent section where the chefs have the responsibility to cook and prepare everything by themselves. Starter chefs spend most of their time wrapping spring rolls, grinding fish and skewing chicken in order to prepare the starters for the customers in advance of the busy hours. Already-made-products are packed in boxes and stocked in the freezer. Starter chefs regularly check these stocks in the morning to find out what items are missing and what needs to be purchased.

While *tao* is the heart of the kitchen, the starter area was perceived as less important. This is because starter menus have emerged into Thai processional kitchens due to the influence of western culture. Thai food is traditionally eaten altogether with no separate courses. A conventional Thai meal, which appears during the staff dinner, includes rice with three or four dishes cooked on the *tao* by the head chef. Thus, the starter section is generally regarded as contributing to the profits of the restaurant business but doesn't relate much to the staff food nor their food culture. While rice is as essential to a Thai meal as blood is to the human body, the chefs tend to view starters as something *"mai cham pen,"* or "optional." For this reason, I found that it is more difficult for starter chefs to possess power in the kitchen space. When comparing to other staff, starter chefs receive lower wages and fewer opportunities to progress in their careers, unless they learn how to cook at the *tao*. The Thaitime in Wandsworth and Wimbledon restaurants have four starter chefs in total; they are Jai, Tang, Pui, and Jeab.

The running section is the area in front of the elevator, near the printer and intercom. Once orders are printed out, the food runner will determine where the ticket should go and which sections are needed to prepare the food. When the food is ready, it is given to the food runner who rechecks the order, garnishes the dishes and sends the food upstairs in the elevator. The chefs who work in this position also act as the point of contact between the chefs and waiters on the ground floor. If there are any special food requests or any relevant food allergies, the food runner will pass the message to the chefs. If the waiters find that the food is taking a longer time than usual or there are any missing plates, they will ask about an order from the food runner. However, from my participant observation, the food runners have less power and so they rarely handle bigger problems and instead let the restaurant manager or senior wait staffs work with the head chefs to accommodate special customer requests or address mistakes.

In the Thaitime kitchens, food runners are considered chefs because their job includes some cooking tasks. Apart from running orders, they are also assigned the task of making Thai style salads. There is one mortar in the running section for making papaya salad. Both Thaitime kitchen have a total of four food runners which are Rath, Ja, Noon and me.

The starters and running sections

During my fieldwork, I worked in the food runner position. During the very busy periods, I worked as second food runner, which meant I got to stand beside the main food runner when she read out orders. I also put rice in boxes or bowls according to the orders and took the food from woks and wrapped it with cling film before giving it to the food runner. If some items ran out in the kitchen, the chefs usually tasked me with bringing in new items from the storage room or the cold room as they couldn't leave their positions during these periods.

The chefs often compared working in the kitchen to belonging to a "*kropkrua,*" or "family". *Kropkrua* literally translates "covered by the kitchen" and thus this compound word implies that family is related to the kitchen space and the sharing of food. This places mothers in a central role in the family, since it is their preparation and provision of food to the various members that defines the family unit (Janowski and Kerlogue, 2007). I found that the head chefs expresses themselves in relation to this concept of "*mae,*" or "motherhood." While this metaphorical use of kinship terms extends outside blood ties and indicates a strong relationship among the chefs, it also reflects that these social relations cannot be interpreted as

separate from familial relations as the structure of *kropkrua* is at the heart of social organization in Thaitime kitchens. Further analysis of this point will be provided in the next section.

## 4.2 Language, Body Language and Social Structures

Social structures in Thaitime kitchen are strongly hierarchical and follow the same pattern of family relations. The most obvious way to examine social hierarchy is to observe it through the use of language. Almost everyone in the restaurant refers to head chef Nang and Ple as *"mae,"* which means "mother", in order to describe their loving and nurturing nature. "*Mae* really cares for her staff" and "she cooks for me like my mom" were common descriptions that I heard from my colleagues when they talked about the head chefs. However, the word *"mae"* in the Thaitime kitchen has a different meaning than how it is used in the English language; in this case it refers to the women who hold power and nurture other people's lives, rather than referencing biological ties.

In turn, it is common for kitchen staff to refer to themselves as "*loohk,*" meaning "daughter" or "son," when they speak with the head chef during normal conversations. This is because the Thai language does not have absolute pronouns like the English language does, and so the pronouns a person uses can be changed based on the interpersonal relationships of the people speaking. However, this does not mean everyone in the kitchen uses this pronoun; the word "*loohk*" is only used by the staffs that have a close relationship with the head chef.

The kitchen staff do not refer to themselves as "*loohk*" during formal situations, like in staff meetings, while in the presence of the restaurant owner nor during busy periods in the kitchen. This word does get used during informal conversations when kitchen staff are preparing vegetables, during cleaning or during lunch. Also, I found that the chefs intentionally referred to themselves as "*loohk*" when they did something wrong and it could be predicted that head chef would be angry. For example, one day Pui came to work 30 minutes late when the restaurant was very busy. This caused tensions with the other chefs who arrived on time. As soon as Pui noticed the reaction of her colleagues, she went to the head chef and said: *"loohk* really sorry for being late but *loohk* very tired and overslept this morning." In most cases, if the junior chefs call themselves *loohk*, the mistakes they made tend to be forgiven and are not taken as seriously. This pronoun is also used when chefs ask for help from the head chef, especially in sensitive cases like negotiating their job positions or calling in sick. From this point, I argue that the word *loohk* connects with the concept of childhood or a stage of social learning. In the Thaitime kitchen, childhood has no chronological age limits nor biological boundaries. For example, junior chefs can take a more submissive role when they need protection and support from the head chef. As Nang explained: "as a head chef, if something goes wrong with the food, I am always responsible for it and protect my *loohk* from those faults." Protection is a crucial element for the mother-child relation in Thai culture and this was expressed numerous times during this study. In one example, the manager walked to the kitchen and asked who made the papaya salad since the customer complained that it was too spicy and not as good as it used to be. The salad was made by chef Pui but head chef Ple quickly walked to the manager and said the salad was made according to restaurant's recipe and under her supervision and so the manager could not fault chef Pui for the complaint.

Nevertheless, not everyone in the kitchen uses this pronoun. The word *loohk* is only used by the staff who have a close relationship with the head chef and only by the staff who are younger than the head chef. Apart from age factor, many staff come with less cooking experience. Thus, teaching the process is also

another important factor that creates a good relationship between them and later develops to a mother-child relation. Lack of teaching might create a distance in their relationship, as can be seen in the example of chef Pang. Pang is an experienced chef who transferred from another restaurant. Because she learned her skills elsewhere, no teaching process took place and there is no sense of gratitude or obligation between chef Pang and the head chef. Although Pang respects head chef Ple as much as other people do, their interactions are more reliant on a formal sense of supervisor and supervisee.

For the chefs who are not included in this mother-child relationship, like Pang and Jai, they use the pronoun "*pii*," which means elder sibling, to refer to head chefs in an effort to show respect. In return, the head chefs refer to the junior staff as "*nong*," which means younger sibling. The words '*pii'* and '*nong'* are commonly used pronouns in the Thai language as it is more polite and appropriate to add the pre-fix '*pii'* before an older person's name and '*nong'* before a younger person's name to describe a certain status and closeness in the relationship between people in a conversation. This same way of speaking transfers to the context of Thaitime kitchens, as the chefs refer to elder colleagues as "*pii*" and younger colleagues as "*nong*." However, while age is a factor in determining social position and the way chefs behave towards one another, this has not necessarily always been the case. Position and social status also take part in this equation. Although head chefs Nang and Ple are not the eldest people in the kitchens, they are in the socially highest rank and receive the most respect in the kitchen areas. In some cases, senior chefs were called *pii* to express respect, even when she was younger than the speaker. For example, Rath calls second chef Lek "*Pii* Lek" even though Lek is about a year younger.

The relationships between the chefs, then, are a reflection of the structure of Thai families, with parents being the head of the household. Thai children quietly learn where they stand in relation to other family members. The relationship between 'older-younger' siblings is based on patterns of respect. Younger members of the family are expected to help take care of older members. Social status, seniority and hierarchical systems are important in Thai culture and these are reflected in the terms people use when referring to one other.

The dynamics in the Thaitime kitchen are similar, as each chef occupies a certain position in the hierarchy according to their age and social status. The relationship is based on family structures with the mother, or the head chefs, at the top, followed by senior chefs which include second chefs and wok chefs. Food runners, starter chefs and new training staffs are considered to be junior chefs and were placed in the bottom of hierarchy. This is illustrated in the diagram below:

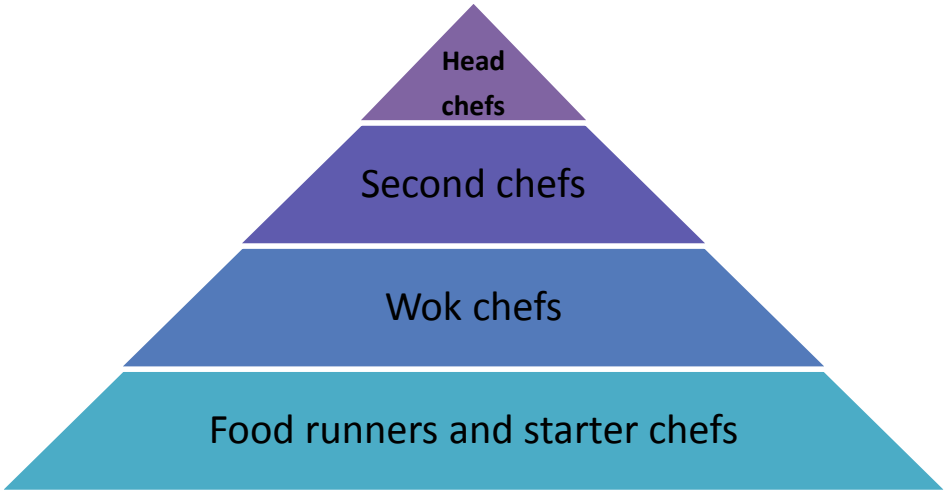



Diagram hierarchical status of the chef in Thaitime kitchen

The social hierarchy of the Thaitime kitchen can be observed through the way people interact with each other. When two people greet each other, the one who is younger or has lower social status is expected to greet the older one first. Every morning, when the chefs enter the front door, they usually greet each other by doing a "*wai,*" which is a customary greeting of Thai culture. To *wai,* the younger people put the palms of their hands together in front of chest, so that each finger touches its counterpart on the other hand. Then, they bring their hands to touch the middle of their chest and slightly bow their head down. *Wai*-ing is usually paired with the word "*sawasdee,*" meaning "hello" in Thai. When greeting in this way, the younger people expect the older people to return the greeting in the same way. *Wai*-ing is also used when passing temples, Buddhist monks, shrines, or anything regards to Thai royal family, in order to show respect.

Although the younger chefs have their own personalized ways of showing respect towards older colleagues, there are a list of common manners from Thai culture that I observed. When the younger chefs walk past the restaurant owner, the head chef or a senior chef while they are seated, they bend forward slightly when approaching that person. Further, if two people are walking towards each other in a narrow pathway, the younger tends to stop walking and give way to the older.

The younger people treat the older people with appropriate respect and try to accommodate them as much as they can, especially during the cleaning hour and the proper meal (the details of which will be provided in the next section.) During cleaning, the chefs normally spend one hour cleaning and tidying up the kitchen areas before they go home. Jai, the starter chef, is responsible to clean the fryers, brush and scour the grill and replace the tin foil liners on the grill. All wok chefs have to clean the stir fry area as well as cover and label fresh ingredients before they are stored in the refrigerator. Rath, the food runner, is responsible for cleaning the elevator area. In theory, the chefs are in charge of cleaning their own sections first and then later helping to clean the kitchen's common areas. However, the junior chefs are the most active and enthusiastic about cleaning. They tend to quickly finish their own tasks, then lend a helping hand in the senior chefs' sections, before sanitizing all kitchen surfaces in the common areas. The junior chefs, including Ja, Amorn and Pui, explained their actions in relation with the notion of '*doo-lae,*'meaning "taking care," which is a very important value in the maintenance of the chefs' relationships and plays a large role in keeping family members together. As Pui states, "my mother always told me…if

we are a family, we have to take care each other." It is obvious that Jai, who is 72 years old, cannot remove heavy frying baskets or lift iron grill racks by herself. Thus, the support and caretaking from younger colleagues is necessary.

From the information presented above, it can be understood that this *kropkrua* (family) structure provides a foundation of social relations in the kitchen spaces. The chefs think of themselves as relatives and kin, even though there are no biological relations between them. Kinship terms are widely applied in how they address each other. The staff of Thaitime restaurants are organized by a hierarchical system where individuals have specific status as being "*mae*," "*pii*" or "*nong.*" Each chef locates themselves in kinship position arrangements where one can be either "mother," "daughter" or "sister" to the others and then must act according to the role. For example, the *nong* pays respect and take care of the *pii*. At the same time *pii* must show their kindness and provide protection to the *nong*.

The fundamental belief of Thai people that everyone has a place in a hierarchy is remarkable. This was influenced by Thai agricultural culture, where land was the primary economic resource. Having land meant having wealth, social status and higher position. Reynolds's *Thai Radical Discourse: The Real Face of Thai Feudalism Today* (1987) significant analysis of Thai society argues that Thai society had long been divided into two classes: the ruling and the subordinate class. In Thai history, lands were allocated to the ruling class according to their rank and common people were forced to perform unpaid labor to nobles and local rulers. This traditional system for distinguishing between different levels of social hierarchy is called the '*sakdina'* system, which is often referred to as 'Thai Feudalism.' A *sakdina* literally is a compound word combining '*sakdi'* (power) and '*na'* (rice field), which can be conceptually translated as "status as shown by land." Although *sakdina* was legally abolished in 1932, some researchers, such as Thongsawang (2020), stress the persistence of the *sakdina* structure in Thai society and point out that social inequality in Thailand originates from the *sakdina* system.

Based on a similar point of view, Hanks (1975) and Roy (1971) use the concept of patrons and clients to analyze Thai social structures and explain personal connections which people give importance to the hierarchal system. The patron-client relationship is "a special case of dyadic ties involving a largely instrumental friendship in which an individual or higher status (patron) uses his own influence and resources to provide protection or benefits, or both, for a person of lower status (client), who, for his part reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services, to the patron" (Scott 1972, p 92).

This research has discovered that systems of social hierarchy, which depend on the ability to hold economic capital in the form of land and labor, have been transferred to kitchen spaces where the restaurant owner can be compared to a landlord or patron. The owner is superior to their client (the chefs) in term of wealth, power, prestige and social class and does favors for the chefs by allowing access to her restaurants (lands). Although the restaurant owner was accepted as patron, her position is always behind the scenes and she does not appear on a daily basis, as she only visits the restaurants approximately two times per week. When the owner is not in the restaurant, the power is in the hands of the head chef, who maintains power and control in the kitchen area.

I found that the relationship between head chefs and other chefs can also be compared with the concept of patron and client, as both positions are tied by reciprocal obligation. Although the head chefs are not the owner, they do have authority to allow or deny people access to the kitchen space (lands) via the

recruitment process and schedule arrangement. In other words, no one can access the kitchen without the permission of the head chef. For new chefs, they have to be accepted and approved by the head chef, before they can receive a work schedule, which is critical as the number of hours assigned greatly impact earnings, and the schedules can also be seen as permission to access kitchen space. This is quite political, as sometimes when head chefs dislike somebody, she prevents that person from accessing the kitchen by not putting their name in the schedule. For example, Nu once made head chef Ple angry because she cooked food in smaller portions than usual and refused to make a new dish when the head chef told her to. Because of this situation, Nu was not given a shift for two weeks, until the head chef calmed down. In contrast, those who maintain close relationships with the head chef tend to receive more privileges which can include more shifts, attention and protection from the head chef when mistakes happen.

