

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part reviews the theoretical framework. The second part covers previous studies.

#### 2.1 Theoretical Frameworks

As this study attempts to compare the representations of Thai and American families presented in fast-food television advertisements, it is crucial to discuss the cultural values dimensions first. The framework of family structures in both countries and the cultural importance of meals should be reviewed. Content analysis, an approach to uncover these representations, will be discussed as well.

##### 2.1.1 Cultural values dimensions

In their book *Intercultural Communication in Contexts*, Judith N. Martin and Thomas K. Nakayama explain the meaning of cultural values as follows:

“Values are the most deeply-felt beliefs shared by a cultural group; they reflect a shared perception of what ought to be, and not what is (100).”

Many cultural-study scholars have categorized several dimensions of cultural variability that can be applied to differentiate cultures. Hofstede’s ‘Value Orientations’ is the most widely accepted theory.

Geert Hofstede, a Dutch management researcher, studied the cultural values of 100,000 employees of the multinational IBM company who were located in 53 different

countries. Hofstede's dimensions of cultural values included individualism, masculinity, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation (qtd. in Jandt 169).

This study will only focus on the collectivism-individualism dimension to interpret the representations of Thai and American families.

### **Individualism vs Collectivism**

Hofstede's individualism-collectivism dimension explains how people define themselves and their relationships with others. This dimension categorizes cultures as being either loosely structured or tightly integrated (qtd. in Jandt 169). Based on Hofstede's scale of individualism-collectivism, the United States ranks first in the Individualism Ranking for 53 Countries and Three Regions, while Thailand ranks 39th to 41st (qtd. in Jandt 171).

The differences in individualism and collectivism affect the ideas and behaviors of people and societies in different ways. Hofstede argues that individualism is associated with a nuclear family pattern while collectivism is associated with an extended family pattern (348). Moreover, Harry Triandis, a well-known professor from the University of Illinois, claims that individualism and collectivism affect child-rearing practices. In individualistic societies, children are taught to be independent, unique, and creative. They are also focused on exploration and self-reliance. In contrast, children in collectivist cultures are taught the importance of family lineage and ancestry. Child-rearing emphasizes conformity, obedience, security, and reliability (qtd. in Neuliep 55). The details of child-rearing practices and family structures will be discussed further.

The table below reveals the differences between individualist cultures and collectivist cultures (qtd. in Boon-in 15).

Table 1: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (Individualism – Collectivism)

Key Differences Between Individualist and Collectivist Societies	
Individualist	Collectivist
People are mostly concerned with themselves and their immediate family.	People are born into extended families or in other groups that continue protecting them in exchange for loyalty.
Children learn to think in terms of "I".	Children learn to think in terms of "We."
Individual ownership of resources.	Resources should be shared with relatives.
Low – context communication prevails (direct style, explicit message, and quiet means problem).	High context communication prevails (indirect style, implicit message, and silence is acceptable).
The media is the primary source of information.	Social networks are the primary source of information.
Self-actualization by every individual is the ultimate goal.	Harmony and consensus in society are the ultimate goal.
Occupation mobility is higher.	Occupation mobility is lower.
Task prevails over relationship.	Relationship prevails over task.
Individual interests prevail over collective ones.	Collective interests prevail over individual ones.

Source :Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory. Models, Frameworks and Theories for Your Alternative References. Web.

## 2.1.2 Family structure

### 2.1.2.1 American family structure

Stuart A. Queen and Robert W. Habenstein give a definition of family in their book *The Family in Various Culture* as "a group of kinsmen living intimately together,

its members mating, bearing and rearing offspring, growing up, and protecting one another” (7). They explain that there are many kinds of family groups but the two fundamental ones are ‘nuclear’ and ‘extended’ families. A nuclear family, or conjugal group or marriage group, is made up of a husband and wife with their children (born or adopted). An extended family, sometimes called a kinship group, is an extension of the parent-child relationship through three or more generations. Therefore, it includes grandparents and grandchildren, cousins, uncles, and aunts (12). Traditional European and American families are considered nuclear whereas traditional Asian families, including Thai, are considered extended.

