

# Changes in the “Shrimp Farmer Networks” in Ranot District, Songkhla Province, from 1987 to 2018<sup>1</sup>

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## บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้ มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อนำเสนอพัฒนาการของเครือข่ายชาวนากุ้งใน อำเภอระโนด จังหวัด สงขลา ระหว่าง พ.ศ. 2530-2561 ซึ่งเป็นพังพักดันที่สำคัญในการทำให้เกิดการขยายตัวและการสร้าง มาตรฐานอุตสาหกรรมการเลี้ยงกุ้ง ความเปลี่ยนแปลงนี้ ได้แก่ การเปลี่ยนจากความสัมพันธ์เชิงเครือข่าย ไม่เป็นทางการอันมีพื้นฐานมาจากสังคมเครือญาติที่แบ่งปันข้อมูลในการเลี้ยงกุ้งจากประสบการณ์ในการศึกษา เรียนรู้และทดลองด้วยตัวเองของชาวนากุ้งในพื้นที่ ยกระดับมาสู่การจัดตั้งเครือข่ายที่เป็นทางการในรูปแบบ “ชมรมกุ้งสงขลา นครศรีธรรมราช” โดยมีเป้าหมายในการส่งเสริมและแลกเปลี่ยนความรู้ที่ทันสมัยและเหมาะสม ในกลุ่มชาวนากุ้งและสร้างการเชื่อมโยงสัมพันธ์กับเครือข่ายภายนอกพื้นที่ อันเป็นการเสริมสร้างศักยภาพของ ชาวนากุ้งและเพิ่มอำนาจการต่อรองกับตลาดและรัฐได้มากขึ้น ความเปลี่ยนแปลงลักษณะการจัดตั้งเครือข่าย จากไม่เป็นทางการมาสู่เครือข่ายที่เป็นทางการนี้สะท้อนให้เห็นถึงความเปลี่ยนแปลงจากชาวนากุ้งธรรมดามา สู่การสร้าง “สังคมผู้ประกอบการ” นากุ้ง อันเป็นฐานที่สำคัญของส่วนต้นน้ำในการสร้างอุตสาหกรรมการเลี้ยงกุ้ง

**คำสำคัญ:** ชาวนา กุ้ง เครือข่าย สังคมผู้ประกอบการ

## Abstract

This article aims to present the development of the shrimp farmers' networks, in Ranot district, Songkhla province, which were a major driving force in the expansion and creation of the shrimp farming industry standards from 1987 to 2018. These changes include a shift from informal networks, based on kinship or community relations, in which information on shrimp farming is shared and acquired through self-study, learning and personal experience from local shrimp farmers, to the establishing of a formal network in the form of the “Songkhla -Nakhon Si Thammarat Shrimp Farmers' Club”. The objective of this club is to promote and exchange knowledge that is innovative and suitable for shrimp farmers and to build connections with networks outside the area. The dynamic change has the way to strengthen shrimp farmers' potential and increase their bargaining power within the market and when dealing with government agencies. This change in the nature of the networks from an informal to a formal network reflects the change from ordinary shrimp farmers to rural entrepreneurs, which will create an “entrepreneurial society” of shrimp farms, and this is an important factor in developing the upstream section of the shrimp industry.

**Keywords:** Shrimp Farmers, Social Networks, Entrepreneurs

## Introduction

Dynamic change and adaptation to it in communities from the past to the present caused Thailand to enter a capitalist system. Government policy aimed to continuously develop prosperity not only in the cities but also to spread it into rural areas. The development of infrastructure to promote regional economic growth [1] caused economic changes; rural people in many areas converted from production for personal consumption to production for sale. In Ranot District the villagers initially used to be farmers, fishermen or rubber growers. Later, when monoculture and commercial fishing were promoted, the villagers adjusted their production methods in accordance to the state and capitalist requirements. By using modern equipment, however, the cost of production increased and there was a bigger risk of incurring losses, not only from higher costs but also from natural causes. This led to migration outside their own region. [2]

Later, when state agencies promoted shrimp farming in Ranot District, villagers were interested and eager to invest in a new career, causing economic expansion in the area. Shrimp farming represents an adaptation of the community from shrimp farming in a rural society that retains the traditional production model to one that goes beyond it. [3] In the process of adapting from traditional production to commercial shrimp farming, they discovered that the exchange of knowledge about shrimp farming, which used to be based on traditional society, culture, and community, changed into more individual relationships. [4] Changes in the production model led to social and cultural changes in the community. Community culture was adjusted to respond to the new career and to adapt to a changing society. Changing production methods led to a move from rice farming to shrimp farming, and gave villagers a new hope and a chance to get back on their feet, even after a bad harvest.

