

**PERSISTENCE AND TRANSMISSION OF MONNESS IN BELIEFS  
AND RITUALS: A CASE STUDY OF MONS AT KO KRET, CHANGWAT NONTHABURI**

**Mrs. Chayanut Intudom**

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บทคัดย่อและแฟ้มข้อมูลฉบับเต็มของวิทยานิพนธ์ตั้งแต่ปีการศึกษา 2554 ที่ให้บริการในคลังปัญญาจุฬาฯ (CUIR)  
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CHAYANUT INTUDOM: PERSISTENCE AND TRANSMISSION OF  
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This thesis is to study the persistence and transmission of Monness in beliefs and rituals of the Mons at Ko Kret, Amphoe Pak Kret, Changwat Nonthaburi in the central part of Thailand. This thesis also attempts to identify Monness in present day ritual contexts, including transforming elements.

Fieldwork was conducted during 2010-2011 in three Mon villages of Ko Kret: Village I (Ban Lat Kret), Village VI (Ban Sao Thong Thaug) and Village VII (Ban Ong Ang). The main methodologies employed were participant observation and interviewing the key informants, as well as the villagers.

Data from the fieldwork indicates the persistence and transmission of Monness in three types of rituals: rites of passage, e.g., birth, adulthood, marriage and death; Buddhist rituals; and rituals related to spirits. Traditional elements remaining regarding rites of passage are few as a result of modernity and acculturation. However, concerning funeral rites, the practices still follow the old traditions, with some elements transformed to suit time and the present social conditions. Mon Buddhist rituals include, among others, Songkran, Tak Bat Nam Phueng, and Tak Bat Dok Mai Thoop Tien. At the same time, beliefs in ancestral spirits and guardian spirits have been retained and annual worship must be performed to show gratitude to such spirits for their protection.

The analysis reveals that elements of Monness in present day ritual contexts can be traced through the arrangement of ritual spaces, ritual objects, musical instruments, songs, performing arts, costumes, ritual texts and ritual food.

The last part of this thesis considers factors determining the transmission of Mon beliefs and rituals which are found to be involved with ethnic consciousness, the role of local leaders, the role of Mon people at Ko Kret, and the geographical features of Ko Kret. Finally, suggestions for further studies on Mons at Ko Kret are provided.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

According to reliable historical evidence, the relationship between the Thai and the Mon began in the Sukhothai period when Magadu (Magato in Thai) a traveling Mon merchant came to work in the court of King Ramkhamhaeng of Sukhothai. His elopement with the king's daughter was recorded. In 1281, back in his country, he became the ruler of Martaban (Motama in Thai pronunciation) with the name of Wareru, and gained recognition from his father-in-law (Guillon, 1999: 156-157).

Mon was an old and highly civilized state in the Southeast Asian region a long time before it was completely subjugated by the Burmese king Alaungpaya from the Kongbaung Dynasty in 1757, ten years before the fall of Ayutthaya at the hands of the same destroyer. At that time, the Mon people were reduced to a minority group in their own land. They became, as Robert Halliday stated, "a people without a country" (Halliday, 1986: 2). In later time, cruelty and intolerable oppression imposed by the Burmese caused them to flee from their homeland in search of a new sanctuary, and the best place for them was in the present day territory of Thailand, then Siam.

The Mon people migrated into the Thai territories during the Ayutthaya period. The first migration recorded took place in the reign of King Mahathammaraja (1569-1590), father of King Naresuan. Then in the next reign, King Naresuan (1590-1605), upon his return from a war with the Burmese, led them to Ayutthaya. After that they continued to migrate in the reigns of King Prasatthong (1630-1655), King Narai (1656-1688) and King Borommakote (1732-1758) (Suporn Ocharoen, 1976: 48-57). These Mon refugees were allowed to live in the outer areas of Ayutthaya and in present day Nonthaburi.

Upon the rise of King Taksin of Thonburi, the influx of the Mons into Thai territories commenced again with Phraya Cheng as the leader. This time the newcomers were led to live at Pak Kret in the town of Nonthaburi and Sam Khok in

Pathum Thani, mingling with Mon people who migrated during the Ayutthaya period. The largest migration took place in the reign of King Rama II of the Rattanakosin period who sent his son Prince Mongkut, then a small boy of only nine or ten years old, to receive them. They were led to live at Pak Kret, Sam Khok and the new town of Pak Lat in the present day Samut Prakan. Mon refugees were welcome and were able to lead their life freely on Thai soil. Mostly they preferred to live in the areas by the rivers. The large communities were at Pak Kret in Nonthaburi, Sam Khok in Pathum Thani, and Pak Lat in Samut Prakan. At present, it is known that there are Mon people scattering in many areas over 30 provinces in all four regions of Thailand. It is remarkable that the Mon people in these communities, although they live in ostensibly a foreign country, are still able to preserve their own identity through their culture, arts, beliefs and rituals.

The settlement of the Mon people at Ko Kret of Nonthaburi Province dates back to the period of King Taksin. The population increased when a huge migration occurred in the reign of King Rama II. The majority of the Mon people at Pak Kret and Ko Kret came from Martaban. It could be assumed that, at early stage of their settlement, they lived among their own people in a closed community and were under the leaders of their own race. Communication with the outsiders, meaning the Thais, might have been very little. Later, in 1884, in the reign of King Chulalongkorn, Pak Kret became a district of Nonthaburi. The first two chiefs of the district were Mon since the Mon people were in great number and still spoke Mon at that time.

As time passed, the communities became more open. More communication was made. Living side by side with the Thais, adaptation, transformation or change, adoption, and exchange of bits of culture were needed in order to suit the new environment and to survive. They needed to know the Thai language and customs in order to communicate, trade, or work with the Thais. Intermarriage between the two races was not uncommon. In the passage of time, they have gradually been absorbed into the Thai environment. The Mons and the Thais are not much different in appearances. Looking at them, we can hardly distinguish them from the Thai people. Moreover, both practice the same Theravada Buddhism.

Having lived alongside the Thais for a long time, cultural integration in some parts has been unavoidable, and most people might assume that the Mons at Ko Kret must have been completely assimilated. However, visiting Ko Kret several times and by observing their way of life, I have found that the Mons at Ko Kret still practice some traditional beliefs and rituals, along with Buddhist rituals. As far as I can see, they are proud of their race, particularly those who have knowledge of history of their long lost highly civilized country. Some still speak or at least understand the Mon language, although the number is not many. Monks still chant in the Mon language in morning and evening chants and in several Buddhist ceremonies. Mon music, *pi phat mon*, Mon performing art, *ram mon*, and the Mon tradition of building Mon *hem* (ห่ม) coffins and crematoriums called *prasat* (ปราสาท) for Mon monks are still in existence.

In order to study how the Mons at Ko Kret have been able to maintain Monness, it is significant to investigate their traditions, beliefs and rituals that persist, including how and through what channels they have been transmitted from generation to generation.

## **1.1 Objectives of the Thesis**

1.1.1 To study the transmission of beliefs and rituals of the Mon people at Ko Kret, Nonthaburi Province.

1.1.2 To identify the transforming and persistent elements of Monness expressed in present day ritual contexts.

## **1.2 Major Arguments**

Today, since Ko Kret is generally known as a famous tourist site because of its location and short distance from Bangkok, one would expect that the Mon cultural roots should have disappeared. However, traces of Monness still persist in many aspects. I would argue that Mon people at Ko Kret still maintain their Monness, particularly in their traditional belief in ancestral spirits and guardian spirits. In addition, they still perform Mon Buddhist rituals, such as Songkran, Tak Bat Nam

Phueng, and Tak Bat Dok Mai. This thesis will identify Monness in the present day ritual contexts, e.g., the role of ritual practitioners, offerings, symbolic objects, language or music used in the rituals.

### **1.3 Scope of the Study**

Ko Kret is a sub-district or *tambon* in Amphoe (equivalent to district) Pak Kret. Ko Kret is composed of seven villages. The ethnic Mons live in Villages I, Village VI and Village VII. The rest, Villages II, III, IV and V, are Thai villages, with some Muslim and Chinese.

This thesis will focus on traditional beliefs and rituals of the Mon people in all three Mon villages: Village I or Lat Kret Village, Village VI or Sao Thong Thaug Village and Village VII or Ong Ang Village. The word “*Ban* (บ้าน)” is used in the meaning of “village” in this research, for example, Ban Lat Kret, Ban Sao Thong Thaug or Ban Ong Ang.

### **1.4 Literature Review**

I will briefly review research on Mon Studies in the form of Master degree theses or Doctoral degree dissertations categorized into two main topics: Mons in Thai society and Mons in Ko Kret.

#### **1.4.1 Mons in Thai Society**

Suporn Ocharoen (1976) conducted research on the Mon people in Thailand with respect to historical aspects since their first settlements. The research gives vast details on the Mon people in terms of their status and role in Thai society from the mid Ayutthaya until the early Rattanakosin periods. Her work, entitled, “The Mons in Thailand: An Analysis of Their Status and Role in Thai Society from the Mid Ayuddhya to the Early Ratanakosin Periods”, focused on the historical aspects of Mon people in Thailand.

Pannika Petkheo (2006) conducted research on the life of ethnic Mons migrant workers. Her case study was the Mons working in rubber plantations in Suratthani in southern Thailand.

Panpoj Panthongkham (1982) examined the Mon language at Bang Khanmak sub-district in the Mon community of Bang Khanmak, Muang District of Lop Buri in central Thailand. Yaowaluck Chatsuksirivet (1987) also examined the Mon language at Tambon Salui of Chumphon in the south of Thailand.

Focusing on the studies of Mon identity in Thai society, Chanai Sonsakul (1992) provided information on the assimilation of the Mon ethnic identity in the Mon Community of Bang Khanmak in Lop Buri province. The thesis was entitled “Mon Ethnic Identity Acculturation and Assimilation: A Case Study of Mon in Bang Khan Mak Community, Lopburi Province.” In another research work, Saratcha Vechaphurt (1996) studied “Cultural Identity Acculturation and Assimilation in Mon Communities, Tambon Songkanong, Amphoe Phra Pradaeng, Samut Prakan Province.”

Other studies on Mon identity include “Identity Formation of Mon Migrants: A Case Study of Transnational Workers in Samut Sakhon Province” by Sukanya Baonerd (2006) and “Identity Construction of Mon Women at the Thai-Burma Border and Their Interactions with the Burmese and the Thai: The Case of Mon Community in Kanchanaburi Province” by Juajan Wongpolganon (2008).

There have also been research interests on Mon culture. For example, Surin Tubrod (1998) studied Mon dance and performance at Mon funeral ceremonies in Phra Pradaeng. Chitranut Pankhao (2008) studied Mon women and spirit cults at Bang Khanmak Community, Muang Lop Buri District, Lop Buri Province. Suwanna Yensuk (2002) studied Mon traditional healing in the Central and the Northern regions of Thailand, providing comparative knowledge regarding traditional healing of the Mon people in central and northern Thailand.

### 1.4.2 Mons in Ko Kret

In recent times, there have been several research studies on the Mon community at Ko Kret in the form of theses. This indicates that the stories about the Mons at this site often attract the interest of the researchers. Since Ko Kret has become a famous tourist place since around the year 1997, students from different institutes have often visited the community to seek information for their research.

Examples of research on the Mons at Ko Kret are categorized and presented as follows.

Since pottery is prominent in Ko Kret, a few studies have focused on Mon pottery. For example, Sopee Yusaph (1990) examined the pottery making of the Mon people at Ko Kret in terms of its continuity and change. The area of study was Village I or Ban Lat Kret. Apichat Ngamniyom (2001) also conducted a survey of Ko Kret pottery and the transferring of Mon knowledge on pottery.

In addition, Apisit Puangprasert (2004) studied Ko Kret pottery industry in terms of the implementation of the government's policy and also Mon pottery as One Tambon One Product (OTOP) of Ko Kret.

As Ko Kret is open for tourism, there have been a few research studies on tourism at Ko Kret. Kunlaphat Vaniksampanna (1997) studied tourism at Ko Kret and also provided guidelines regarding ecotourism which contributed to sustainability and the preservation of the way of life of the people at Ko Kret. Narisara Nongnuch (2001) focused on the communication patterns that affect tourism and tourism management at the Mon community at Ko Kret.

Concerning studies on Mon performing arts, Pongsiri Silpabanleng (1997) studied Mons at Ko Kret in the area of the famous ancient Mon dance. Bunsiri Niyomthat (2000) also had the interest in studying performing art of Mon dance at Ko Kret.

Regarding ceremonial aspects, Saowapa Chaosilp (1994) conducted her research on two important annual ceremonies of the Mons at Ko Kret: Bun Klang Ban (the merit-making at the village center) and Song Chao ceremonies.

Nisaporn Wattanasapt (1999) investigated the role of the temples contributing to the existence of Mon handicrafts at Ko Kret.

Natpraveen Srisap (1994) looked into socio-cultural change and ethnic identity of the Mons at Ko Kret. Her area of study was Village I (Ban Lat Kret).

Somsri Sirikhwanchai (1998) investigated and analyzed the settlement of the Mon community at Ko Kret.

Maneerat Jinukun (2001) looked at the issue regarding conservation and development in the Mon community at Ko Kret with guidelines contributing to sustainable development.

From the examples given above it is noticeable that research on the Mon community at Ko Kret has mostly focused on tourism, pottery, environment and other social issues. But those concerning traditional beliefs and rituals are few in number.

In my thesis, I will examine the persistence and the transmission of Mon beliefs and rituals and also will analyze Monness as presented in the present day ritual contexts.

## **1.5 Research Methodology**

Three methodologies have been used in conducted the research for this thesis.

1.5.1 Documentary research.

1.5.2 Participant observation in Mon rituals.

1.5.3 In-depth informal interviews with key informants transmitting Mon rituals, as well as selected Mon people in Ko Kret.

## **1.6 Expected Benefits**

Benefits hoped to be achieved of this thesis are:

1.6.1 To provide current information on traditional beliefs and rituals of the Mon people at Ko Kret.

1.6.2 To understand persistence and transmission of Mon ethnic identity in Thai society.

1.6.3 To create a model to study persistence and change for other ethnic groups in Thailand.



## **CHAPTER II**

# **HISTORICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE MONS AT KO KRET**

To study the present day Mons in Thailand it is necessary to look into some parts of their history in order to connect the past to the present to understand who they are, where they came from and how they became one of the components that have shaped Thailand.

This chapter firstly presents historical background of the Mon Kingdom and its people, and secondly provides historical and socio-cultural background on the Mon community at Ko Kret.

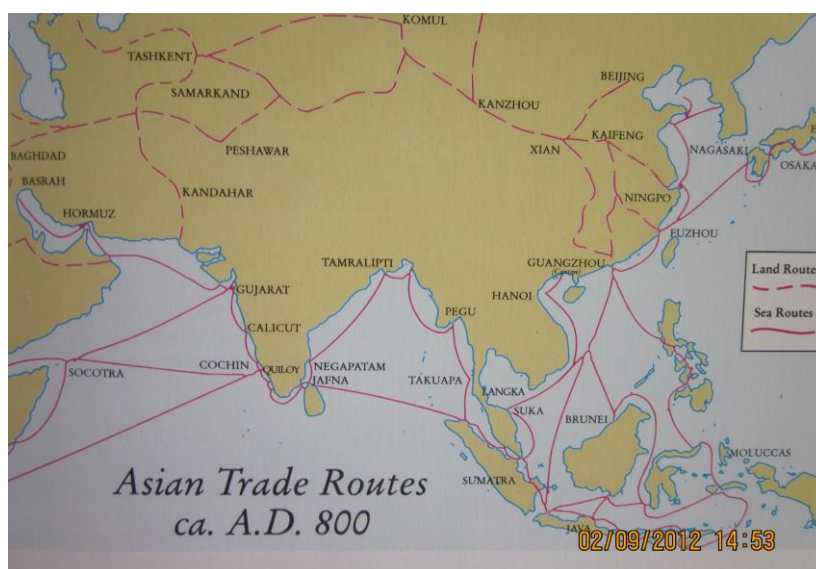
### **2.1 Historical Background of Mon and Its People**

#### **2.1.1 Brief History of the Mon Kingdom and Mon Migration to Siam**

The Mon kingdom ceased to exist as an independent kingdom in 1757, the year Hamsawatti or Pegu, the last site of the kingdom, was completely destroyed by its long-term enemy, the Burmese. Before their fatal destiny, there was a long path that the Mons had travelled. It is quite incredible that such a highly civilized kingdom, whose influence expanded over almost all Southeast Asia, should have only the name left.

