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Information Booklet

For Fieldwork Exercise 2

Ko Kret: A Cultural and Environmental Geography of an Island Community

Ko Kret, located in the Pak Kret District of Nonthaburi Province, Thailand, is a historically rich river island community renowned for its Mon heritage, traditional pottery, and cultural landscape.

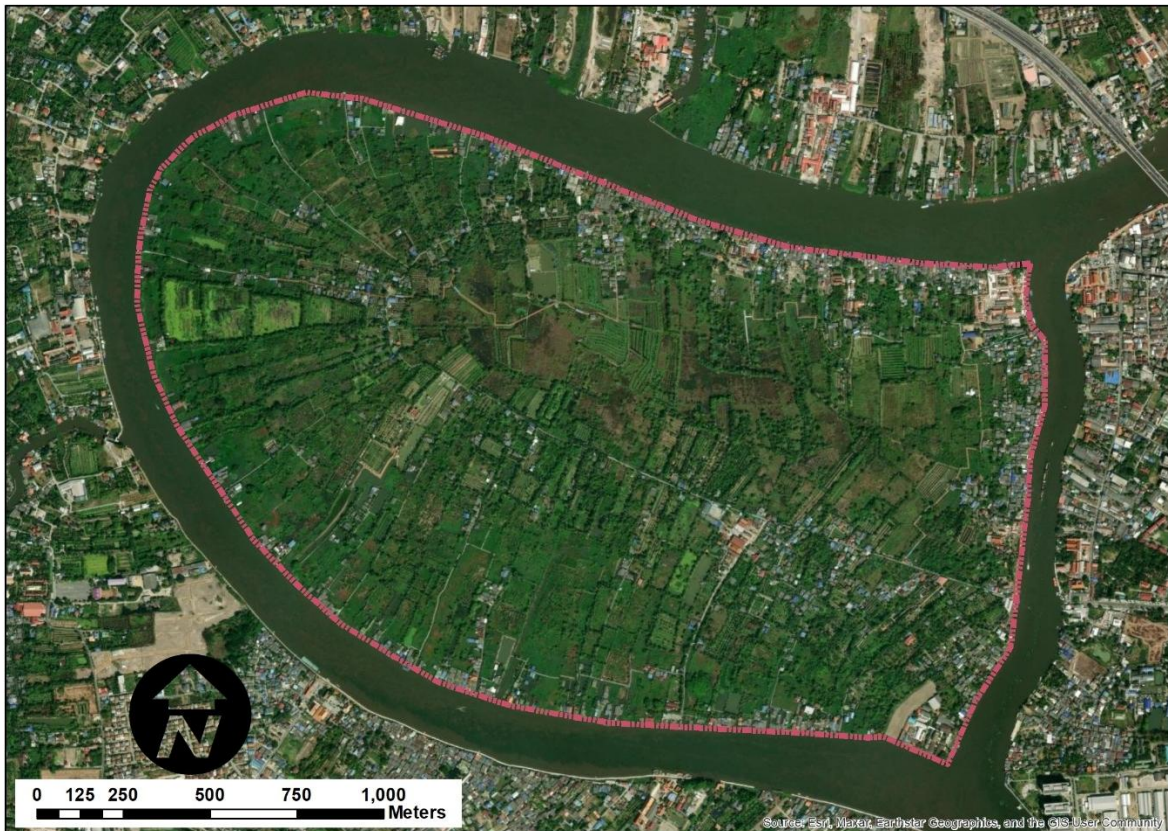


Figure 1: Map of Ko Kret

Ko Kret (Latitude: 13.9114 N, Longitude: 100.4762 E) is situated in the Chao Phraya River within Pak Kret District, Nonthaburi Province, Thailand. The island represents a unique convergence of ethnic diversity, history, and traditional craftsmanship, particularly within the Mon community. Bordered on all sides by the Chao Phraya River, Ko Kret faces socio-environmental changes that challenge its identity and sustainability.

Geographical Boundaries

- North: Borders Khlong Phra Udom Subdistrict, separated by the Chao Phraya River
- South: Borders Tha It Subdistrict, separated by the Chao Phraya River
- East: Borders Pak Kret Subdistrict, separated by the Chao Phraya River
- West: Borders Om Kret and Bang Phlap Subdistricts, separated by the Chao Phraya River

Origin of the Community Name

Ko Kret has been a thriving settlement since the late Ayutthaya period (1688–1767), serving as both a regional trade center and a checkpoint for boats on route to Ayutthaya. The

island's temples reflect architectural styles from that era. Following the fall of Ayutthaya to the Burmese, the community was temporarily abandoned.