According to this theoretical framework, a patron is superior to their client in terms of power. For this reason, they can perform favours for their client by allowing access to land, providing financial support and/or providing social protection (Archer, 1990). With this in mind, I would argue that the relationship between head chefs and other chefs is based on such reciprocity. Head chefs are the most powerful person in the kitchen, as they negotiate the value of 'land,' act as a financial supporter by arranging working schedules and protect the others when they make a mistake. In turn, other chefs are the clients who benefit from this support or influence.

In one of the most influential works of Michel Foucault (1978), he claims that "where there is power, there is resistance" (p 95–96). Nevertheless, I found that there is less visible resistance to the power of head chefs in Thaitime restaurants. This can be explained by two reasons. First, resistance to the head chefs' power has previously caused the other chefs to lose some benefits such as career development and social security. Second, Thai people believe in the Buddhist concept of '*Karma,*' which holds that humans are born in equality according to the merit they earned in their previous life. As a result, they accept their inferior status and believe in authority (Komin, 1991). Additionally, as Buddhists, the chefs were taught about '*bun khun,*' the concept of "indebted goodness" which refers to a kind of "gratitude toward the love and kindness of one's mother in giving birth and bringing them up" (Liamputtong, 2004 p 594).

The involvement of head chefs in cooking, teaching and nurturing is *bun khun* and the lower level chefs seek opportunities to return the favor in order to express their gratitude. One strong belief among Thais is that the *bun khun* of parents is never completely repaid. *Bun khun* is closely related to the concepts of karma, as the person who acknowledges their parents' *bun khun* and repays it will gain merit. Oppositely, disregarding their parents' *bun khun* is considered to be a sin which may result in ill health and misfortune in life (Mulder, 1985). The chefs often mentioned that they have to appreciate and repay the *bun khun* of the head chefs as their "second mother."

Phillips' (1965 cite from Liamputtong, 2004) work on Thai peasant personality's suggests that "Thais talked about the '*bun khun*' of their mothers in great depth, including that they have been fed from their mothers' breasts; it was their mother's blood that fed them; and their mothers have brought them up." Similar reflections are found among the chefs in this research when referring to the head chef. In Thaitime's kitchens, head chefs are perceived as mother figures because they feed the others by cooking Thai food, consisting of rice and side dishes, for them to eat. Thai people share a common belief that rice becomes blood, thereby sharing rice can create kin relations, which supports the notion of the role of head

chefs as a head of the family. All chefs are tied together by the giving and receiving of food, which generates powerful interpersonal relationships between the giver (head chefs) and the receiver (other chefs). In order to expand upon this point, the below section will examine how cooking food and motherhood are intertwined.

## 4.3 Motherhood, Food and Power

The complex relationship of mother, food and power in Thai culture is present in anthropological literatures such as the works of Hanks, 1964; Potter, 1977; and van Esterik, 1996. These literatures indicate women's role as the center of Thai households. Thailand is as a matrilineal society where lineage is traced through the female side of the family and property is passed down along the same matriline. The women, and particularly those viewed as mothers, in Thai culture are seen as the linchpin who keep families together, the moral basis for all kinship relationships and the economic and practical source of household survival (Potter, 1977).

Understanding this position of women in the kinship system helps to shed light on the role of the head chef in Thaitime kitchen. According to van Esterik (1996) food is prepared and cooked by women. Thus, playing important role in nutritious activities, residing close to their own relatives and occupying land make women, especially those in mothering roles, in Thai culture have greater power. From this point, I articulate that power in Thaitime kitchens is mainly related to social hierarchy. The chefs speak of '*amnuad,*' which means 'power,' as belonging to the head chefs who are both mother figures and leaders of kitchen staffs. Thus, power can be defined by leadership positioning and domination in decision making.

In the Thaitime kitchens, food plays an integral part in constructing a family unit and a social relationship. The chefs' identities, hierarchical status and power are expressed and negotiated through food. The everyday life of the chefs is run by cooking and eating activities from when they enter the restaurant doors until the end of the day. However, I found that the chefs were faced with two contrasting ways of cooking. On one hand, cooking is perceived as an important part of the career and a representation of professional practices. On the other hand, cooking is a medium of power and a representation of motherhood. I argue that the chefs in the Thaitime kitchens switch between these competing ideas of cooking.

When the chefs cook or prepare the food for customers, they often used the term "*mue are chiph,*" which means "professional," to express their ideology of working at commercial restaurant standards. According to this view, the cooking is perceived as something fixed and there are rigid rules around the cooking process. The chefs have to learn how to cook in a professional kitchen, which requires using kitchen equipment, preparing the ingredients, understanding basic food hygiene and fostering culinary food for British taste preferences. They gradually develop know-how on what to use in the professional kitchen, where the kitchen equipment is well-organized and clearly categorized according to food hygiene regulations. The cutting boards are arranged by color: red for raw red-meat, yellow for raw poultry, tan for cooked food, blue for fish and seafood and green for fruits and vegetables. All of this is new knowledge that Thai chefs have to learn when starting to cook in a kitchen of European standards.

The idea of a professional chef is clearly expressed during the rush-hour that consists of two hours from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m., especially on Friday and Saturday nights. At this time, the moods of the kitchen staff

change and the kitchen atmosphere becomes tense as the chaotic hours approach. The chefs appear to be concentrated on getting their stations ready; the food runners arrange their areas and change the paper in the printers; the starter chefs cook chicken and pork skewers half-way through to save time when the orders come in; wok chefs top-up missing items in the cooking area; dishwashers speedily wash the dishes from lunch-time in order to make space for the new plates about to come; and the head chef walks around the kitchen to check that everything is in order.

When the orders arrive, the food runner reads the ticket loudly. However, the printing is sometimes so loud that everyone in the kitchen can hear it, so the chefs are already aware that an order came in and paid attention to the voice of food runner. After that, the ticket is distributed according to the chefs' responsibilities. During these moments, everyone is on full speed, as there are new orders coming in all the time. At these times, there is less conversation as everyone focuses on running their section effectively. The division of labor in the kitchen is quite strict. The chefs focus on their tasks and strictly follow the restaurant instructions and recipes.

I found that the chefs avoid showing personal emotions when they employed the idea of professionalism in cooking. Both Thaitime kitchens are places where many situations and emotions take place; the chefs shout, laugh, cry, create friendships, gossip about each other and compete for better positions. Although sometimes they have conflicts "backstage" (Goffman, 1956) with one another, their relationships and their actions never get in the way during "show time." This is because the chefs realize that kitchen work requires various degrees of teamwork and cooperation to run a good service. For this reason, they leave personal emotions behind and work as a team. For example, everyone in the kitchen knows that Jai (starter chef) usually works at a slower pace compared with other people on the team. When the food runner asks for the next table, she is still working on previous tables, forcing Rath or Lek to stop what they are doing to come help her.

A different style of seasoning is one thing that distinguishes the two styles of cooking. When cooking professionally for British customers, the chefs season the food in a different way than they do when they cook at home for themselves. Dishes that are served to customers are an adapted version of Thai food that has been modified to suit the preferred tastes of British people. The most famous dishes such as pad thai, green curry with chicken, tom yam kung and som tum have been selected to represent Thai food. However, strongly smelling ingredients commonly used in Thai cuisine have been removed from the restaurant recipes. For example, som tam, also known as spicy papaya salad, is a local dish from the northeast of Thailand that is served worldwide. When cooking for the restaurant staff, the chefs add, raw, salted crab; fermented fish; and fish sauce to the green papaya, chili, tomatoes and local vegetables in a mortar before mixing together the same way they would in Thailand. However, the chefs do not add fermented fish and salted crab in the customers' dishes. Instead, they add sugar to the dish and use less chili, which gives the food a distinctly different taste than that of the conventional version, in order to appeal to the taste preferences of British customers.

In order to maintain restaurant standards and a stability of taste, all curries and stir fry sauces are prepared in advance. Ingredients, such as fish sauce, curry power, palm sugar and coconut milk are weighed on a scale and mixed together according to the restaurant recipes. All chefs of the Thaitime kitchens are trained to cook the food with the same process and are not allowed to invent anything new or change the recipes, as they are signature tastes that were developed by the restaurant owner. Although the food is

prepared and cooked by the chefs, a lack of decision making in cooking tasks make the chefs feel less important. As my wok chef colleague ironically said, “we cook like robots. All we need to do is just put everything in the wok with a spoon of sauce, that’s it.” For this reason, the chefs state that cooking in the food industry is not the same as cooking at home. These cooking conditions prevent the chefs from using any creativity or expressing their emotions through food.

At the same time, cooking is a tool to express power and emotional for the chefs. But this is only performed when the senior chefs comply with the idealistic picture of ‘*mae’* (motherhood) by cooking food for the staff. All staff food is prepared by head chefs Nang and Ple, although it becomes the second chefs’ responsibility when the head chefs take days off or take trips back to Thailand. Sometimes, the head chefs (or second chefs) ask for a helping hand from senior chefs and wok chefs or assigned starter chefs to cook a dish from the starter section. Food for the staff is never left to the junior chefs. As head chef Nang once explained: "there is no recipe that tells you exactly how to cook food for 15 people. In the UK, the ingredients are very expensive. So I cook it myself rather than take a risk and give it to other chefs who might spoil it.” However, other chefs said that they do not like cooking staff food as it is very difficult to make food that satisfies everyone in the restaurant since if something goes wrong, people will complain about it. Thus, if the chefs are not assigned to cook food for the staff, they try to give a helping hand by preparing ingredients and cleaning up afterwards.

The head chefs used the term *“tam dui jai,”* meaning “done from the heart” when discussing their cooking of staff food. In this way, they always cook traditional Thai food and create special dishes outside of the restaurant menu. The taste of the food is spicier and is more fragrant than what is cooked for customers. Sometimes, the head chefs go to nearby markets to buy special ingredients and vegetables or order Thai products from Thai suppliers. In the Thaitime kitchens, staff food helps create a feeling of belonging to a family. When the chefs cook something that is very delicious, other staff usually give the compliment that their dish tastes the same taste as it does in Thailand, thus, demonstrating that the staff meal connects them with a memory of a dish that they used to eat in their hometowns. Eating Thai food abroad draws the chefs back to those memories of cooking and eating with their families, especially when the chefs cook food from the Isan region, where the majority of the chefs are from. In this northeastern region, they prefer to have sticky rice instead of jasmine rice and prefer fermented fish over regular fish sauce. Sticky rice and fermented fish are considered the essence of what it means to be Isan/Lao. It is a common belief within the Thai-Lao community that no matter where they are in the world, sticky rice will always be the glue that holds the Thai-Lao communities together (Lefferts, 2005).

As a motherly figure, head chefs dedicate themselves by cooking tirelessly. According to the Thaitime restaurant rules, their working hours should start from 11 a.m. and allow them a one and half hour break between 3:30 and 5:00 p.m. However, I found the head chefs and second chefs always arrive at the restaurant at 10 a.m. and most of the time they decline to take a break. When I asked the head chefs why they always come early, their explanation was that the restaurant opens to customers at 11:30 a.m but the staff begin their work at 11 a.m. and the 30 minute timeframe for preparation was not enough for the kitchen to be set up in time for them to cook a good lunch for the staff, as both waiters and kitchen staff have a brief lunch together at 11:20 a.m. before the restaurant opens. After the restaurant closes for the lunch break, head chef Nang often spends time in the kitchen cooking dinner for the staff although, sometimes, if the restaurant is not too busy, she might be able to prepare the staff dinner during the working hours, which frees her up to take a break. Although head chefs have to work overtime and don’t

get extra money or other official benefits, they state that their staff meal preparation must be done with *"kwam tem jai,"* meaning "voluntary intention"

In this situation, the chefs view cooking as a time for emotional expression. When the head chefs are in a good mood, they employ great creativity in the cooking process and create the aesthetics of food; playing with recipes and altering them to the preferences of the staff. This gesture indicates the caring for others and allows the chefs to feel a sense of nurturing, as a mother who feed her children. The verb '*liang*' means 'to feed and nourish' and it is often used when referring to this cooking task of the head chefs. In the Thai context, *liang* has two different implications. On one hand, it indicates intimacy in a relationship, as it is also used with reference to breastfeeding by biological mothers. For example, the chefs often speak of their mothers in Thailand by saying "my mother *liang* me with difficulty, as we didn't have much money." On the other hand, *liang* can be understood as a key for negotiating and displaying power and hierarchy. From this perspective, the word emphasizes the active support of people and institutions through the provision of food and sharing in its consumption. As Esterik (1996) explains, in Thailand, village and district heads must be shown capacity to *liang* their supporters in order to achieve and maintain power. Those who fail to do so will quickly lose their supporters and influence. Therefore, a generosity of *liang* with well-cooked foods is a crucial part of leadership, as the provision of food has historically been used by patrons in order to attract and hold onto their clients.

Similar to kitchen spaces, the provision of food is both an action of love and caring as well as an attempt to maintain power relations. The head chefs appropriate the term *"mae,"* "mother," to maintain power and leadership positions through their ability to cook food to support many clients (staff). This relationship is largely defined by the giving and receiving of food and nurturing which creates reciprocal obligations in term of *bun khun,* the concept of gratitude and which was discussed earlier in this paper.

Power relations and negotiations can be observed during all parts of cooking and eating activities and can present themselves in various situations to varying degrees. My first encounter with this occurred about one month after I started my fieldwork. The problem arose when the assistant manager rushed to the kitchen to remake a dish that had been made incorrectly. The chefs were in the process of cooking food for another table and the second chef (who was in charge) refused to change the queue. After a long period of waiting, the customers were very upset and almost walked out of the restaurant. That night, the assistant manager came to the kitchen and had an argument with the chef, causing tension between the two floors. For an entire week after that, the two floors ate separately. During that time, the head chef cooked good quality food items for kitchen staff to eat but she made pad thai noodles, thai omelets and stir fried chicken for every single wait staff meal; both pad thai noodles and thai omelets are perceived as something very boring and basic. During that week, the wait staff made a quiet murmur of disappointment whenever they saw these foods on the table.

There is the difference between cooking as part of a duty and cooking with love and care. In this situation, the head chef, Nang, and second chef said they were obligated to cook for wait staff because it was their job. However, there was no effective tie between mother and children expressed during the cooking process. During this conflict, the other chefs gave their support to the head chef and second chef, even though this caused damage to their relationship with the restaurant manager, who has much authority in the restaurant. The chefs told me that they supported the head chef because they have to *'tob thaen bun khun'* or 'reciprocate kindness' when there is an opportunity. Previous provision of food was considered

the main cause of *'bun kun'*, as they hold the belief that food becomes blood and is what makes a person alive. The chefs also explained they felt the action of wait staff was not respectful and demonstrated ungratefulness to the head chef, which they considered to be bad karma which would produce bad effects in their lives. After a while, most of wait staff became gradually obedient to the head chef and many of them went to the kitchen to apologize. The relationship between two floors returned back to normal after the restaurant owner came to mediate this conflict. Through this exchange, it is possible to see that the Thai value of "*bun khun*" influenced the way of thinking toward the motherly figure and the head chefs were empowered through this value.

