

SHELL TRADE IN THAILAND: PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

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SUMMARY OF THE PRESENTATION

In the past, Thai people utilized shellfish for three main purposes. (1) Meat of freshwater, as well as marine molluscs was cooked for consumption, or for exchange with other commodities at local markets. Dried molluscs were transported upriver by boat and sold at inland markets. (2) Shells were used for lime making, both on a small scale for chewing mixed with betel nut, and on a larger scale for making plaster. After addition of, among others, brown sugar the plaster would be used for construction of houses, Buddha images and surfacing of houses. (3) Some species of gastropods, notably *Cypraea moneta*, would be used as money in local areas.

At present, the utilization of shell has shifted towards the utilization for food, either in the form of direct consumption by people, or after the molluscs have passed other animals. Molluscs are increasingly used as high protein food additives in poultry and pig farms, and in aquaculture. Crushed shells are used by poultry farmers as calcium supplement.

The demand for mollusc meat is constantly increasing, following the increase in world population, as well as development of taste for molluscs among people in general. Shell products can become of substantial commercial interest.

It should also be noted that a variety of shell products are marketed for ornamental purposes. Pearls and mother of pearl are well known, but also beautiful shells, and rare shells for collectors, or for studies of shell architecture, are increasing in demand. It is partly a consequence of the developing tourist industry, and the desire for nice souvenirs.

We easily realize that shell culture could be an obvious way to satisfy the demand, not least because human activities in many ways impose a threat to balance of Nature. Conservation of natural biotopes should have high priority but, unfortunately, it is not easy to control human behaviour and utilization of the marine resources.

My personal view is that all participants in this workshop should consider the issue of utilization of shell resources, and create new world of marine shell business by conducting research which can result in successful aquaculture. The molluscs so produced can both take the pressure from harvesting in nature but it can also help restoring balance in nature through release programmes. I believe all participants can help in this respect.

The organizing committee asked me to address the question: "What is the direction of, and future prospect of shell trade?" You are the ones who can answer this question -are you not?