After King Taksin the Great reestablished Thailand's independence (1767), he permitted Christian Mon refugees fleeing from conflict to resettle in the area. At that time, Ko Kret was not yet an island but rather a peninsula extending into the Chao Phraya River, known locally as *Ban Laem* ("Cape Village"). Subsequently, a canal was excavated to shorten the river's navigation route, and over time, river currents eroded the land, eventually isolating the area and creating an island initially known as *Ko Sala Kun*.

During the reign of King Thai Sa (1708–1730), the *Khlong Lat Bang Bua Thong* canal was constructed in 1722, under the supervision of Phra Thonburi. The canal measured approximately 1.16 kilometers in length, 12 meters in width, and 3 meters in depth. River currents eventually widened the canal, transforming it into a secondary channel of the Chao Phraya River and converting the peninsula into the island now known as Ko Kret. Locals often refer to it as the "Mon of Ko Kret," reflecting the dominant ethnic identity of its residents.

In 1774, during the Thonburi period, King Taksin again granted asylum to Mon people fleeing Burmese invasions, allowing them to settle in both Pak Kret and Ko Kret. During the reign of King Rama II (1809–1824), additional Mon refugees from the Three Pagodas Pass in Kanchanaburi were permitted to settle in Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, and Phra Pradaeng, further enhancing the Mon presence and cultural richness of Ko Kret.

King Rama V (1868–1910) frequently visited the area and commissioned the restoration of **Wat Paramaiyikawat** as a royal merit-making initiative. Following the 1932 revolution and World War II, Ko Kret and its surroundings became a preferred location for secondary residences and retirement homes for high-ranking government officials and civil servants.

Community Highlights

Ko Kret is a historically significant mid-river community dating back to the Ayutthaya period. It is predominantly a Mon settlement known for its rich cultural traditions, distinctive lifestyle, and enduring crafts, particularly **Ko Kret pottery** – a hallmark of local artistic heritage. The island is also home to **Wat Paramaiyikawat**, a revered temple recognized for its iconic leaning stupa, which serves as a prominent local landmark and symbol of Mon Buddhist identity.

Physical Geography

Topography and Land Use

Ko Kret is a low-lying island surrounded by the Chao Phraya River. The terrain is predominantly flood plain, making it well-suited for horticulture, particularly fruit orchards. However, the area experiences seasonal flooding from September to November. In the past, central parts of the island were used for rice cultivation, but this practice ceased in 1982 due to inadequate irrigation and the limited capacity of shallow canals.

Climate

Ko Kret has a humid tropical climate characterized by distinct wet and dry seasons. Rainfall peaks in September, often accompanied by storms or extended periods of rain. The annual average rainfall is approximately 1,225 mm. Despite the wet season, the dry season is relatively mild, thanks to the island's proximity to the river and the moisture-retaining vegetation of its fruit orchards.

Natural Resources

- **Soil:** The island consists primarily of **alluvial clay soils**, classified as *Inceptisols*, which are typical of the lower Chao Phraya River floodplain and conducive to agriculture.
- **Water:** Ko Kret is surrounded and traversed by several waterways, including:
 - Major rivers: Chao Phraya River, Om Kret River, and Lat Kret River
 - Local canals (*khlongs*): Khlong Wat Chim Phli, Khlong Sa Nam Oi, Khlong Wat Chan, Khlong Paramaiyikawat, Khlong Sala Kun, Khlong Wat Phai Lom, Khlong Wat Makham Thong, Khlong Wat Sao Thong Thong, Khlong To Dam, and Khlong Chom Phu Lai

These waterways have historically supported agriculture, transportation, and cultural activities on the island.

Population

The Ko Kret Subdistrict Administrative Organization divides the area into seven villages: 1) Ban Lat Kret, 2) Ban Sala Kun Nok, 3) Ban Sala Kun Nai, 4) Ban Khlong Sa Nam Oi, 5) Ban Tha Nam, 6) Ban Sao Thong Thong, and 7) Ban Ong Ang.

