

Becoming Professional Female Chefs in Thailand: A Case Study of Chef Bo, Bo.lan Restaurant, Bangkok

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Abstract

Despite females forming the majority of workers in the world's restaurant industry, one of the largest and fastest growing sectors of the world economy, gender stereotyping of their role within it remains persistent. This may particularly be the case in relation to the industry's highest paid position: the position of chef, where females remain most notably under-represented. This current study is based on the case study of Chef Duangporn Songvisara (nicknamed Bo) who was awarded the distinction of 2013 Best Female Chef in Asia. Highlighted by her culinary competence, her full-service Thai restaurant, Bo.lan Essentially Thai, was recognized as one of the top-fifty restaurants in Asia. Through a qualitative research process that consisted of a personal face-to-face interview conducted with Chef Bo together with an analysis of documented sources, this case study aims to investigate the motivations necessary to become a professional chef, how a female chef balances work and personal life, and to analyze how a female chef achieves success in the restaurant business, in particular in the area Thai cuisine. Chef Bo concluded that success in a chef's career required passion and firm goals as work motivators.

Key words: Female; Chef; Restaurant; Work Motivation; Thai Cuisine

1. Introduction: Overview of the Case

The cover of *Time* magazine, one of the world's most influential publications, presented the "Gods of Food" on November 18, 2013. This issue discussed the 13 most reputable and prominent people who carry enormous influence over today's food industry. Despite four women being listed as "Gods": Aida Battle, coffee producer; Amrita Patel, chairman of India's National Dairy Development Board; Vandana Shiva, environmental activist and author; and Ertharin Cousin, the twelfth executive director of the United Nations World Food Programme, none of them were chefs. Interestingly, according to Howard Chua-Eoan (2013), a section editor of this issue, only three males, David Chang, Alex Atala, and Rene Redzepi, were praised as being the best known chefs in the world. Even in this issue, there was something of a family tree that illustrated how the innovations of five prominent chefs de cuisine have influenced the work of younger chefs in their restaurants around the world. Yet, again, of the more than fifty people mentioned, no female chef was named or listed. This omission would seem to demonstrate that the female chef has been forgotten and ignored in

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the restaurant industry, despite the fact that female chefs are among those who have won Michelin stars under its guide for fine dining restaurants (Lusher, 2009).

While cooking in the home remains principally a domain associated with females, its professional counterpart, the restaurant industry, remains a male-dominated sector. In the United Kingdom, for example, of 187, 000 chefs, only 37,000 or 19.7% were females according to the Office of National Statistics in United Kingdom (Cochrane, 2012). Furthermore, of the 143 Michelin-starred restaurants in the United Kingdom, since 2011, only 11 that were awarded stars had female chefs. In the United States, only six percent of head chef positions in the culinary industry are held by females (Lyons, 2014). Although more women are currently increasing their representation in such key positions as chef de cuisine and executive sous chef, male chefs maintain their dominance in restaurant kitchens, regardless of position titles. Nonetheless, females are increasingly represented among the students attending courses at culinary schools. For example, in 2012 almost half of the graduates of the International Culinary Center were female and, at The Culinary Institute of America, there was a significant increase in female graduates between 1992 and 2012 when there was a rise from 21% to 36% (Moskin, 2014).

Nevertheless, Moskin (2014) maintains that women chefs continue to face challenges to being recognized in a male dominated industry where male chefs receive more attention, and where female chefs, who may hold the same job title as their male counterparts, continue to receive a lower salary and have less job security. These findings are consistent with a report by The Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (2012) which showed a comparison between males and females employed in the restaurant industry. The report found that women are negatively impacted by, for example, a lack of benefits, gender discrimination, occupational segregation, sexual harassment, and lack of schedule control. These negative impacts fall unreasonably on women even though the majority of workers in this industry are women.

On another front, since 2011, Veuve Clicquot, one of the world's most famous French champagne houses, has launched an award for the world's best female chef. This substantial breakthrough demonstrates that the status of female chefs is becoming more recognized and professionally accepted, in spite of the lingering power that male chefs retain in the restaurant industry. A consequence of this award is its positive influence on female chefs worldwide. For example, Anne-Sophie Pic, a French chef named the best female chef in 2011 and recipient of the inaugural award from Veuve Clicquot, who, in spite of no formal training, is the only French chef, and the fourth female in gastronomy history, to have achieved Michelin three-star recognition for her family's restaurant, Maison Pic, located in Valence, Drome, France (Anderson, 2012).

In Asia, there are only three female chefs who have been recognized as top chefs by Veuve Clicquot. One of them is Duanporn Songvisava (better known by her nickname, Bo) who was awarded the distinction of Asia's Best Female Chef by Veuve Clicquot in 2013. She is the only Thai female chef working in her independently owned restaurant to be awarded this prestigious title. In particular, her innovations in Thai cuisine were cited in the commendation. Chef Bo was trained and learnt how to cook Thai food in London under the supervision of David Thompson at Nahm, the first Thai restaurant to win a Michelin star award. It was at Nahm that Bo met her partner and husband, Dylan Jones, in 2009, before they both returned to Bangkok and started their full-service restaurant business under the name of Bo.lan Essentially Thai (Klangboonkrong, 2013).

