

Abstract

This thesis is to study the importance of Indo-Pacific Chub Mackerel or *pla thu* on Thai society and economy during 1854 to 1953. It discusses the cultural aspect of *pla thu*'s consumption in Thai society, the development of the fishery of *pla thu* and of *pla thu*'s trade around the Gulf of Thailand and the roles of various groups exploiting the fish business.

Evidences show that Thai people have known and used to consume *pla thu*, the salt-water fish abundantly found in the Gulf of Thailand, since the late Ayutthaya period. In the beginning most of the consumption of this fish appeared in the central part of Thailand, which is adjacent to the coastal areas. The fish consumption in the central plain was facilitated by the interlaced canal system. After the expansion of the railway to the Northeast and the North in the 1890s and the 1900s, the consumption of the fish in these regions increased. The influx of the Chinese immigrants in the early nineteenth century caused significant changes in the fish consumption, both in the amount and the way of cooking. Formerly, the Thai way of cooking fish was mainly to barbecue, to steam or to roast. But the Chinese introduced a new method of frying fish. This method was learned and integrated into Thai way of cooking. Then emerged the new creative dish of Chinese and Thai influences -*nam prik pla thu thod* (chili paste and fried fish)- one of the most popular dishes in Thai society. Later on *pla thu* has become an ingredient in numerous dishes in various styles of Thai cuisine.

In addition, *pla thu* was one of Thailand's important export products to Indonesia, Singapore and Hong Kong. Indonesia was the largest market of the fish, abroad. The demand on the fish, both internal and external, helped extend the fishery of *pla thu* and the fish business. During 1854 to 1953 apart from taxing the fish and related business, the Thai Government did nothing to interfere with this business. But in 1953 the Fish Port Act was promulgated and the Fish Marketing Organization was established. Thus, the fishery and the fish trade has become under the Government's control.

The significance of *pla thu* in Thai society and economy also included the extension of various related business to fisheries and trade, i.e , boat construction and fishery equipment industries along the coastal areas together with the home-industry of fish containers in various areas.