The Mon kingdom was indeed a very ancient kingdom. The people were from a Mongolian tribe, whereas the Burmese were of a different tribe called Tibeto-Burmese. They migrated southward from the uppermost part of this region or the south of China to settle in the lower part of Burma centuries before the beginning of the Christian Era (Htin Aung, 1967: 2). The Mon formed their kingdom in the lower part of present day Myanmar. Their territory stretched eastwards to the central plains of present day Thailand. This strategic location brought prosperity to the kingdom since it had passages to the sea and could conduct sea trade with South Asian countries. The land

was rich in natural resources, for example, teak wood and elephants, and its fertility allowed for excellent agricultural produce, particularly rice. Historical evidence indicates that Arab geographers arrived in this land during the 8<sup>th</sup> century and mentioned it under the name of Raman'n'adesa (Hall, 1956: 11). A short description of the then Mon kingdom was recorded in the *Book of Routes and of Provinces* by Ibn Khordadzebeh (844-848), which is held as the earliest reference to the Mon (Hall, 1956: 11). The book describes its richness that, “the king possesses 50,000 elephants and that the country produces cotton, velvet stuffs and aloes wood” (Hall, 1956: 11).



**Figure 2.1 Pegu on the Asian Trade Routes (Miksic, 1999: 3).**

The Mon centers of culture in the early period were Thaton (or Sudhammavati or Sudhammapura), Twante, Dala and Pegu. All of these areas were independent cities and flourished in Buddhist religion, culture, and trade (Suporn Ocharoen, 2000: 58). The Mons were connected with the Indians by sea. They traded with the Indians and adopted Indian culture and thought. Buddhist religion was included. Thaton was the first to adopt Buddhism from Conjeveram in South India (Hall, 1956: 15). The kingdom Thaton was said by George Coedès to be a principal Indian colony in Lower Burma (Coedès, 1968: 63). The Mons also passed on the Indian culture to the neighboring kingdoms, namely, Khmer and Pyu which was an ancient kingdom in Burma. A Burmese historian Maung Htin Aung wrote that, “Without question the Mons were the most cultured of all the races of southeast Asia. Through Thaton, their window to the cultured world of India, they absorbed Indian culture and then transmitted it all over

Southeast Asia. Both the Payus and the Khmers were in many ways pupils of the Mons” (Htin Aung, 1967: 26). With such advantage, the Mons should have been able to form a great empire, but they failed to do so, and later were overrun by the newcomers, the Burmese, who were “more vigorous and more united and thereby were able to make the Mon kingdoms their vassal states” (Htin Aung, 1967: 10). Htin Aung noted in his book that, “the great failing of the Mons was that they were never politically ambitious and accordingly never attempted to found for themselves an empire of their own, unlike the Khmers, the Burmese and the Tais. They never exploited the initial advantage that history had given them” (Htin Aung, 1967: 6).

The Burmese built their state later than the Mons, but they were stronger and always wanted to exercise their power in order to dominate any neighboring state who was weaker. In 1057, Thaton lost its independence and was dominated by the Burmese King Anawrahta (ruled 1044-1077), the founder of Pagan and the first king of Burma who adopted Theravada Buddhism from the Mon (Hall, 1956: 14). It was not until 1287, 230 years later, that the Mon regained their independence and established Pegu as their new center. In fact, Pegu was much older, having been founded in 825 (Hall, 1956: 11).

In 1540, King Tabinshwehti (1531-1551) successfully seized Pegu. The Mons again were under Burmese rule. Tabinshwehti’s successor Bayinnaung (1551-1581) wished to subjugate the neighboring states. He made war on Ayutthaya, Lao and Shan states in which the Mons were imposed on with military duties. At times when the Burmese were at war with the Chinese, the Mons successfully revolted and were able to enjoy freedom.

The Mon kingdom completely came to its end at the hands of King Alaungpaya (1752-1760), the founder of the Kongbaung dynasty who “had made a holocaust of Pegu (May 1757)” (Hall, 1956: 84). Since that time, the Mons became a minority group in their own land. The people were reduced to slaves, badly and cruelly treated. Slaughter, forced labor, various kinds of oppression from the Burmese caused an influx of the Mons into the Siamese territories during the period of King Taksin of Thonburi through early Rattanakosin period. The Mons finally became, as written by Robert Halliday, “a people without a country” (Halliday, 1917: 16).

At times, the Mon made failed attempts to regain their independence. For example, in 1773 they captured Martaban, but were driven off by Burmese reinforcements. Thousands of them fled into Thailand. Then, in 1783, they captured Rangoon, but, finally, were defeated (Hall, 1956: 93). It was evident that, in the last period before the kingdom was completely destroyed, the Mon people had weak and inefficient leaders. Examples are Smin Htaw Buddhaketi who “spent most of his time searching the jungles for a white elephant,” (Hall, 1956: 77) or Binnya Dala who reigned from 1747 to the end of the kingdom, and who was not of great intellect. This is often remarked upon by the Mons in Thailand at the present.

On 20 December 1852, Pegu was annexed by the British whose expansion of power in this region was in progress (Hall, 1956: 141). At present time, it is a province in Burma.

The Mons immigrated into Siamese territory at different times since the Ayutthaya period. According to historical evidence, during the Ayutthaya period, there were five migrations as follows: (1) in the reign of King Mahadhammaraja (1569-1590) after the then Prince Naresuan declared Siam’s independence; (2) in the reign of King Naresuan (1590-1605); (3) in the reign of King Prasatthong (1630-1655) as recorded by Western historians; (4) in the reign of King Narai (1656-1688); and (5) in the reign of King Borommakote (1732- 1758) (Suporn Ocharoen, 1976: 48-57). After the fall of Ayutthaya, during the time of King Taksin, they continued to arrive with Phraya Mahayotha or Phraya Jeng as their leader. There is historical evidence that when they came they would send the Siamese kings letters to inform of their comings in advance. Then the kings would send officials to receive them and to lead them to the sites prepared for them, mostly along the river banks. The largest flight was in the reign of King Rama II with approximately 40,000 immigrants (Suporn Ocharoen, 1976: 66). It appears that they were considered quite a privileged group as King Rama II’s son, Prince Mongkut (later King Rama IV) was sent with the army to Kanchanaburi to receive the immigrants, and lead them to Bangkok.

The Mon people were welcomed in Siam since they both had a mutual enemy, the Burmese, and Siam then was in need of manpower. Several Mon immigrants were

accepted into the Siamese army and were willing to help fight against the Burmese. Many of them worked as court officials. From thence, they made their settlements in Thailand and spread towards many parts of the country. Their way of life, traditions, and culture are not much different from the Thais because they also practice Theravada Buddhism. In consequence, they have gotten along with the Thais very well and can live together peacefully and harmoniously.

Living in Thailand, the Mons spread their cultural influence to Siam. Good examples are some traditions the royal court adopted from them, such as the ceremony to make sacred water in the royal palace by Mon monks (ประเพณีพระสงฆ์รามัญสวดพระปริตรทำน้ำพระพุทธมนตร์), the royal ceremony Pirunsat (พิธีพืชมงคล) to ask for rain, the ceremony of Songkran, the ceremony to cook sacred rice (พิธีหุงข้าวทิพย์ของมอญ), *Mon rong hai* or *nang rong hai* in the royal funeral adopted since the reign of King Rama I and abolished by King Rama VI (Bulong Srikanok, 2009: 99-105).

At present, the Mon State has been established in Burma according to the administrating policy towards the ethnic groups in Burma. The state was established on the 3 January 1974 and the area covers two provinces, Thaton and Moulmein, but they have no political power (Ong Banjun, 2007: 29).

### **2.1.2 Names Used to Refer to the Kingdom and People**

Considering some research by historians or scholars in Mon Studies, it can be seen that several terms are used to refer to the Mon and its people. Robert Halliday gave an account about the names used to call this kingdom, stating that, “The Mons refer to themselves as Mon; their name in classical literature was Raman or Rmen, from which the term Mon may well be derived. Arab geographers use the old classical Mon term for their lands, Ramannadesa. The Burmans refer to the Mons as Talaing” (Smithies, 1986: 1).

Apart from these, there are many more terms.

- **Peguan**

According to Emmanuel Guillon, the term Peguan was used to refer to this group by European travellers who arrived in South Burma at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Guillon; 1999: 7). Pegaun was derived from the name of the capital, Pegu. The term has ceased to be used a long time ago. This term was also used by the missionaries in Siam in the Rattanakosin period. The statement was found in their record that a group of missionaries built “a day-school for the Peguan girls (Siam and Laos As Seen By Our American Missionaries, 1884: 374)” in the vicinity of Wat Arun in Thonburi in 1852.

- **Mon**

I have heard this term pronounced as “*mone* (ໄມ່ນ)” by the Mon people at Ko Kret. In Thai tongue, it is pronounced “*mawn* (มอญ)”, which is the term the Thai people generally use to call this ethnic group. Guillon wrote that, “Actually the Mons now write their names in three ways, *mañ*, *man* and *mon*, all of which are pronounced the same, /*moun*/, which is rendered *mon* in English and French” (Guillon, 1999: 19).

- **Ramañ, Ramaññadesa**

The term Ramañ is rarely used in the Thai spoken language, but is often seen in literary expressions. The term is often spoken along with the word Burma in the expression *burma raman*, read *phama raman* in Thai, which misleads a great number of the Thai people into believing that the Burmese and the Mons are the same group of people. Also, in the Thai literature *Lilit Talaing Pai* telling about the heroic deeds of King Naresaun, the terms *ramañ* and *mon* used in many places are meant to refer to the Burmese.

According to Halliday, *Ramaññadesa* is a classical Mon term that Arab geographers in ancient times used to call the lands of the Mons (Smithies, 1986: 1).

Guillon gives an explanation that the term *Ramaññadesa* (Guillon's spelling) comes from *rah* (country) + *Man* (of the Mons) + *ña* (people) + *desa* (country-Sanskrit). This term appears in the inscriptions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and it is the name of the country (Guillon, 1999: 21).

At present, the term *raman* is used in the Thai written language, for example, in the term like Thai – Raman Association.

#### - **Rmeñ**

This name is the oldest name the Mons use to call themselves (Guillon, 1999: 21). In Thailand, the Mon people in Chiang Rai Province in the north call themselves Meng. It is quite certain that the term must come from Rmeñ.

#### - **Talaing**

The origin of the term Talaing is confusing. Halliday also states in his research regarding this term that, “a good deal has been said and written, but there is as yet no general agreement” (Halliday, 2000: 11).

Guillon states in his research that the term Talaing “has never been found in a Mon text, ancient or modern” (Guillon, 1999: 17). The term “seemed to be derived from the Burmese *taluin*,...” (Guillon, 1999: 17). However, the Mons never use this term to refer to themselves (Guillon, 1999: 18). In summary, the term was given to them by the Burmese and it was racist since the word can be interpreted as bastard (Guillon, 1999: 19).

Talaing, for the Thais, is often understood to be the Burmese. In the Thai literature *Lilit Talaing Pai*, describing the battle between King Naresuan and the Burmese prince, the term Talaing is used to refer to the Burmese, not the Mons.

### **2.1.3 Language**

One of the many factors that indicates the Mons are a civilized people and which distinguishes their identity is that they have their own language, both in spoken and written traditions. Moreover, Mon language influence seems to have expanded over almost all this region. Maung Htin Aung supposed that the Mon language should be dated before the 8<sup>th</sup> century. He gives an opinion that, “The oldest Mon inscription, found near Lop Buri, goes back only to the eighth century, but the Mons must have learned to write long before that date. Their influence on all races of southeast Asia can be seen from the fact that many words of Mon origin are to be found in most of the language of the region” (Htin Aung, 1976: 26). Emmanuel Guillon also wrote that, “The Mons have had a script since the fifth century of the Christian era” (Guillon, 1999: 19), and “The only vernacular language found in Central Thailand between the sixth and twelfth centuries is Mon” (Guillon, 1999: 53). Halliday also referred to C.O. Blagden’s opinion in his book that, “that language is not only the oldest literary vernacular of Burma but possibly of all Indo-China” (Halliday, 2000: 131). Blagden (1864-1948) was a scholar who studied old Mon inscriptions during Halliday’s time. Inscriptions in the reigns of Anawrahta, Kyanzittha and Alaungsithu of Burma were mostly inscribed in Mon (Hall, 1966: 140), particularly in the reign of King Kyanzittha whose “enthusiasm for Mon culture was intense” (Hall, 1966: 140).

The Mon language belongs to the Mon-Khmer language family or Austro-Asiatic as referred to by anthropologists. The Mon language is monosyllabic and non-tonal. Upon my frequent visits to Ko Kret, I have had opportunities to hear some people speak the language. The first time I heard it, I realized the similarity of the accent of the Mon and the Khmer languages.

The Mon language also has had influence on the Thai and the Burmese languages. Hundreds of Thai words have Mon origin. Examples of loan words are: ปรอย, ปรอย ๆ, ซา, ซา ๆ, นาย, กระเจาะ (Mon กระเจะ), จา (พุด), เปรียง (ควาย คือเอาไขมันควายไปทำน้ำมันตะเกียงในสมัยโบราณ), เหวือก (Mon เฝือก - ฟืน), ฟืน (Mon เฟิน - เหวือก), ตอหม้อ (Mon ตะมาะ - หิน). According to Ong Banjun, a Thai researcher of ethnic Mon who has undertaken a great deal of research on Mon, there are 967 Mon words used in the Thai language (Ong Banjun, 2008: 11). As for the Burmese side, the Burmese alphabet was adopted from the Mon alphabet.



## 2.2 Background of the Mon Community at Ko Kret

### 2.2.1 Historical Background

The density and glory of the Mon communities in Nonthaburi Province in the past can be seen through the Mon temples scattering along the Chao Phraya River from Amphoe Muang down to Amphoe Pak Kret and beyond. These temples, for example, Wat Chomphuwek (วัดชมพูเวก), Wat Tamnak Tai (วัดตำหนักใต้), Wat Sai Noi (วัดไทรน้อย), Wat Samoson (วัดสโสมสร), used to be the centers of the Mon villages in southern Nonthaburi, although the Mon people around this area have already become Thai or “*Mon plai thaew*” (มอญปลายแถว) meaning “lesser Mon” as some call themselves. Further north, in Amphoe Pak Kret, Mon temples are even in a greater number. Examples are Wat Bangjak (วัดบางจาก), Wat Intharam (วัดอินทาราม), Wat Gu (วัดกู)\*, Wat Sanam Nue (วัดสนามเหนือ), Wat Bo (วัดบ่อ), Wat Bang Phang (วัดบางพัง), Wat Ko Phya Jeng (วัดเกาะพญาเจ่ง), Wat Proteket (วัดโปรดเกษ), Wat Phonimit (วัดโพธิ์นิมิตร์), Wat Toey (วัดเตย). At present, some of these temples have already become Thai temples since Mon monks who are qualified to be the abbots are rare. Nevertheless, some still play a role as Mon community centers.