According to Hansford (2011), female chefs remain a minority as managing a kitchen is a challenging position. Nevertheless, Chef Bo has solidified her status as a professional in Thai cuisine in this male dominated arena. Currently, Thai food is recognized as one of the best-known cuisines in the world. For instance, massaman curry was ranked in first place as the most delicious food in the world by CNN in 2011 (CNNGo staff, 2011). Therefore Thai food has increasingly become more recognized by diners around the world, who seek authentic flavors. Chef Somsak Rarongkum, President of The Thailand Chefs Association has commented that the authentic identity of Thai food is not just the spicy taste or the colorful ingredients. The true identity of Thai food is created using the proper raw material and the raw spices which have been traditionally used for authentic Thai cooking for many years. Although Thai food has many different ingredients, the amount to be used in the cooking does not follow an exact formula. The challenge to create the best authentic Thai dishes depends on the chef's talent in tasting and adjusting ingredients as the food is prepared (Pimmasri, 2015). Due to Chef Bo's passion and talents for Thai cooking, Bo.lan restaurant has been ranked number 28 and 37 amongst Asia's 50 best restaurants by S. Pellegrino and Acqua Pannain 2014 and 2015 (Asia's 50 Best Restaurants, 2014; 2015).

As for the celebration of the 55th anniversary of Thai Airways International Public Company or Thai Airways this year, Chef Bo, with her partner, Dylan, have been selected to create a new inflight Thai cuisine menu for both Royal Silk Class and Economy Class passengers on Singapore to Bangkok flights from May 1 until August 15, 2015. With Chef Bo's expertise in cooking traditional and seasonal Thai dishes, Thai Airways passengers can savor the flavors and scents of Thai street food, enhanced with a touch of class and finesse. Mr. Kittiphong Sansomboon, General Manager of Thai Airways Singapore, also said that this special menu designed by the award-winning celebrity chefs from a leading restaurant in Thailand, Bo.lan, reflects Thai Airways seriousness when it comes to satisfying its customers (Chan, 2015; See, 2015).

Such recognition and achievement underscores Bo's competence as a female chef, notwithstanding her role as mother of a young child, to whom she devotes as much time as her busy schedule allows. Based on the case study method, this study aims to investigate the motivations for wishing to become a professional chef, how a female chef balances work and personal life, and to analyze how a chef, in particular a female chef who specializes in Thai cuisine, achieves success in an independently owned restaurant business.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Professional Chef, A Predominantly Male Position

Few researchers have focused on female chefs in the culinary industry; however, Hansford (2011) examined the theoretical and structural background as to why females are under-represented in the realm of the restaurant kitchen, and explained that this paucity has three dimensions: food as gendered, cooking as gendered, and the division between public and private spheres as gendered.

First, food is regarded as gender. Therefore, it holds a position of power because of its being necessary for survival, its role in the determination of someone's status, and its role as a medium of cultural meanings and customs. In Western societies, meat has been symbolized as high status due to its association with wealth, masculinity, patriarchy, and power (Adams,

1990; Inness, 2001). Thus, the concept of consuming meat is symbolic of an act of power and superiority. Counihan (1999) affirmed that the male is expected to consume “heavy” food such as meat to nourish his body, whilst the female should consume “light” foods. This shows that the act of eating meat by men is an act of power (Inness, 2001). Also, Bourdieu (1984: 192) stated that in French society, males need to consume meat as the “stronger” food in order to satisfy their “brutal need”, whereas females do not need to have stronger and more flavored foods as they prefer to consume the “light” food such as fish and salad.

Second, cooking is classified by gender. Different styles of cooking are strongly associated with gender. Females in Western culture tend to be more involved with domestic cooking; meanwhile males are more associated with weekend and celebratory cooking. Men also have more latitude regarding whether they cook or not, however, women must do the daily cooking as it is perceived as their gender’s role and responsibility (Hansford, 2011; Inness, 2001). As meat is associated with superiority and masculinity, this leads to the high status of men when they cook meat. For example, in American society, steak, a red meat, is praised as high status in the realm of meats and the grilling of steak is a symbol of the masculinization of cooking. Throughout American society, a male stereotype is that of the meat grilling man, while females are perceived as lacking the ability to grill. Regarding this combination of the gendering of both food and cooking as reported in the aforementioned literature, Hansford (2001) hypothesized that men are more associated with the cooking of “valuable” foods such as meat than women who tend to be associated with menial styles of cooking and cold preparations.

Last is the concept of public and private spheres. Both Ortner (1974) and Rosaldo (1980) stated that males are affiliated with the public sphere, whereas women are associated with the private or domestic sphere. Conventionally, the kitchen is considered to be part of the private or domestic sphere and females cook daily within it as part and parcel of their gendered domestic responsibilities and it is generally considered to be mundane; whereas males, with their higher status, have a preference for cooking in a professional kitchen as it is part of the public sphere. It is also a general conception that executive chefs working in restaurants, which are viewed as public space, are mostly men.

