

Solar Salt Culture: Production Pattern, Conservation, Revitalization and Salt Making Occupational Development in the Saline Basin of Samut Prakarn

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Abstract: Thailand, firstly, could produce salt from sea water since the beginning of Ayutthaya Era in the region of Laem Phak Bea, Ban Laem District, Petchburi Province according to the legend of Nakhon Si Thammarat. The production then has been handed down from generation to generation. Major characteristics of Solar Salt Culture illustrated via tools and equipments and spiritual culture, which is shown via ceremony and belief. Two major rituals relating to solar salt culture are Pitee Rak Na (Commissioning Ceremony) and Pitee Tam Khwan Na (Guardian Ceremony) Presently, there are several difficulties of solar salt production in Samut Prakarn, especially crisis of salt price, structural change of the landscape where, Sukhumvit Road was built and changed Samut Prakarn into an industrial zone, which affect to the survival of solar salt culture. In order to conserve, revitalize and develop solar salt culture in Samut Prakarn, Dan, as well as setting up a local training program. The most important method in conservation, revitalization and development of solar salt culture is to construct collective awareness about these issues of people thus, government participation is necessary.

Key words: Solar salt culture, production pattern, conservation, revitalization, development, generation

INTRODUCTION

Humans have used salt since the prehistoric period. It is theorized that about 1,000-10,000 BC, there were salt manufacturing communities producing rock salt and table salt near the coastal regions. Salt was very important to the livelihood of humans to an extent that, the Bible describes the value of salt compared to human values, Ye are the Salt of the Earth (The Holy Bible, 1995). There have also been comparisons that salt means, longevity, strength, trustworthy and intelligent (Mark, 2002).

In several part of the ancient world, salt was scarce and therefore, was very expensive in those areas. The weight of salt would be used as payment where, the value depended on the weight of the salt. Salt was used as payment during the Roman Empire. Roman soldiers were usually paid in the form of salt instead of money. The word Salary is derived from the Latin word Salarium.

The term Salarium itself derives from sal and can best be translated as Salt-money (Reinhard, 1996). Salt is also, an important ingredient in flavoring food that humans have long used in every household. Normally, salt is used to add flavor and preserve food such as vegetable,

meat and fish, which are popular foods in Asia (Weerati, 2004). The most common method of preserving marine life was in fact to lay fish and other animals out on the beach or on special platforms to dry in the sun. Salt played a vital part in the preservation of fish by the removal of water thus, delaying putrefaction since water is required by all agents and processes leading to protein spoilage (John, 2004).

The purposes of this comprising: to study the history, background and major characteristics of solar salt Culture in Samut Prakarn, to study the pattern of solar salt production and its difficulties in Samut Prakarn and to study the pattern of conservation, revitalization and occupational development of solar salt production in Samut Prakarn.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Solar salt culture: Production Pattern, Conservation, Revitalization and Salt Making Occupational Development in Samut Prakarn is a qualitative research. Field research and data analysis was conducted throughout May 2007 to July 2008, in Tambon Khlong Dan, Aphoe Bang Bo. The research framework are as in Fig. 1.

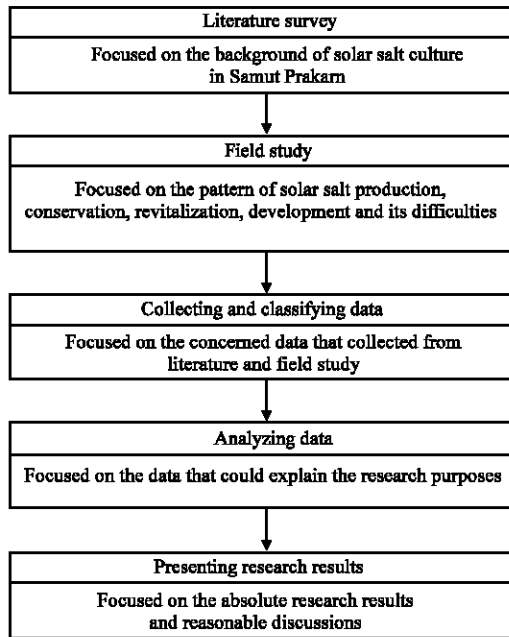


Fig. 1: The research framework

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Salt culture in central Thailand: Thailand has many major sources of table salt production in the river basin in central Thailand. The History of salt in the coastal area of central is presumed to have started in the early ayutthaya period with the oldest salt community in central Thailand located at Laem Phak Bea, Ban Laem District, Petchburi Province. Evidence of salt culture in this community existed during the historical city of Nakhon Si Thammarat in Southern Thailand. It is theorized that the salt culture in central Thailand evolved from the Chinese because the Chinese were producers of salt before Thai producers. Salt production soon afterwards found its way to the coastal communities such as the areas in the province of Samut Prakarn, Samut Saknon and Samut Songkhram. Table salt production became the local indigenous knowledge of the coastal communities and the custom has continuously been handed down from generation to generation.