All changes described led to a new rural society and new relationships between rural people, and this lead to a more diverse society. [5] The change to a marketable production model was based on locally available resources. Therefore, shrimp farming provided an opportunity for new products in the existing rural society and the formation of a new network of relations in rural areas. Yet, networking between people with the same occupation is not enough; there have to be links to networks related to other shrimp farming businesses. So the villagers have to cooperate, exchange knowledge and information both within and outside the community. This includes building a network that is tied to the local government. Building a network of villagers' relationships is a system that reflects the way of thinking and the courage to take risks due to the modifications in the production model. Long-standing networks and the beliefs of rural people have undergone a big social change. The shrimp farming community is therefore a model of rural relations that have emerged, and it is an important factor in explaining the present rural countryside [6].

## Objective

Study the transformation of the shrimp farmer networks from informal relationship networks to more formal networks; and the change from ordinary shrimp farmers to entrepreneur shrimp farmers. This was done to show the changing model of relationships in society among shrimp farmers in Ranot District, Songkhla Province.

## Literature review

Previous studies on shrimp farming in Ranot district, Songkhla province covered many issues, environment, aquaculture, geology, economy and society. Most studies show that shrimp farming brought drastic changes in the area in all aspects of society.

The study by Chakkrit Juthatiprat [7] on the rehabilitation of occupational culture after the shrimp farming crisis of the people of Ranot District, Songkhla Province, aimed to propose factors affecting the rehabilitation of occupational culture after the shrimp farming crisis and studied the guidelines, patterns and impact of the occupational cultural rehabilitation after the crisis. Research was done by Chuchat Phonbundit [8] on the effects of raising black tiger shrimp on the socio-economic conditions of Ranot District, Songkhla Province. This study is a Master of Science thesis in Environmental Management, Prince of Songkla University. The study focused on the conflict caused by the use of land and water resources. Especially the promotion of aquaculture of black tiger prawns developed the need for saltwater for shrimp farming affecting other agricultural practices, causing social conflicts. The socio-cultural changes in the area led to an increase in the migration of workers in the area. Rural social culture began to change to an urban society culture.

Rapeepan Suwannatchot and Somporn Fuengchan [9] studied the impact of shrimp farming in Ranot and Singha Nakhon Districts, Songkhla Province. This study found that the majority of the population in both districts used to be mainly engaged in agriculture (rice farming), and the families were mostly nuclear. Since 1990, people in both districts have changed their use of land from rice farming to shrimp farming. The reason for changing from the former occupation to become a shrimp farmer is because shrimp farming has better returns, resulting in a higher income for the family. Standard of life improved but simple lifestyles declined. The interdependence of traditional communities began to shift to more and more independent relationships.

Another important work on the issue of rural change is “Farmers and Politics” a book about the power in Thailand’s modern rural economy written by Andrew Walker, and translated by Jakkrit Sangkhamanee [10]. This book presents the transformation of rural power among middle-income farmers, since the state is no longer an outside factor in the countryside, but

has created a rapport with various sources of power that are beneficial to the people. Based on the changing socio-political concepts of Asian farmers by Partha Chatterjee, this book presents self-development of poor peasants in a rural village in northern Thailand to become middle-income farmers with more diversified forms of production both within and outside the agricultural sector. The farmers are linked to beneficial sources of power both in the villages and outside the villages as a result of the state's promotion of commercial agriculture

Chaweewan Prachuapmoh's [11] work on social change, culture and political development (during the period 1947-1993) studied Khlong Tan: From rice paddies to shrimp farms, fishing communities on the eastern coast. This research has related issues and can be analyzed in the study of rural adaptation in Ranot District. This study was divided into rice paddy era and local fishery (1947-1970) the new rice farming era and commercial fishery (1971-1987), shrimp farming (1987-1993) and the political development and adjustment of the Khlong Tan villagers

From a literature survey in writing a dissertation outline on the economic and social dynamics of shrimp farmers, Ranot district, Songkhla province, between 1987 and 2018, it was found that there are documents and research related to the issues that need to be studied to provide context and to explaining the social and economic impact of shrimp farming. However, recent studies on shrimp farms in Ranot District, Songkhla Province have lacked a thorough explanation of the changes occurring in Ranot District, with a career in shrimp farming being an important driver. This paper therefore presents a new perspective on the shrimp farming profession, as it has transformed the way social relations are structured in connection with the economy in order to understand the dynamic changes and adaptation of rural areas. Profound changes to a more complex economy than the one of the past and economic movements have reshaped rural livelihoods; in order to keep up with the wave of capitalism driven beyond subsistence production only, farmers had to adapt to these changes.