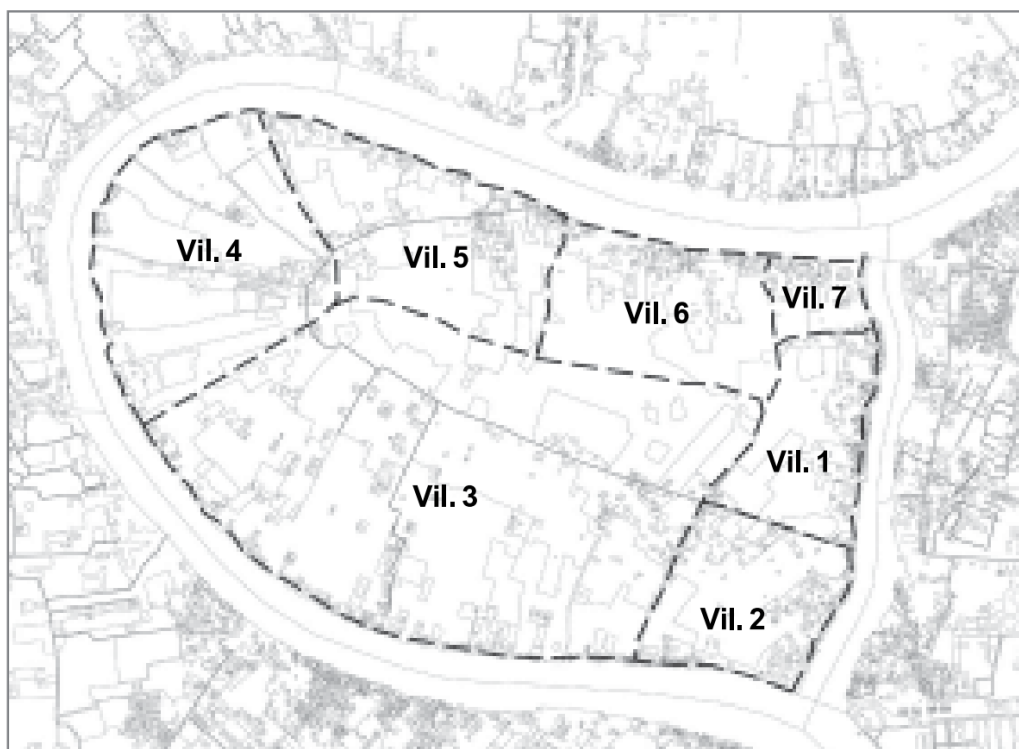


Figure 2: Ko Kret Subdistrict Administrative Organization

Source: Phattanawasiri (2009)

Ko Kret has a total population of 5,624. The demographic composition includes Mon people, who make up 35% of the population and are primarily located in villages 1, 6, and 7; a Muslim population accounting for 15% in villages 2 and 3; and Thai and Thai-Chinese residents, who form the majority at 50%, residing mainly in villages 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Ethnic Groups

Mon People: The largest ethnic group on Ko Kret. Mon immigration occurred during two periods. In the Thonburi period, (1767–1782), King Taksin allowed them to settle in Nonthaburi and Pathum Thani. During King Rama II's reign in 1815, another wave re-settled from Wat Sao Thong Thong to Wat Chim Phli. The community grew through intermarriage, and their descendants still reside on Ko Kret.

Malay Muslims: Muslims in Nonthaburi came in two waves. The first were Pattani migrants during the Ayutthaya period who settled in Bang Kraso and Bang Tanaw Si. Later, Sai Buri Muslims arrived during King Rama III's reign, settling in Tha It before crossing to Ko Kret and establishing homes near Wat Sala Kun (Village 3), across from their original community.

Cultural Capital

Ko Kret Pottery: Mon pottery-making has been passed down since the late Ayutthaya period. The Mon brought this craft with them when they came, and Ko Kret's soil proved ideal for pottery. Initially made for household use, it later became a trade. The pottery is renowned for its high craftsmanship, beautiful designs, and unique decorative patterns that are hard to replicate.



Figure 3: Ko Kret Pottery

Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand. (2025). Experience the charm of Koh Kret, Nonthaburi. Retrieved from <https://thai.tourismthailand.org/Articles/สัมผัสเสน่ห์เกาะเกร็ด-นนทบุรี>

Wat Paramaiyikawat: Located in the northeast corner of Ko Kret at the junction of the Chao Phraya River and Lat Kret Canal. Originally built in the late Ayutthaya period by Mon settlers, the temple was later renamed and rebuilt by King Rama V. It features a leaning stupa, mural paintings by Prince Pravit Chumsai, and houses the province's principal Buddha image, "Phra Nontamunin".



