

Cultural Resources Management at Koh Kred

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bussakorn Sumrongthong

Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts

Chulalongkorn University

Thailand

General Information

Koh Kred is located some 2 km. south of Amphoe Pak Kred, Nonthaburi. The island was once a strip of land extending out along the bend of the Chao Phraya River. After a canal was dug to link the waterway during the Ayutthaya period, it became an island surrounded by two waterways, the Lad Kred and the Om Kred Rivers, which are actually two separate branches of the Chao Phraya.¹

According to the Royal Institute's Thai Dictionary of 1982, Kred or Tred is a small water way that connects two stretches of the same river. Lad Kred, as in the name of a canal, according to a narrow canal that provide a shortcut between two points on a river.



Kohkred(Picture from Google Earth)

Koh Kred is a sub district of Amphoe Pak Kred. It is made up of seven villages on 990 acres of fertile flood plain. Its soil is good for farming and Koh Kred clay is ideal material for earthenware pottery.

¹ Information from Tourism Authority of Thailand's booklet

At the point where the rivers converge, turning into Lad Kred River brings a change in scenery. Houses along the banks are much more densely packed and the famous local pottery is usually seen stacked up at piers waiting to be exported. Given the passing traffic and the two ferry piers that link Koh Kred with the outside world, this stretch of the river is busy for most of the morning and evening rush hours. When it was first dug, Lad Kred measured 12 meters wide and 3 meters deep, but over the year the strong currents have eaten away at the river banks, robbing many landowners of land that now exists only on paper.

Koh Kred 's History

Koh Kred was originally located on a protrusion of land along the bend of the Chao Phraya River; thus its former name of Ban Laem (Cape Point Village). In 1721, when Ayutthaya was the capital of Siam, King Thai Sa ordered a canal dug through the village to shorten journeys up and down the river, facilitating trade and the movement of troops during wartime. The canal, named Khlong Lad Kred Noi, was originally 12 meters wide and three meters deep, but changes in the river's course increased the speed and force of the water so much that over the years water has eaten away at the land on both banks, turning the village into an island, and pushed an ancient Chedi on the island off its foundation. Between 1767-1782 Mon people began to migrate east to Siam during the reign of King Naresuan the Great of Ayutthaya, and the exodus continued well into the Rattanakosin (Bangkok) years. The first Mon immigrants to settle in Koh Kred did so during the times of King Taksin the Great, who reigned during a brief transition period between Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin. The king sent his men to bring back Phraya Jeng, a senior Mon official in the court of Ayutthaya, and other Mon who had been taken prisoner during the fall of Ayutthaya, to settle in areas that are today parts of Amphoe Pak Kred of Nonthaburi and Amphoe Sam Khok of Pathum Thani. Koh Kred already had a Mon community dating back to the late Ayutthaya period, centered around Pak Ao Temple (now Wat Paramaiyikawas), so it did not take long for the newcomers to settle into their new home. In 1815 the Mon of Mataban killed their oppressive Burmese governor in a popular revolt, then fled to Siam sent his son Prince Mongkut (the future King Mongkut, or Rama IV) to meet a group of Mon at the Three Pagodas Pass in Kanchanaburi. A senior officer Chao Phrahaya Abaci Budworm, was dispatched to

bring the Mon of Tak province down to Pathum Thani and Nonthaburi. About 40,000 displaced Mon settled in the kingdom during this period.

The Great Floods of 1995 and 1996 destroyed most of the fruit orchards on Koh Kred, bringing many farmers to the brink of bankruptcy. At the onset of the economic crisis in 1997, most of Koh Kred's earthenware factories were shut down. An aid project by Amphoe Pak Kred grew into a campaign to develop Koh Kred into a tourist destination. The timing couldn't have been better, as it was the start of the Amazing Thailand tourism campaign of 1998-1999, and government support quickly poured in to help bring back to life the customs and traditions of the Mon of Koh Kred. A chief beneficiary of the revival campaign is the art of pottery making, and a cottage industry now caters chiefly to tourists.