In many cases, I witnessed food as an important tool to express power and reflect the emotion of the person who cooks it. As the staff have been working together for a long time, they all know each other's favorite dishes. While the head chefs are expected to cook food that makes everyone satisfied, in many instances the head chef rejects or challenges this expectation. The political agenda can be observed in the menu selection. Sometimes, the head chef selects the menu to satisfy the preferences of a particular person, such as the restaurant manager, or her favorite person. Personal conflicts are also expressed through food. If a conflict occurs between the head chefs and another person, the chefs tend to ignore the preferences of that person, or in the worst cases, cook something that the person dislikes.

Through these examples, it can be seen that motherhood, food and power are deeply intertwined. I argue that appropriating the concept of motherhood and playing with gender roles allow the head chefs to successfully maintain relations with other chefs and establish a family. In the Thaitime kitchens, this feeling of relatedness can be achieved through the practice of sharing food that is cooked from the same pot while rice is believed to become blood. Thus, the sharing of these food items from the same source are believed to be creating kinship ties. This point will be explored further in the next section.

## 4.4 Sharing Food and Nurturing Kinship

At the Thaitime restaurants, wait staff are responsible for setting the tables for staff dinner. They place cutlery together with dinning napkins and a glasses of water on the table for everyone who works the shift. For lunch, head chefs often cook one pot meals such as stir-fried noodles or fried rice, as these do not take long to prepare. One big tray of food is put in the middle of the table and it is surrounded by individual plates that belong to each person present. When everything is ready, all the staff show up in the front of the restaurant and have their lunch together. Normally, the chefs do not spend much time for lunch; they eat quickly and leave the table to return to work before the waiters have finished the meal.

The dinner is the proper meal of the day, where all staff can spend time enjoying their food together. From 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. every night, the staff eat together and have an opportunity to chat in a more relaxed atmosphere during the evening meeting time. At dinner time, the table setting is different from lunch time, as various foods are put in the middle to be shared. Empty plates are placed around the table equal to the number of the restaurant staff present and all the food is sent by the elevator to the dining area, where wait staff take it to the table. The most important part of the dinner is the "*khao,*" (steamed white rice) which is eaten together with "*kab khao*" (side dishes). The rice is brought up in separate large bowls and placed on the side of the table while the side dishes are placed in the center. Head chefs usually cook four or five side dishes which include one stir-fry dish, one deep fry, one soup and one salad. When everyone has sat down at their places, the junior wait staff usually stand up to serve the rice to everyone at the table.

During the dinner, both junior chefs and waiters show their enthusiasm to the senior staff, and especially to the head chef. Doing this is a way to show kindness to the chefs who made their dinner. The dinner begins once everyone has a full plate of rice in front of them. To be polite, junior staff wait until the head chef or restaurant manager takes the first portion from one of the side dishes and then everyone else begins to serve themselves. Rice is eaten by mixing it with a bit of a side dish by the spoonful.

I found that, the concept of '*nam-jai*' is clearly expressed during this period. There is no exact translation for the word '*nam-jai*' in English. However, the words 'hospitality' and 'kindness' are close approximates. The chefs use the word '*nam-jai*' as a compliment for helpful actions that come straight from the heart. It is an important concept that encourages the chefs to sacrifice themselves and express a sense of caring to the others. In these settings, there were expressions of '*nam-jai*' in the way that people served each other food. During dinner, the dishes were passed around to everyone around the table. If someone found a dish particularly delicious, they said it out loud and passed the dish to other people to try it as well. As another example, if the rice on someone's plate was running low, people nearby would ask if they could fill it up for them.

In the Thaitime kitchens, familyhood can be constructed through the practice of sharing food and nurturing each other which can cause the feeling of relatedness. My argument that kinship is established through the provision of food, has connection with the anthropological concept of nurture kinship. The prominent scholars of this idea, such as Schneider (1984) and Strathern (1973), asset that kinship systems and family units are a cultural construct, rather than a self-evident natural fact. Holland (2012) supported this point by stating in his book *Social Bonding and Nurture Kinship* that it is the performance of care which is the most significant factor in mediating social bonds and collecting family members together, rather than blood ties.

There are several ethnographic records supporting this argument. *The heat of the hearth: the process of kinship in a Malay fishing community* of Carsten (1997) shows that, in the Malay culture, eating and cooking food from the same hearth makes individuals define themselves as living in the same family. According to Carsten, the hearth "produces blood and regulates its flow, thereby ensuring reproduction" (p. 128). It can make strangers become family members and make family members turn into strangers as well. Similarly, in *No substance, no kinship? Procreation, Performativity and Temanambondro parent/child relations,* Thomas (1999) points outs that in the culture of Madagascar, giving birth has no connection with parenthood. In contrast, parent status is acquired by the act of nurturing. It is very common to find that a person who nurtures the child is not the same person who gives birth. Thus, the father, mother and children relationship is a performance which relates to everyday practices of work and consumption, of feeding and farming (Thomas 1999, p 37).

The same condition exists in the Thaitime kitchen where family relationships are constructed though everyday practices of sharing food. In the Thaitime kitchens, there are two rice cookers located in the center of the kitchen. They are commercial sized and can cook portions for 50-60 people. All staff in the restaurant eat *khao* (rice) from the same rice cooker together, with a side dish which is cooked by the head chef. While *khao* is believed to become flesh and blood, sharing *khao* from the same origin can be seen as sharing blood or being kin. There is a Thai proverb that says *"kin khao moa diew kan"* which literally translates to "eat rice from the same pot," thus suggesting that those who share rice from the same pot are considered as being kin and should not hurt or compete against each other.

Sharing food can make strangers become family (Carsten,1997), as seen in the example of Tim. When I stated my fieldwork in May 2017, one of the chefs was forced to leave her position due to her visa issues. This occurred at the same time that Tim applied for a job at the Thaitime restaurant chain and started working in the Wandsworth branch. Tim is an experienced chef who knows to cook in a proper way, including using kitchen equipment, preparing the ingredients and understanding basic food hygiene. According to a restaurant rule, new chefs have to pass a trial period of three weeks to prove that they are qualified for the position and have the ability to be part of the team. However, I found that even though new chefs might be able to cook according to restaurant standards, they will not incorporate into Thaitime's family until they have passed the process of feeding and sharing substance. On the first day, Tim entered the kitchen and the restaurant manager introduced Tim to the other chefs. After her work was assigned, she quietly cut vegetables alone in a corner. She called the head chef "*pii"* (big sister), while the other chefs the same age called Nang "*mae*" (mother,) which reflects more intimacy among them. During the beginning period, only formal relationships existed among Tim and other chefs. However, a deepening of relationships was developed through the daily sharing of meals. Tim is a from Khon Kaen, which one of the four major cities in the northeastern region of Isan. Because of her background, Tim enjoys Isan food, which typically contain '*plaadaek,'* a traditional Lao fermented fish sauce. While most of wait staffs from Bangkok avoid the food which contains *plaadaek,* as it has a strong smell, the chefs from Isan make references to *plaadaek* as a part of ethnic group identity. During the meals, head chef Nang would intentionally pass Isan foods around to the chefs; they would each take some and then hand it to the next person. I noticed that the restaurant staffs who cannot eat *plaadaek* were excluded from this circle. Once the Isan foods were passed to Tim, she tasted the foods and gave a compliment to Nang in the Isan dialect. This situation helped Tim to socialize as part of the group, as food is a medium for sharing, for distributing and for giving within a group. Moreover, by sharing *khao* (rice) with other staff, Tim came to be considered as part of the *kropkrua* (family). As I mentioned earlier, *khao* is believed to become flesh and blood, so sharing *khao* can be seen as sharing blood or being kin. The head chefs who produce foods ensure that everyone receives all they need in order to remain healthy, which can be compared to mothers who feed their children. Mothers nurture children before birth, after birth by the provision of their milk and lastly by providing rice (Esterik 1996). This provision of rice repeatedly from the same woman implies that the chefs share the same blood from the same mother, and consequently consider themselves to have become related. Thus, the function of such meals is to invite newcomers into a *kropkrua* (family). Shortly after, I noticed that Tim had begun to call Nang '*mae'* and was offered official employment as a Thaitime wok chef.

I would argue that this sharing of food (especially Thai food) breaks down barriers, helps people connect with each other and creates kinship relations. In Thaitime restaurant, people can feel excluded if they are not able to join eating activities. The dishwashers from Brazil are the good example of this. Although they work in the Thaitime kitchen every day, they usually bring their own Brazilian food and eat separately near their workstation. Thus, they are not considered as part of the family. When compared to wait staff, although many of them do not prefer Isan food, they still share rice, which makes them feel connected.

## 4.5 Spirits in the Kitchen

When someone opens the restaurant door, they will see a Buddha statue, a picture of the previous king of Thailand and a stack of household divinities or adaptations of shrines. The front of the Buddha statues and the shrines is usually decorated with flowers. Small bowls of food, fruits and glasses filled with red liquid

are placed around these sacred objects. On one hand, the restaurants are decorated in ways that emphasize Thai culture and create a Thai feeling atmosphere. On the other hand, there is a belief that spirits are everywhere and might cause trouble to tenants if they are not provided a proper place to dwell. To address this concern, the restaurant owner gave a shelter to the spirits so they can live separate in their own area and bring luck and fortune to the tenants, if properly revered.

A shelter to the spirits at the Wimbledon branch

The availability of sacred objects reflects the blending of superstitions and Buddhist beliefs. Although all the chefs are Buddhists, they also believe in "*phi*," which means "ghosts or spirits," and devote as much time to worshiping them as they do practicing Buddhism. I found that the chefs did not perceive Buddha or King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) as *phi*. On the contrary, the chefs worship Buddha and King Chulalongkorn as gods. They believe in Buddha and King Chulalongkorn's goodness and ability to bring good fortune. However, the word *phi* is used to define the spirits in lower positions, such as the ghosts of women who died during childbirth, stillborn children, those who perished but didn't receive a proper burial, etc.

Knowledge of spirits has been passed down in Thai folklore. The chefs explained each spirit in relation to narratives they heard from their parents and grandparents since they were in Thailand and tried to repeat this act of worship as similarly as they did in Thailand. Every morning, small portions of rice, fruit or Thai desserts are prepared by the head chef and offered to Buddha, King Chulalongkorn's spirit and the *phi*.

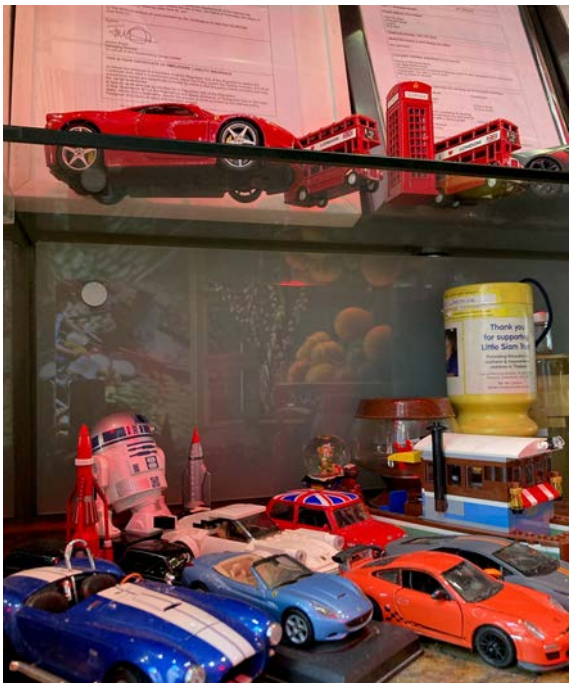
While Buddha and King Chulalongkorn's spirits are perceived in terms of goodness, I found *phi* are seen as being connected with black magic and miracles. They can be kind, dangerous or mischievous. Thus, the chefs put a great effort into pleasing the *phi* and trying not to upset them. During the new year of 2018, the Wimbledon branch was quite busy and a lot of accidents occurred during this period, including an oil leak from the deep-frying machine, a chef getting a skin burn on a hot wok and someone slipping on the floor. After going through a difficult day, the head chef said, "tomorrow I will buy a flower for the *phi*. It has been a while since we last thought of them…so they have forgotten to protect us." There are many situations that the chefs chalked up to be related to the *phi*. For example, sometimes the chefs might forget to turn off the gas, water or deep-frying machinesm which is quite risky and can cause a lot of danger. When the chefs are about to leave the restaurant, there are sometimes noises or strange circumstances that make the chefs go back into the kitchen to check what they have forgotten to do. In these cases, the chefs told me that it was the spirits who helped them protect the restaurant.

The chefs feel closely connected with *phi* and explain strange situations in the kitchen in relation with these spirits. According to the stories from the chefs, there are various types of *phi* in the Thaitime restaurants, including spirits that move around in the restaurant building and those who inhabit objects. Each spirit has its own role and character and the chefs can identify which one they are in contact with.

In this section, I will explore how this belief system becomes a tool to access power in the kitchen spaces. I found that the head chefs, Nang and Ple, have an important role as a leaders who arrange rituals and communicate with spirits. An example of a ritual that I observed was called *"liang* Kuman Thong*,"* which means "to raise a child ghost." In the Wansworth branch, I found that the chefs feel familiar with Kuman Thong, a child ghost who died while still in its mother's womb. A witch doctor kept the stillborn infant's body and spirit and then passed these to someone who wanted to adopt it as their child. The chefs in Wandsworth told me that Kuman Thong was brought to the restaurant by the first restaurant manager. Kuman Thong was perceived as a child who played around the restaurant area and most of the chefs believe in the existence and presence of Kuman Thong. The sound of ankle bracelets and a child's laughter are explained as the doing of Kuman Thong. When objects drop on the floor without reason, when the kitchen door opens or closes on its own or if there is a mysterious shadow passing the porthole window, the chefs say "don't be afraid, he just wants to play with us."

The head chef has a primary role in presenting the offerings and being a spiritual leader in the offering of food. This implies a position of the head chef as a mother of children in the human world as well as the spiritual world. In this way, Kuman Thong is also one of the children that the head chef nutures.

The common practice of raising a child ghost is offering them toys and sweetmeats, such as soft drinks, Thai desserts, candy, or cookies. Red liquid is Kuman Thong's favorite. Head chef Nang, therefore, usually provides cranberry juice or Hale's Blue Boy syrup, a kind of sweetened beverage made with red artificial coloring and flavoring. The red color symbolizes blood and it replaces animal sacrifice, which was once performed very often. The chefs told me that strawberry Fanta is a more popular choice in Thailand, but in the restaurant the staff tried to find something that was available on hand and so they decided to use cranberry juice or Hale's Blue Boy syrup.



Toy offerings for Kuman Thong

In everyday routines, offering food is the head chef's responsibility. So when the head chef arrives at the restaurant, she puts sweetmeat on the shrine and has a conversation with Kuman Thong in order to invite him to take some of the offering. Due to this action, the chefs believe that Kuman Thong, will be satisfied and protect the restaurant from danger. However, other chefs might decide to join the ritual and make their own offering if they are believed to have received a favor from Kuman Thong. Nu (wok chef) had one such experience. One day she arrived at work in the early morning to clean the hood over the main cooking area. Nu climbed a ladder until she reached the ceiling and then she fell. Although it was a high distance from the top of the ladder to the floor, Nu wasn't hurt or injured at all. She told the other chefs that when her body hit the floor, she felt like the floor was as soft as a cotton bed. Nu believes it was Kuman Thong who protected her from getting hurt. In order to express her gratitude, Nu went to the supermarket and bought cookies for Kuman Thong. She then placed cookies on the shrine, next to the other offerings, and thanked him for saving her.