Figure 4: Unique dishes in Ko Kret

Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand. (2025). Experience the charm of Koh Kret, Nonthaburi. Retrieved from <https://thai.tourismthailand.org/Articles/สัมผัสเสน่ห์เกาะเกร็ด-นนทบุรี>

Cuisine: Ko Kret, being a large Mon community, features unique Mon dishes such as *khao chae* (rice soaked in jasmine-scented water), a well-known Mon delicacy. Another local specialty is *tord man nor kala* (deep-fried fish cakes with *nor kala* shoots), made from a plant unique to Ko Kret. A popular saying is, “If you visit Ko Kret and don’t try *tord man nor kala*, it’s like you haven’t truly been there.”

Physical Capital

The natural environment of Ko Kret is considered a strength of community-based tourism. The island's riverside landscape retains its traditional way of life. Surrounded by the Chao Phraya River, Ko Kret also contains small canals that run through the community, making the area fertile and particularly well-suited for agriculture and gardening.

Language

Mon Language: The Mon people are descendants of the Mongoloid race, originally from the western region of China. Linguists and anthropologists classify the Mon language within the Mon-Khmer group of the Austroasiatic language family, which includes many East Asian languages. In Ko Kret, Thai people of Mon descent still use the Mon language to some extent, especially among older adults and the elderly. The Mon spoken in Ko Kret has a distinct accent that differs from other communities. While elders still teach their children and grandchildren the language, its everyday use is declining significantly, which poses a serious threat to maintaining Mon linguistic identity.

Malay Language: Among Thai Muslims, two primary languages are used in daily life: Thai and the local Malay dialect, often informally called "Yawi." This dialect is widely spoken in the Muslim communities of Thailand's southern border provinces. In Ko Kret's Muslim community, religious beliefs and teachings are strictly observed, and thus the Malay language plays a crucial role in religious studies and communication among Muslims.

Current Situation, Changes, Challenges, and Participation

Economic Aspects: There has been a significant decline in agricultural occupations. Agricultural activity has dropped by half since 1990, primarily because younger generations prefer to work outside the island, especially in industrial factories. Ko Kret also faces frequent flooding, damaging farmland and causing losses for farmers. As a result, the number of farming households has greatly decreased, leading to abandoned farmland, especially in the central parts of the island.

Additionally, the once-renowned pottery industry of Ko Kret has declined. In the past, the community produced jars, pots, and mortars using manual labor. However, modern technology has made production faster, cheaper, more attractive, and more durable, reducing the competitiveness of local pottery. Competition from mortar producers in the Northeast and damage from floods to pottery kilns have further hurt the industry. The rising cost of clay, which must now be imported from other areas, added to the challenges. Consequently, during 1995–1996, many locals gradually stopped making pottery.

In 1996–1997, the district chief initiated efforts to revive pottery by transforming it into a souvenir craft and establishing OTOP (One Tambon One Product) groups. Although this led to a brief revival, problems remain. Investment costs are high, demand is low, and many traders now resell pottery from other regions, leading to price wars and slim profit margins. Today, few areas in the community still engage in pottery, and the business is largely maintained by older generations, as younger people are not interested.

Environment and Natural Resources: Ko Kret's community initially settled along the Pak Kret market area. Before the construction of the Khlong Lat Kret canal, the Mon community had already settled along the riverside. After the canal was dug, the community expanded along the riverbanks to the north and south.

Today, these riverside areas have deteriorated. Many homes have been renovated without preservation planning. The unique architectural features of traditional riverside homes have been lost due to the use of modern materials and changing personal tastes. This has diminished the charm and identity of the community.

Moreover, waste management is a growing problem. Many residents only maintain cleanliness within their own homes, leading to a decline in the overall environmental quality of the community. Increased tourism has led to more waste, and without collective efforts to clean up, this has worsened the problem, affecting tourism—a key economic driver of Ko Kret—and contributing to a decrease in tourist numbers.

Ko Kret also regularly experiences flooding due to its island geography. Seasonal flooding disrupts tourism and causes loss of income for locals. While government agencies are aware of the issue, resolving it requires a large budget. A government project to construct a flood protection embankment around Ko Kret is underway, but it has met resistance from locals concerned about its impact on the landscape, waste management, and traditional ways of life.

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