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Beliefs and Relationships of Compressed Puffed Rice Snacks with the People in the Nakhon Chum Community, Kamphaeng Phet Province

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Abstract

Kamphaeng Phet Province, with its strategic geography, served as a crucial frontier town during the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya periods. Consequently, compressed puffed rice snacks emerged as a resilient food item capable of extending the shelf life of provisions during wartime. In the absence of conflict, compressed puffed rice snacks were found utility in religious ceremonies. The process involves subjecting rice to heat until the grains pop, transforming it into puffed rice.

The preparation of compressed puffed rice snacks represents a traditional method employed by the Thai people to preserve food in earlier times, and beliefs have become intertwined with various local customs and rituals associated with compressed puffed rice snacks. In the Nakhon Chum district of Kamphaeng Phet Province, compressed puffed rice snacks, known locally as 'Kao-Tok-At,' enjoy a prominent reputation. The main ingredients include puffed rice, palm sugar, and coconut milk. This article aims to explore: 1) The historical origins of compressed puffed rice snacks in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province; 2) The beliefs and cultural significance associated with compressed puffed rice snacks in the region; and 3) The relationship between compressed puffed rice snacks and significant religious events in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province.

Keywords: Compressed Puffed Rice Snacks, Beliefs, Relationship, Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province

1. Introduction

Upon studying the information presented in the book 'Local Wisdom of Thai Desserts in Kamphaeng Phet Province,' it is evident that compressed puffed rice snacks hold significance in preserving food by subjecting rice to heat until it pops, thus transforming it into puffed rice. This highlights the ingenuity of ancient people in terms of food preservation. Compressed puffed rice snacks are also integral to various ceremonial rituals, grounded in the belief that they possess purity.

Moreover, considering the compressed puffed rice snacks from the perspectives of being a dessert, a food preservative, and their community importance, sweet treats play a crucial role in Thai culture. In the past, the creation of Thai desserts often involved a mix of ingredients based on familiarity, with proportions not strictly defined. The success in crafting these delicacies relied heavily on experience and expertise, necessitating frequent practice to achieve mastery. In this article, the focus is on 'Kao-Tok-At,' compressed puffed rice snacks specific to Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province. This culinary tradition has been passed down within specific family lineages, with Mr.Saranit Yotpanya being the third-generation inheritor. The initial innovator, his grandmother, Mrs.c, practiced the art until the age of ninety-eight, passing the tradition to her daughter, Mrs.Praphasri Ekpan, the second generation. Currently, Mr.Saranit Yotpanya, the grandson, carries on the tradition.

The shop specializing in compressed puffed rice snacks, located at 73/3 Moo 4, Nakhon Chum Subdistrict, Muang District, Kamphaeng Phet Province, is emblematic of the enduring legacy of this culinary tradition.

Consequently, this article aims to examine the history, beliefs, and values associated with compressed puffed rice snacks in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province, as well as their relationship with the local community. This investigation aims to shed light on the enduring significance of compressed puffed rice snacks in Nakhon Chum, Mueang District, Kamphaeng Phet Province.

2. Objectives of the Article

1. To study the historical origins of compressed puffed rice snacks in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province.

2. To explore the beliefs and cultural values associated with compressed puffed rice snacks in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province.

3. To explore the relationship between compressed puffed rice snacks and the local community in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province.

3. Scope of study

This article delineates the scope into two parts:

1. Scope of Content: The scope of the study related to compressed puffed rice snacks in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province, into three interconnected components:

1.1. Studying the historical origins of compressed puffed rice snacks in Nakhon Chum Subdistrict, Mueang District, Kamphaeng Phet Province.

1.2. Exploring the beliefs and cultural values associated with compressed puffed rice snacks in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province.

1.3. Exploring the relationship between compressed puffed rice snacks and the local community in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province.

2. Scope of Area: The study's geographical scope concerns compressed puffed rice snacks only in Nakhon Chum Subdistrict, Mueang District, Kamphaeng Phet Province.

4. Study Instruments

This article used an investigative approach to interview people involved with compressed puffed rice snacks in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province. The analysis is based on information gathered from official documents, academic articles, research papers, and relevant studies.

5. Results

The study on Beliefs and Relationships of Compressed Puffed Rice Snacks with the People in the Nakhon Chum Community, Kamphaeng Phet Province, can be divided into three main topics following the study objectives:

1. To address the first objective, which is to study the historical origins of compressed puffed rice snacks in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province, the investigation into the historical development of these snacks revealed that they have been part of the local cuisine since the Sukhothai period. Initially used as a food source during wartime, compressed puffed rice snacks evolved into ceremonial items, participating in various rituals. Despite their existence since the Sukhothai period, these snacks did not gain significant popularity. However, during the Ayutthaya era, increased trade and cultural exchange with foreign nations influenced the incorporation of foreign ingredients into local cuisine, giving rise to a fusion of culinary traditions. Notably, the time of Ayutthaya is considered the peak period for Thai desserts, and Maria Guyomar de Pinha or Marie Guimar (ท้าวทองกีบม้า), married to Chao Phraya Wichayen who is considered a symbol of that era “It is the most prosperous era for Thai desserts.” The development of Thai desserts continued with contributions from various innovators, resulting in a diverse array of traditional sweets. (Keeariyo, C., 2012) Compressed puffed rice snacks in Nakhon Chum Kamphaeng Phet Province, have become a renowned local delicacy,

particularly known for their aroma, sweetness, and representation of the region's culinary heritage.

