



ศูนย์ส่งเสริมศิลปาชีพ
ระหว่งประเทศ
(จังหวัดน่าน)



Arts and Crafts
Koh Kret Pottery



Koh Kret pottery is ancient handicraft made by Mon people in Koh Kret. Mon people are renowned for their expertise in their making of pottery which has been passed down from their ancestors. The containers made include pot, water jar, plant pot, and cauldron. The special feature of Koh Kret pottery is that it is highly porous earthenware in light orange to red color. The pottery made here has beautiful shapes and unique intricate designs. In the past, Koh Kret Potter was created by simply scratching and bulging only. Now it can also be perforated to have more detailed patterns.

Decorating pattern reflects imitation of nature, such as lotus flower petals, leaves, and flowers. At present, utilization of Koh Kret pottery become

decreasing. With the advanced technology, people turn to use modern substitution material instead. Therefore, Koh Kret pottery is created as decorating stuff, souvenir or collectibles instead of stuff for real usage. Example includes a bowl for holy water, a jar, a tray, and a container for libation.





Characteristics which reflect the local wisdom and artisan expertise

The special feature of Koh Kret pottery is that they are highly porous earthenware in light orange to red color. The ones in black are made of a mixture of husk in the clay and it is burnt with high temperature. The designs are made from carving with specialty tool of ancient Mon from Koh Kret. This is done by carving the thorns of coral tree to be the main designs on the tip that can be pressed on the surface of the container.

Another unique characteristic is an earthen jar of Koh Kret. In the past, it was huge and was molded in various sizes, ranging from a big to a medium size. An engraved jar is marked with a number from 1 up to 6 (a number indicates a size from big to small ones respectively), and Plu jar, which is the smallest one.





A medium-sized earthen jar

- A big earthen jar in an oval and high shape, with a broad shoulder and a broad mouth. The lower part is getting slightly narrow. Its bottom is flat. The mouth of the jar is bigger than the bottom. A big bowl is used to cover instead of a lid. There is no engraving. One jar can contain up to 10 buckets of water.

- A medium-sized earthen jar, is smaller than a big earthen jar. It is around 60 centimeters high. Its mouth is 30 centimeters wide. There is no engraving, no lid. One jar can contain 8 buckets of water.

- An engraved jar. The shape is different from a big and a medium-sized jar. It is in a round shape, not slim with a broad shoulder. The edge is made into a tiny twisting line around to support a lid not to make it move. The edge of a jar is decorated with lotus petal designs. A lid is like a baked-clay flat plate with a cork. A bowl can be placed upon a lid. A lid is also engraved with a simple pattern. There are 6 sizes of an engraved jar, from number 1 – 6

ranging from a big to a small size respectively.

- Plu Jar is smaller than a number 6 jar. It is used to keep betel which will prolong its life than leaving it outside a jar.

An exterior surface of an earthen jar of Koh Kret is not coated. This keeps the water cool. However, its disadvantage is that it makes the water seep away. With the knowledge of Mon people in Koh Kret, they mold a pedestal to support an earthen jar to prevent the water from seeping into the floor, and making any damages to a house. As for a big jar, a cross wood is used to support a jar in almost every house.

People in Sukhothai province normally use an earthen jar to ripen fruits, such as sapodilla. Fruit gardeners in Thonburi and Nonthaburi normally use it to ripen banana. An engraved jar number 6 which is a small one is normally used by sellers in a boat to keep drinking water.

Moreover, Koh Kret Pottery can be also classified into various kinds of appliance, including a bowl or a mortar (Kutchra or Katern bowl). For example, Katern bowl is in a slightly curved shape, underneath the edge is curved downward, the bottom is flat. It is 15 centimeters high. It is used to crush flour to make Thai rice noodle or it is given to a monk to dye monk's robe. A bowl for pickled fish which is smaller than Katern bowl, is used to ferment fish to make pickled fish. Its edge is flat. It can be used as a lid for a big jar as well.

A mortar is used to cook chili sauce in every house. It can be divided into 2 shapes, namely, an elephant's foot-shaped mortar (Krok Teen Chang) and a bell-shaped mortar (Krok Song Rakang). An elephant's foot-shaped mortar is in a thick cylinder with a broad mouth and a narrow bottom. Its edge is thick with a big waist. Its bottom is thicker than other mortars. A bell-shaped mortar is in a slim shape with a thick edge like a bell. Its waist is narrow. The bottom is smaller than that of an elephant's foot shaped mortar. A bell-shaped mortar is more popular than an elephant's foot's shaped mortar as it can be loaded in a boat more than the latter one. It can be molded in many sizes, namely, a big and a thick mortar, a big and a medium mortar, Yua mortar and Load mortar (used by fishermen to tie with fishnet), Rue Jang mortar, depending on requirements of each family. A special big mortar is used to cook chili sauce to feed many people in a religious ceremony. Apart from this, there is also a mortar for pounding betel and areca as people in the past normally ate betel.