As for the Asian experience, in the past, females did not work in traditional Chinese kitchens, however, women do now work in Chinese kitchens, which has been a substantial shift for the Chinese culinary industry (Lau, 2015). Although female chefs are more visible in the restaurant industry across Asia and more skillful Asian female chefs continue to enter the industry, it remains an insufficient proportion of females working in the position of chef as compared with their male counterparts due to the traditional societal norms which continue to resist change in this area. In retrospect, physical condition, one of the pivot factors, significantly discourages Asian females from working in the culinary industry (Vora, 2015), which is consistent with previous studies based on the Western experience, where women also continue to be underrepresented in the role of chef due to this factor.

2.2 Work Motivation

Work motivation is a complex subject influenced by a range of variables as well as having a significant personal dimension. Grant and Shin (2011) explained that work motivation is a psychological process which directs and energizes an action towards a job, task, role, or project. However, Mullins (2010) argued that expectancy theory is one of the key work motivation theories that provide a framework for understanding work motivation within the

hospitality industry. In general, expectancy theory posits a relationship between the effort expended and the perceived likely outcomes, and the expectations that reward will be related to performance. Therefore, the level of performance relies on the perceived expectation regarding effort expended and the desired outcomes. This basic model of expectation is also explained by Vroom (1964). According to this work, there are three key components of expectation theory: valence, instrumentality, and expectancy. First, valence differs from a value, but it is the anticipated satisfaction provided by an outcome. People therefore feel that outcomes are important or valued. Second, instrumentality is the extent to which performance will lead to the outcomes, so a good performance will bring about a better outcome. Last, expectancy is the relationship between a chosen course of action and its predicted outcome, so effort will lead to performance. If expectancy is absent, people feel that the effort is unproductive.

On the other hand, if valence and instrumentality are missing, people will question whether their performance is worth the effort. Thus, Vroom was the first scholar to explain that personal preference of the individual and their desire for particular results from their behavior and efforts and that this personal preference will differ between individuals (Mullins, 2010). Arguably, Vroom's expectancy theory is a better and more precise psychological predictor of within-person than between-person in terms of work motivation (Van Eerde & Thierry, 1996). To illustrate, a deputy kitchen chef wishes to attain higher status and seeks promotion to kitchen chef, so the desire will result in a higher level of performance only if the deputy kitchen chef believes the opportunity of gaining promotion is possible.

Another theory which seeks to clarify work motivation within the service industry is the goal theory or goal-setting theory, primarily based on the pioneering research of Locke (1968). The core of this theory is that people's goals or intentions play a crucial role in determining behavior. Locke recognized the influence of perceived value, as indicated in the expectancy theory of motivation, and proposed that these values will increase the experience of emotion and desire. Goals will lead to people's responses and actions. Goals also direct work behavior, maintain motivation, and bring a certain effect or feedback (Mullins, 2001). Goal theory can be extended to more explanations about work motivation, since expectancy theory focuses only on the psychological procedure related to work motivation and contains less explicit theory and guidance (Grant & Shin, 2011).

Locke (1968) proposed that people with specific goals, such as a defined level of performance, or a given deadline for task completion, will perform significantly better than those who have no set goal or only unclear goals. Furthermore, people whose goals are difficult to achieve will tend to over-perform compared to people whose goals are easier. Difficult goals are most likely to produce outcomes when people are committed to them, when they receive feedback, and when tasks are simple rather than complex. If there is no commitment, people question whether it is valuable to work towards difficult goals. Without feedback, they cannot benchmark their process and adjust effort, persistence, and task strategies accordingly. If the tasks are simple, effort is a significant factor in performance, but if the tasks are too complex and task strategies become more dominant, the result is a decrease in the performance effects of goal theory (Locke & Latham, 2009). Additionally, goals should be set at a challenging, but still realistic, level. Difficult goals will lead to better performance than easier ones. However, if the goals are set too high or are impossible to accomplish, performance will suffer, particularly over the long term. As a motivational technique, goal theory is viewed as being more suitable and applicable to the hospitality

industry than formal theory and it also provides a fruitful approach to work motivation and performance (Mullins, 2001).

2.3 Elements to Succeed in Restaurant Business

The well-known research paper “Why Restaurants Fail” by Parsa, et al. (2005), sets forth 12 factors that a restaurant owner should address in order to succeed in the restaurant business: (1) provide a clear concept with distinct knowledge of marketing functions; (2) ensure all decisions make the long-term economic sense; (3) adapt desirable technology to keep a record of and track customers; (4) cultivate managers via continuing education through trade shows and workshops; (5) effectively and regularly communicate values and objectives to staff; (6) set out a clear vision, mission, and operation strategy; (7) establish a cost-conscious culture; (8) focus on a single clearly focused concept and develop it well; (9) make a considerable time commitment both to the restaurant and family; (10) constitute and build a positive organizational culture through consistent management; (11) control managerial flexibility; and (12) select the location carefully. Overall, the most significant influences contributing to a restaurant’s success are food quality as well as the core characteristics of the owner-manager, who must have the knowledge, drive, skills, determination, and passion necessary to ensure success.