Kuman Thong and the other spirits are regarded as sacred beings that can bring good fortune, protect the restaurant and eliminate suffering. This belief has led the chefs to make vows and perform rituals which the chefs call '*kae bon.*' When the chefs face problems that they cannot solve, such as illnesses and financial problems or issues with their visas, they ask for a favor from Kuman Thong and promise to return the favor by showing gratitude. When performing these rituals, the chefs go to the shrines and '*wai*', pressing the palms of their hands together while slightly bowing their heads as a form of respect. They usually close their eyes and state their needs in their minds. After that, the offerings, which can be either material or non-material, must be identified. These methods of fulfilling vows depend on the requests made by the individual. In most cases, vows are fulfilled by offering a special toy or food such as toasted duck, crispy pork belly or traditional Thai desserts, because these are convenient. This offering could be made by the chef or be bought from other Asian restaurants. The chefs use a variety of methods to fulfill the vows. Some chefs might promise to observe the precepts or refrain from eating meat in

particular periods in order to dedicate merit to the spirits. However, all methods have the same purpose: to pay back the spirits who helped them and their families to achieve what they have wished for.

During the period that I conducted my research in the Thaitime kitchens, I experienced that when the chefs faced financial problems, they usually made a vow to win lotto. For example, in June 2018, I saw that Tang (starter chef) was experiencing financial problems. In that period, she came to work with an anxious expression on her face and tried to borrow money from other colleagues. However, according to her unreliable credit, no one accepted her requests. Tang told me that her father took a mortgage on their house in order to have money to open a grocery store in front of the house. However, the business was not bringing enough benefit to cover the debt and the overdraft was increasing every day and she had nearly lost her house as a result. Tang bought about ten lottery tickets and made a vow with Kuman Thong. She said that if she won the lottery, she would reciprocate this good fortune with a model house and a number of toys. Three days later, everyone was surprised to see that Tang won 5,000 pounds from her lottery ticket and came to work with a large number of toys. Fulfillment of a vow is taken seriously and disregarding the commitment might bring disaster to someone's life. For example, one time, Rath (food runner) told everyone that she was having a bad dream quite often. In her dream, there was a big crocodile trying to attack her. After listening to Rath's story, Fah (wok chef), who is interested in omens, said there was a risk of danger because Rath did not fulfill her vow within the timeline that she promised. Fah searched on Google and found out that there is a Thai belief that crocodile symbolize a need to fulfill a vow to the spirits.

The chefs believe that Kuman Thong is head chef Nang's child. In the same way, Nang has been protected by Kuman Thong. Disrespecting her could upset Kuman Thong and it is believed that this could cause destruction. On many occasions, I found that an accident had occurred after one of the chefs had an argument with Nang. The chefs believed these accidents were the intention of Kuman Thong.

Another spirit that has an important role in both restaurants' kitchens is Mae Phosop or "mother of rice." Most of the chefs grew up in peasant families and are therefore familiar with Mae Phosop and were taught to pay respect to rice. The chefs believe that there is a goddess of rice who guards the rice plants to make them grow well. As Jackson (2011) explains, in Thailand, there are various rituals that reflect the farmers' deep respect and gratitude to Mae Phosop at every stage of rice production, from preparing the land to seeing the leaf tips appear at the time of harvesting. Every single grain of rice contains the spirit of Mae Phosop and should not be left to waste. Thus, the chefs who are older than 40 years of age such as Jai, Mai, Armon said it is bad karma to throw away cooked rice as it might enrage the spirit of Mae Phosop. When the restaurant staff eat together, they try to finish all the rice on their plate. In case someone fails to do that, they might *wai* (put their hands in the position of obeisance), in order to show their respect and apologize for the leftovers. Each day, leftover rice from the Thaitime restaurants was kept in the fridge and re-used for the staff lunch the following day. I also observed that the chefs treated raw rice with respect. They avoided stepping over the rice bags and tried not to drop the rice grains on the floor. In order to create a sense of 'authentic' dining experience, the Thaitime restaurants particularly use Thai jasmine rice which is grown in and imported from Thailand. Thus, the rice is deeply intertwined with a number of myths, rituals and superstitions.

On many occasions, I found that accidents in the kitchen or a chef's illness was explained as a punishment by Mae Phosop. The spirits are believed to inflict illnesses and misfortune upon individuals

who do not respect them or who conduct inappropriate actions, such as in the following case of Pat. Pat is 32 years old and had just moved from Bangkok to London about four months previously. Since I met her, Pat has suffered from stomach problems which made her get stomachaches after eating. When Pat started working as a part-time kitchen helper, she usually sat on top of rice bags while peeling garlic in the storage room. No one noticed her action, until one day the head chef walked into the storage room to check the stock. Apart from blaming her for being lazy, she was told that sitting on the rice is a violation of the Mae Phosop spirit and this behavior might be the cause of her stomach problems. She was told that Mae Phosop might be angry and preventing her from eating rice. Ignoring the messages of the spirits was also identified as a primary explanation of bad luck and accidents. If the accidents or illnesses were believed to be a result of a minor mistreatment, the chefs solved the problem by stopping those actions. However, if the chefs felt it was a more serious matter, they would light incense sticks, make an offering and invite the spirits to accept an apology. Although not all the chefs strongly believe in superstition, they do follow the directions of others and never violate the social norm. As they said, "do not believe but do not violate," which means it is more secure to sacrifice and respect the spirits rather than suffer the consequences, in case the spirits truly exist.

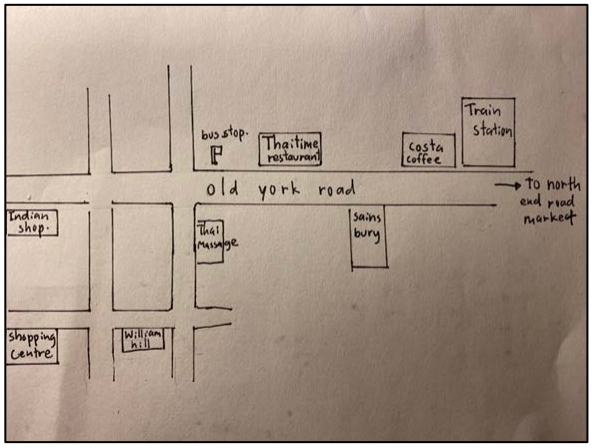
Mae Phosop is addressed by the title of '*mae*,' the same word for "mother" that restaurant staff use for the head chef. In Thailand, this word is also used as the title of other female spirits of high level such as Mae Ya Nang (mother goddess of boat), Mae Thorani (the mother of Earth) and Mae Khonhkha (the mother of river). From this point, it can be seen that women, especially '*mae*' (mother), are sacred and are believed to possess extraordinary powers. The head chefs, thus, are treated with respect and are regarded as a person who engages with the world of the spirits. Apart from that, their duty to cook rice for everyone in the restaurant causes them to be perceived as close to Mae Phosop. Inappropriate behavioral conduct towards the head chefs is considered as bad karma and might prevent the actor from future prosperity. For example, one time chef Pui had argument with head chef Ple. She was very angry and spoke badly to her. Over the next few days, other chefs went to Pui and explained that "it is a bad karma to yell at *mae* because of her role in cooking and nursing us." When Pui calmed down, she brought a Thai flower garland as an offering to head chef Ple. Pui put her hands in the position of obeisance to *wai* and apologize. Chef Ple took the flower garland, indicating acceptance of the apology. This action can draw a parallel with the ritual that the chefs conduct to the spirits when they are mistreated. This reflects the association of belief systems, motherhood and power, as the chefs believe that those who have mother status receive extraordinary powers.

To conclude, the belief in *phi* has stood the test of territory and is integrated as an important part of Thai culture among the chefs living in the UK. Although the chefs may not adhere to rituals as strictly as they would in Thailand, they still hold onto the beliefs that have been passed down from their families in Thailand and the senior chefs. This belief in the spiritual world provides moral support, encouragement and explanation when the chefs are in trouble. It directly and indirectly helps them confront several situations in their work lives such as creating a prosperous restaurant business, preventing accidents that might happen and helping the chefs when they experience personal problems. Moreover, the worship of mothers in Thai belief systems makes the head chefs, who are the mothers of the kitchen, have a higher position than others. Head chefs are associated with the world of spirits and play a primary role in spiritual rituals. Thus, they gain the respect of other chefs and hold the power in the kitchen areas.

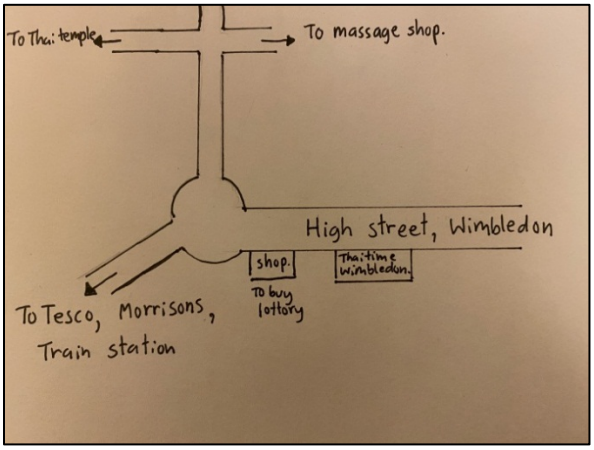
# Chapter 5 - The World Outside the Kitchen

The previous chapter described the chefs' daily lives in dealing with the kitchen surroundings. This chapter concentrates on the environment outside their kitchen. The chefs' lives are situated both inside and outside of their workspaces, but the dynamics within these two spaces share some notable similarities and differences. Even though their current livelihoods are primarily spent in the UK, their personal connections are deeply rooted in Thai society, the country where they are originally from. Thaitime kitchens are seen as a combination of Thai social structures and cultural operations that the chefs are familiar with. But when the chefs leave the kitchen, they continue to reach out to those places that hold cultural and emotional connections to their homeland. The relationship between chefs and the places they regularly visit is explored in this chapter, as is a discussion on how visiting these places can help the chefs maintain their Thai roots and culture while living in the UK.

The result from the data collection indicated that chefs rarely travel more than one and a half miles from the Thaitime Restaurant nor visit places that are unfamiliar to them. The majority of visits are often centered around their accommodations, the Thai Temple, ethnic grocery shops, the Thai massage shops and the betting shops. These maps below provide a view of the places that chefs frequently visit during their free time. When immigrants establish themselves in a new place, they usually develop a sense of identity and belonging to perceive new places with specific social meanings (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). These places are not only a physical setting but are rather replete with symbolic meanings, emotional attachments and feelings that individuals hold about a given setting (Cuba and Hummon 1993). In addition, I found the chefs often share fond memories and project cultural importance upon the places they frequently visit in Wandsworth and Wimbledon. Thus, I will explore the relationship between chefs and places they regularly visit and discuss how visiting these places can help the chefs maintain their Thai roots and culture while living in the UK.




Picture 1 Thaitime Wandsworth and the surrounding area




Picture 2 Thaitime Wimbledon and the surrounding area

The concept of 'transnationalism' is applied to understand social connectivity across borders in this phenomenon (Robinson 2007). The term "transnational space" was introduced to the anthropological field during late-20th-century, responding to the global economic restructuring, migratory flows and deterritorialization (Low, 2009). Transnationalism was often expanded into various sub-concepts such as transnational migration, transnational communities and transnational spaces, which are all helpful when it

comes to the understanding of the relationship between the chefs and their surrounding places. For example, the studies from Appadurai (1988), Rosaldo (1988), Feld and Basso (1996), Gupta and Ferguson (1997), represent a growing body of anthropological scholarship that seeks to account for the remarkably social and cultural features of places. According to this view, social and cultural spaces are no longer fixed within national boundaries but they can "extend over several and distinct geographic spaces" (Pries and Sezgin, 2012: 26). The idea of a transnational space is utilized in this context to underline the reasons chefs maintain their ties to Thai culture, even when Thailand and their country of settlement are so geographically distant.

Futhermore, it is found that the chefs (as well as many other Thai migrants) often live within large groups, composed of other Thai individuals who work in Thai restaurants. They regularly visit the same places and share cultural values. The following section offers examinations of the chefs' experiences towards various physical places and the establishment of the chefs' transnational space sharing with other Thai migrants in the UK.

## 5.1 Accommodation

There are two categories of the chefs' accommodation. The first is one provided by the restaurant owner and the second is private accommodations. Within these two categories, the chefs manifest different emotional and affective relationships towards their living spaces. In this section, I begin by describing the contrast between these accommodations and then discuss accomodations through the Thai concept of "*baan,*" which means "house" or "home."

### The staff accommodations

The staff accommodations are located on the second and third floors of the restaurant in the Wandsworth branch. There are no accommodations in the Wimbledon branch since the upper floor of the building was renovated and used for the office. Therefore, the chefs who work in Wimbledon must take a bus to Wandsworth, which takes 25 minutes. The accommodations for staff are limited and overcrowded, and bedrooms are sometimes shared by two people. The tenants are a mixture of the chefs and wait staff who work at Thaitime. During the time I conducted my research, there were nine chefs living in this space and most of these were newly arrived and had an insufficient budget to rent a shared private flat.

The staff accommodations have basic facilities, including a microwave, stove, fridge, freezer, toilet, bathroom and washing machine. The accommodations are not only a place for the chefs and waitresses to relax but are also an important area for socializing. Saturday nights are regularly spent drinking beer with colleagues, as the restaurant is not open on Sunday mornings. Although the accommodations are not very spacious, all the Thaitime colleagues would often sit together in Pim's (wok chef) bedroom, watch Thai dramas and play cards together. At these times, the kitchen would be transformed into a more social environment rather than functional living space, since tenants would usually bring food with them from the restaurant back to the flat which could simply be reheated in the microwave. Tenants who worked at different branches would share their food and stories and socialize together.

During their stay, tenants must follow several rules of the house. For one, the restaurant owner prevents tenants from changing the room layout or the decorations of the room with permanent furniture. There is also a piece of paper showing house rules on permanent furniture in the common areas, such as kitchen

and bathroom, and informing the tenants to tidy up the area after use. Accommodation are regularly checked (at least once a month) by either the owner or occasionally by the restaurant manager.

The living space has eight bedrooms. The entrance of the room through the door is followed by the small bedrooms with simple layouts. There are no televisions, bookshelves, writing tables or unnecessary furniture items. Only a bed and wardrobe are arranged in the room. Chef Fah's room, for example, has a single bed right by the door. There is a mirror hanging on the wall above a small bedside table and a black wardrobe next to that. I can find only a few things showing the identity of the occupant, which include a small photo of Fah's family on the bedside table and rabbit doll on top of the bed. The chefs told me that all room accessories, such as a pillows, blankets, bed sheets, duvet covers and clothes hangers belonged to the previous tenant; it's common for tenants to leave these things behind when they move out. In this way, the occupants have few opportunities to express their stories and identity via material objects. While collecting and displaying material objects can play a significant role in developing a sense of belonging, I found that the live-in chefs avoided engaging in these activities. For example, Chef Praw said, "I do not feel comfortable because I cannot do what I want. If this really was my own room, I would decorate it in my own style." Chef Ying also said, "every day I open the wardrobe carefully with a fear of breaking it. I want to hang my favorite picture on the wall, but I am too afraid to damage the walls."

Some chefs prefer living in the restaurant accommodations because it enables them to increase their savings, as live-in staff do not need to pay rent. Instead, they pay only 20 British Pounds to cover the electricity bill each week and the chefs do not need to spend money for their travel expenses to work. However, this situation makes the chefs have less power because they are reliant on the restaurant owner. Living in free accommodations creates a feeling of indebtedness among the chefs, where they feel they should work harder in order to return this gratitude.