Furthermore, the data indicates that compressed puffed rice snacks are a type of ingredient widely used in various Thai desserts. In the case of Nakhon Chum, these snacks, known as "Kao-Tok-At," are made by finely grinding puffed rice, mixing it with caramelized palm sugar and coconut milk, pressing it into molds, and baking it over fragrant candle smoke. The snacks are known for their aromatic and sweet characteristics. Traditionally, this knowledge and recipe were passed down from generation to generation within the family. However, due to factors such as illness and the COVID-19 pandemic, the production of these snacks temporarily ceased in Nakhon Chum. Nevertheless, due to the demand from the local community and the reputation of "Kao-Tok-At," production resumed when Mr.Saranit Yotpanya, the third-generation inheritor of the recipe, decided to revive this traditional delicacy.

2. To address the second objective, which aims to explore the beliefs and cultural values associated with compressed puffed rice snacks in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province, the study reveals that these snacks hold a significant connection to local beliefs and cultural traditions. People in Nakhon Chum often incorporate compressed puffed rice snacks into various ceremonial rituals, earning them the designation of an auspicious and ceremonial treat. The connection between compressed puffed rice snacks and local beliefs is deeply rooted, with the snacks being utilized in diverse ceremonial practices. Thai people have historically held the belief that puffed rice represents purity and beauty, making it a symbol of virtue. Consequently, people in Nakhon Chum have embraced compressed puffed rice snacks as a representation of cleanliness and aesthetic beauty, frequently including them in ceremonial events. The snacks are particularly prominent during auspicious occasions, such as teacher appreciation ceremonies, where they are combined with flowers for ceremonial purposes. Additionally, in processions, compressed puffed rice may be scattered along the route, although this practice has diminished over time. In summary, compressed puffed rice snacks hold a unique cultural significance in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province, serving as a symbol of purity and beauty, intimately intertwined with local beliefs and ceremonial traditions. (Yotpanya, S., 2023, interview)

Like "Foi Thong," which is believed to bring good fortune and symbolizes prosperity (Kooamornphatana, N., 2010), compressed puffed rice snacks in Nakhon Chum are considered an auspicious delicacy and a symbol of the region's prosperity. In terms of nutritional value, compressed puffed rice snacks from Nakhon Chum are a unique and sought-after food item in the region. When the local community faced a period without access to these snacks, Mr.Saranit Yotpanya, the owner of the local store, decided to revive their production due to the demand from the older generation of Nakhon Chum residents. Consequently, compressed puffed rice snacks have once again gained popularity among the older generation, who recognize them as a distinctive delicacy of Nakhon Chum, difficult to find elsewhere. Therefore, compressed puffed rice snacks are

not only culturally significant but also play a role in preserving the local culinary heritage.

As for the ingredients used in making compressed puffed rice snacks in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province, there are three main components:

1. Glutinous rice husks
2. Palm sugar
3. Coconut milk

The equipment utilized in the process includes:

1. Stainless steel basin
2. Flower-shaped molds
3. Plastic gloves
4. Candle smoke generator for baking the snacks
5. Container for mixing palm sugar with coconut milk
6. Containers for holding processed puffed rice in coarse and fine textures.

3. To address the third objective, which seeks to explore the relationship between compressed puffed rice snacks and the local community in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province, the study findings indicate that compressed puffed rice snacks are intricately connected to local beliefs and cultural practices. Compressed puffed rice snacks, believed to possess auspicious and virtuous qualities, is favored by the people in Nakhon Chum. Consequently, it is commonly integrated into various ceremonies, such as Thai Saart Day, where compressed puffed rice snacks become a vital ingredient in dishes like Krayasart Saart Thai and numerous other traditional Thai sweets. From the study conducted by Samart Jansoon, Thai Saart Day is associated with the belief that departed relatives could receive merit from their living siblings, providing a chance for them to return and partake in the ceremony. Thus, this day becomes significant for making merit offerings to deceased relatives, believing that it will bring them full merits, the opportunity to reincarnate, and overall happiness.

Moreover, Thai society, particularly in rural areas, is agrarian, and the month of October marks the beginning of the rice cultivation season. During this time, rice seedlings are transplanted, and farmers have a period of relative leisure before the harvest season. This seasonal cycle allows for the observance of religious rituals and the expression of gratitude towards sacred entities, such as Mother Earth or the Rice Goddess, who play a role in nurturing the rice plants. Consequently, local communities engage in merit-making activities, expressing gratitude for the flourishing rice crops and praying for abundant harvests. Additionally, Thai communities, including Nakhon Chum, often observe the practice of making offerings to field spirits or rice spirits, locally known as "Mae Phosop" or "Phi Naa," to ensure the prosperity and fertility of the rice fields.