Successful restaurant owners should have a passion for business, a high level of energy, and the capacity to motivate employees, as work in the restaurant business requires a significant time commitment. Time commitment necessities and the balance between work and personal family life is a critical factor, and a successful organizational life-cycle is strongly contingent on the family life-cycle. Many successful owners disclosed that family input was pivotal, driving them in decision-making regarding starting or leaving the restaurant business. Family and spousal advocacy are indispensable for the success of a restaurant (Parsa, et al., 2005: 316). Despite the time pressures of the restaurant business, many successful restaurant owners are good at balancing their time between work and family, or they are single.

Also in the Asian restaurant business, both Veuve Clicquot Asian female award winners – Hong Kong chef Vicky Lau (2015 winner) and Taiwanese chef Lanshu Chen (2014 winner) – affirmed that to become a successful independent restaurant owner is challenging and difficult for everyone due to consistently long hours and personal time sacrifice (Lau, 2015; Vora, 2015).

As stated above, numerous factors contribute to restaurant success. One determining aspect of success is the employee, specifically employee training, personality, and diversity. The level of capital and financial management are also determining factors, as well as location and having a well-defined restaurant concept. Interestingly, research by Parsa, et al. (2011) showed that nearly 60% of independently owned restaurants are more likely to fail than chain restaurants. This 2011 report was consistent with these researchers’ previous findings (Parsa, et al., 2005). A more recent study by Parsa, et al. (2015), however, indicates that restaurant size and location are influential factors in determining the potential for success; with larger restaurants having a statistically higher success rate. As for restaurant type, full-service restaurants have higher successful rates than quick service restaurants. Indeed, larger restaurants with chain affiliations have more chance of success than small, quick service operations. Finally, location matters: restaurants located near business areas succeed at a higher rate than ones near residential areas.

3. Research Methodology

This study was based on a qualitative research methodology and employed the in-depth interview technique to collect data during a four hour interview conducted with Chef Bo on April 23, 2014 in her restaurant, Bo.lan. Furthermore, data were collected from articles found on web pages, in magazines, and in newspapers, and also from personal interviews. The in-depth interview aimed to acquire detailed information about Chef Bo's personal opinions and ideas, behavior associated with being a competent female chef, work motivation and balance and, finally, her passion for Thai cuisine. Chef Bo is a suitable candidate as a subject for the collection of such data because, as noted earlier, she is the only Thai female to receive the award of best Asian female chef by *Veuve Clicquot*; in her case, in 2013.

Despite the sample size of this in-depth interview being only one, there is debate and questioning regarding "how many" interviewees are sufficient for adequate research. Morse (2000) argued that it depends on numerous factors, such as the quality of data, the scope of the case study, the nature of the topic, the amount of useful information obtained from each participant, the use of shadowed data, and the qualitative method and study design that are sought and used in a particular interview (as cited in Dworkin, 2012, p. 1320). Add to this, one interview used in a case study is possibly enough because it depends on the research focus (Baker & Edwards, 2012, p.40). Therefore the scope of this case study principally focuses on how to become a recognized and successful female chef, with passion and also balance between family and life in the area of Thai cuisine. Chef Bo, so far, is the only first Thai female recognized with a prestigious award. So a single case is justified.

Furthermore, using case-focused analysis as a method of collecting data and then analyzing it has been generally applied in business studies (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2013). The data can be collected from a variety of sources including: documents, field work, archival records, verbal reports, direct observations, or any combination of these (Yin, 1981: 58; Yin, 2003: 8). Johansson (2003) emphasized that triangulation is essential to ensure the validity of case study research. In general, data collection methods are triangulated when various methods are combined; and the case study method combines data sources, theory, or investigations which might also be triangulated. Weiss (1994: 168) also showed that an advantage of employing the case study is that it conveys the respondents' experience and what it is like to be this person in this circumstance. Another significant beneficial aspect of the case study approach is that it is effective in the investigation of contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context and can elucidate the boundaries between phenomenon and context which are not clearly evident (Yin, 1981: 59). To ensure validity, the information and data collected for this study have been triangulated from several evidence including documents from newspapers, websites, reports, theories, and with personal interviews with Chef Bo and Chef Somsak Rarongkum, President of Thailand Chefs' Association; and also other data sources.