Moreover, molding is also done for household usage, such as a pot for Palmyra palm sugar. Its mouth is 10 centimeters wide, a pot itself is 20 centimeters high. Javi pot is in a short round shape, with a broad shoulder, similar to a small engraved jar. It is 15 centimeters high, and a mouth is at 10 centimeters wide. It is used to keep lime to eat with betel, shrimp paste, pickled fish or pickled bamboo shoot.



Old mortar



Pottery wares



Old waterpot

A caldron is used to keep drinking water similar to ewer in the north. Its bottom is round with a supporting pedestal. Its lid is pointed. It symbolizes a pagoda which is an inspiration of Mon people who are Buddhist. Its body is round, representing fertility. In the past, a caldron was not engraved completely, some areas were left with smooth surface for heat release and to keep refreshing water. At present, exquisite patterns are engraved for value added as it does not used to keep water any more.

A potter in the past did not mold pottery for trading but for pleasure during leisure time. Pottery was also done to compete among the potters themselves or to give to revered persons or to a monk. Mon artisans have carried on arts in the royal court for almost 200 years up to the present time.

There are three main styles as follows: 1. The designs which are made from carving with specialty tool; 2. The designs which are made from perforating; 3. The designs which are made from embossing or debossing to create either raised or recessed relief images according to the designs.



The designs which are made from carving with specialty tool



Sketching patterns





Electric or modern gas

Koh Kret Pottery was initially made of clay from a paddy field in Koh Kret area, had it mixed with river sand to enhance strength. The sand can be easily found along the Chao Phraya River. It was burnt in a kiln with a cover which is called by a villager as “Tao Lang Tao” [a turtle back kiln]. It is a kiln with a heat upward system. There is a window to put firewood in front. Firewood was brought from mixed forest and mangrove forest. At present, good quality clay become scarce. A potter has to order clay from nearby areas of Koh Kret and from Pathumthani province. Burning is not done in a kiln with a cover any more since it is broken and it is

difficult to fix or replace. Only 2 kilns are still operating which are used to burn mortar. Later on, people use Tao Jeen [a Chinese Kiln] or it is called by a villager as Tao Maeng Pong as it looks like a big long room with 5 windows to put firewood in front and on top along the roof line of a kiln. Scraps of wood from sawmills and dry coconut leaves are used as kindling instead of wood from mangrove forest. It is used to burn flower pots or big stuff. At present, Mon people in Koh Kret build a small kiln in a square shape at 1.50 x 1.50 meters. It is called Tao Thung. Coconut shell, firewood and scraps of wood are used as kindling to make small pottery.



Background of Koh Kret Pottery

Koh Kret is a community that has enjoyed prosperity since Ayutthaya late period. Once Mon people migrated to count on the royal protection of King Taksin of Thailand, he permitted them to settle down in this area. Koh Kret is therefore named as an ancient Mon community, with a simple way of life along the Chao Phraya River. Its nature, culture and tradition have been still reserved. The area also houses ancient remains and antiques which are valuable and unique in terms of history and architecture.

Most people know that Koh Kret is an islet in a middle of the lower part of the Chao Phraya River. Mutao Pagoda of Porramaiyikawas Template is a landmark located on one bank of the Chao Phraya River. It was originated as a result of canal built to bypass a meander in the Chao Phraya River in 1722 during the reign of King Tai Sa. This was called “Minor Kret Shortcut Canal”. At present, it is a sub-district in Pakkret District, Nonthaburi, covering an area of 4.2 square meters or 2,625 rai.

Later on, the tide changed its course and eroded the bank, widening this canal into Kret Shortcut River. The land around the cape hence became an islet. During the reign of King Rama V, it was named in a title deed as Koh Salakul after the name of Salakul Temple that was established by Chao Phaya Rattanathibes in Thonburi Period. Later, once Pakkret district was established, this area was renamed to ‘Koh Kret’. As time passed, the tide gradually eroded the bank of canal and widened it into a river until the cape part was totally disconnected from the main land. It has completely become an islet in the middle of the water finally.