Most Thai desserts that incorporate puffed rice as an ingredient are often associated with cultural beliefs, traditional ceremonies, and enduring prosperity. This significance has been documented in the local wisdom book of Kamphaeng Phet Province on pages 50-51, stating that 'around the tenth month, between the rainy and winter seasons, typically in September and October, crops start to bloom and yield. Rice grains

begin to ripen, signifying the initial harvest season. (Sangsida, N, 1998, interview) It is believed among villagers that the first harvest if used for worship, sacred rituals, or consumed at home, not only contributes to the thriving growth of crops but also brings auspiciousness to those partaking in the ceremonial act. Furthermore, it is thought to ensure success and prosperity in future endeavors.

Additionally, Nakhon Chum's compressed puffed rice snacks are closely intertwined with the local community, being an exclusive delicacy during auspicious occasions. The snacks are believed to play a role in various ceremonial events such as Thai Saart Day. There is a belief associated with those who have passed away, as well as other ceremonies like teacher homage events. The snacks, characterized by their beautiful and pure white color, are often scattered along ceremonial processional routes. These snacks are only available during ceremonial events and are not accessible.

A study on local cuisine in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province, reveals the rich heritage of traditional Thai food and desserts passed down through generations since before 1956. This cultural diversity, stemming from Thai, Chinese, Karen, Mon, and Lao ethnicities, has evolved due to changes in lifestyle and family environments, resulting in the disappearance and lack of successors for some local foods. Therefore, it is essential for everyone to actively participate in preserving and promoting the local wisdom of food and desserts to ensure their continuity. (Sumkaew, P. and others, 2021)

According to interviews with the owners of Nakhon Chum's compressed puffed rice cake shops, these snacks have a historical connection to the local community, particularly in Nakhon Chum Subdistrict. They have been made at home for a long time and were not commonly distributed. In the past, they were often homemade for children in houses with many kids. Sometimes, they were sold if a household operated a store, with the snacks placed in closed containers. In earlier times, these snacks were frequently sold to children more than in the present day. (Yotpanya, S., 2023, interview)

Consequently, it can be concluded that Nakhon Chum's compressed puffed rice snacks have a historical relationship with the local community, primarily serving as ceremonial treats and being closely tied to the beliefs and culture of the people. The snacks are distinctive and not widely commercialized, as evidenced by the accounts of past generations, who made them for their children at home or occasionally sold them in local stores for the neighborhood kids to enjoy.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

From the study on Beliefs and Relationships of Compressed Puffed Rice Snacks with the People in the Nakhon Chum Community, Kamphaeng Phet Province, it can be summarized that the historical origin of compressed puffed rice snacks in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province, dates back to the era of grandma, Somtawil Ekpan, the first generation involved in making compressed puffed rice snacks in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province. The tradition was then passed on to her daughter, Praphasri Ekpan, who due to her advanced age and physical condition, temporarily ceased the

production of compressed puffed rice snacks for a period of 2-3 years. Subsequently, driven by the reminiscences of Nakhon Chum locals who missed the long-unconsumed compressed puffed rice snacks, Saranit Yotpanya, the present generation, resumed production.

To explore the beliefs and cultural values associated with compressed puffed rice snacks in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province, it can be concluded that these snacks are intricately linked to the local community's practices. The community believes that compressed puffed rice snacks is often used in various ceremonial events on significant days, such as Thai Saart Day, and other auspicious rituals like Teacher's Day ceremonies. There is a prevailing belief that the snacks represent something beautiful and virtuous, symbolized by the white color of the compressed puffed rice. Additionally, there is a custom of scattering compressed puffed rice along the processional route during religious ceremonies, further emphasizing their connection to ceremonial events. Moreover, these snacks are exclusively available during ceremonial occasions, reinforcing their value among the people of Nakhon Chum.

To explore the relationship between compressed puffed rice snacks and the local community in Nakhon Chum, Kamphaeng Phet Province, and the local community, it can be summarized that these snacks are primarily consumed during ceremonial events. The belief system and cultural practices of the people of Nakhon Chum involve incorporating compressed puffed rice into various ceremonial events on important days, reflecting its perceived goodness and virtue. The narratives from the past suggest that these snacks were crafted for children within households or occasionally sold in shops to cater to the local children. This tradition has positioned compressed puffed rice snacks as a local delicacy and a traditional snack specific to the Nakhon Chum Subdistrict.

7. Recommendations

1. It is advisable to organize activities that highlight and showcase compressed puffed rice snacks as distinctive features of events, aiming to elevate these snacks into symbols and icons of the Nakhon Chum community in Kamphaeng Phet Province.

2. There should be diverse distribution channels for compressed puffed rice snacks, reaching various areas and markets.

3. Knowledge dissemination about the production of compressed puffed rice snacks should be facilitated within the community, extending to other communities and local youth. This is to promote and preserve the sustainability of the community's way of life.

8. Recommendations for further studies

1. It is recommended to expand the research areas related to compressed puffed rice snacks to encompass a diverse range of topics.

2. Detailed guidelines for the preparation and cooking process, including distinctive alphanumeric characteristics, should be established. For example, specifying the number of sugar usage.

9. References

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