Regarding the concern about the generalizability of data collected using the case study analysis technique; Yin (2003: 10) argued that "case study [...] are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universe. In this sense, the case study [...] does not represent a 'sample', and in doing a case study, your goal will be to generalize theories (analytical generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)." In addition, Hartley (2004: 332) pointed out that "case study research is a heterogeneous activity covering a range of research methods and techniques, a range of

coverage (from single case study through carefully matched pairs up to multiple cases), varied levels of analysis (individuals, group, organizations, or organizational fields or social policies), and differing lengths and levels of involvement in organizational functioning.” The purpose of conducting case study research is also to present an analysis of the context and processes, demonstrating the theoretical issues being applied (Hartley, 2004: 323). Thus, this study attempts to explore and provide details about a Thai female chef who specializes in Thai cuisine through the conducting of a case study with the aim of revealing insights into how Chef Bo’s experience contributes to her restaurant.

4. Findings

4.1 Motivation to be a Chef

In the early days of her childhood, Chef Bo had no interest in cooking because her parents never encouraged her to pursue such a profession. However, after graduating with a Master’s degree in Gastronomy from the University of Adelaide, Australia, she attained the position of Commis – a junior or assistant cook – with Chef Amanda Gale, a female chef who specialized in Thai cuisine at The Metropolitan Bangkok’s Cyan. Bo found Chef Amanda to be a role model as a female achiever and believed that one day she would become a professional chef, concentrating on Thai cuisine in the fashion of her role model Amanda Gale. In her Master’s thesis on Thai gastronomy, Chef Bo’s primary aim was to learn how to cook Thai food using both Western conventional cooking methods as well as more traditional cooking instruments such as a mortar with pestle, based on ancient Thai cooking books. This quest drove her not only to work diligently for eight hour each day in the kitchen, but also to study the history of Thai cuisine cookery. Chef Bo used this clear picture of her goals, as well as her desire to follow in the footsteps of Chef Gale, as a source of continued motivation as she worked towards becoming an experienced Thai chef specializing in Thai cuisine.

Chef Bo explained that whilst completing her Master’s thesis on Thai cuisine in Adelaide, Australia, she started to question herself about how to cook Thai food. Even though she is a Thai national, she nevertheless had little idea of how to cook Thai food, and she did not know about the ingredients commonly used in Thai cooking. During her school break, she applied for her first position as a commis chef in the kitchen of Chef Amanda Gale, a female chef specializing in Thai cuisine. She found herself enjoying cooking Thai cuisine and learnt a great deal about becoming a competent chef. From that point, she has been learning how to cook Thai cuisine in her own professional way, whilst at the same time observing other experienced chefs as a means of continually gaining inspiration and to help focus the goals of her career path.

This pattern of motivation is consistent with the goal theory (Locke, 1968; 1975), which concludes that people’s goals or intentions play a crucial part in determining behavior. The influence of perceived value, as part of the expectancy theories of motivation, plus these values, give rise to the experience of emotions and desires. Employees strive to accomplish their goals to satisfy the pull of their emotion and desire. Goals direct work behavior and performance and lead to a level of consequence or feedback which is an effective motivational technique. This implies that individuals having their own motivation do have a clear and specific goal. A specific performance goal will direct behavior and maintain motivation for an employee.

To become a female chef is not easy is what Chef Bo claimed. This comment can be explained as a response to the common misconception of females as “cooks,” while males are viewed as “chefs.” Female chefs are simply doing what all women can do, which is to “cook” at home, whereas male chefs are conceived of as high status as they are perceived as belonging in the professional kitchen (Cochrane, 2012). Thus, with this extra barrier to overcome, it will be more probable that a female chef would “give up” as the role is already highly demanding and, for instance, requires a great deal of practice and attention to cooking details, with long working hours spent standing in the kitchen. Females, therefore, to achieve the ultimate goal in the restaurant arena of becoming a chef, must possess on average more passion and motivation in comparison to their male counterparts. Work in the professional kitchen requires huge stamina and an ability to keep working for long hours under high pressure as a chef has to work for irregular periods, staying focused and working productively during that time, as well as handling the inevitable tedium. For example, all chefs must prepare their ingredients and complete their preparatory *mise-en-place* before starting their cooking. This is a lengthy duty which requires care and attention, as well as being a physically uncomfortable task involving standing for long hours in the sweaty and greasy conditions of a hot kitchen. In addition to the long working hours, there is the added challenge; perhaps more for a female than a male, as physical strength is required when a chef is lifting heavy and hot implements during the cooking process. Chef Bo reiterated her point by adding that being a chef is not inherently discriminatory against females, but sometimes when a chef is female, she is disadvantaged in terms of physical ability, for example, when required to lift heavy objects such as a large pot. Chef Bo added that she observed gender differences during her time working as a chef under the supervision of Chef David Thompson at Nahm in London. During this experience, she worked an 18-hour day for three days and 12 to 13 hours for the remainder of the week. She recalled, regarding her kitchen work in Nahm, that when three cases of squid arrived, she had to clean, julienne, and prepare the dressings for the entire shipment to be ready for the salad station. Nahm was a fast-paced restaurant and she recalls that she could not afford to walk, but had to run in the kitchen as she could not complete her tasks as quickly as the men. Because of long working hours and manual labor concerns, the kitchen working environment tends to be unattractive to females, thus if females strive and prove themselves for the high ranking position of chef, they must possess the traits of dedication, passion, and hard work (Shardlow, 2011).