Tenant selection is based on the preferences of the restaurant owner. Generally, selected tenants are hardworking, share a positive attitude towards the restaurant and have a good relationship with the owner. The owner gives priority to the chefs who have full-time status, as they are considered the most important workers of the kitchen. During the second week of my employment, one of the kitchen staff members was leaving the job for another restaurant. Once their room available, chefs started guessing who is going to be the person to get an offer from the owner. Unsurprisingly, chef Ying was the one who moved in, since she had been one of the best kitchen staff with a good performance during the past year. Ying is an example of what a good chef should be: tolerant of hard work, well-organized and very polite to the owner and other colleagues.

Although the accommodations are highly competitive and lack freedom, staff accommodations are a desired choice for those who are new to the UK and especially those who have work permit visas. The chefs in this group have strong intentions to earn and save as much money as they can. Living in staff accommodations is an important strategy to be able to save money to send back to their family in Thailand. Once the chefs spend several years working and living in the restaurant accommodations, and they have achieved their goals of improving their families' standards of living, many of them move out to private accommodation as soon as they can manage the expenses.

Due to live-in accommodations being limited in terms of privacy and spaces, this type of accommodation is not suitable for those who have partners and/or children. I found that the chefs usually stay in staff accommodations for a particular period of time and move out when they have partners and want to start

their own family life. For these reasons, the accommodation is a dynamic space where tenants move in and out quite often. Most of the chefs spend around one or two years in staff accommodations. Sometimes, the chefs are pressured by the restaurant owner to consider moving out, like if the chefs have a conflict with the owner or if there is someone who has better performance and is therefore more suitable for accommodation benefits. As an example, take Chef Prew's example. She used to work six days per week and lived in the restaurant accommodations. However, since Prew found out that her husband had a secret relationship with another woman, she became absent from the kitchen many times without advance notice, which affected her working performance for many months. When the owner discovered this problem, she asked Prew to move out and give the room to a new chef. This dynamic contributes to a sense of insecurity among live-in chefs and these conditions make it difficult for them to develop a sense of belonging in their accommodations.

**Private accommodation**

There are twelve chefs who own or rent private properties in neighboring areas like Putney, Fulham, Tooting and Colliers Wood. However, I found that many of these chefs, including head chef Nang, second chef Lek, Jung, Mai, Pui and Tang live in "Penguin Village," in the Southfield area. According to the chefs' explanations, the name "Penguin Village" was given by local residents who saw groups of Thai people walking uphill to work in the morning and felt this resembled penguins walking. The convenience of a 20-minute commute to both Thaitime restaurants and the existence of a strong Thai community network has attracted many chefs to this area. Tang (wok chef) told me that about 20 years ago, "Penguin village" was more affordable, which enabled some people in the first generation of Thai chefs to purchase houses in areas close to each other. However, nowadays, prices have increased, which makes it less affordable for them. Thus, those wishing to live in this area must rent a floor of a house from the previous generation of chefs who worked to save money for more than 15 years. The earlier migrants are now likely to be in their 50s and have reached the top of their chef careers. Most of them are head chefs of big restaurant chains such as Thai square, Bussaba eat Thai and Thaitime restaurant. In many cases, I found that the chefs who rent spaces get access to those spaces through connections from relatives or hometowns with the house owner. Head chef Nang, for example, lives in her sister-in-law's house and has a relative who lives the same neighborhood.

All houses in "Penguin Village" have the same layout. Each house has two floors with a family living on each floor and shared living spaces, a bathroom and a kitchen. Although most who live there are not the property owner, they typically rent the house for an extended period of time. Second chef Lek has been living in "Penguin village" for eight years, for example, while Jung, Mai, and Pui have been there for about five or six years. Pui is the only one who bought her house, which she did with her husband, who has a stable job. Head chef Nang has been living in "Penguin Village" for the shortest period, since she moved from London four years ago.

Since chefs tend to occupy these homes for long periods, they can invest in home furniture, which reflects their identity. As chef Pui said, "I bought my own house six years ago. I'm much happier than I was at the in live-in accommodations. You can have more control over a place you live, which I very much prefer." This enables chefs to recreate an environment they are familiar with from their homeland. For example, Pui's home furnishings are predominantly wooden which reminds her of her family-run wood factory in Thailand. I noticed that most chefs prefer wooden furniture rather than other materials, which is because

their houses and furniture in Thailand are mostly made of wood. Traditional Thai houses are adapted to their environment and so the use of wood and bamboo reflects the forests that provided these materials ubiquitously.

Every house has its own place for an altar with the Buddha image, which is placed in the highest point of the house. Having Buddha statues in a house is believed to bring peace and happiness to family members. Each bedroom reflects the preference of the occupant, as chef Lek's room has big posters of her favorite Thai folk song singer on the walls. Chef Mai decorated her room with pink wallpaper and a dressing table because she is fashionable and likes wearing make-up.

Backyard gardens are used for planting Thai vegetables such as bird's eye chili, holy basil, morning glory and lemongrass. The chef who own houses generally spend time in their gardens at least two twice per week, watering the plants and pulling out the weeds. The garden becomes an important source of fresh ingredients which, in turn, creates transnational spaces where plants and knowledge travel across borders. I make special note of the knowledge here because the chefs rely on their previous experience of planting particular vegetables from Thailand or they call their family in Thailand to request advice about plants they are unfamiliar with gardening. As chef Mai said: "I brought some plant seeds from my aunt's garden when I visited Thailand last year and I planted them in the plot. Since then, I give her a call every time I don't know how to prune the branches or want to know why my plants do not produce fruit."

Pictures of home-grown vegetables

The chefs usually buy vegetable seeds from their hometowns to plant them in their gardens in the UK. In this way, they connect with their agricultural background and evoke memories of the place where the seeds came from. For example, many chefs told me that it is their intention to create a backyard garden in the UK as an adaptation of the garden space in their Thai home. Thus, the gardens are particular spaces that serve to create and maintain links to home.

Home grown vegetables are used by household members and also distributed to other Thai residents in the village. By the exchange of these vegetables, the relationships between the houses are strengthened. It can be noticed that the chefs who are close friend frequently make this kind of exchange.

All the chefs' houses that I have had a chance to visit have the same house plan. The open-plan kitchen, which integrates with a living and dining room, allows for many household activities to take place in the

same area. The dining table for 4-6 people allows small groups to sit together, enjoy meals and play cards. At "Penguin village," food is cooked and served in Thai style with large side dishes designed for sharing. The kitchens are fully fitted with the equipment and utensils you would expect to find in a contemporary Thai kitchen, such as a mortar and pestle, rice cooker and steamer. Tenants keep the kitchen stocked with traditional Thai condiments and fresh produce, which is shared between them. The foods tend to be cooked in a large pot and left on the stove for easy accessibility of other people in the house. Thus, there is a sense of sharing, even as household members might eat at different times. "Have you had food yet?" is one of the common phrases for household members to greet each other to invite the sharing of food.

The chefs from different household do not eat together, unless it is for a special occasion, such as birthday parties, New Year's Day (for both the Thai solar calendar and for the Gregorian calendar) and celebrations when someone receives a British passport. In these events, Thai residents in "Penguin village" are invited to participate and bringing Thai food from their house to share.

**The concept of 'baan' and 'baan pak'**

In order to understand the importance placed on accommodation culturally, I use the Thai concept of '*baan*' and '*baan pak,*' which I found are concepts that contrast similarly to the difference between 'house' and 'home.' In English, 'house' mainly relates to "physical structures in streets and neighborhoods, which mainly takes its shape through the practices of planners, architects, craftspeople, and builders" (Samanani, F. & J. Lenhard. 2019 p 2). By contrast, 'home' relates to the subjective sense of being rooted within the world and sometimes may refer to imaginary spaces (Ibid, 2019).

The word in Thai for house is "*baan,*" which can also be translated as any place of residence as well as belonging. The word "*baan*" is the root of lots of other Thai words such as "*baan gert,*" which means "birthplace," or "*moo baan,*" which means "village/ group of houses/ the smallest neighborhood." Thus, the idea of "*baan*" in the chefs' perception can be both a private house as well as public space such as streets, villages and neighboring areas. In terms of language, "*baan*" is somewhat ambiguous. It does not have to be limited to physical structures. Instead, it extends into abstract meanings, as the chefs told me that their village names start with "*baan*" and are followed by specific name. Many times, the chefs introduce their friends who have the same cultural background to me by saying "*kon baan diew kan,*" meaning "we are from the same house," if they share similar local accents, cuisines, cultures and landscapes.

The distinction between the physical structure and the sense of belonging in the word "*baan*" was evident when considering the context and meaning of compound words. For example, the word "*baan gert,*" or "birthplace," relates to the sense of belonging. The word "*baan pak,*" which means "temporary house," is commonly used when Thais refer to the place of residence where they immigrate to work and live in other areas outside their hometown. Thus, it reflects the physical structure of the building.

The chefs who live in "Penguin Village" use the word "*baan*" (home) to refer to their place of residence. For example, when they make a journey from the restaurant to their home, they use the phrase "*kap baan,*" meaning "going back home." Live-in chefs, in contrast, used the word "*baan pak*" (temporary house), when they mentioned their staff accommodations. This emphasis placed on the compound word '*pak,*' which means 'temporary,' is particularly important as it implies that the houses are temporal and do not belong to them. This is because of two living conditions.

Firstly, live-in chefs have limited autonomy to arrange or control their living spaces. While the term 'home' relates to the act of bringing a particular space under control, as Mary Douglas (1991) states:

> "home is always a localisable idea. Home is located in space, but it is not necessarily a fixed space. It does not need bricks and mortar, and it can be a wagon, a caravan, a board, or a tent. It need not be a large space, but space there must be, for home starts by bringing some space under control" (1991: 289 in Samanani, F. & J. Lenhard. 2019).

I have found out that a sense of 'home' is difficult to achieve when chefs have limited power over their private space. During their stay, tenants have to follow several rules of the house and the chefs express that living in restaurant accommodations is not comfortable and the experience is far from the feeling of being at home.

Material objects play a significant role in developing a sense of home. 'Houses' are transformed into 'homes' through renovation, decoration and furnishing. These activities allow inhabitants to express stories, memories and personal identities via different furniture (Miller, 1988). Nevertheless, I have found that live-in chefs rarely decorate or significantly change their rooms. Instead, many choose not to buy home accessories as this will be a hassle when leaving their accommodation, reflecting the view many that the restaurant accommodation is a temporary space.

The chefs who live in the "Penguin village" are more independent and have more opportunities in the creation and management of their 'house' enabling them to transform it into a 'home.' The growing of Thai vegetables and the furnishing of the house in a Thai style are important ways to express ethnic identity and reminders of their hometown. These objects evoke positive feelings of familiarity and help the chefs solve feelings of estrangement and dislocation in the new place of residence, and thus make them feel at home.

Secondly, the small kitchen which is not used as a kitchen means the accommodation atmosphere lacks care and nurturing, a core family quality in their culture which is crucial for reinforcing a sense of being at home. Based on the Malay context, Carsten (1997) suggests that the kitchen is the most important part of the Malay house. As she stresses:

> "It is the place where the family meets, where food is prepared, and where kinship is made through the transformation and sharing of substances. The hearths are obvious sources of physical sustenance, but they are also often the symbolic focus of the house, loaded with the imagery of the commensal unity of close kin. Houses are material shelters as well as ritual centres" (Ibid 2003:55).

According to Carsten, the hearth is the center of the house and sharing foods that were cooked at the heart unite household member as well as reproduce kin relationships. Similar to Carsten's view, I found that the act of sharing meals from the same hearth and sharing kitchen equipment among household members demonstrates qualities of nurturing and togetherness which help bring a sense of 'home'. The chefs use the phrase "*kin khao baan*," which translates to "eat at home," to mention having food in their house in "Penguin Village." Thus, the houses in “Penguin Village” offer the chefs a place that empowers their identity and meets other Thai who share social references.

While making this comparison between the staff accommodations and the houses in "Penguin Village," it can be seen that the physical existence of 'house' and a subjective sense of 'home' can exist simultaneously, but do not always map neatly onto one another. The place a chef identifies as *'baan'* may not necessarily be a place in the UK. Some chefs, especially those who do not have a permanent house, felt that their belonging remains in Thailand and recognize *'baan'* only to be in the context of their original hometown. In contrast, I found that the group of chefs who live in in "Penguin Village" have developed a sense of belonging in the UK and also hold strong attachments to Thailand at the same time. This can be noticed through the chefs' expressions. When I asked the chefs about where they consider '*baan*' (home) to be, those who rent or own a house in "Penguin Village" told me that they have two '*baan,*' with one in Penguin Village or London as their 'second home.' When the chefs come into contact with the food, Thai individuals and their native language, they resonate with a familiar experience and the familiar feeling of being at home is recreated.

It is possible that, for some immigrants, *'baan'* may exist as an imaginary place that used to exist or could be a place which they imagine in the future. It can be suggested that either a physical or imaginary space, be it a small room, building, street, province or country, can conjure the feeling and embodiment of *'baan,'* providing it holds a memory, feeling or special meaning for an individual. For example, Jai (starter chef) believes that "my home is in Udon Thani province in the upper northeastern region. It is a Thai story building which always smells of boiling rice, as my next-door neighbor opened a porridge shop." Jai's original home was expropriated in order to build a highway and no longer exists.

## 5.2 Thai Temple

For Thai people, the temple is closely connected to their way of life from birth until death and is deeply ingrained in Thai culture. When discussing the importance of the Thai temple with Jai, she stated, "when I was in Thailand, I usually went to the temple with my grandmother. The temple is the heart of the village and a place of sacred rituals. When I came to the UK, I wanted to continue doing what I usually did back home." Many chefs also state that their homes in Thailand are often located close to temples and their families often help to take care of the temples. Because of this, chefs feel that spending time in a familiar environment and helping maintain areas of the temple, by sweeping the floors, preparing food in the kitchen and looking after the temple grounds, helps them connect to a way of life that reminds them of Thailand. Thai temples, therefore, serve as an important ground for Buddhist and Thai immigrants in the UK.

The Buddhapadipa Temple is the only Thai Buddhist temple in Wimbledon, London. The temple is located just 0.8 miles away from the Wimbledon Thaitime branch, which is about a 15-minute walk from that branch or a 35-minute bus ride from the Wandsworth branch. The chefs who work in Wimbledon usually visit the temple once a week, while the chefs based at the Wandsworth only visit the Temple on special occasions, as it is greater distance to travel. Chefs usually visit the temple on their own but sometimes will be accompanied by colleagues or the restaurant owner. Nikkit (Thaitime restaurant owner) plays an important role within the temple and is involved in running various activities there. She regularly donates large quantities of food to the temple monks and also donates money to maintain the temple and occasionally offers restaurant employees to serve at large events held at the temple.

The Buddhapadipa Temple has two main buildings: the front house and the main chapel. The front house is the area where everyday rituals are conducted and the place where visitors and monks can meet. The

main chapel is used for public and formal occasions such as important Thai festivals. It was built using typical Thai-style architecture, which presents the ideology of the religion via elaborate paintings detailing on the life of the Buddha. There are three Buddha statues located within the temple. The largest and most prominent is the Black Buddha, which is surrounded by other statues, candles and artificial lotus flowers. Due to the sanctity of the Black Buddha, chefs often visit the chapel to pay their respects and make religious vows. In instances when chefs face problems they are unable to solve, they request a favor from Buddha and promise to return the favor by performing rituals to fulfill their vows. The methods of fulfilling vows to Black Buddha and Kuman Thong (the child ghost mentioned in the last chapter) have the same structure and purpose. However, while the child ghost prefers sweets and toys, boiled eggs and flowers are considered more appropriate offerings for Black Buddha. This is related to the religion and symbolic system in Thailand. For Thais, flowers are a symbol of purity and enlightenment and boiled eggs represent procreation. When Thai Buddhists visit the temple for fulfilling vows, they usually bring these offering with them. The chefs, as well as other Thai immigrants in the UK, also act in accordance with such religious practices.