Salt production pattern and its difficulties: Salt production requires large areas adjacent to the sea. The area should be plain, steep with its elevation is equal to sea level. The soil for solar salt should be clay or soft soil with good water carrying. After site selection, site would be prepared and reclaimed by dividing into plots and surrounded with dyke. Salt would be produced by retaining sea water into the field, drying under the sun

and thus, water would be gradually evaporated, until crystallization to be white salt. When, the salt crystal reaches the desired thickness, the producers will transport the salt for storage elsewhere and dry it once more before distribution. Salt production can only be done during the drought period, which the months, which sunlight and wind is optimum. The production of solar salt requires a combination of several techniques, which comes from the local indigenous knowledge of the saline basin people. Presently, there are several difficulties of solar salt production in central Thailand especially, in Samut Prakarn, where is the research area. The difficulties was caused by the slump in price of salt and the structural change of the landscape where, Sukhumvit Road was built and changed Samut Prakarn into an industrial zone. The government's policy of promoting industries in the coastal regions has caused the construction of many factories and changed the lifestyles of local communities into factory workers and other occupations. These are important factors that have contributed to the decline of solar salt culture and the disappearance of solar salt communities.

The pattern of conservation, revitalization and occupational development of solar salt production in samut prakarn: In order to conserve, revitalize and develop the culture of solar salt production in Samut Prakarn, Solar salt Learning Center would be established at Tambon Khlong Dan, as well as setting up a local training program. By these ways, the general public and local youth are given a chance to study and partake in their ancestors heritage. In addition, government should realize to participate in the conservation Solar salt culture and carry on forward the knowledge of solar salt culture to new generation.

DISCUSSION

The researcher discussed results as follows:

- According to the background and major characteristics of solar salt culture in Samut Prakarn that showed its cultural diffusion from one area to other areas. This cultural diffusion consisted with the theory of cultural diffusion, its concept refered to the center that culture arised, developed it self and then diffused around there areas
- According to the pattern of solar salt production and its difficulties in Samut Prakarn that showed its adaptation related the changes of ecology, economy, globalization and government's policy. This cultural adaptation consisted with the theory of cultural

ecology, its concept referred to the adaptation of culture to ecology and cultural identity of each culture area that led the ways to solve difficulties

- According to the pattern of conservation, revitalization and occupational development of solar salt production in Samut Prakarn that showed its enculturation through an idea of the establishment of Solar salt Learning Center at Tambon Khlong Dan for distributing the knowledge of solar salt culture. This enculturation consisted with the concept of enculturation, which was referred by George Foster that focused on the way to hand down culture to new generation

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The solar salt culture of communities in the saline basin of Samut Prakarn consisted of various community institutions; such as family, traditions, beliefs and lifestyles, etc. These institutions play an important role in linking each other together. The relationship and combination of the role of each institution has created cultural identity called Solar salt Culture. The pattern of solar salt production from the past to present has changed according to the surrounding environment and social situation. Some salt communities could not adapt to the change and their salt customs have been devoured by trends of modern society, but some salt communities have found ways to cope with the changes of globalization and adapted themselves in line with modern society. The most important method in the conservation, Revitalization and occupational development of solar salt production in modern time is to construct collective awareness about these issues of people thus, the strength of community will return.

SUGGESTIONS

Concerned organizations and institutions such as the general public, Development of Agricultural Extension, Ministry of Education, Administrative leaders and local community leaders should be aware of the importance of conservation, revitalization and development of the community's solar salt culture. The community, private

and state sector must take serious actions such as the establishment of Solar salt Learning Centers, Solar salt Culture should be incorporated into the local curriculum and the establishment of a local agency to support the professions of solar salt production.

The disappearance of solar salt communities not only in the saline basin of Samut Prakarn but also in other saline basins of Thailand should be researched and documented in order to provide a clearer picture and database that will help in the conservation, revitalization and development of existing solar salt communities so that solar salt culture heritage can be sustained for future generations.

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