Ko Kret is the name of a sub-district in Pak Kret District of Nonthaburi Province, north of Bangkok. “*Ko*” is a Thai word for island. This area was an old community that flourished since the late Ayutthaya period. Originally, its name was *Ban Laem*. It is generally understood that it became an island when the canal Lat Kret Noi was dug by command of King Tai Sa of late Ayutthaya around the year 1722 in order to make a short cut to Ayutthaya. However, looking at the map made by De La Loubère a French missionary who was in Siam during the years 1687-1688 in King Narai’s reign, Ko Kret was already an island (De La Loubère, 1986: 5). Therefore, it was possible that the said canal was expanded.

The canal was only 6 *wa* or 12 metres wide in the old days. Because of soil erosion caused by strong currents, and it was said that the river changed its course, the

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\* The word *gu* (กู) here is not a Thai word meaning “rescue” as understood by most of Thai people, but is a Mon word meaning *ban rai* (บ้านไร่) or a house in the field.

canal became wider, and the area was clearly seen as an island. In the past fifty years the canal has become even much wider until it can be called a river. Nowadays it is Maenam (river) Lat Kret.

In those days, trading activities were busy around Ko Kret. Vessels with goods bound for Ayutthaya via this canal had to stop to pay tax at the station on Ko Kret. Later, in the reign of King Rama II, a Chinese official Chao Phraya Ratanathibet whose original name was Kun (กุน) was appointed as Chao Phraya Phra Khlang responsible for tax collecting and came to station in Ko Kret. His station was at the pavilion built on the grounds of an old temple, therefore, the villagers called the pavilion Sala Kun, which means Kun's pavilion. The name of the temple was also called Wat Sala Kun, and the name of the island was sometimes called Ko Sala Kun.

It is remarkable to note that Chao Phraya Phra Khlang (Kun) was married to a Mon lady of Ko Kret, and, later, their daughter named Im became Chao Chom Manda Im, one of King Rama I's consorts. This is one among many cases that indicates the connection between the royal court and the Mon community at Ko Kret.

The Mon people from the land of the Mon were led to live in the areas of Pak Kret since 1774 in the period of King Taksin. The majority of them were from Martaban.

In 1884, in the reign of King Chulalongkorn, Pak Kret was elevated to be a district under the new system. Ko Kret also became a *tambon* of Amphoe Pak Kret. Since that time, the official name of the island became Ko Kret. The first two Chiefs of District or Nai Amphoe, Phra Ramannonthakhetkhadi (พระรามัญนนทเขตต์คีดี) and Luang Ramannonthakhetkhadi were ethnic Mon indicating that the number of the Mon people must have had been greater than the Thais; they still spoke their own language and the communications with the Thais were minimal. After that, their successors were Thai which also indicated that the Mon people could communicate with the Thais better than before, or, in other words, they were more assimilated to Thai culture.

Originally, Ko Kret had five Mon villages named after the villages in which they once lived in order to remember their homeland. These five villages were: Kwan Hatao (กวานฮะตาว-บ้านบน), Kwan Hamo (กวานฮะโม-บ้านล่าง), Kwan To (กวานโต-บ้านกลาง), Kwan Alat (กวานอะลัด-บ้านสวนหมาก), Kwan Aman (กวานอามัน). *Kwan* is a Mon word for village. According to the new administrative system, there are three villages, and Thai names were given. Village I or Ban Lat Kret (บ้านลาดเกร็ด), in the east, consists of Kwan Hatao or Ban Bon (บ้านบน) and Kwan Hamo or Ban Lang (บ้านล่าง). Village VI or Ban Sao Thong Thaug (บ้านเสาธงทอง), in the west, consists of Kwan To and Kwan Alat. Kwan Aman, in the north, became Village VII or Ban Ong Ang (บ้านโองอ่าง). Kwan To and Kwan Alat of Village VI are generally called Ban Bon and Ban Lang respectively. Each village is separated by a canal.



Figure 2.2 Map of Ko Kret.

The rest are Thai villages: Village II – Ban Sala Kun Nauk (บ้านศาลากุลนอก), Village III – Ban Sala Kun Nai (บ้านศาลากุลใน), Village IV – Ban Klong Sa Nam Oy (บ้านคลองสระน้ำอ้อย), and Village V – Ban Tha Nam (บ้านท่าหน้า).

The size of Ko Kret is 4.2 square kilometers or 2,625 rai. The population is approximately 5,635 (census of Jan. 2012). Fifty percent of the population is Thai, eight percent are Muslim, and thirty-five percent are ethnic Mon. Muslim people live along the southern bank of the island.

Of all the three Mon villages, Village I is the largest with a population of 1,055 (255 families). The population of Village VI is 763 (181 families). The smallest village is Village VII with a population of 377 (123 families).

The Mons are often said to have a preference to live by the water, meaning rivers or canals. Mon communities in Bang Kradi, Bang Khanmak (in Lopburi), Phra Pradaeng, Pathum Thani, Ratchaburi are located by the canals or rivers, and so is the Mon community of Ko Kret. The people's houses are clustered along the Chao Phraya River banks. Living by the river gave them a lot of advantages, particularly in the past, when pottery trading was a lucrative business. The inner area in the middle is for agricultural activities. Such condition also contributes much to the villagers close relationship.

Most of the houses in the community are wooden houses as generally seen in upcountry. Some are in half brick, half wood. Some are in traditional Thai style. Most of them are oil painted, not in colors. The houses on the edge of the banks have the fronts facing the river, with ladders running down into the water. The people can get into boats right from their houses. The backs of the houses face the walkway so the tourists walk pass the backs of their houses. In the past, the houses were one-storied supported by tall posts, with space underneath where children could run through from house to house. Later, because of population increases, the people adjusted their houses by closing the underneath space to make a room or rooms. Some well-to-do families have two-story houses.

## 2.2.2 Socio-Cultural Background

### 2.2.2.1 Religious Practices

In Mon communities, each village has its own temple. The village temple serves as the village center where the villagers meet at religious ceremonies or some festivals. This is also the place where the people can turn to in time of difficulties. The village temples in the Mon community of Ko Kret are: Wat Chimplee Suthavas of Village I, Wat Phailorm of Village VI (the upper village), Wat Sao Thong Thaug of Village VI (the lower village) and Wat Paramaiyikavas of Village VII. All of them are temples from the late Ayutthaya period. The most important temple since the past until at present is Wat Paramaiyikavas. This temple was restored by command of King Chulalongkorn and since then has become a royal temple. Its main pagoda is a model of the Shwedagon in present day Myanmar and houses Buddha relics. The temple is the center of the Mon temples in Pak Kret. Moreover, it plays a major role as the community's center of religious and cultural activities. During the period of King Rama V, the temple served as the education center for the Mon people when the king introduced modern education to the Thai people, until there were formal schools. In later time, the temple's role in providing education was reduced, but some people, although there were schools, still liked to come to the temple to learn. Decades ago, monks taught Thai, Mon and English to the village children in their own cells. At present, the temple teaches only Pali to monks during the Buddhist Lent. The current abbot is Phra Sumetmuni (พระสุเมตมุนี), who is an ethnic Mon.

Wat Chimplee Suthavas has now become a Thai temple with a Thai abbot. Sao Thong Thaug Temple became a Thai temple for a short while. At present, the abbot is ethnic Mon.

Monks are highly respected in the Mon communities. Up until now, monks have maintained their roles as spiritual and community leaders at the same time. As spiritual leaders, they conduct various ceremonies, preach or teach and give advice to the people. In Ko Kret community, Phra Sumetmuni plays an active role in cultural preservation.

The Mons at Ko Kret practice Buddhism as their major belief, with a mix of animism and Hinduism. They follow the Buddha's teachings, as well as often go to temples to make merit. At the same time, they still hold the old belief in ancestral and guardian spirits and some rituals are held to worship these spirits. Hindu elements are found in some rites, for example, the rites to pay homage to teachers of music or craft. In such rites, in addition to a Buddha image and the pictures of human teachers, figures of Hindu gods Shiva, Ganesha and so on are also set up and worshiped.

The shrine of the village guardian spirit is another important place in a Mon village because of their old animistic belief they still hold. Village I has Chao Pho Noom or *Pea cu Samoen Plai* or Chao Pho Ketkeao Chaiyarit as its guardian spirit. Village VI has Chao Pho Kamphaeng Muang or *Pea cu Kaman Doeng*. Village VII has no guardian spirit. Village I regularly holds an annual rite to worship its guardian spirit. Village VI cannot hold the rite in some years because the people are not well-prepared.

#### **2.2.2.4 The People**

Even at present, the Mon people at Ko Kret still maintain the character of a close knit society; that is, the people in the villages know each other, perhaps from the previous generations. Frequently visiting the community, I have found that several families are relatives through marriage. The people of Village I may have connections with those of Village VI or Village VII. So it seems to me that the people of all the three villages are kinsmen.

The villagers are willing to be part of the village activities. For example, if there is a death in any family, they will come to lend a helping hand when the news spreads. Invitation cards are not necessary. Generally, they do not mind being asked for some donation of money, usable items, or their own labor.

The Mons have been known to be the enthusiastic merit makers. They hold merit-making ceremonies all year round. On the Buddhist Sabbath days or Wan Phra (four days in a month) or the important religious days they come to the temples to make merit by offering food to the monks and listen to the chanting and preaching. In the past, when the people still worked on the island, they could stop working for many days

on the Buddhist Sabbath days or during religious festivals in order to go to the temples for merit-making. The Thais once called them *Mons the Mania* (มอญกั้ง) because they were thought to be merit-making mania. At present, they still maintain this tradition, although the number of the people is smaller since many of them go to work far from the island.

Aged people are often seen devoting their time serving the temples and monks in jobs, such as growing trees, weeding, cutting the overgrown branches, boiling water for monks. They believe that in so doing they will gain a lot of merit. Most of them look healthy. It is probably because of the peaceful environment they live in or a lot of walking. The river is still clean. The air is not polluted since there are no cars on the island.

In the past, most of the Mon people worked as potters or workers on the island. Nobody was jobless. They could find something to do all the time. Later on, owing to the country development, they exposed themselves more to the outside world to study or to work. In modern times, the children from the Mon community of Ko Kret go to Thai schools in Pak Kret and beyond. Several of them have tertiary education or are educated abroad. In addition, the community has entered into tourism. Having more communication with the outside world, their way of life has become different.

#### **2.2.2.5 Occupation**

The old generation was particularly specialized in making pottery. In fact, this profession was a continuity of their tradition from generation to generation since they lived in Martaban. Martaban, in ancient times, produced clay jars and traded far and wide. Pottery was one of the most famous products of Martaban. Guillon's research states that jars made in Martaban were "known throughout the Orient as Martaban jars,..." (Guillon, 1999: 187). He states further that, "The fame of these jars was so great and lasted for so many centuries..." (Guillon, 1999: 187). So, there is no doubt why the Mons at Ko Kret are skillful potters. Talking with the people here it was found that many people's backgrounds have some connections with pottery. It was the most lucrative business and it contributed to their connection with other Mon communities. The Mon community of Ko Kret used to be the biggest pottery industry in all Mon

communities. Pottery factories were scattered all over the three Mon villages. Old brick kilns, which look like archaeological sites, have been left deserted, attesting to the glory of Ko Kret pottery in the past.

The Mon produced clay food containers, big water containers, clay mortars, plant pots and so on for daily use and to sell. Large size fine pieces were given as gifts. The most famous products were jars for holding water. Unglazed Ko Kret jars were well known for their superb workmanship and the quality in keeping the water cool. People might have often heard of Sam Khok jars or *toom sam khok* (ตุ่มสามโลก) which may have misled them to think that they were produced in another Mon community at Sam Khok in Pathum Thani. In fact, they were jars made by the Mons at Ko Kret, but bought by traders from Sam Khok to be sold there which at that time was a big pottery market. Clay mortars were also famous for their nice shape and were long-lasting.

In modern times, with the world progressing, a lot of new inventions brought about a great impact on the pottery business. Clay pottery became old-fashioned as it was replaced by metal and unbreakable plastic utensils. Ko Kret mortars also fell out of popularity. It has been around 15 to 20 years that they have stopped producing mortars. A great number of unsold mortars have taken on a new role, that is, they are used to protect soil erosion at the river bank or the canals.

As a result, the pottery business has declined. At present, the main products are pots for plants. Small-sized pottery is sold as souvenirs. Big-sized containers are still made, but the number is not great, and they are used mostly for house decorations.

The young generation, particularly those who receive a good education and take various occupations, such as employees, officials in governmental organizations, officers, teachers, outside the island, have no interest in carrying on the pottery tradition because they see it as very hard and time-consuming. This also causes labor shortages.

Before the great flood in 2011, there were two factories that remained, and the workers were Mons from Myanmar. After the flood, there is only one kiln that is still



working. It is at Village VI. There still are many skilful potters left. Some have established their business elsewhere to avoid flooding.

### **2.2.3 The Community's Involvement with Tourism**

Before Ko Kret flourished as one of the leading tourist destinations, it experienced some turmoil which made it lose its glory of the past. Reviewing the accounts repeatedly transferred to me by the abbot of Wat Paramaiyikavas and some aged people at Ko Kret, it can be concluded that its transformation had two factors. These factors pushed the community down to its lowest level before its revival.

#### **- Influence of Modernity**

Pottery making could be said to be an important part of their life and was the way to earn a living for the Mons of Ko Kret for a long time. I had several opportunities to talk with Uncle Thonghaw Ngiew-ok (ลุงทองหล่อจิวออก) (now 83) who was a potter himself at a younger age and owned two or three kilns. According to him, the community used to have about thirty pottery factories. The Mons here were good at making clay pottery, especially jars. Once the firing was finished, they could earn enough for a whole year. They loaded the products on boats and rowed along the canals to sell them to the Mons and the Thais. Uncle Thonghaw used to go as far as Chachoengsao Province by boat to sell his goods. He also gave me an image of the atmosphere of the old times: the canals and crystal clear water, the lush green trees, and the friendly bargains between the sellers and buyers. It was not only selling, but also an exchange sometimes. For example, they exchanged their goods for rice, eggs, etc.

The advancement of science and technology, on the one hand, has brought great progress and has made life easier. However, on the other hand, advancement has been a double-edged knife which has brought negative impacts.

Around the year 1962, according to Phra Sumetmuni, the way of life of the Mon people began to change. This period witnessed the decline of clay pottery. This was because daily utensils made of aluminum or zinc and, later, plastic, which had never

existed in the island, spread from the mainland and became popular among the people. These items were new, different from their clay items and were unbreakable, so the people preferred them. Also, the country was more developed in many respects. Clay pottery was therefore considered old-fashioned. This caused a reduction of the use and making of clay pottery. The *Mon mo kradi* (หม้อกระดี่) used for cooking began to disappear. Clay mortars had to give way to blenders (old-fashioned ones wound by hand). Unglazed jars were overtaken by Chinese styled Ratchaburi glazed jars in dragon pattern. The situation became worse the next two years. They could sell only clay mortars, but the number enormously decreased. To solve the problem, they turned to producing plant pots only to make a living. The critical situation made the people poorer.

Apart from this, water gates built in several canals obstructed them from going to sell the products by boats.

#### - **Influence of Natural Disasters**

The way of life of the Mon people has had a close connection with water since the old time. They chose to settle their communities near the rivers or canals since their first arrival. In such geographical location, being impacted by nature, particularly flooding, is inevitable.