Koh Kret was both a commercial community and a place where a checkpoint for boats travelling to Ayutthaya was located. Temples on Koh Kret are beautiful and all are in Ayutthaya arts. However, they were abandoned during the second fall of Ayutthaya. After liberation of Siam from Burmese occupation, King Taksin permitted Mon people settle down in this Koh Kret area again.



The main occupation of Mon people in Koh Kret is making pottery of which the knowledge and expertise has been carried on from their ancestors. Koh Kret also has good quality clay, which is suitable to make pottery. Its clay is tough and not crumbly. Its color is yellowish, not too dark. Therefore, Mon people have earned their living by making pottery as their major occupation. Koh Kret Pottery is therefore an old local handicraft. It has been a wisdom heritage for over 200 years. Koh Kret has been widely known as a community of excellent potters since the past. Its pottery has a unique characteristic, beautiful, durable and suitable for utility.

Important source of production of Koh Kret Pottery can be found in the areas of Moo 1, Moo 6 and Moo 7, located between Porramaiyikawas Temple and Phai Lom Temple nowadays. Mon people call it “Kwan Aman” which means “Pottery House”. Besides, there are also other houses in Mon language, such as Kwan Amo (Lower House), Kwan Ha Tao (Upper House), Kwan Toh and Kwan Ah Lad.

Koh Kret Pottery almost disappeared once due to flooding problem during flooding season. Later, once Koh Kret has become a famous tourist place, a conservation movement to protect the knowledge of ancestors was initiated, resulting in liveliness of the community. Villagers together have gathered knowledges from older generation and created works that more align with the needs of younger generation. Product development has been introduced, such as, a carved clay lamp and an aromatherapy oil burner, etc. Koh Kret Potteries has become popular again. This also creates value-added to the product and boosts more market demand.

How to make pottery

Materials to make Koh Kret pottery

Clay is an important part. Suitable clay must be tough, in yellowish color or not too dark. At present, clay become scare because owners of paddle fields or gardens rarely sell the clay to potters. Therefore, they must buy the clay from the opposite side of Koh Kre or from Pathumthani Province of which its characteristics are pretty similar. The purchase must be done during the end of rainy season around the 11th month so that the clay still absorbs water and its texture is not too hard.

To prepare clay is done by drying it in the sun and in the rain for a while. Water it from time to time. The next step is a crushing process. Place some sand on the floor before placing the prepared clay on it. Then, have a buffalo tramp back and forth on the prepared clay. Then, constantly water the clay to make it soft and mixed properly. This also makes it convenient for a buffalo to walk on it. Prepare a bucket to take buffalo's droppings. Watch out not to have it fell on the clay because it will cause any weed in buffalo's droppings to contaminate in the clay. This tramping will take around 7 days, 2 hours a day to acquire the well-mixed clay.



Then, gather the clay into a big pile. Cover it with dried banana leaves. Constantly spray water to prevent it from getting hard. When to use the clay, take it in a sheet form at a desired amount. Mon people call it "Say Tai". Step on the clay until it gets well-mixed and tough. Turn the clay pile upside down for 2-3 times. Once it looks ready for use, step on it until it gets into a flat and round pile, with a 2-meter long diameter, and is 50 centimeters high. Tramping also requires skill to make it tough and turn into a round and nice looking pile. Tramp on it with feet to make a flower-shaped pile. Skilled trampler can make a big beautiful flower-shaped pile. At present, a machine to mix clay is available. No more clay tramping by men and buffalos is required.





A potter's wheel

A potter's wheel is used to form a vase, a jar, etc. A wheel is made of a big piece of wood, which is adjusted into a semi-circle shape, like a top. The upper part is flat with a round-flat stick on top of it, like a flat top. A diameter of a wheel is 50-60 centimeters long. The lower part is cored into a round shape with a 10-centimeter long diameter, 30-40 centimeters deep.

To set up a potter's wheel, burrow the ground to make a hole a bit bigger than a wheel. Tightly put a wood pole that is made of hardwood in the middle of a hole. This pole must be placed the most upright. Once a potter's wheel is placed, it must be revolved properly with a good balance. The wheel is located 7-10 centimeters high above the ground, which is considered a proper height for working. In the past, a wheel revolving was done manually. At present, a potter's wheel can spin around using an electric motor

A cover sheet is used to cover an unfinished work to prevent the clay from getting dry ahead of time. While molding, a potter use wet cloth to hold the clay. This is unbleached cloth, a bit bigger than a handkerchief. Fold it into small and long cloth, at 7 centimeters wide. While molding, always dip it in



Tool carving



A small bowl

water. Holding it with wet cloth will help smoothen pottery, leaving no fingermark. This also makes it convenient to mold the clay as this slippery cloth helps reduce friction of clay and hand, hence, faster molding.