After visiting the temple several times, I noticed that senior monks and the temple manager reflect the concept of Buddhapadipa Temple as a place for practicing meditation with the aim of reaching 'nirvana,' the Buddhist spiritual goal of achieving perfect peace and happiness. During sermon, the monks emphasize the development of traditional Buddhist mindfulness. However, I have found that chefs did not perceive or refer to the temple as a space with relation to ‘nirvana’ or mindfulness. Alternatively, they spiritualize the temple in a different way by focusing on the religious spaces as a portal to bring them closer to Thai customs and identity. There are several Buddhist rituals, Thai social events and major national festivals arranged at the temple all year round. However, the most prominent among the chefs is the Songkran Festival, which is the Thai New Year that takes places in mid-April.

During my fieldwork in April 2018, chef Jung invited me to join the Songkran Festival with her family. As a marking of the New Year Day, the celebration was rich with symbolic traditions consisting of both religious rituals and various fun activities, such as beauty pageants, games and traditional food. Jung told me, "for Thai immigrants in London, there is no better place to celebrate the Songkran Festival than at the Buddhapadipa temple."

On Songkran day, we met in front of the temple at 9 a.m. Jung showed up with her son and husband. She was carrying a bag in her hand, which contained home-cooked foods and snacks that she brought for making an offering. Offering food to the monks is a central ritual activity for Buddhists, as it refers to a process of gaining merit by the act of giving and supporting Buddhism. Jung led me to the courtyard where the ritual was to be conducted. Her family lined up behind other visitors, who had arrived before, and took the food out of the bag. When the monks came, they stopped in front of the visitors and opened the lid of their alms bowl. When it was her turn, Jung slowly placed the foods into the alms bowl and then did a *“wai”* by putting her hands between eyebrows and slightly bowing her head. The monks who received the food blessed her at that moment as well. After that, all the food was arranged on a long table inside the front house, while visitors sat on the floor. After the senior monk arrived, the chanting in Pali, the sacred language used in Buddhism, began, followed by monks collecting food from the table in order of seniority. The communal meal was a relaxed and friendly event and the offering leftovers were shared amongst visitors of the temple.

The main point of the food offering ritual is the reciprocal exchange between the laity and the monks. Plank (2015) states that reciprocal exchanges and appropriation are the two main ways in which Buddhist rituals work in Southeast Asia. In reciprocal rituals, the concept of "*tambun*" (making merit) is used, and by giving food or gifts to the monk, the donor receives "*bun*" (merit) in return. Jung told me that she holds strong belief in the importance of *tambun* by providing food to monks, as it is perceived as a way of ensuring good karma, which is a good luck that will affect all life events and help her reach happiness and peace. The verb "*tambun*" is commonly used by the chefs when they perform all sorts good of actions in religious-related activities. The verb "*tam*" means "to make" and the noun "*bun*" means "merit." "*Tambun*" then, or "making merit," in chefs' perceptions is very much linked to the temple or activities that are conducted at the temple, such as donating money, food offerings or other essential items to the temple and/or monks. Thus, the chefs visit the temple on a regular basis in order to *tambun*, as they believe such merit will create good circumstances in the future, such as health and wealth, as well as determine the quality of their next life.

In the Songkran Festival, several rituals and activities are held throughout the day. Making merit through a food offering is an integral part of the morning activity. In 2018, all chefs visited the temple on Songkran, in which seven of them attended the ritual in the morning and the rest gradually arrived in the afternoon. I noticed that the younger chefs who were under 40 tended to skip the food offering ritual and instead participate in the fun-filled activities arranged in the afternoon. This is because the younger generation focuses their interest on socializing and celebration of the Thai New Year, rather than the religious rituals by themselves.

In the afternoon, the activities were moved outside to special celebratory locations within the temple grounds where Thai migrants around London can gain access. Snacks were available from food-stalls which were open throughout the celebration. The food available is typically associated with the Thai identity and visitors to the temple claim the food is more authentic by comparison with the food usually available in Thai restaurants. Picnic tables were set up and visitors congregated and socialized in groups. I joined the group with the chefs that included Nang, Ple, Ying, Fah and Rath. The chefs brought food from the food stalls and shared it in the middle. Some chefs came to the festival with their husbands or other Thai friends who did not work in the Thaitime chain. However, I noticed that when their European husbands approached the group, they often felt disinterested and left after staying for a while. This is because they could not understand the conversations that were being had in Thai. Only Thai friends of the chefs were able to assimilate into the group. Many Thais who used to work at Thaitime or who are relatives or friends of the chefs came to share space or sit nearby. In this way, the temple area can be considered a socializing space where Thai immigrants gather and interact with one another.

The chefs and other visitors also participated in a sacred tradition of pouring water over the Buddha statue, as doing this represents the purification and washing away of one's sins and bad luck. Water is also poured on each other. However, this was not as intense as occurs in Thailand. Chef Ying told me that when she was in Thailand, Songkran was like a water battle, where water plastic guns or buckets with water inside have been used as a weapon. The Buddhapadipa Temple is different and visitors only pour a small amount of water onto each other's hands. This is because the weather in the UK is much colder than the weather in Thailand so splashing water onto someone directly might cause them to become sick. To this point, the traditional ritual from other geographical locations have had to be adjusted to adapt over

spaces from Thailand to the UK in order to maintain their original value. The ritual thus can be changed, following the social and environmental conditions.

One of the main events organized during Songkran celebrations at the temple is the Miss Songkran beauty contest in which contestants are clothed in traditional Thai attire. At the end of the day, raffle winners and beauty contest results are announced. During this period, chefs frequently express their feelings using the term *'sanuk,'* which translate to 'fun.' They explained to me that eating Thai food, speaking the Thai language and joining in with Buddhist rituals and fun activities reminds them of being in Thailand and brings them closer to home. Chef Rath explained, "I feel warm in my heart as I am surrounded by Thai food and friends. It makes me feel like I have temporarily returned home."

The chefs also visit the temple at times of personal events, such as birthdays or the birth or death of loved ones. The chefs usually go to a temple on these special days in order to *tambun* by offering food to the monks and providing souvenirs for the monks to keep, which they call "*sang-ka-tarn*" (essential offerings). To make *sang-ka-tarn*, the chefs have to prepare a yellow bucket which contains essentials for the monks such as toiletries, dry food, medicines and monks' robes. The chefs then sit down on the floor with their legs tucked under, bow their heads forward and offer the bucket to the monks with both hands. Monks normally have a small piece of cloth that the chefs put the yellow bucket on. As touching between women and monks is not allowed and only men can touch the monks. After *sang-ka-tarn* is given, the last process of *tambun,* which called "*kruat nam,*" is performed. *Kruat nam* is the ritual where one pours water into a small bowl while the monks chant. The others who do not get to pour the water will put their hand on the person who pours the water or another person who is touching the person who pours. This is symbolic of sharing the goodness that they have just done with the spirits, whether it is the spirits of loved ones or of someone that they have wronged.

Interactions between Thai Buddhists and monks through religious activities serve to strengthen social and cultural bonds, which encourage chefs to visit the temple. The chefs usually express that the orange robes of Buddhist monks make them feel peaceful and secure. This is because they are familiar with such uniforms from Thailand. For them, orange robes are a symbol of purity, and the wearer must be pure in body, speech and mind. In this way, monks do not merely transfer merit through rituals but also provide visitors with a sense of belonging, emotional comfort and reassurance.

In short, the temple is significantly important to Thai people for maintaining their cultural and religious identity as good Buddhists. The chefs perceive the concept of "*tambun*" (merit-making) as connected with the temple and Thai Buddhist monks. It means that this social activity can only be performed in the monastic space. Temples, thus offer a transnational space for Thai Buddhists whose customs and beliefs extend across national boundaries.

## 5.3 Ethnic Groceries, Markets and Shopping Centers

The ethnic grocery stores are considered a cultural space, enabling immigrants to connect with their local cuisine and identities. The Thaitime restaurant in Wandsworth is surrounded by ethnic grocery shops, markets, and shopping centers that are all within walking distance. Chefs regularly visit these places in their day-to-day lives to purchase the raw ingredients and products used in their eating culture. While there is no Thai supermarket in Wandsworth or Wimbledon, I discovered that Indian grocery shops have become the main source of ingredients for Thai cooking. The shops referred are to as "*ran kheak*,"

meaning "the shop of Indians," as this business is largely run by the Indian immigrants. Although Indian grocery stores mainly sell Indian products, dry supplies including pulses and spices, as well as frozen products, fresh fruits and vegetables, that are commonly used in Thai cuisine can be found.

The chefs visit grocery shops approximately three days per week. Often when the chefs are on their way to work via public transport, they get off one or two stops before the restaurant to pick up supplies. They can purchase a wide variety of Asian fruits and vegetables such as white radishes, sour green mangos, okra, bitter melons and pomelos. The products purchased in *ran kheak* are only those unavailable in mainstream supermarkets, as the prices in the Indian stores are much more expensive. As chef Pat said to me when we met in front of one shop, "I came here to buy things for a party at my friend's house. I am planning to cook fried fish with Thai mango sauce. So, I need sour green mango, apple custard and frozen roti for dessert."

Since *ran kheak* has no fresh seafood or meat available, chefs have sourced these ingredients from North End Road Market. This market is lined with butchers and fishmongers and provides a much cheaper alternative to the chefs than the supermarkets. Another reason why chefs prefer to use high-street butchers and fishmongers is that they are able to source animal parts that are not usually on display or are not popular in the UK market, for example, chicken skin, beef tendons and fish heads. These rare ingredients are valuable to their cuisine, as dishes made from these parts help maintain a connection to the chefs' culture and hometown. Chicken skin, for example, are considered leftovers by butcher shops. However, they are a rare and valuable item for Thai migrants, since crispy fried chicken skin usually comes alone as a snack food or is eaten together with a various menu items like papaya salad, sticky rice and noodle soup.

Nevertheless, with Thaitime in Wimbledon being located in an upper-class area, there is a lack of these type of markets that allow for sourcing of ethnic ingredients close to the restaurant. The chefs in Wimbledon are still limited in terms of what they can buy when compared with the chefs working in Wandsworth. Consequently, readily available ingredients from large nationwide supermarkets are used. Among nationwide supermarkets, I found that the chefs prefer Morrison's over the others because they sell some products which can be used in Thai cuisine such as whole fish, liver, beef tendon, pork skin and some Asian vegetables. There is also an Asian corner which provides various noodles including MAMA, an instant noodle with spicy soup flavors that is popular in Thailand.

Searching for the places to purchase ingredients in a new country can be a challenging task for new immigrants, as Mamiew experienced. Mamiew start working as trainee chef of Wimbledon in May 2018 and this was also her first month in the UK. During the initial times, she told me that it was hard to find appropriate ingredients for cooking Thai food, apart from what was available in the restaurant stocks, which chefs are not allowed to take home. In the following week, I saw Mamiew go out to the nearest shopping center with other chefs during her break time. She came back with Morrison's bags and told me that it was much better to go shopping as a group because other chefs can provide good suggestions. Thus, the networks of immigrants can help new immigrants access Thai food in the local area, as Mamiew never knew that Morrison's had some specialized products until she went there with other chefs.

After participating in shopping activities with the chefs for a period of time, I noticed that the chefs clearly separated what they bought for themselves (or sometimes for sharing with other Thais) and what they bought for their British husbands and children. The food items for themselves, as I mentioned above,

serve the purpose of cooking Thai dishes. In contrast, processed food, such as breads, cornflakes, yogurts and sausages are only intended for their families. This distinction shows that it might be difficult for the chefs to assimilate into British food culture, as they try to maintain their previous dietary habits as much as possible. While assimilation is “the process whereby individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant culture of a society” (Pauls, 2008), I found that the practice of grocery shopping represents ways in which the chefs have worked to maintain their food identities while they are living in western society.

Through spending time with the chefs outside of the kitchen, I observed a large portion of their time and money being devoted on food related activities. Despite both Thaitime restaurants being located close to shopping centers, the chefs only shopped for non-food commodities two to three times per month. When they did shop for non-food commodities, these typically included clothes, watches, shoes and some branded goods. Luxury items are often forgone by the chefs as personal finances exclude them from regularly purchasing more expensive goods. I noted that the chefs would make more purchases like this when planning a visit back to Thailand. Items purchased would be taken back home to family and the purchasing of gifts to take home is symbolic of a successful life abroad. Some of the chefs explained how some people in their hometowns in Thailand can have a negative impression of those making a living abroad. Chef Lek said that although she had a higher status upon returning to Thailand, some of her friends called her '*mia farang*,' or 'foreigner’s wife,' implying that there had been sexual exchanges to obtain wealth. Views such as this, prompt the chefs to prove they are self-sufficient in making their own money so they can purchase expensive branded items. Chef Lek stated, “I own some expensive items and I want people to realize that this was bought with my own money through my own hard work.” Chef Ple experienced a similar situation. She told me that her family has a better standard of living since she came to the UK. The gossiping among villagers became more intense when she made a big donation to the temple in her village. In order to challenge the image of the passive housewife, Ple adapts to the image of modern women by dressing in the latest fashions and wearing make-up when she is back in her hometown. As she said, "I want to look like a working woman as everyone sees in media…I don't want people to think that I just came abroad to stay at my partner's home."

Brand consumption and the symbolic reasoning already mentioned, means that chefs are more likely to purchase brands which are recognizable in Thailand. Yet, many products available in the shopping centers in the UK are not ones that you would find in Thailand. For example, the chefs might choose Louis Vuitton and Longchamp handbags, which are well-known in Thailand, rather than Ted Baker or Yves Saint Laurent, which are not popular among their social groups. As the chefs said, "there is no point in purchasing luxury brand products unless someone in my community knows how expensive it is." Thus, feedback and reactions from others in their social groups determine their consumer behavior and product choices. By accumulating these brand items, the chefs expect positive reactions and gain social acceptance among others, in particular from the people from their hometowns.

## 5.4 Thai massage shop

There is a similarity between massage shops and Thai restaurants, as these massage shops have created spaces for Thai female migrants. As Thai massage parlors are relatively famous worldwide and in Europe, there are several Thai massage shops within London. When accompanying the chefs to Thai massage shops, it can be recognized that most of the staff include Thai females with very similar backgrounds to

the chefs. As both the chefs and masseuses share such similar backgrounds, the chefs' visits were not purely for relief of physical aches, but also were to allow for social engagement with staff at the massage parlors.

Due to the shared background that the chefs and masseuses, or "*moh nud*," have, friendship is readily cultivated between both parties. Chefs, when visiting the massage shops, often say *"pai ha pheun,"* which translates to "going to visit friends." The masseuses provide for the chefs a support network that is often relied upon when there is any conflict within the restaurant and when they require external advice. The chefs bring food from the restaurant and often spend hours talking with staff in the massage shops. Having joined these groups and listened to their stories, I realized that the chefs and *moh nud* share similar stories and problems. Chef Lek said "When I tried to bring my daughter from Thailand to live with me in the UK, I sought advice from Nam and Baitong (Masseuses) about the visa process as they had been through it before." Not all chefs are successful in the visa process, with many having to leave family behind in Thailand. The chefs and masseuses' bond over shared worries, and it is often of such similar nature that verbal communication is not always necessary. As Chef Ja said: "My friends at the massage shop understand my worry by just looking in my eyes."