Flooding is natural in this area, particularly around the tenth or eleventh lunar months (September-October), when water inundates from the north. In some rainy seasons, it is as if the island submerges in the river since the water can rise up to as high as thigh or chest level. In fact, the Mons were accustomed to it and they have been able to cope with it. They know when the water will come. In the past, before its arrival, they would collect clay beforehand for their pottery business during the wet seasons. However, in the years 1975, 1978, 1981, 1984, the floods were so severe which affected the people's lives. Kilns were submerged in the water. The pottery business became less and less profitable. In 1991-1992, the pottery business came to a standstill because almost all of the factories had to be closed down. The employees left the island to earn a living elsewhere. Some of the young generation who worked as teachers, officials,

company employees and so on, moved away while their old parents stayed to take care of the houses. The people were facing unprecedented difficulties. The whole island became dead quiet.

The revival of Ko Kret arrived around the years 1996-1997 when Phra Sumetmuni, then acting-abbot of Wat Paramaiyikavas, had an idea to revive Ko Kret pottery in order to help the people who suffered from hardship, and to make Ko Kret a well-known cultural tourist destination with the cooperation of Mr. Watcharin Rojanapanich the new and active Chief of District who shared the same idea. He paid visits to Phra Sumetmuni to collect detailed information about Ko Kret, surveyed the whole island to make a plan. Late in the year 1997, a market place was open in the grounds of Wat Paramaiyikavas with full cooperation from the acting abbot. The people, both Thai and Mon, were persuaded to bring all sorts of goods they could produce to sell. The plan worked very well. A lot of visitors came to the market to enjoy shopping. Phra Sumetmuni recalled that the best sale was rice and home-made fish sauce.

The following year Phra Sumetmuni held a festival, Amazing Ko Kret, at Wat Paramaiyikavas. It was suggested that pottery be reduced in size to be sold as souvenirs or house decorations. Large-sized ones were produced less in number.

In 1999, a pottery contest was held at Wat Paramaiyikavas again. It was successful with the cooperation of the temple, Mr. Watcharin Rojanapanich the then Chief of District, head of the sub-district or *kamnan* (กำนัน), heads of the villages or *phu yai ban* (ผู้ใหญ่บ้าน), and the villagers.

From 1999 onwards, the condition of the people grew better. Pottery factories were re-opened. Their children began to come back. Later on, the abbot suggested that the people tear off some part of the walls of their houses to make shops to sell pottery, home-made goods or food and desserts to earn a living. This idea has made the island more charming. A narrow cement walkway with lovely shop houses on both sides, old temples, wooden houses along the river bank attract a great number of visitors. Ko Kret became better known to the people.

Its geographical character also provides a good advantage. It is really an island floating in the river which very much attracts the interest of the outsiders. Visitors can get there only by means of boats. The island is peaceful, particularly on weekdays. Another advantage is that it is not disturbed by the noisy sound of cars or fumes. Given these factors, it has not been difficult to promote tourism in Ko Kret.

Mon had a long and glorious past before it met its end. Then the Mon people left their own land to form new settlements in various parts of Thailand. The Mons at Ko Kret transmitted their forefathers' heritage, passed through ups and downs and the currents of changes until they are as we see today.

### **CHAPTER III**

## **PERSISTENCE OF MON BELIEFS AND RITUALS IN PRESENT DAY KO KRET**

From past to present, the way of life of the Mons in the three villages at Ko Kret has changed in accordance with the passage of time and the changing condition of society. Judging only from this, it may be generally understood that they have been completely absorbed and already have become Thai. The two peoples can hardly be distinguished because of their similarity in appearances. They communicate in Thai. Furthermore, the cultures are not much different since they practice the same Theravada Buddhism. So, it is understandable that one may believe that they have been completely assimilated. Looking at the dynamic changes, it is very hard for them to resist the force of change. Thus, I would like to prove how much they have been able to maintain their Monness.

Ko Kret today is well known as a famous tourist destination because of its location as an island. The distance is not very far from Bangkok, which makes it very convenient for the visitors to make a one-day trip. The short distance makes the island easily impacted by modernity.

Frequently mingling and talking with them, observing and participating in several rites has revealed the fact that, in addition to cultural elements I have discovered, such as language, food, pottery, art, performing arts, they still have strong faith in Buddhism, as well as very much cling to their traditional beliefs and rituals transmitted from generation to generation.

The Mon people here still carry on animistic beliefs reflected in some rituals – a belief that seems to be immune to global change. Some details have been adjusted or transformed for their convenience or in accordance with the age of changing. Some of their traditional beliefs and rituals have disappeared and some are practiced differently from other Mon communities in Thailand.

As information in written form related to Mon rituals is less, the method I mainly have used in order to see the picture of their life and to procure necessary information for this chapter is interviewing the people, as well as to be part of the rituals. Information was also sometimes gained from friendly talks with the people.

To categorize the Mon rituals persisting at present day Ko Kret, I will divide and present them into three groups: rites of passage, Buddhist rituals, rituals related to spirits.

### **3.1 Rites of Passage**

For the Mon people, their life seems to be full of rituals, from birth onwards until they die. I will provide details about the passage of life of the Mons of Ko Kret in five parts: birth, adulthood, marriage, sickness, and death.

#### **3.1.1 Birth**

According to the Mon custom, in the past, the first thing pregnant women had to do was to place a coconut at the top of their beds from the first day of their pregnancy, which would be left there until the day the women gave birth (Juan Kruevichyarn, 2000: 34). The person who took care of the delivery of a baby was the village midwife. Asking Uncle Thonghaw from Village I, whose grandmother was a midwife about this custom, the answer was that this was the way the Mons at Ko Kret practiced a long time ago. Only they practiced a little bit differently. At Ko Kret, it is said that a coconut would be placed near the spot a baby slept, and it would be left there until its young leaves sprouted. Then the parents would plant it in the ground. One baby means one coconut tree. When questioned why it must be a coconut, he says he did not know. This was the way they practiced for generations. In my view, a sprouted coconut probably symbolizes prosperity and intelligence. It would also result in enhancement to the family economy since they could make use of a coconut tree when it was grown enough to bear fruit.

The midwives were very important in those days when hospitals did yet not exist or transportation was still inconvenient. The delivery would be conducted in the house, in a tepee-like tent improvised with cloth. This was to protect the baby from sudden cold or heat. In preparation, as told by Uncle Thonghaw, a mattress for the baby, together with a pencil, a book, a thread and needle, would be placed on a flat bamboo basket. When the baby was born, the child would be placed to sleep on the mattress. It is said that the objects are the symbols of intelligence and diligence. The placenta was not buried soon after the completion of the delivery, but would be kept, with salt, in a small jar and left in that condition until deformed, then it would be buried. Sometimes the placentas were kept for a long time and buried altogether with the jars containing the next babies' placentas. The reason why the placentas were kept in such condition is unknown. After the women gave birth to their babies, they had to lie on a wooden board on the floor, near the fireplace for a few days up to seven days. This was the ancient wisdom to treat their wombs.

In later times, when healthcare and transportation have improved, women go to hospitals to give birth which are well-equipped with proper medical care from modern doctors for the sake of safety and hygiene. Traditional birth and midwives have become antiquated and no longer exist.

Although there are a great deal of changes in birth rituals, some traces of Monness have still been maintained. Some Mon children, both boys and girls, still wear a topknot or a braid after their birth hair is shaved. This is quite rarely seen in present day Ko Kret, but it can be seen still. I have been told that some parents write the words "topknot" and "braid" on two pieces of paper, or make two clay dolls with a topknot and a braid, and let their children pick one up.

It is believed that wearing a topknot or braid makes the children healthy and nurturing will be very easy. In addition, they will not be disturbed by ghosts.

A topknot or a braid is to be cut when the children are sufficiently grown. The latest age is typically nine years old. But there is nothing compulsory about the age. It depends on the parents' decision. Cutting of a topknot or a braid probably indicates that they are not children any more, but going to become youths. After that, in the

past, some parents had their sons ordained as novices or sent them to study with monks.

To cut a topknot or a braid, a tonsure ceremony must be performed. The ceremony takes two days. In the evening of the first day, the parents have to invite monks to conduct the evening chant at their house. The next morning the parents will take their child to the temple where the cutting will be done. Breakfast will be given to the monks. The parents will cut the child's topknot or braid while the monks are having breakfast and shave the head until it is smooth and shiny. When the monks finish breakfast, they will chant a *mantra* called *jayanto* to bless the child and white threads called *mongkol* (มงคล) will be placed on the child's head. In the past, rich families might host an entertaining performance such as *likay* for celebration. For families who were not very rich, they might hold a tonsure ceremony together in order to save money.

At present, the parents can bring their children to the temple, Protgate (วัดโปรดเกษ), a Mon temple on the other side of the river. This temple hosts a tonsure ceremony for the children once a year in March. The people will take their children to the temple to attend the ceremony. Before cutting, the children's topknots or braids will be adorned with some kind of grass, i.e., lalang grass or *ya kha* (หญ้าคา). To the Mon people, this kind of grass is auspicious as it was offered as the Buddha's seat the night he reached enlightenment. According to the Buddha's life, eight bunches of the grass were offered to him by a Brahmin named Sodthiya on his return to the *bo* tree after he floated the tray in the river. The Buddha improvised bunches of grass as his seat at the foot of the tree, sat on it, and never left the seat until he achieved his ultimate goal. Hence, the grass is held sacred and is used in auspicious rituals. The strong faith of the Mons in Buddhism can often be seen in such elements as this.

### 3.1.2 Adulthood

Traditionally, parents would send their sons to the temples to serve the monks, or if they were very naughty, they would be told to go to a temple to help the monks.



The boys first received their education with monks. Some practiced Mon art with skilled monks. The girls helped their parents with housework as with Thai girls.

At present, Mon boys and girls go to schools in and outside Ko Kret similar to Thai children. In the case of education, there is no difference. According to the law, they are Thai, so they have to abide by Thai law.

For sons, they have one important duty to perform when they are grown enough, that is, to be ordained as monks. It is considered the greatest deed every son should perform to express his gratitude to his parents. In so doing, the parents will gain great merit. It is also generally believed, as with Thai people, that monks can lead their parents to heaven catching their yellow robes.

One case study undertaken was an ordination ceremony of a young man of 21 at the Mon temple Paramaiyikavas of Village VII in January 2010. As this young man came from a Mon family in Village I, his parents and elderly relatives wanted him to use the Mon language in the ceremony. This was also his wish. Before the ordination day, he went to the temple a few times to meet the abbot to learn the details of the ceremony, some instructions and to practice some necessary language. All was in Mon. According to the old tradition, he had to pay homage to the ancestral spirits at home and informed them of his deed.



**Figure 3.1** The *nak* paid homage to Chao Pho Noom.

On the designated date, the young man, or now *nak* (*naga*), was seen in a beautiful outfit, a pink silk ankle-length *sarong*, white long-sleeve shirt and a gold

and white transparent gown, but bare-footed. He also had a golden belt around his waist and a golden necklace. After he had his head shaven at the temple by his parents and elderly relatives, he was led in a joyful procession, with a *klongyao* (กลองยาว) band and old women dancers at the front, to the shrine of the guardian spirit of the village.

This procedure is very important for the Mon people at Ko Kret. In holding a ceremony such as this, they must inform the guardian spirit of the village. The name of the guardian spirit of Village I is Chao Pho Ketkaeo Chaiyarit (เจ้าพ่อเกษแก้วชัยฤทธิ์) or Chao Pho Noom (เจ้าพ่อหนุ่ม), who is highly respected by the Mons. The information about Chao Pho Noom and his importance will be presented in the part concerning rituals related to spirits.

The purpose of coming to the shrine of Chao Pho Noom was to pay homage to the spirit, to ask forgiveness for any wrongdoing done unknowingly, and to inform the spirit of the ordination so that he would rejoice in the wholesome deed and bestowed auspicious blessings. A set of incense sticks and candles bound together on a vessel (ฐูปเทียนแพ) was presented as offerings. The objects, such as a set of three yellow robes, an alms bowl, a fan, etc., were shown to him. The *nak* paid homage to Chao Pho with a lotus flower, three lit incense sticks and one lit candle in his pressing hands. The whole ceremony at the shrine was guided by Uncle Thonghaw, who was with the *nak* all the time until the ceremony was complete. He gave him advice as to what he should do or speak. The language used here was Thai.

Uncle Thonghaw is very kind and well respected. He is one of the leading persons who plays an important part in preserving the Mon heritage at Ko Kret. He is often present at religious ceremonies as a practitioner who knows the procedures of the ceremonies well. He can observe the precepts (สมาทานศีล) in Mon. He also has some connection with the Mons at Paklat, Samut Prakan.

The procession moved back to the temple afterwards. Before entering the grounds of the ordination hall or *ubosot*, the *nak* had go to pay homage to the

guardian spirit of the temple, which is called *Tala Than* (ตะลະทาน), to inform the spirit of his ordination, the same way as done at the shrine of Chao Pho Noom.

After this, the *nak* proceeded to the grounds of the *ubosot*. Before entering the *ubosot*, he circled clockwise three times around the *ubosot*, which is not different from Thai custom. The *nak*'s hands were pressing together in the attitude of *wai* (ไหว้) with a lotus flower between his fingers. Every time he approached the four boundary stones (*sema*) of the *ubosot*, a man would take the lotus from his hands to be place at each boundary stone and a new flower would be replaced in his hands. This act was repeated twelve times altogether until the walking was completed.



**Figure 3.2** The *nak* paid homage to *Tala Than*.

The act of offering a lotus flower to each boundary stone is called *kaloh sema* (กะเลาะเสมา) in Mon, meaning paying homage to the *ubosot* boundary stones (So Plainoy, 2001: 223). This is not practiced in Thai tradition. The procedures of paying homage to the house spirits, the guardian spirit of the village, the guardian spirit of the temple, and the act of *kaloh sema* correspond to those written in a book first published in 1972 entitled *Lao Rueng Phama Raman* (เล่าเรื่องพม่ารามัญ) by So Plainoy, who acquired information from some Mon people (So Plainoy, 2001: 221-223).

The ordination was performed inside the *ubosot* presided over by the abbot, along with a group of preceptors. In the ceremony, the chanting and the formal responses were all done in Mon. The ceremony began after the *nak* asked forgiveness

from his parents for past wrongdoings, giving them a vessel of incense sticks and candles as offerings.

This ceremony indicates an integration of Thai and Mon customs. In genuine Mon custom, the parents and relatives will never set foot into the *ubosot*, particularly women. They stay outside to give the *nak* to a monk, then the door is closed. The ceremony inside is the matter of the *sangha* (Juan Kruevichyajarn, 2000: 71-73). This old custom is still strictly practiced in the Mon community of Ratchaburi (Juan Kruevichyajarn, 2000: 82). The custom was also practiced here at Ko Kret in the old days, as told to me by some senior people. In later time, the people became more flexible. Parents, relatives, and women have been allowed to witness the ceremony inside the *ubosot* as in the Thai custom, since they see no harm in doing so. In ancient Mon tradition, women were forbidden to enter the *ubosot*. Some temples have just allowed women to be inside the *ubosot* only a few decades ago. For some Mon temples, for example, Wat Songtham in Samut Prakan, women are still not allowed to go up to the area of the main pagoda.

The ordination ceremony normally lasted about thirty to forty minutes. After that, there will be a ceremony to celebrate the new monk, now in bright yellow robes. His parents and relatives will present to him a few things necessary for daily use, for example, a pillow, a blanket, a pair of sandals, an umbrella.

Unlike the Thai ordination ceremony, the ordination in Mon way has no preaching for the *nak* to appreciate his parents' virtues and the duty the son should perform to repay them, called *tam khwan nak* (ทำขวัญนาค) in Thai. This is also confirmed by So Plainoy who gained the knowledge from his Mon friends (So Plainoy, 2001: 222). So Plainoy's confirmation seems to be at variance with Juan Kruevichyajarn's accounts. According to Juan Kruevichyajarn, the procedure of *tam khwan nak* was practiced at the Mon community of Ban Muang in Ratchaburi in the past, but it is rarely seen at present because of the lack of practitioners (Juan Kruevichyajarn, 2000: 71-73).