## Research method

This study is a qualitative research based on the Historical Research Methodology; it focuses on the change of shrimp farmer networks from ordinary shrimp farmers to the building of a shrimp farming society. The research method used was the historical approach divided into two periods: the first between 1987 and 1998 and the second between 1999 and 2018 using fieldwork data, documentary research sources, and the research is presented in an analytical description. This study relied from both primary and secondary documents such as government publications information from journals, newspapers, research papers

and theses and other related studies. The fieldwork process used in-depth interviewing methods, with shrimp farmers, shrimp farming entrepreneurs and others directly or indirectly involved in shrimp farming in Ranot District, Songkhla Province.

### **Research instruments**

The researcher chose the Guideline interview method as a research instrument, in which the data from the in-depth interviews were used as primary data because they were taken directly from shrimp farmers in Ranot District, Songkhla Province.

### **Population and sample**

The researcher selected snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was done first mixed with purposive sampling. In this study, the researcher interviewed groups of persons involved in shrimp farming, such as shrimp farmers, middlemen shrimp harvesting teams, shrimp pond cleaning teams, and the owners of the shrimp farming equipment store in Ranot District, Songkhla Province. Therefore, data were collected from a total of 4 snowball samples, using as criteria people from Ranot people who were engaged in shrimp farming at the time of research. The selection was made from both those who are still in shrimp farming and those who used to work in shrimp farming by purposive sampling. The researcher obtained information from the Kung Thai newspaper and from local shrimp farmers including the owner of a shrimp business, a total of 3<sup>3</sup> a shrimp farmer and the Vice President of the Songkhla Nakhon Sri Thammarat Shrimp Club.

### **Results of the Study**

This study of changes in shrimp farmer networks, Ranot District, Songkhla Province, 1987-2018, focused on two important issues: 1. Changes in shrimp farmer networks from informal network relationships to formal network; 2. Organizing the changing relationships in shrimp farmer society to describe the changing model of relationship among shrimp farmers.

1. Changes in shrimp farmer networks from informal network relationships to formal network;

Shrimp farming as a career started in Ranot District, Songkhla Province, around 1987. It was considered a new occupation in the area as the villagers traditionally worked in farming, local fishery and palm tree plantations. Shrimp farming or shrimp business was something new and challenging for the villagers who decided to pursue this career, but they were unable to apply their knowledge from their former occupation. Therefore, helping each other to share knowledge in order to succeed in a new career is very important as the villagers must help each other in sharing knowledge and techniques of shrimp farming. They did this

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<sup>3</sup> Thesis on the “Economic and Social Dynamics of Shrimp Farmers in Ranot District, Songkhla Province, 1987-2018”, based on 20 non-specific samples and 21 specific samples.

by formatting the relationship into networks, both informal and formal. The networks are important in the exchange of information about methods for raising shrimp and combining forces to create bargaining power with the government. In the case of an informal network formed on the basis of being kinship, Somchai [a pseudonym] [12] spoke about the cooperation to help each other as follows: "We inform each other send news to each other, our pond is here, but if someone over there has a disease we warn each other because birds carry the disease to other ponds." Or farmers in the same area exchange news and information of shrimp farming among them. Pronsuk [a pseudonym] [13] said farmers from nearby ponds will exchange information, in the morning they meet, drink coffee and discuss their issues. In the same way, neighbors talk to each other, share new knowledge. If somebody found a better way to do something, he will tell the others. There is also cooperation and knowledge exchange between shrimp farming areas in the nearby sub-district. Wasna [a pseudonym] [14] recalls: "The support of the network of shrimp farmers includes studying other people's techniques and feeding formulas. Sometimes we go to study from them; others come to study from us, People from Rawa and Paak Tre keep in contact and this enabled them to cope with the epidemic. An informal network is a group of relatives and friends who work in the same profession and try to seek knowledge from the villagers' point of view. Through their experience they become more successful. Informal relationships contain in addition to contacts with local people, connections with shrimp farmers outside the area through the participation in shrimp farming seminars organized by the private sector in the provinces. There are formal exchanges of knowledge about new technology and techniques in shrimp farming, Knowledge exchange among shrimp farmers through informal networks has existed since the beginning of shrimp farming in the area in the period from 1987 to 1998. Over the past 11 years, shrimp farmers have worked together to exchange knowledge on shrimp farming for survival or the need for successful shrimp farming because they lacked academic knowledge according to the formal education model. Based on the need for new economic opportunities, they had to seek knowledge to develop and accumulate the necessary skills. [15] Chatchay, Anan, Pitak [a pseudonym]

In 1999, the shrimp farms in Ranot District changed from black tiger shrimp to white Vannamei shrimp. Because the market demand changed from black tiger shrimp to white shrimp. In addition, an epidemic in black tiger prawns caused great damage to the shrimp farmers. As a result, some shrimp farmers decided to quit this career. But it was also found that there were some shrimp farmers who continued their careers in raising white shrimp. However, the business model had to be adjusted and required higher costs. As a result, farmers who decided to raise shrimp during the transition had to be serious about wanting

to pursue this career and needed to focus on seeking knowledge from both inside and outside sources. Farmers had to adjust themselves from shrimp farmers to shrimp farming entrepreneurs in order to bear the risk by developing farming techniques using technology and science.