In individualistic cultures, children are taught to tell the truth even if it might hurt, and to express their feelings since that shows sincerity and honesty. Confrontations and conflicts are normal for families. Moreover, children are taught to be independent. It is normal for children to have small jobs or part-time jobs in order to earn their own pocket-money. Parents are proud of their children and they can sometimes spend their own money without asking for the parents’ permission.

Nevertheless, even though the nuclear family pattern was the main pattern of American families in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, American family structures nowadays have changed considerably. Andrew Cherlin, a sociology professor at Johns Hopkins University, says that family life in 1965 and today is totally different. A single parent family, a same-sex marriage, a childless family, or even a cohabiting couple, have gradually become typical in American society (cited in “The Modern American Family” par. 11-13). Stephanie Coontz, a social historian at Evergreen State College, states that the values of marriage and family life have changed. People may move through several different patterns of family life throughout their lives. It is normal for a person to marry,

divorce and remarry, have a child or not (cited in Anger par. 12-15). When discussing family structure, marriage, divorce, and birthrate are relevant. According to “The Changing American Family,” an article in *The New York Times*, the nation’s birthrate in 2012 was only half of the rate in 1960. The number of marriages and divorces has also declined sharply. On the other hand, the rise of cohabiting couples jumped from 2.9 million in 1996 to 7.8 million in 2012. These phenomena may have occurred because of the soaring cost of rearing a child. Based on data from the US Department of Agriculture, the average middle-class couple spent 241,080 dollars to raise a child to age 18 (Anger par. 20-22, 24, 32). Although modern American family patterns are varied, the core value of family still remains as Mark Addicks, of General Mills, said, “What has stayed the same are the traditional values and desires to bring a family together, to nurture kids, to make them develop and be everything they can be. That has not changed.”(cited in “The Modern American Family” par. 32).

#### **2.1.2.2 Thai family structure**

In their book *วัฒนธรรมหมู่บ้านไทย (Thai Village Culture)*, the traditional rural family in a village setting is generally an extended family as there are several generations living under one roof, or at least under several roofs within the same compound. They might consist of grandparents, grandchildren, cousins, uncles and aunts (Natsupha and Lertwicha 238). Denis Segaller, writing about marriage and family life in rural Thailand, states that when a young man marries, the couple often goes to live with the bride’s parents, along with all her brothers, sisters and their spouses. Sometimes they all live together in one big house, or they may each have their own separate house within the family compound. When a couple has a baby, the young

wife's mother looks after the baby while her daughter goes out to work, to parties, and even on trips to the provinces or abroad (169-73).

Hollingsworth gives another perspective of Thai families that are now apparent in Thai urban and suburban areas. He claims that young couples generally build their own independent households. However, a man may move in with his wife's parents, at least for a while. The husband's family often makes a marriage present to the family of the wife. Although most young couples build their own homes, a youngest daughter and her husband may live with her parents to look after them in their old age and finally inherit their property (29).

Natsupha and Lertwicha also claim that due to pressures from the emerging occupational structure and from other economic factors, the Thai family unit of the future will increasingly take a nuclear rather than an extended form. And although the nuclear family will try to maintain a link with the grandparents, there will be greater physical and psychological distance between grandchildren and grandparents than in the past. This phenomenon is now evident in the urban, modernized society. In contrast, rural Thai families continue the long tradition of social and economic unity. Young children do housework and look after younger brothers and sisters. Older children help their parents in the family rice fields. On the other hand, urban families lose the unity that comes from working together. Most large scale urban work situations involve bringing people who have no common links of kinship or neighborhood into daily interaction (240).

To maintain the relationship between nuclear family and the grandparents, married couples who do not live with their families usually go to their parents' homes

on Songkran Day and New Year's Day. Songkran Day (the ancient Thai New Year) takes place in mid-April of every year. On this day, married couples and children bring presents of cloth to make sarongs and sprinkle perfumed water over their parents as an act of homage. The parents in their turn give their blessings to their children (Segaller 18-19,173). Songkran and New Year are the significant occasions that bring family members together.