Ong Banjun also gives an account in his book *Ton Than Vithi Mon* (ต้นธารวิถี มอญ). The author is from a Mon family in Samut Sakhon, a large Mon community in the south of Bangkok. The area is near the sea. Hence, the Mon people in Samut Sakhon are called the Salty Water Mons or *Mon Nam Khem* (มอญน้ำเค็ม). According to Ong, only the rite *ba ha ma* (บะฮะมะ) is practiced in a real Mon ordination ceremony. This rite is performed by a male practitioner called *mo khwan* (หมอขวัญ). In the rite, the *nak* will kneel pressing his two palms together in front of *mo khwan*. *Mo khwan* holds a long staff in his hand. A long thread is tied at the end of the staff and the family ring tied at the end of the thread. *Mo khwan* will chant in Mon, teaching the *nak* about the gratitude he should express towards his parents and appropriate behavior while in the monkhood. While chanting, *mo khwan* will immerse the ring in sacred water and then lower it in the *nak*'s hands. This act is repeated until the chant is over. Thai-styled *tam khwan nak* is performed in a cheerful way along with entertaining performances such as noisy music and dancing. The Mon *ba ha ma* is solemnly and quietly performed, so it has become antiquated and is no longer practiced (Ong Banjun, 2009: 190).

### 3.1.3 Marriage

Wedding ceremonies of the Mons at Ko Kret at present are different from the past. For example, in the past, monks would not be invited to be present at a wedding ceremony because it was considered the laymen's concern. Nowadays, they practice as the Thais do, that is, monks are invited. They might see this as auspicious for the wedding couples. However, although things have changed, one old belief is still preserved, i.e., a wedding ceremony cannot be held if there is a death in the family. It must be postponed for one or two years at the least.

### 3.1.4 Sickness

The Mon people of Ko Kret have several ways to cure sickness. From talking and observing, I learned that the way the Mon people here cure a disease depends on its causes: sickness caused by natural causes and sickness caused by the unseen beings.

### **3.1.4.1 Sickness Caused by Natural Causes**

Sickness caused by natural causes means sickness which is caused by various kinds of diseases, for example, diarrhea, malaria, influenza. In the old times, there were traditional healers who used traditional methods and medicine to cure the diseases. For pregnant women, there were village midwives who would help them in giving birth. Village healers in the past played a crucial role in the matters of health and welfare of the villagers, with low payment or nothing in return, so they were well-respected.

With improved health and welfare systems, developed medical care, hospitals that have come into existence and transportation that is more convenient, the people go to hospitals for proper medical services. Traditional healing has become out-of-date and the role of the healers gradually has diminished until they no longer exist in these days. Old texts on traditional healing and traditional medicine have been given to be kept in some temples. Examples of these texts can be seen at the museum of Wat Paramaiyikavas. The most famous village healer of Ko Kret who belonged to Village I died decades ago and the knowledge was not passed down to the younger generation.

### **3.1.4.2 Sickness Caused by Unseen Beings**

The Mon people are truly religious. Their faith in Buddhism is indisputable. Nevertheless, they still have a strong belief in unseen beings. The unseen beings can be anything from celestial beings, ancestral spirits of the clan, guardian spirit of a village or a temple, house spirits, starving ghosts, or wandering ghosts. Many people still believe that these unseen beings have the power to make them fall ill, or sometimes punish them when the beings are made angry. Despite rapid progress in science and technology, traditional animistic belief such as this is still in existence.

The Mon people have several methods to solve the problem caused by unnatural causes such as these. Examples are as follows.

### **Conducting *Ram Phi* Ceremony**

The *Ram Phi* ceremony has been not seen in Pak Kret for over six decades as told by my key informants. However, I was certain that this ceremony must have existed during the early settlement.

*Ram Phi* is referred to as *kalok* dance by Halliday (Halliday, 2000: 114). *Kalok* (กัลล) is a Mon word for a spirit, a demon, a *yaksha*, a sept, a clan (Halliday, 1922). Breaking some house rules, for example, by allowing someone from a different clan or a pregnant woman to stay overnight in one's house without asking permission from the ancestral spirits, can possibly make the spirits angry. Any unexpected misfortune can occur to that family, or a member of the family may be possessed or get sick. In this case, a *kalok* dance may be suggested by some knowledgeable persons to be performed in order to ask forgiveness from the spirits and to please them.

An elderly gentleman I talked to at the Mon Community of Bangkradi where the *kalok* dance is still performed, but only once in a long while, says that everything is better and the sickness or bad fortunes are all gone after a *kalok* dance is performed.

### **Asking Help from Monks**

Some people when they get sick, go to temples to ask for help from the monks instead of going to hospitals. This is because some Mon monks have special ability in curing diseases using traditional methods or some spells. I saw a woman bring her son to see the abbot of Wat Paramaiyikavas to ask help as the boy was not healthy and often got sick. In reply to my question, the abbot told me that he gave the son some chant. Another time, a woman came to see him with her crying baby. The mother said her baby cried a lot with unknown cause. The abbot gave the baby a loop of white threads called *mongkol* which he made himself. Unbelievably, the baby stopped crying. He said the baby was better because of the power of the Buddha (พระพุทธรูป). To make these special threads, he has to perform a chanting rite. Some *mantra* was

passed down to him by his monk teacher. Sacred water is another thing many people still use as medicine.

### **Wearing a Topknot (For Children)**

Some parents will have their children wear a topknot. They believe that, in doing so, their children will be healthy. Nurturing them will be easy and they will not be disturbed by wandering ghosts.

I talked with a woman from Village VII whose little daughter was wearing a topknot. When asked the reason, she answered that she often had the feeling that her little girl was followed or disturbed by something unseen and it made her uneasy and cry a lot. She went to a temple and a monk advised her that the girl should wear a topknot. She followed his advice. Strangely, since then the child was happy and always in good health. This portrays clearly a typical way of Mon belief.

### **Conducting the *Toh Anaem* Rite**

Sometimes when a child cries or gets sick from unknown causes, some people believe that the child is disturbed by a wandering ghost. The traditional rite, *Toh Anaem* (เทาอะเนม) or *Sie Kaban* (สี่กบาล) in Thai, may be conducted. This is a rite to feed the wandering ghosts. To conduct the rite, the people will place some food on the lid of a clay pot or a banana leaf or a common bowl and leave it at a road side or a forked road and invite them to accept the food. Usually, the rite will be conducted in the evening when the sun is nearly gone.

### **Asking Help from Guardian Spirits**

Sometimes when a child feels sick and uneasy at night, and the parents do not know what to do, the first person they think of is Chao Pho Noom. The father or mother comes out of the house, turn their face toward the direction the shrine of Chao Pho Noom and makes a wish to Chao Pho to help.



### 3.1.5 Death

Of all the rites of passage, the ones related to death seem to be the most important. They reflect their belief in rebirth, the result of good and bad deeds and the relationship with the dead. Importantly, significant elements of Monness and traditional beliefs can be seen in these kinds of rites.

Regarding the rites connected with death of the Mons at Ko Kret, it was found that the practices are based on three old Mon texts combined. One of them is called *Lokasamutti*. Another one is mentioned by Halliday as *Anisamsa Kammathan* (Halliday, 1986: 21). The other is *Kala Kalee* (Mon pronunciation *Kala Kaloy*) mentioned by Phra Maha Charoon Yanacharee (Phra Maha Charoon Yanachari, 2006: 30-49). The people follow the instructions given in the texts quite strictly, particularly parts concerning the disposal of the remains of the dead who die from different causes. Although there are some transformed elements, the principles are retained.

The *Lokasamutti* is believed to have been written by a monk named Maha Sanghanath who came from the city of Singhol to the east of the city of Sayawati and stayed at the temple Mieh Rieng. The text is written in the ancient Mon language. In 1941 Phra Khru Lon (พระครูถิน) the abbot of Wat Huahin in Ban Pong, Ratchaburi brought this text from Hamsawatti and had it inscribed on palm leaves. One of the copies was given to Wat Muang (Juan Kruewichyajan, 1994: 168, 203). Juan Kruewichyajan, a retired teacher of ethnic Mon from Ban Muang, Ratchaburi translate it into Thai in 1993 to disseminate knowledge about the Mon people's way of life.

The origin of another book, *Anisamsa Kammathan*, is unknown, but Halliday had it in his possession (Halliday 1986: 21).

The other text *Kala Kalee* was translated from Mon by Phra Maha Charoon Yanacharee in 2006. This text gives instructions on the preparation of funeral rites by one of the Buddha's disciples Phra Kala to King Pasenthikoson and the couple named Kala and Kalee.

Normally, a funeral rite of a layman is held in a private sphere and limited only to the relatives or acquaintances of the dead. Not many people, especially those who are non-Mon, have the opportunity to observe the details of the rite. In contrast, a funeral of a revered monk is publicly held. It is an immense undertaking along with a great extent of work, a huge sum of money, skilled artisans and a great amount of manpower.

To give description of the funeral rites of the Mons at Ko Kret, I will divide them into two parts: the funeral rites of laymen, and the funeral rites of monks.

### **3.1.5.1 Funeral Rites of Laymen**

In the Mon way, the matter of death seems to be very significant. The funeral rites consist of vast details from the day a person dies, the disposal of the body, religious rites, to the cremation day. After that there still are some rites to be performed.

Funeral rites of the people who die of natural causes and those who die of unnatural causes are different.

#### **Persons Dying Unusual Deaths**

In the ancient text *Lokasamutti*, people dying unnatural death are as follows: a woman dying with her foetus; a person dying of some illnesses like epilepsy, smallpox, cholera, the plague, leprosy, swelling, paralyze, psychosis; a person dying from being bitten by a mad dog, a snake, or a tiger; a person dying from accidents, such as being hit by a lightning, falling from a tree, drowning, hanging oneself to death; a child under ten years old; a person dying of sudden causes.

According to the text, if a person dies of any of these unnatural causes, the body must not be taken into his or her house or kept or cremated since it will bring bad luck to the family. The body must be taken right to the graveyard and buried

immediately, and without any religious ritual. The body will be left buried for as long as months or years. After that, it can be unearthed to be cremated after some religious rituals are conducted. The Mons of Ko Kret followed this practice strictly in the past as confirmed by my key informants. It may sound unfair that those unfortunate people dying an untimely death should have no right to receive any religious service. Only a *bangsukun* ceremony is possible, but must be performed right at the burial grounds. This can be understandable as it is because of matters of hygiene, health and welfare of the other people, particularly in cases concerning contagious diseases. Burying the bodies immediately is to prevent the diseases from spreading as is mentioned in the manuscript. If one who dies of paralyze, epilepsy, psychosis or sudden illnesses, this is considered a bad sign, but the reasons are not given.

At present, things have changed. During my fieldwork, I had an opportunity to witness the funeral of the two Mon men who lost their lives at the same time in a boat accident (November 30, 2009). Their bodies were not buried immediately but, as in the Thai way, cremated after one to three nights of religious rites. This reflects Thai influence. The other reason is that, in modern days, there is no space to bury the dead any longer because of the expansion of the community. The graveyard and the old pyre of Wat Paramaiyikavas of Village VII have long disappeared and been replaced by a school. A crematorium has been built. Wat Sao Thong Thaug of Village VI also has a crematorium. An old-fashioned pyre can still be seen at Wat Chimplee Suthavas of Village I, but it is no longer used.

### **Persons Dying of Natural Causes**

The body of a person dying at a hospital must not be taken into the house, but straight to a temple. The case conforms to the old Mon belief not to take the body of a person dying elsewhere into the house again. People who disobey may meet with a lot of trouble. This is strongly believed by the Mons at Ko Kret.

In case of one who dies in his or her own house, the body must not be moved. Family members will help build a traditional Mon bed for the dead called *cong neh* (၅၅၅၅၅၅). Pronunciation of this word is varied. Some people pronounce *cong nah* (၅၅၅၅၅၅) or

*cong leh* (ຈົງເລະ). When the news spreads the neighbors will come and lend their hands in this task. Lending one's hands in any task in a funeral is considered an act of merit-making. People will gain a lot of merit or *bun* (ບຸນ) from this kind of task.

In treatment of the body, two waters are used. Firstly, warm water is used. The body will be cleaned neatly with soap and hair washed. In the last step, normal water is used to pour over the whole body. Powder is also applied to the face. Then clothes are put on the body with the front reversing to the back. After that, they can take the body to lie in the bed. In the past, during bathing, waste inside the body would be excreted by way of pressing hard on the stomach. This was to delay the decomposition of the body.

It is better to describe a traditional Mon bed for a better understanding.

*Cong neh* (ຈົງເນະ) is a bed for the dead. I have been told that this name means a bed of victory which conforms to the explanation given by Dr. Sued Gajaseni (Sued Gajaseni, 2000: 77). Looking up Halliday's Mon-English dictionary of 1922, three words were found: *cong* meaning a bed, *ceneh* (verb) meaning overcome, and *cenah* (noun) meaning victory. Since I have heard the people pronounce both *cong neh* and *cong nah*, therefore my conclusion is that the word should be derived from both *cong* + *ceneh*, and *cong* + *cenah*. The meanings of which are not different. I have also heard it pronounced *cong leh* (ຈົງເລະ) by an aged Mon man at Khlong Glua. It is believed that the one who lies in this bed is the one who has overcome all worldly sufferings caused by birth, aging, sickness and death, and is traveling along the path to *nibbana*. Another explanation given by Phra Maha Charoon Yanachari is that the word means the resting place of the dead (Phra Maha Chaoroon Yanachari, 2006: 39).

A traditional Mon bed for the dead is made of bamboo. But the meaning behind the use of the material make it much more valuable than only simple bamboo pieces – the meanings which are related to the Buddha's dhamma. The detail as described by Dr. Sued Gajaseni is that the lower part of the bed consists of four bases, one is placed above another. These four bases represent the four planes of existence: Abaiyaphumi (ອບາຍກູມີ), Sukhatiphumi (ສຸກຕິກູມີ), Rupaphumi (ຮູປກູມີ), and Arupaphumi (ອຣູປ

ភ្នំ). Its six posts represent Six Classes of Objects or Six Arammanas which should be abstained from in order to reach the Six Heavens. Eight long pieces of bamboo and eight short pieces of bamboo on its floor represents the escape from eight Hells. The bed's roof is made of twenty pieces of thin bamboo in a grid representing the twenty planes of Brahmas (Sued Gajaseni, 2000: 77).

In later times bamboo has been very scarce in Ko Kret, so the people have adapted by using any kind of wood easily available at any shop selling construction material or even wood from a bed. Building of a bed is much easier using woods and can save both time and energy than using bamboo. The bed must be made immediately when someone in the family has died. Nobody makes it in advance since it is considered an ill omen and of ill intention. Regardless of its adaptation, the principle is the same. It is a low bed with six posts. On its top is a roof made of thin pieces of wood with a piece of white cloth spread on them. Flowers are hung at its rims as decorations. In the past, some kinds of leaves, for example, tea leaves or guava leaves, were used to help prevent undesirable odour and a container was put beneath the bed to catch lymph that flowed from the body. At present times, modern chemicals are much more efficient to delay the decomposition of the body and to keep the odour at bay.

A ring belonged to the dead and a betel nut-cutter will be tied to one end of a long thread hung from the roof of the bed to rest over the chest. The ring and the cutter have religious meanings hidden in them. The ring, as explained by Dr. Sued Gajaseni, represents *cakkhuyan* (ទឹកច្រូត). Some people say it may represent the circle of life or *samsara*. A betel nut-cutter represents an instrument used to break the circle, an instrument that helps the dead escape from the endless circle. In the past, these set of objects helped signify the appropriate time to take the body to the graveyard or the pyre. The time came when the body swelled and got close to the betel nut-cutter.