Chef Somsak Rarongkum, President of Thailand Chefs’ Association, affirmed that the path of being a professional female chef in Thailand is very difficult and challenging because females at first have to undergo several years for training in the professional cooking schools where they learn the knowledge on how to manage a restaurant, calculate food cost and labor cost, and constantly work in a team. Additionally, there are two critical points which make being female chef in Thailand quite formidable. First, the kitchen management is quite momentous for a Thai female chef because of her stereotype to be accepted and respected among her work team by both her male and female colleagues. Therefore being a professional female chief in a kitchen is not accepted and gets less respect in Thai culture compared with males, who are predominantly in the position of chef. Another important point is that working as a chef requires a lot of stamina and physical hard work, so it is quite a big challenge resulting in one of the significant drawbacks for Thai females because she has to carry heavy things, so she needs some strength and also works very long hours. Working in the kitchen as a chef is very a tough job for a Thai female, Chef Somsak said. (S. Rarongkum, personal communication, June 22, 2015).

Ultimately it is inconsequential whether the chef is male or female; the work has to be done professionally and meet the demands of the given day, she added. With this comment, Chef Bo revealed how much achieving her goal of becoming a chef cost her, including the ongoing personal challenge to keep raising her performance level. Yet, another factor challenging her as she sought to accomplish her goal was self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). According to Lyons (2014), 35 year-old Brazilian chef Helena Rizzo, who won the 2014 Veuve Clicquot best female award, disclosed that working in the kitchen is equally difficult for both males and females because of long hours, the heat, cuts, burns, and weekend shifts, and many who aim to become successful chefs have to make a number of sacrifices. This factor is also an internal belief regarding her job-related capabilities and competencies. Chef Bo's achievements demonstrate her high self-efficacy, and are a testament to the realism and feasibility of the higher goals she set for herself as a female chef. Therefore, the first step toward achieving goals is to build and reinforce people's self-efficacy.

4.2 Perception of Women and Work Balance

Female restaurant workers in general face problems of occupational segregation, lack of career mobility, discrimination, sexual harassment, lack of benefits, and lack of schedule control. In restaurant employment, women are under-represented in high-paid positions such as chefs, but are over-represented in many of the lowest paid areas such as food preparation staff (The Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, 2012). Notwithstanding this, Moskin (2014) said that in the food industry there are many new jobs being created and openings for women, and these are not limited only to "pastry chefs," an area which has grown considerably in terms of increased reputation and profitability. Although women nowadays still enter and expand their careers from line cooks to executive chefs in the food industry, the majority of chefs are notably male. With regards to the position of chef, which is the highest paid position in the restaurant industry, males remain more prevalent than females, with females accounting for only 19 percent of the chefs in the American restaurant industry (The Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, 2012). This low percentile can be explained by "stereotyping," which tends to infer positive or negative characteristics on a person based on a general categorization and perceived similarity. It is also about the process of perceptions and making judgments of other people, instead of a person as an individual. Sex stereotyping has a large effect on the hotel, catering and tourism (HCT) industry, one of the largest and fastest growing service sectors. Furthermore, this statistic shows that kitchen work is considered to be mostly for males and housekeeping jobs mainly for females (Mullins, 2001).

In Thailand, despite the financial crisis, the hotel and restaurant industry has the fourth largest growth in terms of jobs and performs well compared with other sectors. The mainly female dominated hotel and restaurant sectors generate more employment opportunities (Baum, 2013). As Chef Bo concluded, it is more difficult for a female than a male to balance work and private life because of the responsibilities related to family and home that are often unequally shared. As family care responsibilities are still borne chiefly by women, more females have to take parental leave than males. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2014), females surveyed across 26 countries spend twice as much time as males on home duties, and a routine day finds a woman spending 168 minutes doing housework while a male spends only 75 minutes (OECD, 2014).

Chef Bo considered herself fortunate as she receives support and assistance from her mother to care for her young son, but she admits that she would prefer to spend more time with her child than on her restaurant duties. With 10 hour working days, the 33 year-old female chef,

usually wakes up around 7.00 or 7.30 am to look after her child until noon before leaving for her restaurant. Here she is fully occupied until the last restaurant guest finishes eating; then she can return home. Her restaurant, Bo.lan, opens from 6pm until midnight every day, except for Mondays. Therefore, Monday is the only day when she can have time to spend with her family, including her mother, with whom she lives. This example supports the claim about the boundaries around which a female has to balance her personal life with work. She said that she is very fortunate that her mom can take care of her young boy while she goes to work at the restaurant. Chef Bo's example is consistent with the results posited by Parsa, et al. (2005) who argued that the distinct characteristic of the successful restaurant owner is the capacity to unite and manage their family life cycle with the business cycle.