People at Koh Kred

The majority of Koh Kred's population is split almost equally between ethnic Thais and those of Mon descent. The cultural and racial amalgamation that has occurred over the course of two centuries makes it hard to separate the two ethnic groups. But an observant visitor can tell them apart by the orientation of their homes, their traditions and rite. Thais make up about 42 percent of the local population. Most of them live in the north, south and west of the island, in villages No.2 through 5. Most of Koh Kred's Thais are believed to have settled here before the arrival of the first Mon immigrants. Historical records show that at the southeastern end of the island stood a customs checkpoint where goods and travelers passing through the canal were taxed for the passage. At the rear of the island, the water created a rather natural harbor for passing boats. A human settlement, Ban Pak Kred Noi, subsequently rose on the Pak Kred side, providing temporary shelter and a trading place for passing tradesmen. At the site of the old customs checkpoint only the name has survived; it is now Ban Pak Dan, or checkpoint village. The ancient Mon kingdom occupied the east side of the Irrawaddy Plains in what is now Myanmar. The kingdom was constantly at war with the Burmese, its neighbors to the North, from 1600 B.E. (1057 A.D.) well into the 23rd century B.E. Several waves of Mon immigrants fleeing the war with the Burmese came to Siam, attracted by geographic proximity, a similar climate and the common faith in Buddhism. The immigrants were welcomed and treated as equals by their hosts, as their migration was seen as a weakening of the Burmese military might. Many of these immigrants later formed a core part of the Thai army.

The Mon immigrants were given land on the banks of the Chao Phraya and the Mae Klong, two strategically important routes. They were given religious freedom and were free to observe their own traditions and rites. The biggest Mon settlements were in Amphoe Pak Kred in Nonthaburi, Amphoe Sam Khok in Pathum Thani and Amphoe Phra Pradaeng in Samut Prakan.

The Mon of Koh Kred makes up about 43 percent of the local population. Most of them live in village No.1, 6 and 7, which together make up the largest Mon community in Nonthaburi province. These ethnic Mon carry on the traditions of their ancestors. They worship the household guardian spirits of their paternal family, and the Mon language is still taught at some temples. Outside temple wall, however, the language is spoken by only a handful of elderly people. About 15 percent of the local population is Muslim, most found in Villages No. 2 and 7. Muslims moved to Koh Kred around 1984, when some local people traded land with the Muslims of Tambon Tha It on the opposite side the river. Some of Koh Kred's Chinese married locals and moved here; the rest are descended from Chinese potters who moved to the rest are descended from Bangkok's Ratchatewi district, circa 1995. The reason is obvious: Koh Kred is located close to a clay source, and pottery barns and kilns already existed. The newcomers had only to alter the size and shape of the kilns, from the Mon-style camel's back kiln suited for firing water jars, to the low, oblong "dragon kiln" for firing flower pots, the Chinese trademark ware.

The Cultural Management at Koh Kred

Tambon Administration Organization (TAO) , Tambon Koh Kred is comprised of 20 regional offices. Their temporary employees and the organization are self-managed. However, the Amphoe Pak Kred group is separate from the Local Administration Organization and they work independently of each other.

After the massive flooding in 1995 which caused much suffering to the local villagers Mr. Wacharin Rojanapanich, the District Chief Officer of this region, initiated an assistance program at that time and commenced to restore Koh Kred as the tourism resource of the province. This was achieved by using the prominence of the Mon's culture and their unique pottery as a marketing focus. Also at that time, Mr. Somchai in the position of Sub district Headman for the Tambon Koh Kred area, took action as did the initial group with Mr. Surajitr to promote the tourism to the Koh Kred region

since 1996. Starting from restoration of the molding of pottery in Koh Kred, Koh Kred then used public relations to promote tourism so that Koh Kred became more well known.

Since 1997, when the government announced the “Amazing Thailand” slogan for promoting tourism in Thailand, Koh Kred has been contacted by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) to send the Thai-Raman people to join the parade and present themselves and their culture in the festivals held in many provinces.