Apart from this, food must also be prepared for the dead. Such food consists of dried food, such as rice grains, dried chillies, salt, red onions or garlic. Everything is put in a clay pot. The clay pot will be placed in a metal or clay basin, on three small rocks. Another kind of food is three rice balls mixed with sugar prepared in a bowl. In

addition, there must be a lamp which will be always lit, a glass of pure water and a coconut. A set of the personal belongings of the dead, for example, trousers, a shirt, a pair of shoes or sandals, a belt, a pair of glasses or a hat, will also be prepared and placed on the floor near the bed. In the past, they were arranged in a bamboo basket which was called a basket of soul or *poeng hamao* (เปิงพะมาว - กระบุงวิญญาณ).

The body may be kept at home for two or three days depending on the decision of the relatives. Monks are invited to chant in the evenings. Food is prepared for guests and helpers. In the past, monks were also invited to chant in the morning and had breakfast at the front of the *cong neh*. Eating was difficult for them when the body began to decompose, and the tea or guava leaves became useless.

At the appropriate time, a coffin will be prepared. In Mon tradition, preparation of a coffin will be made outside the house. The Mon people will never take a coffin under the roof of their houses. The body will be carried from the bed to the coffin outside the house. The shape of a traditional Mon coffin is unique. It is narrow at the lower part, the top is wider. It has no cover and a bamboo grid is used as its bottom on which the body is laid. The body may be covered with a piece of cloth only to prevent it from being seen. This type of coffin is still used in some communities. However, for the Ko Kret community nowadays, coffins in box shape are used since they are easily available.

In bringing the dead to the temple, a monk will be invited to walk at the front of the coffin holding a sacred white thread in his hand with its end tied to the coffin. It is as if the dead is led to the temple by the monk. Wat Paramaiyikavas is a temple where the people often come to hold funeral rites since the place is spacious.

The coffin must not be taken pass any house for fear that it may hit the houses. In the *Lokasamutti*, a house hit by a coffin cannot be lived in any longer. It must be dismantled and given to a temple. In consequence, it has become a tradition practiced, even at present, for the coffin to be taken to Wat Paramaiyikavas by means of boat. Funeral chants may be continued at the temple for a few nights before the cremation.

Normally, at Ko Kret, religious rites for the dead are held from one up to five days. At Wat Paramaiyikavas, the chant will be performed in Mon if the dead are Mon.

During my fieldwork, I had several chances to observe and participate in a few funeral rites. The one I would like to raise as an example is the funeral of an ethnic Mon, Mr. Boontham Thongpetch.

Mr. Boontham died of old age at 85, in his own house in Village VI. Before retiring, he was a skilled potter and had his own kilns. He died in his sleep in the afternoon of 16 July 2010 while listening to preaching from a tape recorder. The body was laid in a normal bed after being washed, not in a *cong neh* because it was inconvenient for the family to make. His children decided to take their father to the temple the following day. The next morning a box shaped coffin was prepared. Water mixed with curcuma was poured in the coffin followed by pure water, before placing the body inside. The coffin was not taken to Wat Paramaiyikavas through the village, but by the river. All these activities were held in a private sphere and the information was transferred to me by Mr. Boontham's sons.

At the temple hall, the coffin was arranged the way often seen at any Thai temple in Bangkok. What attracted my interest were some ritual objects. There was a clay pot filled with rice grains and dried chili and salt in plastic bags. The pot was put on three small rocks with some charcoal underneath. Some people say that this is provisions the dead can use while traveling to the next world. A bowl of three rice balls mixed with sugar, is said to be the food of the dead. A lamp, a light for the dead, will be kept lit all the time. There was also a glass of water. A coconut was also among the items. Its juice was to be used to wash the face of the dead before the cremation ceremony. Another item was a tray containing some personal belongings of the dead, e.g., clothing, sandals, a belt, a blanket.

The religious rites were held for five nights. Dinner was prepared for the guests every evening. The cooks were the housewives who were invited or came voluntarily to help. A group of monks were invited to chant every night.



**Figures 3.3-3.5 The funeral rite of Mr. Buntham Thongpetch, at Ko Kret.**



In the ceremony such as this, Mon art of performances can sometimes be seen. The *pi phat mon*, the Mon classical music band Somchitr Silp (สมจิตรศิลป์) of Ko Kret came to play for him every evening. Its sound echoed across the river to the opposite bank. Its sound as mentioned by Halliday “was said to overcome the sound of the roaring sea” (Halliday, 2000: 63).

It was my intention to come to attend the last funeral rite on the fifth night (21 July 2010) which I found it worthwhile. This night, I had the opportunity to see the famous art of Mon dance or *mon ram* (มอญรำ) of Ko Kret. Around 8 o'clock or later, while I was thinking of leaving the temple, ten women in long black *pha thung* (ผ้าถุง) walked up to the hall where the coffin was put up. I wondered what was going on. Hardly had I stopped wondering, they began their performance. It was the Mon classical dance *mon ram*. They performed beautifully to the tune played by the *pi phat mon* band. Asking whether they were hired, the answer was no. They were willing to come because Mr. Boontham was a respective gentleman. Furthermore, his wife at young age was a *mon ram* teacher herself. She transferred the knowledge to several girls including her daughters. The dancers tonight were both her students and her own daughters.

The cremation ceremony on the next day (22 July 2010) was not different from the Thai way. A food offering to monks was held before noon. In the afternoon, there were ceremonies of *matika* and *bangsukun* in the Mon language. The cremation started at five. A large crowd from inside and outside the island came to pay their last respect. Invitation cards were not needed. Attending the ceremony, an impressive rural atmosphere was worthy of note.

One month later (19 August 2010), his 89-year-old wife Mrs. Chamnai Thongpetch (จำหน่าย ทองเพชร) died of old age after being hospitalized for months. Since she died outside the house, the body was taken right to the temple in accordance with the traditional rule. The arrangements, the music and the performance were the same as for Mr. Boontham's funeral rite.

Interesting information about Mrs. Chamnai was transferred to me by the abbot of Wat Paramaiyikavas. In the year 1946, when King Anand (Rama VIII) and his younger brother (the present King Bhumibol), came to visit Ko Kret, Mrs. Chamnai, 25 at that time, was one among the dancers who performed traditional *ram mon* before the royalties. She transferred the knowledge to her daughters and many girls in Ko Kret. She made pottery by day and taught dancing at night. Her students did not have to pay, but were asked to bring only lamp oil.

In the past, when old-fashioned pyres were still in use, the Mons at Ko Kret would attend the cremation carrying a piece of firewood with them in order to help cremate the body. Normally, firewood was in abundance since it was used in pottery making. The people could easily pick it beside the walk way. This was considered an act of merit-making. This admirable tradition disappeared when this type of pyre went out of use.

Traditionally, after a cremation, two important ceremonies of *Toh Ayong Kyaj* (เกาะอะ โยงกยาจ) and the religious ceremony on the seventh day will be held for the dead. Another one is the ceremony to inter the ashes and bones (พิธีบรรจุอัฐิ) according to Mon custom. The detail of these ceremonies will be given later.

Talking with the people, I found that in the last ten years funeral arrangements have been held many times in the three villages. Such arrangements need quite a lot of space. So, it may be inconvenient for some families because of the limited space in their houses. However, the people have still carried on the practices, although they are only seen once in a while.

Another example was the funeral of Mr. Wanchai Tonthan (นายวันชัย ต้นแทน) who died on Saturday 5 September 2010. The one who sent news to me was a young undertaker of 28 named Mr. Chatupol Buaheng (จตุพล บัวเฮง). He was interested to train to be an undertaker since he was only eleven and at present is an undertaker by profession. He works for the Mon temples of Wat Klang Kret (วัดกลางเกร็ด), Wat Bo (วัด

๒๑๐)\* on the Pak Kret side, and also Wat Paramaiyikavas. He is ethnic Mon and has knowledge of building traditional Mon beds for the dead. As Mr. Wanchai was his relative, he allowed me to go and observe.

The house was at Tambon Khlong Glua (คลองเกลือ), another Mon community in Pak Kret. In the past, the areas around Pak Kret were crowded with Mon people. As time passed, the community was separated by roads and modern villages. An aged gentleman at the house said that, “We Mon have lived here before the Thai people, the Thais were the newcomers”. He seemed to be proud of his race.

Mr. Wanchai Tonthan, aged 47, died of kidney failure on 5 September 2010. The body was already on the bed when I arrived. His wife kindly gave me permission to take photographs freely. The six posts of the bed were decorated with bright colored flimsy pieces of cloth, its roof with garlands of jasmines. Hung from the roof of white cloth to chest level of the dead was a piece of banana leaf made into a conical shape attached with flowers. In the banana leaf, a betel nut was hidden. Scissors and the ring were seen. Normal scissors were used since they could not find a betel nut cutter. On the floor were a pot of rice, a lit lamp, a coconut, a glass of water and personal belongings. The air was permeated with the strong smell of chemical from the body. Incense sticks also had to be kept burning all the time. Big and long Chinese incense sticks were applied since they lasted long. This is not practiced at Ko Kret. Religious rites were to be held for six nights.

The cremation was due to be held on Saturday 11 September 2010, at the crematorium at Wat Bo. On that day, the merit-making on the seventh day was held starting with food offering to seven monks in the morning.

Before taking the body out of the bed, an interesting preparation was made. Two traditional clay pots were prepared. One was filled with pure water. The mixture of water, curcuma and red lime was seen in another one. Some people said these two

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\* According to the abbot of Wat Paramaiyikavas, the word *bo* in the name of this temple is originally a Mon word meaning rattan forest, not a Thai word for a pond. It was the name of a temple in their homeland.



Figures 3.6-3.11 The funeral rite at Khlong Glua, Pak Kret.

pots represent the four elements which make a human-being. Some people call them *mo ti chak* (หม้อตี่จก).

A coffin was prepared outside the house. Before taking the body out, the bed had to be dismantled to make way. Mostly, the wood from the bed is discarded. At present, some people use it if they do not mind because wood is rare and expensive. At the time when bamboo was used, they would be abandoned in the field or burnt with the body or given to a temple.

In accordance with the old belief, the Mon people will not take the dead through the door used by the living. Therefore, if they wanted to follow this custom, they had to break down a wall. An alternative is to transform the door into a special path called a *pratu pa* (ประตูป่า) by attaching branches of plants, mainly coconut fronds, to the frame. As soon as the dead body is taken through this path, the branches have to be removed immediately.

In the case of Mr. Wanchai, this special path was made by attaching coconut fronds to the door frame. As soon as the body was taken through, the fronds were torn off. Then his daughter was told to fling the two clay pots on the floor after him. The pots broke into pieces and the red and yellow mixture spattered all over like blood and lymph. This was said to symbolize the end of the four elements.

Later, I had the opportunity to see arrangements such as this in Ko Kret on 15 January 2011. On 14 January, I was told by one of my key informants that I should come to observe a funeral rite arranged traditionally in Village I. It was the last day before the dead was to be taken to the temple.

The house belonged to Captain Pairat Ratanaudom of the Thai Royal Navy, Uncle Thonghaw's nephew, and the house was right at the edge of the river, with a veranda overlooking the water. The dead, his father, who was the former village headman, died in his sleep at the age of 79. The owner of the house gave me permission to enter to observe and take photos. The time was in the morning.

In the room, in one corner, the body was lying peacefully in the *Mon cong neh* bed, decorated with white lace and jasmine garlands. It was the spot where he was found dead, so the bed had to be placed here. The head was facing the south. A roll of a betel nut, a ring and a pair of scissors were seen hanging from the roof of the bed. Surrounded the bed were bright colored flowers as decorations. Four monks were present. There were the ceremonies of food offering and chanting to dedicate merit to the dead.

While waiting for the boat which would transport the body across the river, the same special path was prepared by attaching coconut fronds to the door frame. In the afternoon, the boat and the coffin arrived. The boat docked right at the veranda and the coffin was off-loaded and placed at a spot out of the cover of the house roof. Some ritual was seen performed at the head of the boat by the son of the dead.

It is believed that the head of every boat is the place where the female spirit of the boat lives. She will help protect the boat and its passengers from any danger. The ritual performed was to worship her and requested her consent to take the dead on board. The offerings were flowers, incense sticks, a candle and a nice piece of cloth which was tied together at the boat head at the end of the rite.

In the room, the bed was dismantled. The roof and pieces of white cloth which once adorn the bed were removed to give way to the undertaker who knew the way to tie the body. The body was tied in the *Mon* way with ropes made of white sacred threads. Surrounding the body were the relatives, looking quietly at the body being tied. The roll of fading betel nut, the ring and the scissors were cut off. The ring was given to the youngest daughter.

Outside the room, a ritual was performed. A relative poured the mixture of curcuma and water from a clay pot back and forth along the length inside the coffin. Then she broke the pot into pieces on the floor. The action was repeated, but this time with pure water and, again, the pot was broken. The ritual finished, the body was moved from the bed through the special path to the coffin. Then the coconut fronds were removed immediately. Now the coffin was loaded onto the boat, along with ritual objects, such as the clay pot, lamp, and coconut, including the flowers, wreaths





**Figures 3.12-3.14 The funeral rite at Village I, Ko Kret.**

that once adorn the bed. The flowers and coconut fronds were deposited in the river. The bed had to be discarded somewhere, for example, at a temple. Keeping it in the house was considered an ill omen. Later, the merit-making on the seventh day would be held.

It can be seen that, in traditional Mon funerals, rite after rite are performed with considerable details. Comparing the funeral at Khlong Glua mentioned previously with the ones at Ko Kret, some differences can be seen, even though the two communities are not very far from one another.

### **The *Toh Ayong Kyaj* Rite**

The *Toh Ayong Kyaj* (เพาะอะโยงกยาจ) or *Toh Ayong Jat* (เพาะอะโยงจั๊ต) as generally pronounced by the villagers, is one of the most important rites related to death which is rarely seen because it is performed privately in the family. The rite will be held after the cremation. Traditionally, the Mon people will make a Buddha image for the dead who are of age and importance in the families, for example, fathers, mothers, grandparents. The Buddha image will be offered to monks to dedicate merit to the dead. The rite begins at home at night and continues to the early morning of the following day. In the past, the people moulded the Buddha images themselves, sometimes in big size. To my understanding, the rite is to make an ordinary image into the Buddha because its process is the imitation of the night Siddhartha, who denounced the worldly life, attained enlightenment and became the Buddha. It is believed that the dead will gain great merit from this rite.

At night relatives will be kept busy with complicated preparations. Examples of objects needed are: a golden-colored Buddha image representing the sun which gives light and warmth at day; a silver-colored Buddha image representing the moon which gives light to disperse the darkness at night, or only one Buddha image of any size; 7 *bo* leaves attached with Bermuda grass (หญ้านพรง); 37 stems of lalang grass (หญ้านคา) wrapped with cotton balls on the top; 7 coins; 49 betel balls; red lime; curcuma; 49 desserts representing Visakha's sweet rice; 80 small-sized candles, 4 middle-sized candles; 1 big-sized candle; a clay pot containing rice grains; a pair of small-sized





**Figures 3.15-3.18 The *Toh Ayong Kyaj* rite.**

centipede flags; a pair of small-sized umbrellas or chat (ฉัตร). All plants used in the rite are related to the Buddha. All these objects are placed near the sleeping bed of the dead.