Also, Lyons (2014) pointed out that females are more likely to achieve the position of professional chef if they have the support of their partners. For example, Elena Arzak, the winner of the Veuve Clicquot Best Female Chef Award in 2012, was married to Manu Lamosa, an architect, and had two children. She said her husband was obliging and concerned with work in the family sphere; and he spent more time raising the children than she did, as she was working in the restaurant. Nonetheless, she added that it is not easy for female chefs to accomplish their goals as they have more career interruptions than males. This can also impact negatively on their job development and promotion prospects, resulting in less financial rewards in their jobs. This is another reason why male chefs are more prevalent in the industry.

4.3 Bo.lan Restaurant, a Representative of Authentic Thai Cuisine

Five years ago on January 15, 2009, Thai restaurant, Bo.lan, was set up by married couple, Chef Bo and Australian Dylan Jones. Beforehand, both had worked and trained in Thai culinary skills with Michelin star chef David Thompson, at Nahm, a highly reputable Thai restaurant in London. Bo.lan, a 72-seat and full-service restaurant, is located on Sukhumvit Road, Bangkok. It was constructed on the model of a modern Thai house with a small garden area. The décor used is unadorned wood, along with some quite unique features. For example, the ceiling is made of old-Thai style baskets with hip, unconventional plates. The walls are hung with paintings mostly related to impressions of traditional Thai cooking styles and characteristics. In the garden, more tables provide a comfortable alfresco dining ambiance.

Specializing in authentic Thai cuisine, Bo.lan offers a bi-monthly menu which is based on the seasonal availability of meats, vegetables, and spices. Chef Bo emphasizes that her restaurant mainly focuses on slowly cooked food, which is succulent, fresh, and tasty. This concept of the slow food movement was first introduced by Carlo Petrini in 1986 and is a process of cooking that should be conducted in a clean, respectful way, without harming the environment, and animal welfare or health. Furthermore, food producers should receive fair compensation for their work. In Petrini's terms, slow food is essentially regional, promoting and protecting local goods (Popham, 2009). Hence, the ingredients used in Chef Bo's cooking are from organic farms such as the organic gaba rice from Si Sa Ket province. Her menu is based on the slow food cooking method, with all ingredients such as fish, meat, and vegetables being provided by local people from the local areas, Chef Bo explained.

Chef Bo also uses traditional cooking instruments such as mortar and pestle to make her own chili paste for all her curry dishes. This process can take a great deal of time for *mis-en-place*, and her cooking team also prepares every single order with conventional cooking methods.

For example, if there is an order for green chicken curry, her cooks will prepare the green chili curry paste using fresh ingredients for that particular order resulting in a time consuming preparation process. Therefore, her customers are informed that their requested dishes will take a certain amount of time because all dishes on the menu are based on primary Thai traditional cooking methods. When preparing her *mis-en-place*, she takes full responsibility for the pounding of all spices so that she can be completely confident in the ingredients that are used to make the spice for her curry dishes. It takes a great deal of time when using mortar and pestle to prepare the *mis-en-place*, Chef Bo added.

These traditional Thai cooking methods are time-consuming and require skilled techniques as well as experience to ensure that they are made correctly. With Thai ingredients such as Thai basil and chilies, coriander, ginger, coconut cream, garlic, onions, shallots, lemon grass, fish, and soy sauce, the chef must have high competence to harmoniously combine the ingredients and create a balanced taste. Thai dishes depend on balancing, said Chef Bo. Indeed, many specialists claim that to cook Thai dishes well is not easy as Thai cuisine is a harmonious blend of the spicy, the subtle, and the sweet and sour, as well as also being meant to equally satisfying the eye, the nose, and the palate.

Lastly, Chef Bo insisted that her restaurant will become a zero carbon eatery by 2018 as she now works closely with local farmers to support bio-diversified products as seen in her changing menu. She said that her restaurant already sources everything locally and uses organic produce. Her kitchen waste is now turned into fertilizer; however, she intends to convert it into methane gas so her kitchen production will be less dependent on gas companies. Also, she said that frontline staff uniforms are made from organic cotton in Chiang Mai, and that soon the cotton napkins provided in her restaurant would also be organic. Now her restaurant filters and bottles its own water, which significantly further cuts the restaurant's carbon footprint as transportation is reduced, and they are also switching from plastic bottles to glass bottles (Songvisava, 2014).

4.4 Means to Success in a Thai Restaurant

Parsa, et al. (2005) claimed that the key factors to accomplish success in the restaurant business are food quality and the qualities of the owner, including knowledge, drive, skills, determination, and passion. There are additional factors which include the employees' training, personalities, and diversity. Chef Bo found that even though her restaurant provides above average paychecks, it is very difficult to find the right staff and then to retain them. She admitted that her restaurant has a high rate of staff turnover and the average retention rate of kitchen staff is 12 months; for front-of-the-house staff the rate falls to ten months. This situation is in agreement with the findings of Moskin (2014), who stated that many fine dining restaurants in United States are faced with an exceedingly high rate of job turnover, due to the combination of tough schedules and physically demanded jobs required in the restaurant industry. Chef Bo also said that from her experience and observation, most Thais working in restaurants do not consider their jobs as a career, and do not seem to strive for improvement, nor do they take personal pride in their work because restaurant jobs have a lower social status than others such as in the hotel business.