During conversations in the massage shop, chefs regularly raised conversations about marriage and relationship concerns. After visiting the massage shop several times, I found that most of the masseuses are married migrants. However, these same masseuses were found to have strong friendship networks too. They are often new to the country and British culture, but they also suffer from disadvantaged legal standing in the sense that if their marriage breaks down, there is the possibility that they will be forced to leave the country. These masseuses often exchange their experiences and support each other through any hardships they face.

Massage shops are not only places that connect people with similar backgrounds, but also represent a center of health and well-being for all Thai immigrants. Chefs, due to their long hours standing up in the kitchen, were found to report having symptoms such as back and shoulder pain and various aches around their bodies. Back pain was experienced by 75 percent of the chefs asked, while 60 reported body aches and 45 percent reported shoulder pain. Symptoms come and go and often improve when the chefs take time off work, but they often are chronic. The restaurant kitchen also poses several potential health risks perpetuating these symptoms. It can be noticed that the chefs have to work under difficult circumstances which make their health suffer. The kitchen work is often strenuous and may necessitate activities such as lifting heavy boxes of ingredients. During busy periods, the chefs are exposed to smoke from cooking and oils known to cause adverse health risks to their lungs. Most of the Thaitime chefs work hard and stand for long hours, in order to prove that they deserve to be chefs in accordance with restaurant standards. However, as chefs age, kitchen life can cause serious health risks. Therefore, it could be argued that the chefs are likely to experience specific syndromes that appear among a vulnerable group. Migration itself does not imply poor health, however there are several circumstances which most immigrants are likely to face linked to their inferior employment status (Gronseth, 2010). This is similar to what Kleinman, Das and Lock (1997) describe as "social suffering," which is "collective and individual human suffering associated with life conditions shaped by powerful social forces" (Ibid p 6). The social suffering that the chefs experience is derived from their migration status, which results in poor working conditions, limited career choices and limited social welfare.

Despite being registered with the NHS (National Health Service), most of the chefs fail to present themselves to their doctor and report any ill-health when they are not feeling well. While it could be considered that language barriers along with insufficient knowledge of the right to care and treatment are the main factors in this particular finding, there also appears to be some incompatibility between professional recommendations and the reality of working in a kitchen that discourages chefs from seeking professional medical advice. Chef Ming said, "My doctor recommended that I avoid standing still for too long or lifting heavy objects and maintaining good posture at work which I found impossible to follow." The chefs also often link their illness with their careers. Chef Ja mentioned how lifting heavy woks and pots is the main cause of back and shoulder pain, especially if they are not held close to the body. Pain in the wrists and shoulders can also arise due to repetitive stirring. Chefs have explained how, due to the necessity to move pots to and from stoves, some maneuvers that contribute to straining certain areas of the body are unavoidable. The issues around the use of NHS services are found among many chefs. This includes the availability of appropriate services, lack of knowledge about how the British healthcare system works and expectations about interactions between patients and healthcare professionals. Local clinics do not improve or aid chefs' health-care practices, in actuality, they make the chefs remain disconnected and alienated.

When the chefs realize that their symptoms are not relieved with time off work, they turn to the massage shops. Chefs claim that Thai massage techniques offer traditional methods to heal any pain they may be experiencing while also lowering their anxiety. Chefs have made statements like how "nothing makes my sore back feel better than a Thai massage" and "a good masseuse can help reset my body balance to something close to normal." If the problem areas are correctly massaged, it is believed that illness will be cured and pain will be eradicated from the body.

Chefs can easily make appointments and the massages usually take place in the mornings before chefs start work. The rooms the massages are conducted in are thoughtfully lit to create an ambiance and the chefs stay comfortable by wearing loose-fitting clothes. After explaining any problem areas, the masseuse begins work through a series of compressions, stretches and massages around the area of pain. Techniques used by the masseuse include walking on the back and cracking knuckles, if required. Chefs leave feeling relaxed and relieved from any pain they were previously experiencing. I found that the chefs and masseuses are share the same beliefs about illness. For example, in many cases, the chefs explained that "I become ill because my muscles are not in the right place as they should be" and the masseuses respond by explaining that, while doing the massage, they will "force muscles back in their place" which will relieve the pain in the particular area.

While observing these encounters, I found that the relationship between the chefs and masseuses is constructed through formal and informal interactions. An example of this includes how the chefs would formally explain any problems and pains they had experienced to the masseuse. However, upon commencement of the massage, the tone of the encounter would become more informal, with conversation revolving around private matters. Chefs are also treated like friends, often receiving discounts from the bill, reflecting the overlap in their status of being regarded as a client and friend simultaneously.

Cultures around the world have different ways of dealing with illness, and there are ethnographic examples that support this. Examples include the community healing dance of the Kalahari Desert in

southern Africa or the belief of 'Shamans,' who are healers who meditate between humans and the spirit world in Southeast Asia (Pescosolido, 2011). This research highlights a significant cultural determinant toward illness, which suggests that coping techniques towards illness are derived from an individual's personal, interpersonal and cultural reactions to disease or discomfort (Kleinman, 1975). In relation to this, it can be argued that Thai culture is the chief determinant shaping the chefs' perceptions of healthcare as they deploy non-western medical techniques such as Thai massage in their everyday life, often opting for alternative treatments they are more comfortable with.

Thai massage has its roots in Thai peasant society, where every village had massage healers whom villagers would turn to when they had muscle aches from working the field (Unesco, 2019). The chefs told me that they became familiar with massage when they were young. They saw their parents and elder relatives visiting a massage healer's house when experiencing muscle aches. The practice is regarded as part of traditional Thai healthcare, the knowledge of which has been passed down within healer families over the generations. Currently, this practice has developed into a formal system of knowledge and there are now available training courses provided by the Watpho Thai Traditional Medicine School in Bangkok. The school uses the space on the temple grounds and was approved by the Thai Ministry of Education. Practitioners who can complete at least 800 hours of training will receive a professional license and will be regarded as a professional massage therapist (Salguero and Roylance 2011).

Although Thai massage is a traditional healing practice for Thai people, it has become popular in the western world for its health benefits and relaxing experiences. Due to the tourist flow, Thai massage shops are ubiquitous across Thailand, especially in some parts of Bangkok, Pattaya and Phuket. They also extended to street-side shop houses in London, New York and Australia. The difference between a "healing massage" and "pretty spas," where tourists can buy sexual services, is a massage license, which indicates a better knowledge of how to perform proper massage techniques. The masseuses that are regularly visited by the chefs usually compare themselves with other masseuses who work in "pretty spas" in Soho (Chinatown) by saying; "we are different from those who work in Soho. They don't know anything about muscle lines in the human body, but we spent many years learning about it."

The massage shops in Wimbledon and Wandsworth claim that they opened their business for healing purposes and all masseuses have passed the training courses from Thailand and hold a massage license. According to this, the massage shops act as a gateway in providing access to traditional healing for the chefs as well as other Thai migrants. The masseuses are partners in the delivery of healthcare across the border and they share a collective understanding and beliefs about illness with the chefs. Thus, these massage shops are an important healthcare resource for the chefs and can be understood as transnational spaces, where skill and medical knowledge travel from Thailand to the UK.

## 5.5 Betting shops and casino

The chefs of Thaitime restaurants gamble as part of everyday life. Most of the chefs whom I encountered in this study had at least some experience of gambling. This took the form of buying lottery tickets, playing cards and spending time in local casinos during their leisure time. This section outlines how Thai chefs define and perceive gambling in their own terms.

Generally, gambling is defined as taking part in risky behavior for potential financial gain. Nevertheless, it is clear that the chefs view gambling as a much more complex pastime. Firstly, in relation to playing

cards, the chefs believed that their behaviors were a form of reciprocity within their social circle. Secondly, chefs viewed going to the casino and playing the lottery as examples of more mainstream forms of gambling.

**Gambling as a form of reciprocity**

An anthropological article referred to gambling among ethnic groups, like the Wape and Tiwi, as a 'dynamic form of reciprocity in which money is cycled within a community of gamblers' (Mitchell 1988:647). For the Tiwi, gambling is considered a bona fide form of work that brings money to the family. Tiwi women spend considerable time playing card games and gambling becomes especially intense in the days following the payment of wages and pensions. They use experiences and skills to team up against others and if they win, their money is shared with their kin (Goodale, 1987). There is nothing in the ethnographies to suggest that gambling is considered immoral or wrong. Instead, gambling is embedded positive reciprocity, honoring egalitarianism and sharing. As an institution, gambling serves the same purpose as those that share food and other vital assets.

Gambling among the chefs is similar to gambling in other ethnic groups. According to this view, gambling is a prominent part of one's culture and provides a significant financial contribution within particular societies. This section argues that gambling offers an economic function as well. It is a ceremonial exchange system in which money, as well as traditional forms of wealth, circulate from person to person with the possibility that those in financial difficulty can benefit and, conversely, that those who are better off can forfeit some assets. As the chefs use Thai idiom "*reaw lom nai nong tong ja pai nai,*" which can be translated to "if boat capsizes in a small pond, the treasures cannot go anywhere," to expose and criticize the nature of their gambling activities where money has nowhere to go and, instead, circulates among the group members.

The chefs usually play cards on Saturday night at the common space of their accommodation. A popular card game amongst the chefs, called 'slave,' is played where the players attempt to get rid of the cards in their hand as quickly as possible. A chef deals all of the 52 cards out to all the players and after seeing the card, each player places money to bet in front of them. The person with the three of clubs starts first, as that is the lowest value card. The game continues in a circle where everyone has to beat the card the person before them laid down by laying a card of higher value. If they don't have a higher value card, the player can skip their turn. The first person who has no cards left is the winner and is regarded as the master. The last person who still has cards in their hand loses and becomes the slave. The slave has to give their betting money to the master together with their best card, which can be used during the next game.

This game is a widely played card game among Thai people and the chefs were already familiar with it since they were in Thailand. The 'slave' card game has been integrated in Thai culture as a competitive leisure activity. The stakes are small, or even not necessary, but could be increased according to player economic background. Many chefs told me that it is common for women in their village to set up group for playing 'slave' and other card games. Thai women are more likely to play card games than men because they have more time on their hands, as many of them do not work outside their homes. However, the game is perceived as a second priority which comes after cooking and other household chores.

Theoretically, card players should play against each other to try and win money, but in reality, the chefs play it slightly differently. They form teams and apply strategies to help their friends facing financial difficulty to win the game and collect the money. It was observed that the chefs created alliances to compete against those who are wealthy at that moment in time. They also chose to skip their turn even if they have a higher card in hand to assist specific players in financial trouble. For example, Chef Nu lacked the funds to fly back home when her parents became ill, but the chefs set up this game several times and raised £500 to help her fly home. The chefs particularly use card games to raise the money because money won from a friend is not considered to be 'debt.' Although there is no obligation to repay a fixed amount of money, the winners are expected to continue playing other games and offering help (sometimes by intending to lose) to other members who are face financial problems. This is a moral issue which involve a reciprocal exchange between winners and losers. As chefs Nu explained:

> "Last year, my mother was critically ill in the ICU and I didn't have enough money to buy a ticket to Thailand. Luckily, I got 500 Pounds from playing card games and my the problems was solved. When I came back from Thailand, I lost almost 400 to the same person I beat last time. So, I believe such money circulates within our group."

Other than financial incentives to gamble, social gambling also has an important role in motivating participation. During the game, the chefs laugh, joke and have a generally fun time. The playing of card games forms an important means for group bonding and relaxing after busy shifts in the kitchen. Sometimes players may be encouraged to join in to show support to those in a difficult situation. Clifford Geertz pointed out how important social relations are between betting individuals attending cockfights (Geertz, 1972). Balinese people at cockfights do not necessarily bet on the cock they believe will win, as it is the display of showing support to one's social group that can be the primary driving factor in placing a bet. Betting confirms social relations between villagers, and often this has greater importance than the financial aspect. A parallel between this Balinese example and the chefs can be drawn in terms of gambling behavior because the critical point of the game is not to win money but to socialize and to support the vulnerable individual in one's social group.

Culture plays an important role in gambling and influences gambling behavior (Subramaniam et al., 2015), and, unsurprisingly, playing cards is a localized practice that links the chefs to their cultural background. For the chefs, this game is not new and similar games are played in households across Thailand, especially during community events. Playing cards arguably is a transnational activity and also a form of reciprocal exchange to distribute the money within a social network.

**Gambling as a real gambling**

Gambling is also regularly conversed about between chefs, especially following the headline news in a Thai magazine about the Thai student, Jirtchaya Klongjarn, who won 1,000,990 British Pounds following the purchase of a lottery ticket at Ladbrokes. The chefs often purchase such tickets along with fruits and vegetables at ethnic grocery stores. The chefs do not consider this to be a form of gambling. To the Thai chefs, gambling is considered to be something that might bring negative consequences. Buying a lottery ticket is viewed as a small price to get a chance to win big with less risk compared with other gambling forms. Chef Rath said to me that she buys lottery every week because she "just want[s] to get rich" and if she can the jackpot, it can be a shortcut to the fulfilment of her dreams. I found that the notion of winning the lottery has been incorporated into people's dreams and hopes and, for the chefs, the opportunity to

build their parents a new house before they die is the most incredible dream. The chefs hope that money from a big win can be the way to help them fulfil their role as a good daughter who can repay their parents for their love and care.

The majority of chefs only buy one lottery ticket or instant scratch tickets on a weekly basis but sometimes increase this for occasions, such as their birthdays. They believe that good things do happen on such days, or they may receive things 'for free' as birthday gifts from mystery powers. However, buying lottery tickets is still considered as a low-risk way of potentially winning big. Contrastingly, betting shops and casinos represent places where chefs perceive 'real gambling' to take place. The chefs spoke about the high risk that occurs when one engages in too much of this type of gambling since, when they visit such establishments, they usually play at higher intensities and for longer amounts of time. Betting with more considerable sums of money can also cause financial disaster if the gambling goes wrong.

Although some gambling forms such as cockfights and playing cards are native to Thai culture, the chefs had never experienced gambling in a casino before. There are no casinos in Thailand as it is prohibited by the government and playing casino games, even without a monetary exchange, is cause for arrest by the local police. Therefore, casinos and betting shops are something new that the chefs learn when they reach the UK.

Most chefs state that it is a friend (usually another chef) who exposes them to their first gambling experience, by asking them to be a companion, as the chefs usually go in groups of three to four people. During the first time, the one who has never gambled just observes and encourages the others. The chefs were found to prefer roulette machines, due to their ease of use and their exciting nature. There is a wheel with numbers from zero to 36, and the player makes a bet of their preference by placing chips on a certain number. If the ball lands on their number, the player gets the reward, depending on how much the player bet on that number.

After watching their friend for a while, the chef begins to play other machines and experiment with other games. Even if they feel confident and clearly understand the rules, the chefs do not risk too much during this period. The turning point comes when they are under financial strain. The chefs state that they feel obligated to send money to family members in Thailand, and if they are experiencing financial difficulty, sometimes gambling can solve that problem.