A small bowl, placed on the right of a potter to always dip the cloth in water into it. Potter can also wash his/her hand in a bowl when much clay attaching on his/her hand which makes it difficult to work.

Calm is a 2-shell calm mostly found along the north part of the Chao Phraya River. Choose a big one at around a palm size. Polish an internal surface. Hold a circle wood with the left hand, hold a calm with the right hand. Carry a work with both hands while revolving a wheel. Put equal weight of both hands on the work so that it will not get distorted.



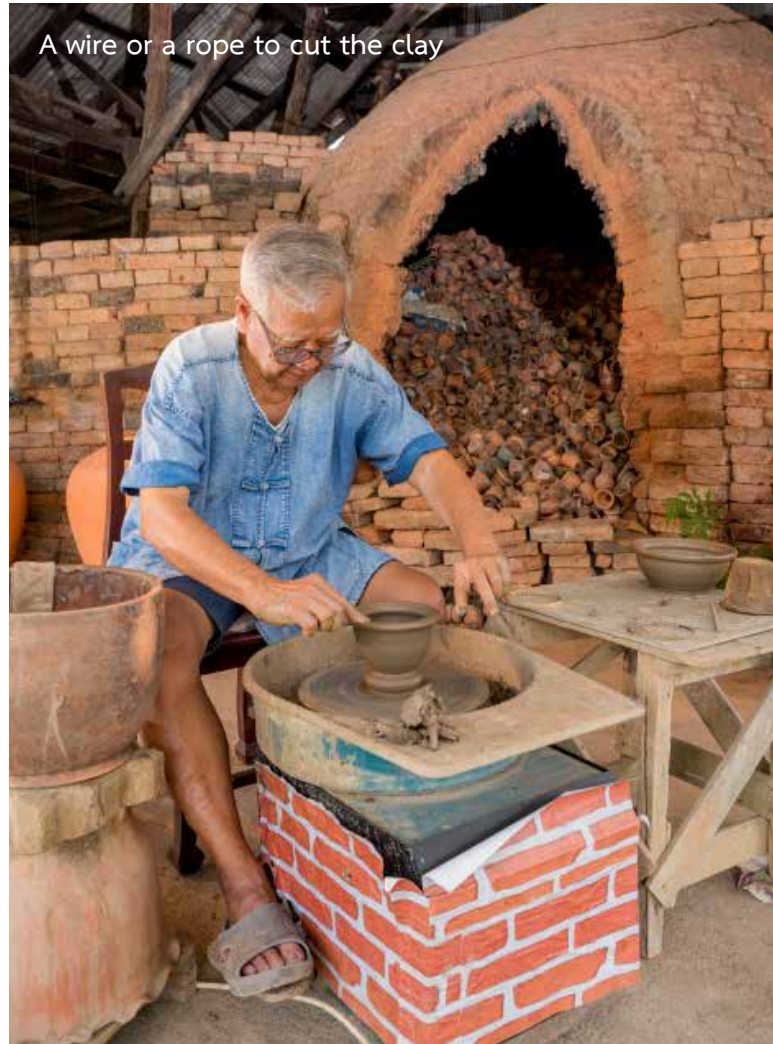
A tipped wood is a round, 80-centimeter long wood with a tipped end to decorate a lower part of pottery. It is used to stab the surplus clay out of the exterior part of a bottom of pottery to make it round and smooth. It is also used to decorate the lower surface of pottery.

A wire or a rope to cut the clay for a small sized pottery without using any paper to support while molding on a wheel. It is normally 30 centimeters long.

A steel or wood scraper is used to decorate, scratch, level off or draw a pattern on a utensil. A broken clockwork is normally used to make a steel scraper. As for a wood scraper, use a bamboo stick that is sharpened at both sides until it gets flat and smooth like a knife at 20 centimeters long.

A thick, not too big coconut shell. Polish the edge until it is smooth and shiny. It is used to polish and smoothen a surface of big pottery, such as a jar.

A step to prepare firewood to burn pottery. Initially, wood from mixed forest was used. If high temperature was required, Tatum wood was used instead. An electric and modern gas kilns are used at many places now.



A wire or a rope to cut the clay



Traditional kiln



Electric or modern gas kiln



References

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