To join her restaurant team, the job requirements in Bo.lan are quite simple. There is no requirement for restaurant business experience or a need for a proficient command of the English language, as the employees, including both back and front-of-the-house staff, will be trained by the management to the "Bo.lan standard." In addition, Chef Bo said that she

prefers to hire inexperienced rather than experienced cooks for her restaurant as she can train them in her own specific style. She also argued that it is imperative for individuals provided with this specialized cooking training to have the necessary skills to be effective, all in accord with the individual detailed standard of the Bo.lan kitchen.

Regarding the Bo.lan clientele, there is mixture of foreign and local customers. In addition, amongst the local customers, there are two different types of patrons: those who love their dishes, typically seniors, 50 years old or above; and those who have been accustomed to the taste of authentic Thai cuisine since they were young. This group usually becomes regular customers. In contrast to those who do not prefer Bo.lan and wish to criticize it usually cite the expensive cost or the taste of a particular dish as their reasons. To prevent this negativity, Chef Bo attempts to explain where the meat, ingredients, and products come from. If there is a complaint about the restaurant bill, or about a specific food's taste, she will describe her detailed cooking technique and the process of preparing authentic Thai dishes. Notwithstanding such criticism, Bo.lan restaurant has received high praise from its clients regarding their food experience from well-known travel websites, such as Tripadvisor (www.tripadvisor.com).

5. Conclusion

Despite the fact that the number of female chefs is now gradually expanding and more females are entering the male-dominated chef career arena, Chef Bo, cautions that a chef's career is not glamorous. Long working hours are required as well as demanding physical labor, not to mention the high competition that is part and parcel of the restaurant business. She strongly believes that without clear goal setting, it is difficult to succeed in this career. Interestingly, Hansford (2011) found that professional fine dining kitchen female chefs not only confront being undervalued by their male colleagues, but they also face stigmatization from their female co-workers as females tend to be critical and judgmental of other female colleagues. The female chef is viewed as “immensely emotional” by both male and female co-workers. Because of this, some female chefs aim to disprove this perception by characterizing themselves as “tough-skinned,” being capable of enduring the long working hours and making the many other sacrifices necessary to accomplish their goals.

Regarding becoming a skillful chef, Chef Duangporn Songvisava, or Bo, has demonstrated that the goal of becoming a professional chef for females is realistic. She asserted that passion and a strong sense of motivation are both essential factors driving the success of a competent female chef, an industry that is highly pressurized and competitive and that demands a substantial investment of time and energy. Furthermore, given the current culture where women continue to spend more time on household chores than men, such duties can be burdensome and even become obstacles for women wishing to achieve their goal of becoming a professional chef. Nevertheless, Chef Bo has demonstrated that the goal is attainable. Furthermore, female chefs are confronted with challenges beyond their male counterparts as they must either sacrifice their career or have their family life (Carter, 2013). However, in the case of Bo, she has found how to balance her restaurant and family, overcoming perhaps the most challenging aspect confronting female chefs, as the professional kitchen makes great demands upon chefs in terms of time.

As has already been noted, regardless of gender, the job responsibilities of a chef can be burdensome, with shift after shift of constantly changing schedules requiring long hours of

standing in the hot, stressful, and physically demanding kitchen environment. Stabiner (2013) emphasized that chefs are more likely to face injuries than the average worker in the United States, with physical strains, sprains and tears representing the most common injuries. The industry's physical conditions may also be disadvantageous for females. Therefore, a female chef needs to have very good stamina in order to successfully negotiate the physical and emotional demands of this career. However, Chef Bo's experience underscores that even though the career of becoming a recognized female chef is not an easy path, it is still possible. Her experience also attests that effective performance, based on the goal theory, seems to be achievable when an individual's goals are specific and challenging. In short, skill to do the work, ability to set success oriented goals, and the readiness to receive performance feedback are key to becoming a successful Thai female chef.

This case study has limited its focus to only one female chef from Thailand who has won a prestigious award. It is, nevertheless, valuable for highlighting her insights on the factors underlying how to succeed as a professional female chef. Several areas emerge from this study that should be addressed in future studies. For one, future studies should focus on the critical factors that most often contribute to becoming a competent female chef in Asia, including the complex role of family, inherent job characteristics, and managerial pressures. Second, this study has convincingly revealed that becoming a professional female chef in Asia is not easy, thus a comparative study focusing on the career path and factors that contribute to becoming a successful female chef in Western countries would provide value to the restaurant business. Third, a study of patron perceptions, focusing on whether the gender of the chef affects a customer's restaurant dining experience should be undertaken. Indeed, future studies could be initiated to better understand which factors affect customer perceptions, including whether the gender of the chef affects customer expectations, frequency of restaurant revisits, and customer loyalty.

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