The chefs say *'pai ha ngein'* when visiting the casino, which translates to 'I'm going to go and make money.' There is an understood concept that luck can be granted to an individual, especially if they are successful in making money while gambling, as Chef Pim said, “If you are lucky, you win.” Or, as Chef Lek said, “In the casino, intelligence doesn't matter, gambling is your destiny.” The beliefs in good luck/ bad luck, or ‘*kham chock dee/ chock rai,’* are deeply connected within the casino setting and determine gambling outcomes. Since Thailand is a Buddhist country, most Thai believe that “*bun*” (merits) always brings good luck. In other words, luck is determined by the merit accumulated in the past. In addition, Thais are taught to believe in mysterious power and spirits, which leads them to believe in the phenomenon of winning numbers. In order to increase their opportunity to pick the right number, people usually go to the temples and make merit, which they dedicate to people who have already passed away. By doing so, the spirits will send a signal of lucky numbers in one way or another. However, each person has to decode this signal by themselves.

The chefs mentioned the common belief that luck and invisible spirits or *'phi'* can influence outcomes too. Hence, the worship of these spirits before a casino visit is the norm. Chefs also limit risk through never betting all that they have, even when playing with large sums of money. Most of the chefs recognize the negative consequences of losing money through gambling and the repercussions this would have on their family members in Thailand. Therefore, if they lose more than 70 percent of their budget, they attribute this to it being a bad day and stop to resume gambling on a different day. Also, during good periods of personal finance, the chefs reduce visits to the casino, only returning in times of financial hardship. In a sense, the casino can be viewed as a place where immigrants who need money quickly to fulfil financial obligations can have the chance to succeed.

To sum up, this chapter attempts to understand how the meaning of places are produced and reproduced by the chefs. Once the chefs remake themselves in the UK, they first encounter feelings of disruption and dislocation. Then, they establish a sense of belonging in the new place of residence. According to my observation from the fieldwork, the chefs regularly visit the same places around the restaurants including their accommodations, the Thai Temple, ethnic grocery shops, Thai massage shops and the betting shops. My research suggests that the chefs do not simply occupy these places, but also experience them, develop identity and belonging around them and perceive them in specific social meaning. The activities in everyday life, such as decorating the house, finding ingredients from the market, participating in customs at Thai temple and visiting massage shop, manifest strong connections to their homeland.

# Chapter 6 - Summary and conclusion of the thesis

## 6.1 Summary

While working at Thaitime restaurants, I developed an interest towards the life history of my colleagues. My position as a part-time kitchen staff allowed me to establish relationships with the chefs and gain access into the sphere of Thai immigration. I spent time listening to their meaningful stories, observing their day-to-day interactions and participating in their daily activities. My background motivates me to begin this research, with a special consideration of the pattern of female transnational migration, social relations within the kitchen spaces and the way they deal with the world outside the kitchen. This research was conducted in two restaurants of the Thaitime chain, the Wandsworth and Wimbledon branches, and the key informants are 21 female chefs who worked in the restaurant during my employments period from 2017 to 2018.

The findings identified three key areas responding to the research questions: First, what are the patterns of female transnational migration from Thailand? Second, how do female chefs use strategies to access the power and do how they develop social relations within the kitchen spaces? Finally, how do the chefs experience the world outside their kitchens?

In order to answers the first research question about the pattern of female transnational migration, I began by considering cultural and economic backgrounds of northeastern Thailand, also known as Isan, as seventy percent of the chefs originally came from this area. I found that the decision of Isan women to migrate is strongly related to their household characteristics and the most significant migration catalyst factors in Isan is rural poverty, which is the consequence of the agrarian transition. The failure of government policy made the chefs unable to meet their basic needs from farming income and/or due to obligations to repay the debt, which led to them making the decision to migrate. Although the economic considerations seem to be the main motivation, I argue that cultural factors are also important for the chefs. The matrilineal descent system in Thailand, where an individual is considered to belong to the same descent group as their mother, creates tight relationships between parents and daughters. Thai daughters and parents are also bound with deep reciprocal relationships which they call "*bun khun*" (indebted goodness). The chefs believe that their parent parents got *bun khun* by raising them and they have an obligation to pay it back by nurturing their parents in their old age. Thus, the chefs make their own decision to work outside their hometown and send remittances back to parents as a way to fulfill their duties as daughters. In this way, they follow existing gendered role expectations by financially taking care of aging parents.

I also summarized the three broad streams of migration routes of the chefs at Thaitime: (1) typical migration of the chefs via work permit; (2) marriage migration; and (3) independent migration as students. The chefs from Isan mostly immigrated to the UK via a spouse visa. Since Thailand's economy increasingly depends on tourism, the chefs migrated to work in tourist cities and met their partners there. After maintaining a long-distance relationship, both partners ultimately decided that they wanted to marry and live together and so the wedding ceremony was arranged in the village, among the wife's relatives in a traditional Thai style wedding. The picture from wedding day is kept as an important part of visa application. After the visa is approved, the chefs gain the legal right for international mobility, work and residence in the UK. The chefs who travel with a work permit visa also have similar backgrounds. However, they are more reliant on a social network of friends, kin or village members who persuaded them to work, provide useful information and inspire the chefs at the same time. While the chefs from rural backgrounds migrates via a spouse or work permit visa, the chefs from central Thailand mostly began their journey with a student visa. When compared to the chefs from Isan, the chefs who came abroad with student visa categorize themselves as a middle class and decided to go to the UK because they wanted to be fluent in English and gain new life experiences. However, after enjoying working, saving money and socializing with other Thai colleagues, I found that the chefs changed their intention from a focus on studying to a goal of permanent residency.

Regardless of which immigration route the chefs started from, I found that they sent more than half of incomes back to their hometown. These remittances were used for home construction, household expenses, education, medical fees, agricultural purchases and investment in family businesses. The chefs, as international migrants, have had important impacts on household economic development and helped their families escape poverty.

The chapter 4 moves away from an emphasis on the chef's migration background to their experience in Thaitime kitchen spaces, where I pursued the idea that the kitchen has become more than just a space for the chefs to work. The chefs have also been able to use kitchen spaces for cooking and eating activities to generate social power and create social relationships. I argue that the chefs' relationships are constructed around the concept of *"kropkrua"* (family) in Thai culture. In Thaitime kitchen, the idea of being kin was constructed through sharing of foods. All staff in the restaurant eat *khao* (rice) from the same rice cookers together with a side dish, which is cooked by the head chef. While *khao* is believed to become flesh and blood, sharing *khao* from the same pot can be seen as sharing blood or becoming kin. The chefs locate themselves in kinship position arrangements, even though they are not kin and no biological relations can be traced between them. Kinship terms such as *"mae"* (mother) *"loohk"* (daughter) *"pii"* (older sister) and *"nong"* (younger sister) are applied in how they address each other and then they act according to

this role. In order to answer the second research question, I argue that the head chefs appropriate the term *"mae"* to maintain power and leadership positions through their ability to cook food to support many clients.

In Thaitime kitchens, head chefs are called *"mae"* (mother) and stay at the top of hierarchy, which can be observed through the use of spaces. The kitchen areas are divided into three sections: the cooking section, the starters section and the running section. However, the cooking section where stoves, or *"tao,"* are situated, are mainly occupied by the head chefs. In Thailand, cooking at *tao* is the responsibility of women and this places women in the position of power within the family. This idea also translates to the Thaitime kitchens, where *"tao"* are also perceived as the center of power. The provision of well-cooked food from *tao* is both an actions of love and caring for others as well as a way to create reciprocal obligations between a giver and receivers in term of *'bun khun'* (indebted kindness). Providing food is the main method of *'bun khun,'* as food is believed to become blood and is what causes someone to be alive. Thus, the head chefs are empowered through this value and the other chefs usually respect, give support and listen to head chef in order to express their gratitude.

Moreover, Thai belief systems become a tool to access power for the head chefs, as *'mae'* in Thailand are sacred and are believed to possess extraordinary powers. The head chefs, thus, are treated with respect and are regarded as people who engage with the world of the spirits. They have an important role as a leader in presenting the offerings and have been protected by the spirits.

In the final chapter, I expanded my research to the other places outside the restaurant kitchens. Data collection indicated that chefs rarely travel or visit places unfamiliar to them. The majority of visits were centered around, accommodations, the Thai Temple, ethnic grocery shops, Thai massage shops and the betting shops. Thus, I aimed to explain how chefs' experiences determine places they visit and how their sense of belonging develops through everyday activities, such as grocery shopping, gardening, joining rituals and getting massage treatments.

The experience of leaving a place that was perceived to be "*baan*" (home) and settling in a new environment challenges the chefs to reflect on the meaning of "home." I began by investigating a contrast between the private houses in "Penguin Village" and the restaurant accommodations and found that material objects which relate to hometowns in Thailand play an important role in creating a sense of belonging. In "Penguin Village," the chefs decorate their houses according to their cultural background and grow Thai vegetables in their gardens. The availability of these objects evokes memory and makes the chefs feel at home. Live-in chefs, in contrast, have less opportunity to express their identity via

material objects. Thus, they tend to perceive their accommodation as temporary and find it difficult to develop a sense of belonging within them.

Food also plays an important role in retaining a connection to the chefs' eating culture and evokes memories of friends, family and homeland. The chefs, therefore, try to maintain their dietary habits by finding Thai/Asian ingredients in local markets. This allows the recreation of Thai dishes that are authentic and help maintain identity and remindeders of home.

In order to maintain Thai identity and to be a part of the Thai community in the UK, the chefs regularly visit the Thai temple and massage shops during their free time. While the temple is hugely significant to Thai people for maintaining their religious identity as Buddhists, massage shops are perceived as the places where healing can take place. Both places, offer a transnational space where customs, beliefs and perspective of health extend across national boundaries. However, by settling into a new country, the chefs not only limit themselves to places that are associated with their homeland but also learn new things, such as playing slot machines in the casinos. For the chefs, a casino is symbolic of hope and risk but can become significant when the chefs face financial difficulties.

## 6.2 Discussion

The study of Thai female migration began to appear in academic literatures as a result of cross-cultural marriage between Thai and western couples. Many literatures, as I discussed in chapter two, present a stereotype of Thai women in the UK as peasant women who got married with foreigner because for economic reasons. Such literatures suggest that marrying a foreigner from a developed country has become an ideal choice for Isan women. For instance, Bunmattaya's (2005) research suggests that the majority of villagers in the Roi-Et province of Isan prefer to have daughter over a son, because daughters can marry  a foreigner, allowing their families to become rich. In addition, the girls in this village agreed with their parents. Instead of planning to work hard at school and get a good job in the future, the girls wanted to rely on their foreigner husbands. Piayura's (2012) research supported this point by mentioning that "all of informants, like many of the Thai women with the 'Farang Dream', hoped to receive money from their Farang husbands to send to their family in Thailand" (Piayura, 2012, p 157).

Nevertheless, this research had a different result, as most chefs did not expect to receive a significant amount of money from their partners. It is important to note that annual home visits of former migrants create the connections and networks, as well as provide information and inspiration for prospective migrants in their hometowns. Thus, most chefs realize that there is an availability of work at Thai restaurants in the UK, which can be a source of income and a place of community, before making a decision to live in the UK. The chefs who are marriage migrants perceive foreign husband as a key to

access the UK, but they did not intend to rely on their husbands financially. As I have demonstrated, a number of chefs make the own choice to marry with "*farang kee nok,*" the slang word which means "white men from a poor background," because they believe they can work in the UK and send remittances home as other migrant have. For the chefs aged between 30 and 45 years old, which is the evident majority in this research, international migration is not something new in their village. They have watched and learned from other migrants' experiences and see the benefits from the social networks and Thai restaurant business that are already established. Thus, cross-cultural marriage by itself is not perceived as wealth and, instead, the demand of Thai labor in the service sector and other the benefits of working and living in the UK are the pull factors that attract the chefs. Even after immigrating, the chefs continue their primary intention by working in Thai restaurants. Moreover, they help their partners financially by paying the bills and prefer not to completely rely on them. The remittances and branded items purchased are also from their own wages and savings.

The ethnography and narratives discussed in this research suggest that Thai female migrants cannot simply be stereotyped as a dependent spouses. I agree with Angeles and Sunanta (2009) that the popular image of the Thai "mail-order bride," which emphasizes powerlessness and victimhood, misinterpret a more accurate picture of migrant lives. In reality, their immigration life is complex and includes many different aspects apart from marriage life. The chefs also participate in the labor market and engage with London's urban setting. Therefore, this research focuses on women's agency in their everyday lives of transnational migration. This ethnography conducted in Thaitime kitchens has shown that the chefs carry Thai culture and social structures with them through transnational migration. Kitchens, as the specific spaces where transnational processes occur, have a connection with village social structures including kinship and power relations. In order to improve their positions in the hierarchy and negotiate for greater power, it is my observation that female chefs in higher positions tend to deploy the idealistic stereotype of 'mother.' This is accomplished by performing a maternal role of nurturing children through the act of cooking, feeding and teaching. In Thai culture, the mother is the most powerful person in the family and has the central roles of political leadership, moral authority and control of property (Haviland, 1997: p 579), consequently female chefs are often placed with supreme value in their role as mothers. Indeed, the anthropological perspective acknowledges that mothering is not restricted to reproduction and caretaking by biological or legal mothers (Ebaugh, 2000). Typical mother-child relations are shadowed and can be seen in social relations between those in high positions and subordinate staff, in their charitable the acts and nurturing demeanor.

The concept of 'transnationalism' emerged from the realization that migrants abroad maintain ties to their countries of origin, making "home and host society a single arena of social action" (Brettell, 2000).

However, transnational practices can, in fact, enable a sense of local attachment and, rather than challenging the integrity of the nation state, they form part of the process of its inevitable renegotiation and transformation (Sheringham, 2010). It is clear in this research that the chefs maintain a strong sense of local attachment while they are living in the UK. By considering everyday routines, I found that full-time chefs usually work six day per week and they might work every day in cases where someone in kitchen team takes a long holiday in Thailand. Part-time chefs might have shifts of lesser duration, but most of them also work in other restaurants as well. Thus, the chefs spend most of their time in the kitchen, which makes them separate from the mainstream culture of the host society and, in turn, develop strong ties within their transnational community. Even when they are outside the kitchens, they regularly visit the same places that are familiar to them and have connections with their cultural backgrounds. As discussed in the last part of this research, the chefs' experiences differ in different places. Thai restaurants, the Thai temple and Thai massage shops clearly represent key sites for enabling migrants to maintain direct links with Thailand. Such places help them maintain links with their home by relying on their memories and familiar object or tastes, consuming Thai products, and maintaining close contact with family. In other words, migrants can establish transnational belonging without travelling to the countries to which they feel they belong to. These places offer people a space that empowers their identity, where they can meet other people with whom they share social references.

The places like "Penguin Village," supermarkets, ethnic grocery shops, shopping centers and casinos are all good sites to understand how the chefs negotiate their identity within the urban settings of London. I argue that the chefs draw on available resources when negotiating and constructing their identities. When encountered with host culture in public spaces, the chefs are active agents who select something that connects with familiar tastes, memories and cultural preferences. Such practice enables immigrants to transform their current places of residence by placing their identities and inserting their belonging into neighborhoods in the UK, as well as defining places in their own terms.

In short, this research has provided a perspective into the world of Thai restaurant workers. It particularly critiques the popular discourses that tend to homogeneously represent Thai women in the UK as "passive" and "submissive" "wives" who "heavily rely on men." According to this ethnographic data, the chefs should be seen as an active agents who employ tactics to participate in international migration, construct social relations by creating a "kropkrua" in the kitchen, negotiate spaces and situate themselves within the context of UK.

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