Whatever the pattern and the size of families are, children learn codes of behavior from their parents. Thai children learn codes of behavior that will guide them throughout their lives from both their parents and grandparents. Thais attach great value to relative position, age-status, and a family-like atmosphere that is consistent with hierarchical notions. The father is regarded as the leader whereas the mother plays a crucial role in the family finances. Children are taught to pay respect to elders and look after them when they are adults (Natsupha and Lertwicha 238).

From the perspective of a Westerner who is married to a Thai, Segaller states that the spirit of family solidarity is a root of Thai society. Thai family life is on the whole far more closely knit than is now usual in the West. One of the main factors forming these strong bonds of attachment is the universal love and respect for parents and older relatives. This difference in the homage shown to seniority is reflected in the Thai vocabulary for relatives. The primary emphasis in brother/sister relationships in Thai is on age rather than sex. The word *phi* is used for an older brother or sister whereas *nong* means younger brother or sister. The sex can be qualified by adding the ending *-chai* (male) or *-sao* (female). Thais also have more precise vocabulary than does English for other family members such as *ya* (father's mother) and *yai* (mother's mother), *pu* (father's father) and *ta* (mother's father) (169-73).

The very real feeling of togetherness within the Thai family circle is called *unchai*, literally “heartwarming” or conveying a sense of security. If any family member is in financial trouble, the resources of the whole family are mobilized to provide help. When people are sick, there is always some family member to look after them. Thais who have children never worry about saving up for their old age. They know with certainty that their children will never let them starve, but will continue to support them out of gratitude for their rearing, upbringing, and education (Segaller 169-73).

### **2.1.3 Importance of meals**

Marcel Danesi and Paul Perron claim in their book, *Analyzing Cultures: An Introduction and Handbook*, that any object that has to be interpreted can be considered as a code. Food codes are connected with how eating is expected to be conducted. Specific dishes may have a meaning reflecting social class. The way to prepare food and how it is eaten also reflect complex food codes. For this reason, food codes also regulate the order in which dishes are served, the ways the food is to be placed on the table, preferences in being served, and who must show deference to whom. Food codes also affect seating positions and topics of conversation (238-39).

Having a meal with someone or a group of people is not a meaningless activity. According to Visser, eating events are crucial to establishing and maintaining social relations and harmony. He states that “dinner invitations can be fraught with hope and danger, and dinner parties are dramatic events at which decisions can be made and important relationships initiated, tested, or broken.”(cited in Danesi and Perron 239). This statement not only refers to the relationship of colleagues or friends but also family members as well.

Although American society promotes individualism, family members generally eat meals together. A CBS News poll investigated American eating habit in 2005, and the results reveal that most Americans (74%) eat dinner together on weekdays and 78% eat together on weekends. Dinner is often a time for families to get together at the end of a day. Almost 50% eat home-cooked meals and rarely eat fast food as dinner. Nevertheless, findings about eating behavior reflect some changes as one-third of respondents said that the TV is always on during meals. Besides, 5% of the sample said that people at their family dinner tables text, email, or use their cell phones throughout the meal.

Similarly, in Thai society where the family kinship is strong, family members typically eat meals together. Moreover, Thai table manners are complicated due to the values of hierarchy and seniority. For example, the eldest parent always sits at the head of the table and starts to eat first. Then, the rest can eat. The meal can be started only when everyone is present at the table. When passing food to an elder, children should slide the plate across the table instead of picking it up. Lifting up a plate is regarded as impolite. Family members should avoid leaving the table before the rest of the family. Dinner is a precious time to ask about each other's welfare and exchange news. To be openly disinterested, such as texting, e-mailing, or using cell phones, is to show and foster an undesirable, uncaring attitude (Kiengsiri, Bhinyoying and Promathatavedi par. 1-5).

#### **2.1.4 Advertising, Culture and Ideology**

In *Promotional Culture: Advertising, Ideology, and Symbolic Expression*, ideology, in a semantic context, refers to the level of reality in which people give

meaning to their world. At the social level, this means symbols, values, norms, and ideals that are arranged by culture (Wernick 23). Croteau, Hoynes and Milan explain the meaning of ideology in their book, *Media/Society: Industries, Images, and Audiences*, as follows:

“An ideology is basically a system of meaning that helps define and explain the world and that makes value judgments about the world. Ideology is related to concepts such as worldview, belief system, and values, but it is broader than those terms. It refers not only to the beliefs held about the world but also to the basic ways in which the world is defined. It has a broader and more fundamental connotation (153).”