Tambon Administration Organization (TAO) has the major responsibility in managing the public utilities in Koh Kred. In addition, Koh Kred has organized the activities and the traditions of the Raman people by supporting many opportunities for them, while the Provincial Office of Culture has a role in monitoring and coordinating directly with the people or the temples in the area. In this area most temples are Mon temples except the temple of Wat Salakun which is the only Thai temple. Most people on Koh Kred are Mon people. It is made up of about 35 percent of the people living in Mu 1, 6 and 7 and most people in Mu 2 and Mu 3 follow Islam.

In addition, there are about 15 percent Thai people. The Mon people in Koh Kred have their own culture: Such as the traditional Mon dance, Song Kran festival, and the gift of food offerings to Buddhist monks. Koh Kred has organized the presentation of a traditional Mon dance at Wat Poramaiyikawas every Saturday-Sunday but it has stopped doing so recently. In the past, the occupation of the people in Koh Kred was durian planting and pottery molding for sale. Some people went to work outside the Koh Kred area.

The villagers are in need of more facilities such as bridges, roads and ports in Koh Kred. In addition, the agencies and the outsiders still need Koh Kred to be maintained in historical condition. This will allow Koh Kred to build the identity of ecotourism so when the outsider comes they will see the natural beauty with a growing pottery industry balanced with modern devices such as the electric kiln for consistent quality.

Therefore, Koh Kred should be promoted in other aspects such as improving the landscapes, improving the architecture in Koh Kred to be conservative and in a traditional way. But the important problems, that is that there is an annual flooding problem such that each year its flooding last for a duration of about three months

(September to November). The permanent solution is to construct a levy/dam surrounding the island, but this requires a very large budget.

There are also some obstacles of using the land needed to build a road around the island. Will it be placed on the land of the villagers or the landowner? How will these landowners be compensated and whom determines the precise route of the road and which land owners will be affected?

In addition to assist in the promotion of tourism, the organization held English language training for bikers for hire and it provided the (printed?) guides which was a student group to give local tourist information to visitors on Saturday-Sunday. The primary need of the Tambon Administration Organization (TAO) office at the present time, is funds for the budget to develop Tambon and promote tourism in Koh Kred. In the aspects of their culture, there are many supports such as Wat Poramaiyikawas which has a museum that houses their cultural items, but there is something to study to develop further such as the Mon culture. That is the good thing for the overview of the culture on Koh Kred.

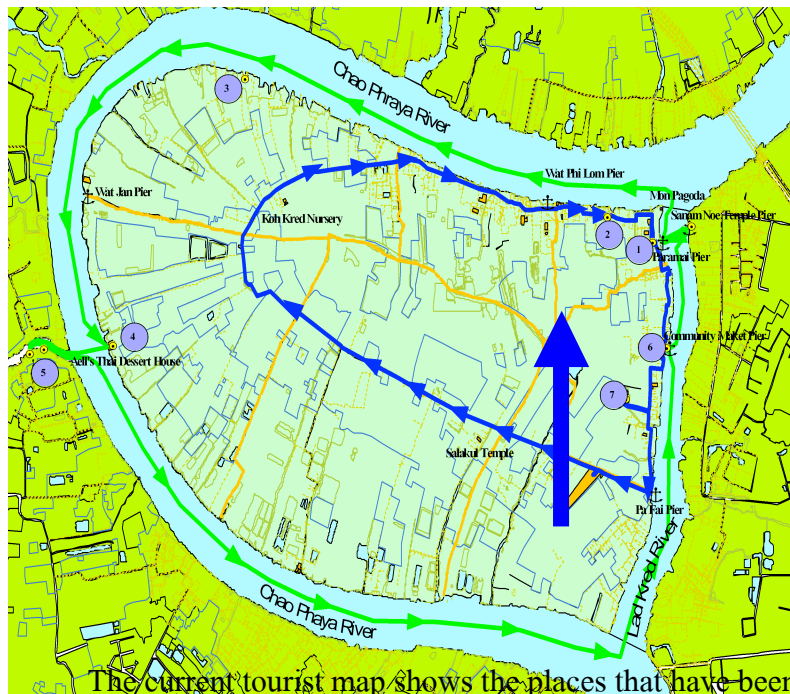
The exquisite water-pots are different from those of the historical past due to the application of the potter such as process or type of clay at this time. The important benefit of Koh Kred is that the people on Koh Kred are made up of a variety of races and religion, but when there is an occasion or an important event, they all work together side by side with no disagreement and live together peacefully. The cultural resource on Koh Kred in 7 villages consisted of :