Candles will be lit one after another starting from the small ones to the biggest one. Someone must keep an eye on them all night and never let them extinguish. A clay pot containing rice grains is used to hold these candles. It is believed that the dead is not at peace if drops of candle wax are seen spreading in a wide circle covering the rice in the pot. The bed in which the dead used to sleep will be made neatly. Over it is the clothing of the dead. If some creases are seen in the morning it is believed that the dead has come back to lie on them at night. In the past, some people even sprinkled white powder on the floor with the belief that the dead might come back and leave footprints on it.

It was not possible for an outsider to see the parts performed privately in a family. The information above was given by relatives of the dead, a monk, and some people. The parts performed at the temple, I witnessed with my own eyes.

The rite is to be continued at the temple in the early morning in the presence of monks. The relatives dress in black, or black and white. All the above-mentioned objects will be brought to the temple. The light from the big candle is still on. The rite at the temple begins around five o'clock in the morning. A little later is allowed, but, traditionally, it must be before sunrise. Four monks are present, seated with white sacred thread in their hands. The image is arranged appropriately with a small centipede flag and an umbrella made of paper as decorations at the back.

37 stems of grass will be lit first. They give bright light when burnt since the cotton balls are soaked with oil. This represents intelligence or *pañña*. Monks chant the *anekaja* in Mon. Someone mixes curcuma and red lime together in a flat tray. The mixture is yellow and red, said to represent the river Neranjara where Prince Siddhartha attained enlightenment and became the Buddha. At the end of each chant, relatives drop *bo* leaves attached with Bermuda grass and a coin in the yellow red mixture. This action is repeated seven times. The coins must be dropped strong

enough so that the clanks can be heard when they hit the tray. When the last echo is heard, it means the image becomes the perfect Buddha. At the end of the rite, the mixture of curcuma and red lime, and the leaves will be disposed of at the foot of a *bo* tree in the grounds of the temple. The image will be brought to the ceremony to make merit on the seventh day and then offered to a monk.

This kind of rite is rare to be seen, although during my fieldwork in Ko Kret, I had opportunities to witness this rite at Wat Paramaiyikavas twice. One was held for Mr. Boontham Thongpetch (23 July 2010), another one for his wife Mrs. Chamnai Thongpetch (25 August 2010).

The rite held for Mrs. Chamnai Thongpetch was observed in full. In the age of technology, the bright saffron robes, the image glittering in the light, the chants that filled the silence of the place, were noteworthy.

The *Toh Ayong Kyaj* rite was not performed for Mr. Wanchai. This rite no longer exists at Khlong Glua. It is possible that this is because of a lack of knowledgeable people who know the procedure of the rite. However, they still offer an image of the Buddha to monks in the ceremony on the seventh day.

### **The Rite on the Seventh Day**

The Mon people at Ko Kret hold that the merit-making on the seventh day is the most important for the dead. They believe that the dead will realize their death on this seventh day. Acts of dedication on this day will make the dead gain great merit which will result in a desirable rebirth. The rite can be held in the morning or late in the morning. In the ceremony, there is chanting, a food offering to the monks, a water pouring ceremony, and then the offering of a Buddha image, and the offering of a huge quantity of necessary utensils to the monks. The ashes and bones of the dead are wrapped in a piece of white cloth and present in the rite as if to represent the real person.

In general, the way of performing the rite is not much different from the Thai way. As far as was observed, the differences are that monks chant in Mon-Pali;

utensils offered to monks are in a very great amount, ranging from things of daily use gathered in a large-sized container, to big items which will be of use to the temple, such as an electric fan, a gas stove, or sometimes a television set.



**Figures 3.19-3.20 The rite on the seventh day.**

Traditionally, food for the dead is prepared in a bowl made of banana leaf. The size of it is about 10 inches in diameter. Many kinds of food and dessert will be put together over cooked rice in this bowl. The most important part in the rite is the act of dedication by pouring water on the food or *kruat nam* (กรวดน้ำ). When the most senior monk begins to utter the *kruat nam* speech, known as *imina bot yai* (อิมินาบทใหญ่), one of the relatives also begins to pour water gradually on the food in the banana leaf bowl and wish for the good of the dead.

The speech is long and is translated from the Mon language for good understanding and for everybody attending the rite to wish the dead well. It is meant mainly for a good rebirth, e.g., for the dead to be reborn in a noble family, like a king's family, not a corruptor's family; for the dead to be reborn in a rich family, not a poor family, and so on. At the conclusion of the rite, the Buddha image and all the utensils will be offered to the monks. The bowl of food will be taken to be placed on the ground at a forked road and the wandering ghosts will be invited to accept it. This represents an act of giving or *dana*.

### **The Rite to Inter Ashes and Bones**

Traditionally, the Mon people at Ko Kret will neither bring the ashes and bones back homes, nor dispose them of in the river or at sea as the Thai people do. The way they have practiced since the past is to bury them in the ground in order that

they will turn into their original condition which is soil, one in the four elements. Normally, burial sites considered auspicious are spots around the base of a pagoda or the foot of a *bo* tree. In doing so, it is as if the dead are in the presence of the Buddha because pagodas and *bo* trees are held as the representatives of the Buddha. In the past, burying the remains in the ground around the main pagoda, Maha Raman Chedi of Wat Paramaiyikawas, was popular. Many years ago when officials from the Fine Art Department came to help restore the Maha Raman Chedi, they found a great number of human bones buried in the grounds around its base. It was unacceptable for them because the temple was on the list of national treasures. Since then, burying the remains around the base of the Pagoda has been prohibited. Niches have been made on the lower part of the walls in the temple grounds instead for the people to bury the remains of their love ones. The area is to the west of the temple grounds which is considered the direction of the death.



**Figure 3.21** The rite to inter the ashes and bones.

The ceremony to inter the ashes and bones can be held after the completion of the merit-making on the seventh day or it can wait until they are ready. Even if they wait, they will not keep the ashes at home, but will leave them in the care of the monks at a temple.

Objects used in the ceremony are incense sticks, candles; flowers, such as roses, lotuses, will not be used in this ceremony because they are held to be flowers for the Buddha, not for the dead; small pieces of soil wrapped in pieces of paper and tied with black ribbons; small flags made of colored paper; and a small wooden ladder, an important part in the ceremony. This ceremony was observed a few times.

In the ceremony, a monk must be present to lead at the front of a procession when the remains are taken by relatives to the niche. The monk holds a sacred thread with its other end linked to the remains shrouded in a piece of white cloth. The ceremony will be performed by a person who is used to this practice, under the guidance of a learned monk. Uncle Thonghaw is seen very often as the practitioner in the ceremony. At the niche, two candles will be lit and put on the floor on the left and right at the front of the niche. They are as if to light the way for the dead. Incense sticks are lit and given to the audience, one for each person, as well as a flag and a flower. Donation of money will be requested from the audience as if to share in buying a little piece of land from the Goddess of the Earth to be the resting place of the dead and it will be offer to the temple at the end of the ceremony to dedicate merit to them.

The ladder plays an important part in the ceremony. It acts as the means to lead the dead up and down to the resting place. In the past when the Mons buried the remains, it would be leant against the pit. At present times, it is leant against the niche. When everything is ready, the performer utters a speech of well wishes for the dead to be reborn in a good place, for example, the Tavatimsa Heaven, a king's or noble's family, a rich family, or a land in which Buddhism is practiced. The language used is the Thai language translated from the Mon language. After the speech, the performer lifts the remains up and down three times. While the remains are up, he utters the Mon words *taan* (တၢၤ) meaning up, and then *chi* (စိ) meaning down when they are down. There is no principle how many times the acts are to be repeated. Sons, daughters, relatives and audience also wish for the good of the dead. When the last *chi* is spoken, the performer puts the remains in the niche. Everybody puts a flower and a flag at the front of the niche. Lastly, the niche is sealed with a stone slab engraved with the name, dates of birth and death of the dead.

Flags and flowers used in the ceremony also have their importance as they are for the dead to worship and offer to the Buddha's topknot said to be kept at the Chulamani Pagoda in the Tavatimsa Heaven. The performer has to warn the dead not to give them to anybody they meet on the way who may ask for them.

### 3.1.5.2 Funeral Rites of Monks

The funeral rites of Mon monks, especially those who are senior, are very important and have been strictly and traditionally practiced until these days. The Mon people believe that any assistance rendered to a funeral rite of a monk will make them gain great merit. Monks represent the Buddha. So attending a funeral rite of a monk is as if they were attending the funeral of the Buddha (Book in Commemoration of Phra Khru Samutwaraphorn, 2000: 156).

For the Mon people, monks are a vital part of their life. Monks are not only of religious importance, but also possess the role of community leaders. Monks are involved with their lives from birth until death. They are the Buddha's disciples who inherited the Buddha's Teachings and disseminate his Teachings to the people. They observe 227 precepts, so they are considered noble and deserve to be highly respected and praised. The Mon people will not even step on a monk's shadow. When they die, particularly high ranking monks, their remains are treated respectfully and completely different from a laymen's. Special coffins are made to keep the bodies. They will not be cremated at the crematoriums used by the laymen because they may have been thieves, prostitutes, or have died from some disgusting diseases. Such places are not appropriate for them. Special crematoriums will be erected and coffins built in honor of them. This tradition has been practiced in the Mon communities both in Burma and in Thailand for a long time.

They also believe that monks come from heaven. When they die they will return to where they came from. Therefore, the people do not have to feel sad, but rejoice and need not wear black at a monk's funeral rites. They can go to a monk's cremations in colored garments to congratulate his return to heaven.

#### Special Coffins and Crematoriums

At Ko Kret, a special Mon coffin used to keep the remains of a monk is called *long hem* (โลงหม), meaning a coffin with a lid decorated with spires. The coffin is called differently in different communities. For example, it is called *ala bok* by the



Mons at Phra Pradaeng. The word reflects the influence of the Westerners who arrived in their communities in the past. In Pathum Thani, it is called *hem kao wun* (หมากวุ้น) because its shape looks like a morning glory flower. A Mon bed of victory or *cong neh* will not be used since such a bed is for laymen. A crematorium built to cremate the remains of a monk is called a *prasat* (ปราสาท). A coffin will be made first to keep the body until the crematorium is finish. Construction of this type of coffin and crematorium is a great, time consuming and costly project. Skilled artisans, as well as manpower, are needed. Mon art will be fully displayed in this kind of work.

A Mon-styled coffin is narrow in its lower part and gradually, artistically wider from the middle part up to its upper part. It is intricately decorated with Mon art of golden pieces of paper hammered into patterns. A special Mon crematorium or *prasat* will be built in the open space in the grounds of the temple. This crematorium, as well as the coffin, will be burnt together with the remains. Its roof is decorated with 1, 3, 5, 7 or 9 spires. The crematorium is also ornately decorated with thousands of Mon patterns made of pieces of golden paper. The mythical bird Hassadeeling will often be seen as part of the decorations. The belief is that the bird possesses enormous strength and can take the soul of the monk back to heaven.



**Figures 3.22-3.23 Mon coffins used at the Ko Kret.**  
(Courtesy of Wat Paramaiyikavas)

The Mon communities in Thailand, including Ko Kret, have preserved this tradition down to these days. In a monk's funeral, the artisans and villagers will be more than willing to sacrifice their energy to help. The artisans will do the best they



can to produce the best creations. It is unpaid work. Ones who lend their hands to assist in any kind of work will gain great merit. This is the way they have strongly believed since the past.



**Figures 3.24-3.25 Mon temporary pyres.**  
(Courtesy of Wat Paramaiyikavas)

Wat Paramaiyikavas of Village VII has maintained the traditional funeral ceremonies of revered monks, particularly the abbots, from the past until the present. In this last 15 years, there have been funerals held for monks twice at this temple. The important reason why the temple can conserve this tradition is because it has never lacked skilful artisans. In the past, some monks were artisans themselves. At present, there is only one, the retired ethnic Mon Lieutenant General Chativat Ngamniyom (พลโท ชาติวัฒน์ งามนิยม), the only artisan of Ko Kret who possesses full knowledge of Mon art of hammering golden English papers, the making of Mon coffins and crematoriums for monks, as well as Mon fireworks or *looknu*. He inherited the knowledge from his late Mon monk teacher from the Mon temple of Sanam Nue who made him swear to work only for the religion and not to earn money or reputation. He has devoted his time and energy, particularly after his retirement, to work for Wat Paramaiyikavas for more than 20 years. He was the artisan who built two crematoriums for two late monks. In addition, he also makes coffins for some other Mon communities when requested.

The last two funerals for monks were held in 1994 and 1996 when a much-respected Mon monk aged 102 passed away and, later, the revered former abbot. The

people from all the three villages came together and helped build a coffin and crematoriums under the direction of the new abbot (the present abbot) and Lieutenant General Chativat Ngamniyom.

At present, this kind of crematorium may be rented because of a lack of skilled artisans. Wat Phailorm of Village VI held a funeral for the late abbot a few years back. The crematorium was rented from the Mon community in Kanchanaburi. In the cremation ceremony of the late abbot of Wat Sao Thong Thaug in 2010, the crematorium was rented from Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya.

### **Rites Related to Cremation Ceremonies**

#### ***- Ram Sam That***

One or two days before the cremation day, a ritual of Mon Dance of Three Trays or *Ram Sam That* (รำสามถาด) will be performed. The ritual is to pay respect to the late monk, to worship all heavenly beings the Mons hold sacred and to request the success of the ceremony. Nowadays, nobody in Ko Kret can perform this ritual. However, 14 years ago (in 1996) the late Dr. Sued Gajasenani came to perform the ritual at the cremation ceremony of the former abbot of Wat Paramaiyikavas whom he highly respected. The rite can be performed in both the funerals of the high-ranking monks or in ceremonies such as a Kathin ceremony, the elevation of an umbrella onto the top of a pagoda, or an ordination ceremony. Music used in this ritual is a *pi phat mon* ensemble. The rite can still be found performed in some other Mon communities, for example, Pathum Thani and Phra Pradaeng.

#### ***- Mon Rong Hai***

The Mon people at Ko Kret hold that the *Mon Rong Hai* (มอญร้องไห้) or the Lamenting Mons is a ritual performed for kings, royal members and revered monks in their funerals. The *Mon Rong Hai* is not really crying with tears, but it is a kind of singing. The purposes are to describe and praise their goodness, to express appreciation, and to bemoan their departure. The *Mon Rong Hai* is performed by a group of elderly women. In Ko Kret at present, there is no one who can perform this

ritual. If needed, they will be hired from other Mon communities, such as Bang Khanmak in Lop Buri province.

### *Looknu*

In the cremation ceremony of a monk, *looknu* (ลูกหนู) cannot be omitted because they also are an important part. In this thesis I will refer to *looknu* as Mon fireworks. Since the Mon people believe that monks are noble, it is not appropriate to cremate their remains by hand. Traditionally, in the old days, this kind of firework was used to cremate the remains of monks by shooting it at the coffin. They would explode and cause fire when they hit the target. The idea is said to be derived from the ceremony to cremate the remains of the Buddha in which the sacred fire burnt without being lighted by anybody (Khanittha Khanthawichai, 2008: 98).



**Figure 3.26** *Looknu*.

The villagers will make the fireworks and bring them to the cremation site in the field to help cremate the body. When the time comes, they light the fireworks which will run along wires. When the fireworks hit the coffin, they burst into fire. This is also an act of merit-making. However, the powerful shots often had undesirable results. The coffin could be broken into pieces and the remains scattering on the ground. Some farmers were not happy with such activity and were unwilling to let the people use their land as a cremation site. This traditional way of cremation is now obsolete since the community has become crowded. A crematorium is erected in the grounds of the temple. These factors make it impossible to shoot the fireworks. However, they still carry on the tradition of making them and bring them in a procession, circling the crematorium three rounds to pay homage to the dead monk on

the cremation day. After that, they will be brought to be shot at an imitation of a crematorium in the field in a contest to celebrate the monk's return to heaven.