The media reflects the cultural and ideological sphere. It provides the social knowledge through which we perceive our lives and those of others (Dant 166). We can often be unaware of the ideological position of contemporary media because it reflects our own taken-for-granted views of the world. Actually, ideologies do not necessarily reflect reality accurately. In fact, they can often present a distorted version of the world (Croteau, Hoynes and Milan 154).

When talking about the ideology of family, people often think of a happy nuclear family that consists of a couple with a son and a daughter along with a dog, living in a large suburban style house. This is the Western ideal image of family since it shows completeness and perfection (Furgang 7). Moreover, this image has been accepted in many family-oriented societies such as China, Pakistan, India, and Thailand as well. This portrayal is prominent in commercials since most urban family units nowadays tend to be nuclear rather than extended. The advertisers try to appeal to the people with enough money to buy their products, this means primarily urban, middle-

class people with disposable income. In reality, patterns of families in modern industrial societies are varied. The other forms of families such as single-parent families, same-sex families, couple-without-children households, although increasingly common in different parts of the world, are not seen as normal or desirable (Abbott, Wallace and Tyler 144). Therefore, it is clear that the media does not reflect all the different ideas about family. In fact, the media picks up only a slice of the different ideologies in society to appeal to the target customers.

Media scholars are often interested in assessing how media content compares to the real world. However, analysts of ideology generally perceive the definition of the real as, itself, an ideological construction. Instead of assessing images and making some judgment about the level of realness, ideological analysis asks what these messages tell us about ourselves and our society (Croteau, Hoynes and Milan 154). This research will look at advertisements as a reflection of the real world and explore the messages that fast-food, a cross-cultural product, intend to tell us about families in Thai and American societies.

### **2.1.5 Content analysis**

In order to find the ideology related to cultural studies, content analysis is frequently applied by scholars. Content analysis is both a quantitative and qualitative method for studying media and culture (Tonkiss 368; Stokes 132; Rose 82). It seeks to analyze texts in terms of the presence and frequency of specific terms, narratives, or concepts. This can involve counting items such as specific words or categories. Counting and analyzing textual data can proceed in various ways. A common starting-point is to define categories of analysis and to code the data using these categories.

However, content analysis cannot offer a practical framework or tool (Tonkiss 368-69; Stokes 134). Rose suggests that the codes used must depend on a connection between the image and the broader cultural context in which its meaning is made (91). The categories may be pre-set by the researcher in advance of reading the data, or they may be based on an initial reading of the texts. In many cases, coding categories emerge from a combination of these two processes (Tonkiss 369). A quantitative content analysis can go beyond the simple process of counting to reflect issues of meaning and context when combined with other methods. A qualitative content analysis can be used as a framework for the more interpretive analysis of texts (Tonkiss 371).

This research focuses on qualitative content analysis; the coding categories include the setting, number, age and gender of characters, gestures, story lines, products, and props. Each advertisement is evaluated focusing on these categories. The dialogue between characters and the voice over are transcribed in order to help understand the story. To interpret the data more successfully, the coded items are then critically analyzed. For example, the research evaluates such things as how setting affects the feelings of characters, and the implications of a repetitive action. The frequency of coded items in each category reveals the differences between Thai and American families and lead to the messages that the advertisers intend to tell us about Thai and American families.

## **2.2 Previous Studies**

As this research aims to compare the representations of Thai and American families, research related to Thai and American families portrayals is reviewed. Not many scholars have done research on the portrayals of Thai families in advertisements. Therefore, portrayals of Thai families in other media such as films and news articles are

reviewed. The portrayal of families in other societies and ideologies of motherhood and fatherhood in advertisements are included as background.