1. Community Organization Coordination Center, Tambon Koh Kred
2. Pottery Handicraft Center
3. Cooperative Groups consisted of 4 groups:
 - Cooperative Group of Auspicious Sweets,
 - Cooperative Group of Dessert
 - Cooperative Group of Plastic Weave
 - Cooperative Group of Artificial Arts
4. Saving Groups for Production Mu 2 consisted of 2 groups :
 - 7 Village Funds and Urban Community Fund
 - Village Fund Network at the Level of Tambon
5. Center for the Promotion of Culture

6. Agricultural Technology Transfer Center²

Current Tourism Management at Koh Kred

Current Tourist Map



1. Poramai Temple Museum
2. Koun Arman House & Mon Traditional Dance Centre & Museum
3. World War II plane
4. Aell's Dessert House
5. Klong Kanom Wan (Thai Dessert Canal)
6. Community Market Pier
7. Koh Kred Pottery & Handicraft Centre (OTOP Village)

The current tourist map shows the places that have been pro

travel companies to attract tourist. The tour agencies usually bring tourist to visit a few stops as seen in the map above. Tourist will have a chance to explore places number 1 and 2 after arriving at - Poramai Temple Pier. Then they will walk through market where souvenir, foods and snacks are on sale along the pathway. The next famous place to stop is Koun Arman House. Tourist can explore traditional Mon archives at the museum in the house. If lucky, tourist can explore Mon traditional Dance by Khun Yai Prung or/and her team. Khum Yai Prung is one of the Mon generations who is the most famous dance master at Koh Kred nowadays. The next target is a boat trip starts from Community's market pier. There is the World War II plane displayed on the way to Aell's dessert House. After stopping by Aell's Dessert House and exploring the Thai dessert making process then get back to the boat and travel along the Klong Kanom Wan opposite side. This channel is famous for Thai dessert making. Later, they will go back to Community Market Pier and walk along the small street to OTOP Village the

² Somchai Tadchang: Head of Tambon Administration Organization (TAO), interviewed: 16 November 2005

see a presentation of the OTOP Centre in the small meeting hall. Outside is an old kiln where tourist can see a demonstration of pottery making process.

After our survey to find out cultural resources of Koh Kred we discovered more interesting places which should be beneficial for the tourist to visit. The below suggested tourist map shows the additional places that we recommend tourist to stop by. There are 18 suggested places for tourist to stop in order to gain experience in wider view of cultural resources at Koh Kred.



Suggested Tourist Map

1. Poramai Temple Museum
2. Community Market Pier
3. Chamlong's Mortar Kiln
4. Mae Payom Dessert House
5. Koh Kred Pottery & Handicraft Centre (OTOP Village)
6. Mak-Ai Potter's House
7. Chimpli Temple
8. Plastic Weaving Centre
9. Kred Buddha Garden
10. Rang Dang Tea Shop
11. Sou Tong Thong Temple
12. Tum's Pottery's factory & Old Kiln
13. Phi Lom Temple
14. Thai & Mon Music House
15. Borirak Potter's House
16. Koun Arman House & Mon Traditional Dance Centre & Museum
17. Sangop's Thai&Mon Music House
18. Aell's Dessert House

19. Batik & Artificial Centre

Suggestion

Noticing atmosphere of the surrounding places of the suggested stopping point it can be seen that with the capability of the space available at each house there could be the possibility to develop the unused space to benefit cultural tourism in the future. If the tourism authority could get together with local authorities in promoting the Mon's cultural place and provide more option to the tourist by helping the local to organize their own places according to their own way of life so that the place where they live could reflects the Mon culture- a living culture that not only the Mon themselves but the tourist can relate to.

References:

Tourism Authority of Thailand's Booklet

OCharoen, Suporn. Mon in Thailand, Thai Research Fund

Memorial Book of Phratraisoranatach (Malai Buppatamo) Wat Poramaiyikawas

Momorial Book of Phrakru Phatum Tammarat (Ampha) Atito Wat

SaladangNoe