This included cooperating for business exchanges to develop shrimp farming to meet market demands [16]. Later, efforts were made to upgrade the formal relationship model through the joining of a group of shrimp farming entrepreneurs. In 2009, the Shrimp Farmers Club of Songkhla Province was established to call on the government to help resolve issues such as falling shrimp prices, issue a policy to promote shrimp farming or resolve conflicts between shrimp farmers and other sectors. In addition, the Shrimp Farmers Club in Songkhla Province has links with formal networks outside the area to share knowledge, such as the Surat Thani Shrimp Farmers Club, Tha Thong River Basin Shrimp Cooperative Limited, Pattani Shrimp Farmers Club, Satun Shrimp Farmers' Cooperative. This led to the integration of shrimp farmers in the form of a network of small shrimp farmers in 7 southern provinces which acts as an intermediary with government agencies in solving problems for shrimp farmers. For example, the President of the Southern Shrimp Farmers Network, in cooperation with the Songkhla Shrimp Farmers Club, submitted an offer to the state for assistance to shrimp farmers who were damaged by floods and wind in 2010 [17]. Later, in 2018, there was cooperation between shrimp farmers in Songkhla and Nakhon Si Thammarat provinces by establishing the Songkhla Nakhon Sri Thammarat Shrimp Club. Bunchu (a pseudonym) Vice President of the Ranot Area Club stated that the club has a policy to promote shrimp farming by sharing knowledge, farmers' experiences and achievements shrimp prices and items of public interests [18]. In 2018 when shrimp prices fell in the domestic market and production costs increased, shrimp farmers suffered. The Southern Shrimp Farmers Network has therefore acted as an intermediary in coordinating with the government in helping shrimp farmers. [19] Apart from the government sector, the Songkhla Shrimp Farmers Club also connects itself with the private sector to create a partnership. through organizing meetings to exchange knowledge and production technology, such as organizing the Southern Thai Shrimp Day Krabi Shrimp Day Shrimp Day Festival, etc.



**Picture 1** Songkhla Nakhon Si Thammarat Shrimp Club joins discussions with the Provincial Electricity Authority Source: Thai Shrimp Newspaper <https://www.facebook.com/ThaishrimpNews. Online/photos/pcb.2226628130715088/2226627250715176/> Online. Retrieved January 5, 2021



**Picture 2** The Songkhla Nakhon Sri Thammarat Shrimp Farmers Club submits a letter to the Prime Minister opposing the import of shrimp from India. Source: Thai Shrimp Newspaper <https://www.facebook.com/ThaishrimpNews. Online/photos/pcb.1806870956024143/1806870892690816> Online. Retrieved January 5, 2021

2. Organizing the changing relationships in shrimp farmer society to describe the changing model of relationship among shrimp farmers.

Shrimp farming requires cooperation and mutual assistance, both giving advice and exchanging information including cooperation in surveillance and prevention of shrimp theft. The interweaving of the Shrimp Farmer Network Relationship Set created another network and relationship model, transforming the Farmer Social Network into an Entrepreneurial

Social Network. This occurred in response to the change in the manner of production inside rural society. The difference in the informal network relationship model is that they are related only through family or kinship; they naturally depend on each other. Later, when developing a formal network relationship model, there is a connection between local and non-local shrimp farmers groups in the form of clubs and networks that create bargaining power with the government and cooperation with the private sector. A series of relationships shifted from vertical to horizontal where farmers could ask the government to solve problems and form economic network cooperation. In addition, it was found that shrimp farmers' information was exchanged through online media to help shrimp farming across the country. Formal incorporation is the linking of individuals into a new form of social networking; namely a shrimp farmer entrepreneur society consisting of farmers who are aware of the risks they have to bear and the need to interact with the government or the way to obtain government support, much more than in the past. [20].



**Picture 3** Meeting the Songkhla Nakhon Si Thammarat Shrimp Club was established in January 2018. Source: Kanwadee Rueangdej

## Conclusion

This study of changes in shrimp farmer networks, Ranot District, Songkhla Province, between 1987 and 2018 studied 2 important issues. First changes in shrimp farmer networks from an informal network relationship model a to formal network and changing relationship model in shrimp farmer society and to illustrate this changing model of relationship among shrimp farmers It was found that the shift in relationships arising from informal networks to formal networks resulted in the change in the relationship model in the community from a farmer society to an entrepreneurial society. In addition, the government should support the organization of a network of farmers in all fields and have a policy to develop and promote more potential rural entrepreneurs.

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