"Representation of Relationship of Family Members as Seen on Thai Films", conducted by Atawee Khothong, published in 2009, aimed to analyze representation of relationship of family members as seen on Thai films. In terms of methodology, Khothong collected films focused on drama from 2002 to 2008 from the Hall of National Films and from [www. thaifilm.com](http://www.thaifilm.com). From the 22 Thai drama films looked at, only seven of them that best represented the relationship of family members were analyzed in detail. Textual and content analysis frameworks were used to analyze the data, especially in terms of scene, storyline, and dialogue. The findings of this research were divided into three parts; family members' roles, family conflicts, and improvements of the family relationships. Firstly, the films presented the role of wife/mother as breadwinner who also had to take care of all the family members and do household chores. The husband/father was represented as the family leader. His role was earning a living and he had the power to make final decisions for the family. The children's role was portrayed as being respectful and having good manners. Secondly, families had two major causes of conflict. The first cause was economic and other external factors. The second major cause was bad relationships between family members; including lack of understanding, distrust between the wife and husband, or not complying with set roles. Lastly, what built up a family relationship was the expressing of love and understanding among family members. These expressions of love and understanding could be reflected in thoughtfulness. Moreover, the expressions of love and understanding could be felt directly from positive family conversations.

"Image and Family Life in Thai Society," research conducted by Kulapa Wajanasara and published in 2011, was a report of the project entitled "The Study of Population and Family Changes: the Impacts on Thai Society and Policy Choices." This research investigated the changes in the Thai family in several aspects: structure, status, and role and function. Wajanasara analyzed 26,095 news and online articles published during the previous thirteen years (1996-2009), focusing on headlines and content of the news by using textual and content analysis as the framework. The findings of this research revealed that there were 3,184 news items that reflected the relationships among family members. The family relationship could be divided into three categories: tight-knit families, families in discord, and concubinage families. The research findings defined a tight-knit family as a happy family which includes the understanding of each family member, maintaining the family by doing activities together, and seeking success in family life. The family relationship could be improved by sharing. Families had a good time talking to each other. Besides, the sexual relationship within married couples was also vital to a good family relationship. Thus, having good family relationships was based on three main factors: spending time together, loving and understanding each other, and a good sexual relationship between the parents.

Karen Danna Lynch's journal article entitled "Advertising Motherhood: Image, Ideology and Consumption" was conducted to investigate changes in the advertising images of mothers and to examine the relationship between the ideology of motherhood presented in the ads and patterns of consumption. She chose to analyze advertisements from *Life* and *Redbook* magazines from the 1950s through the 1990s. Content analysis was used to analyze 194 advertisements, including 68 from *Life* magazine and 126 from *Redbook*. The ads were coded by looking at their products, props, settings, and actresses

and included expressions, poses, directions of attention, and other details. The findings showed a shift in the portrayals of motherhood from domestic-centered to child-centered. In the 1950s ads, mothers were ‘domestic moms’ who cared for home, husband, and children. Mothers in the 1960s ads began to shift from the care of home and husband to the care of children. Mothers in the 1970s ads were ‘effective moms’ since they could improve the lives of family members through the clever use and purchase of the advertised products. In the 1980s ads, women were depicted as ‘nurturing moms’ – taking care of their babies. Mothers in the 1990s ads were ‘expertise-guided moms.’ Their child care depended on expert advice. However, the portrayals of mothers in every decade referred to the ‘consuming mothers’ – who used and relied on advertised products.

Scott Coltrane and Michele Adams studied gender stereotypes in advertisements. In their research, "Work-Family Imagery and Gender Stereotypes: Television and the Reproduction of Difference," 1,699 television commercials from 1992 to 1994 were analyzed. A total of 2,651 characters were coded. Each character was rated on gender, family relation, occupational variables of interest, and according to age, race, relationship to other characters, and interaction style. The results of this research revealed that media imagery perpetuated gender stereotypes which had changed only slightly. Men were portrayed as dominant, were employed in professional occupations, were active, and had authority whereas women were portrayed as the opposite. Women were more likely to be shown in family situations and less likely to hold jobs. Women in TV commercials were more often and more significantly portrayed in family roles (23.7% versus 16.3%). However, the proportions of family

portrayals for both men and women were below the actual likelihood that men and women occupy family roles.



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