

Food Glorious (Thai) Food!

Has the “DaeJangGeum” craze overshadowed the value of our traditional Thai food? This is a perplexing question that Thais’ must find the answer to!

Culinary culture and a balanced diet are things that have been extremely important to Koreans for a long time. A famous Korean proverb “Sin – To – Bul – Yi” refers to the belief that the “body and earth are one”, implying that everything produced from the land is fit for the people who live on that land. Hence, culinary culture and the importance of nutrition have been just as equally important to Koreans as their history.

Korea is one of Asia’s most interesting civilisations’ and “DaeJangGeum”, apart from being a beautiful representation of Korean history, is also a reflection on their traditional culinary culture.

Korea experienced tremendous economic growth in the last part of the 20th century and whilst the popularity of junk food had increased this was not necessarily true all of the time. A survey conducted in Korea showed that younger generations still prefer to eat a more traditional diet such as Kimchi. Also, fat consumption made up only 16.7% of total energy consumed by Koreans, which is a lot lower than other countries, especially in Asia whose fat consumption levels have increased twofold. For Thai people, 22% of total energy consumption is fat. Korean food consists of an abundant amount of vegetables and protein from seaweed.

As well as prospering economically Korea is a major spearhead in the technology industry, however it still values the traditional aspects of its culture. Both government and nutrition organisations have put a lot of effort into advertising and public awareness campaigns to promote the benefits of Korean food and warn of the dangers of consuming excessive amounts of high fat western foods. Also, they have tried to promote healthy consumption habits to appeal both older and younger generations.

If we look at Thailand, according to various nutrition studies traditional Thai food and vegetables are high in nutritional value. Moreover, the traditional diet of Thais consists of many herbs that are full of nutrients and free from chemicals that assist with good health. Thai tradition states that diet should be “principally rice and vegetables” and that “protein should come from various types of fish”

However, the eating habits of Thai people have changed dramatically, with individuals increasing their consumption of fried, sweet and salty foods. It is obvious as to why the rates of heart disease, cancers and diabetes have increased dramatically. Of course the most obvious factors affecting these rates is dietary and lifestyle habits, in which Thai people are consuming more than their necessary energy requirements and not eating a balanced diet. In addition, decreased levels of physical activity due to increasingly busy lifestyles are also affecting Thai people.

However, nowadays Thai people are slowly becoming more aware of their health by trying to make sure they eat a healthy diet and increasing their physical activity levels.

Certainly, “Thai food is food for your health”, as traditional Thai food is full of vegetables and herbs. Therefore, we should be able to borrow the Korean proverb “body and earth are one.”

In our study we examined young adults and the associations between the psychological, social, and cultural factors in regards to eating traditional Thai food. Results show that more than 50% of young adults feel that traditional Thai food can counteract this every increasing trend towards fast food consumption. Hence, there is still hope that young Thai adults will rethink their dietary habits and chose to consume Thai food. Many societal institutions such as families, communities and government should work together and campaign to create sense of pride in the culture and uniqueness of traditional Thai food that was passed on from the skilled hands of our ancestors.