The Mon fireworks are believed to be developed from traditional weapons that the Mon soldiers would shoot at the Burmese camp sites while at war in ancient time. Ancient Mon fireworks were made of bamboo filled with explosive substances. The camps would be burnt when shot (Interviewee: Lieutenant General Chativat Ngamniyom). Nowadays, several people at Ko Kret still know how to make them. Particularly at Wat Paramaiyikavas, the abbot supports the firework making in the temple grounds to preserve the old wisdom and to maintain the Mon tradition. The fireworks of Wat Paramaiyikavas are made of mango wood. Contained inside is the mixture of a few kinds of substances, the formula of which is kept secret for the benefit in the contest.

The making of the Mon fireworks needs quite a large sum of money and a number of skilled helpers. I had the opportunity to witness the making at Wat Paramaiyikavas twice in early 2010. Furthermore, I also watched the fireworks contest to celebrate the cremation of the late abbot of Wat Sao Thong Thaug (7 March 2010). The teams came from Mon temples in Nonthaburi and Pathum Thani provinces. The contest was held at the field near the temple, crowded with contestants and the audience, with the announcer speaking with a great sense of humor both in Thai and Mon.

### **Performing Arts in Monks' Cremation Ceremonies**

Mon performing arts seen in a monk's cremation ceremony in Ko Kret are the Mon classical music "*pi phat mon*" and the Mon classical dance "*mon ram*", both of which are cultural heritage passed down from generation to generation and still exist today. The *pi phat mon* and the *mon ram* are known as the performing arts of the Mon people in Thailand. The *mon ram* of Ko Kret is well-known for its beautiful and graceful movements. The performance *mon ram* is mentioned in the Ayutthaya period in the royal funeral of King Boromkote in 1758 (Somphob Phirom, 1985: 62). The *pi phat mon* and the *mon ram* can be performed both in joyous occasions and inauspicious ceremonies, for example, funeral ceremonies.



Figure 3.27 The *pi phat mon* band.



Figure 3.28 Mon dance or *mon ram*.



Figure 3.29 *Rong than* in a monk's funeral rite.

The *pi phat mon* has been adopted by the Thai people for a long time. In the Thai perception, it is the symbol of a funeral since it is played only in a funeral. The *pi phat mon* was performed in a Thai funeral for the first time in the funeral ceremony of Queen Debsirindra in the reign of King Rama IV. Since she was Mon, the king ordered the *pi phat mon* ensemble to be performed in the ceremony. In the reign of King Chulalongkorn, the *pi phat mon* ensemble was ordered to be performed in the funeral of one of his children. Later, the people followed the tradition, thinking it was the way high-class groups practiced, without understanding its origin (Naris and Damrong, 1962: 236-237). Hence, it has become the tradition.

### **Tradition of *Rong Than***

The *rong than* (โรงทาน) is the place erected by the host temple to cook and give free food and drink to monks and the people who attend the cremation ceremony of a monk or lend their hand in any kind of work. According to the abbot of Wat Paramaiyikavas, the Mon people derived the concept of *rong than* from the Buddha's history. In the Buddha's time, a kind and rich man named Anathapindika erected a *rong than* to give food to the poor people and sick monks. An act of giving is considered a great merit so the Mons made it their tradition. Phairat Chanbaeb wrote that it came from the story of Phra Vessantara who made great givings before he became the Buddha in his next life. It is as if a ladder leading to heaven of the Mon people (Phairat Chanbaeb, 2008: 110).

The erection of *rong than* will be sponsored by the host temple, the villagers, companies, and other Mon temples. The *rong thans* are found both in the cremation ceremonies of monks and joyous occasions, such as Songkran Festival for which a *rong than* will be open in each village. Mostly women will come to help in cooking, or food may be ordered from any where for convenience. On the cremation day of the late abbot of Wat Sao Thong Thaug of Village VI (March 2010), several *rong thans* offered a great variety of food. Everybody could eat, even the people who did not attend the ceremony.

### **Disposal of Monks' Ashes and Bones**

The disposal of ashes and bones of Mon monks after being cremated is not much different from that of laymen. A small ladder is also used in the ceremony. Things offered to monks are larger in quantity. Traditionally, they will not be disposed of in the water, but buried in the grounds of a temple, particularly the spots around the temple's main pagoda. Some may be interred in a place, such as inside a model of a stupa especially made for this purpose.

The complexity of the funeral rites of Mon monks can be seen in the various rites as described above. Ong Bunjoon also writes about the swinging of monks' remains (ໄກ່ຈາກໜຶ່ງ) over the fire until they become dust, a practice that is still practiced by the Mons in Thailand and in Myanmar (Ong Banjun, 2008: 114-119). According to the abbot of Wat Paramaiyikavas, it is not the tradition of the Mon communities in Pak Kret, Pathum Thani or Phra Pradaeng. He told me that neither his predecessor who died at 80, nor the other revered monk who died at 102, had ever seen this tradition practiced around this area. This practice was held at Wat Phailorm twice since the dead monks were from Sangkhla Buri. A lot of Mons from Sangkhla Buri came to attend. It appeared once in Pathum Thani in the funeral of the abbot of Wat Chankraphor in 2008. The ceremony was arranged by the monks who were from Sangkhla Buri. Therefore, it could be a tradition practiced in the Burmese-Mon communities. This tradition is not found in the old texts, and the experts on Mon studies such as Halliday, Mr. Juan Kruevichyajarn and the late Dr. Sued Gajaseni never wrote about, nor mentioned it.

### **3.2. Buddhist Rituals**

The Mon people hold a series of religious festivals in one year round. However, the most important ones are Songkran Festival in the April, Buddhist Lent Festival (Khao Pansa) in the eighth lunar month (July), and the End of Buddhist Lent Festival (Ok Pansa) in the eleventh lunar month (October). Ceremonies related to these festivals will be held in every large Mon community in Thailand, such as

Pathum Thani, Ko Kret, Bangkradi, Phra Pradaeng in Samut Prakan, Samut Sakhon, Lamphun. The ceremonies are essentially the same, but may be different in some details.

### 3.2.1 Songkran Festival

Songkran Festival in April (the fifth lunar month) is held to be important because it is the traditional New Year day. It is the season the people rejoice in making merit and it is also the time of celebrations. The festival draws the people to come together to join in many activities. As in other Mon communities, Songkran Festival at Ko Kret last three days – 13, 14 and 15 April. The first day is called Maha Songkran Day, the second day is Wan Nao or Wan Klang (วันเนา, วันกลาง) which marks the end of the year, the third day is the beginning of the next year or Wan Thaloeng Sok (วันเถลิงศก). This period of time is really eventful since a series of religious ceremonies are held and the people are very happy.

When Songkran time draws near, the villagers will make their houses clean and neat to welcome the New Year. Wat Paramaiyikavas will prepare Phra Maha Raman Chedi where the Buddha relics are enshrined for the people and visitors to pour fragrant water over the relics. Water containers are created in the shape of the *hamsa*. It could be said that it is an attempt to express their identity because the *hamsa* is the symbol of the Mon. People and visitors can come to make merit by pouring water over the relics all through April.

On 13 April, the day begins with an offering of food to the monks at every village temple in the morning followed by a preaching of the Buddha's dhamma. Since Wat Paramaiyikavas of Village VII is a big temple and the present abbot is the Chief of Sangha of Tambon Ko Kret (เจ้าคณะตำบล) and always supports the conservation of old Mon traditions, the temple plays the role as the center in holding the Songkran Festival.

The traditions seen during the festival are as follows.



### Offering of *Thong Takhap* to the Buddha

*Thong Takhap* (ธงตะขาบ) is a flag in the shape of a centipede. It is made to offer to the Buddha represented by the Buddha relics enshrined in a temple main pagoda. Therefore, the flag will not be seen hung at any temple without Buddha relics. Wat Paramaiyikavas has the Maha Raman Chedi in which Buddha relics were enshrined by King Chulalongkorn in 1884 (History of Wat Paramaiyikavas, 1997: 39). Every Songkran Day, seven flags will be carried in a procession starting from Village VI to be hung on seven *hamsa* posts around the Chedi. The number of flags is not compulsory. Wat Paramaiyikavas has seven *hamsa* posts around the Chedi, so the artisan makes seven flags in seven colors. It is incumbent on the people of Village VI and VII to arrange the flag procession while the people of Village I are responsible for the *khao chae* procession on the following day.



Figures 3.30-3.31 Centipede flags and a procession.

The answer to the question of why the flags must be made in the form of a centipede is that a centipede is by nature a very strong and brave creature as are the Mons who never fear the enemies. The deeper meaning is that a centipede will try to protect itself and its offspring when in difficulties by circling itself with its offspring in the middle. This gives a hint that if the Mon people had strong leaders, they would not have lost their country (Book In Commemoration of Phra Khru Samutwaraphorn, 2000: 169-170).

In fact, in Pak Kret and Ko Kret, the tradition of offering *Thong Takhap* disappeared for decades. The people made only small-sized flags for use in the ceremony. *Toh Ayong Kyaj* mentioned previously. Traditionally in former times, villagers would make a flag and carried it to a temple. In later time, they very much focused on earning their living and had no time for such things. Frequent flooding also kept them busy and the changing condition of society brought poverty to them since they could not sell their products. The tradition was almost forgotten until 12 years ago (in 1998) when the present abbot of Wat Paramaiyikavas and his helpers started his campaign to recover old Mon traditions and the living condition of the people after a series of great floods. The ceremony of offering *Thong Takhap* was added to the festival. To preserve the tradition, he decided to adapt the way of practice, i.e., the temple takes responsibility for making the flags and gives them to the villagers. The villagers will take the flags in a procession to the temple on 13 April.

Visiting the small and quiet Mon village of Ban Tak Daed (บ้านตากแดด) in Pathum Thani, I found that the villagers still help to make centipede flags and carry them in a procession to hang on a *hamsa* post of the Mon temple Chankrapor (วัดจันทน์กระพ้อ).

The flags will be made a few months before the festival by the artisan and some villagers who are willing to act as helpers. The activity is considered an act of merit-making. The flags are made with bamboo ordered from Bang Khan Mak in Lop Buri, bright colored pieces of cloth and are decorated with English golden papers hammered into Mon patterns. Each flag is about four metres in length and seven-colored for seven days. Each part has religious meanings, such as its two antennae means *sati* and *sampajanna*, or ten rings along the length of its body means the last ten past lives of the Buddha and so on. The design of the flag in each community is not very much different. But religious meanings depend on the designer's idea.

In Ko Kret, the flag procession is long and cheerful with colorful Mon costume, the beauty of the flags, the smiling faces, the dancers and the drum beaters, often seen at the front of most processions. Before hanging the flags on the *hamsa*

posts, a man prays to worship the Buddha relics. Two offerings of *baisi* (บายศรี), cooked rice and boiled eggs are placed at each post. These are the offerings for the gods (*devata*) who protect the posts. After that, the flags are drawn up to the post tops and they will be hung there until the next Songkran Festival.

### **Tradition of *Rong Than***

*Rong than* (โรงทาน) is one in many examples that indicates the Mons' strong belief in Buddhism. This represents the act of merit-making by giving or *dana* because it is the place where the villagers and the passers-by can get free food or, at least, drinking water. Apart from this, many activities are conducted at this place, for example, *khao chae* making, ceremonies of bathing the Buddha image, merit-making of the village (บุญกลางบ้าน), bathing the senior persons, and so on. It is important as it serves as a center or a gathering place of each village where villagers get together and take part in various activities during Songkran Festival.



**Figure 3.32 Kalamae making at Village I (Ban Bon).**

The erection of the *rong thans* needs the cooperation of the villagers. Factors necessary are: the open space which should be around the center of a village and is permitted to be used by its owner; the hosts who help provide food or drinks; and donations from the villagers to support the activities. *Rong than* is one in many activities that indicates the unity of the villagers. *Rong than* will be open for the first day in each village from early April, or on April 13, and will close down after the ceremonies of offering syrup and releasing fish and birds.

It was noticeable that the *rong than* of Village I, both the upper village and lower village, were busy with a number of villagers. *Rong than* of the upper village (Rong Than Daosamran) was busy with *kalamae* (กะลามา) making, while the lower village (Rong Than Mitsampan) was busy with *khao chae* making. The others were rather quiet. Rong Than Daosamran normally holds the ceremony of merit-making in the morning on the first day of its opening, which is on 13 April. In the ceremony, apart from offering food to the monks, they also offer food to the Land Spirit by setting up a table in the open on which is placed many kinds of food.

### ***Khao Chae Offering***

On the second day, 14 April, the important ceremony is *khao chae* offering to monks and ancestral spirits. *Khao chae* is cooked rice in fragrant water eaten with some kinds of accompaniment. It is held to be the best food the Mon people can offer to the gods and monks. *Khao chae* is believed to have originated from the legend telling about a childless rich man who, on Maha Songkran Day, offered rice together with some accompaniment neatly made to the god of a banyan tree as he made a request for a good son. He ordered his servant to choose the best grains of rice and wash them carefully seven times until they were perfectly clean and then cooked to offer to the god. Later, his request is granted. He had a son as wished. The rice that the rich man offered to the god is the origin of *khao chae* that the Mon people make during Songkran Festival. Hence, it has become a tradition to offer *khao chae* to monks at Songkran.

The making of *khao chae* during Songkran Festival is a tradition of the Mon people of Ko Kret that has still been preserved. When Songkran draws near, someone will go from house to house to request some donations. Villagers will help donate things they can offer, for example, rice, coconuts, necessary materials, some ingredients, including money and energy.

Thai people also enjoy eating *khao chae* in hot season without the knowledge that it is from the Mon culture. It in fact spreads from the Royal Palace. In the early Rattanakosin period, many wives of the kings or the palace officials were from the

Mon families. Some of these ladies, particularly Chao Chom Klin (เจ้าจอมกลิ่น), one of King Mongkut's wives, who later became the king's consort, still lived the Mon way of life. She often cooked Mon meals in her palace and made *khao chae* for the monks and her beloved persons during Songkran Festival. *Khao chae* made by Chao Chom Klin was famous and was the most favorite of King Chulalongkorn (M.C. Chidchanok Kritakara, 1998: 42-43). *Khao chae* made in the palace is called the palace *khao chae* or *khao chae chao wang*. *Khao chae* the local Mon people of Ko Kret make at Songkran Festival is different in its accompaniment. A set of Ko Kret *khao chae* consists of a dish of rice in fragrant water accompanied by dishes of *kaeng khua pakbung sai kunghaeng* (แกงคั่วผักนึ่งใส่กุ้งแห้ง), *huachaipow phat kathi* (หัวไชโป้วผัดกะทิ), sweet pork (หมูหวาน), *kratiamdong phat khai* (กระเทียมดองผัดไข่), *yum thua fak yao sai mamuang* (ยำถั่วฝักยาวใส่มะม่วง), black beans boiled in water and coconut sugar (ถั่วดำต้มน้ำตาล) which is also an accompaniment. Fried shrimp paste (กะปิทอด) and fried stuffed large chili (พริกหยวกยัดไส้ทอด) belong to the palace. The people here do not make them.

All kinds of accompaniment will be cooked until dry. Black beans must also be simmered over the fire until dried.

In Village I (Lower Village), *khao chae* is made at the village *rong than* by the villagers, mostly women. Several skilful *khao chae* makers live in this village. The process of *khao chae* making is long and complicated, so it needs time and a number of helpers. They start to make it on the preceding day and very early in the following morning. Upon completion it will be first offered to Nang Songkran in the morning. An eye-level altar is erected and decorated with an umbrella and flowers. A set of *khao chae* is placed on the altar. The one who conducts the ceremony lights a candle and nine joss sticks to invite Nang Songkran to receive the *khao chae*. One set will also be taken as an offering to Chao Pho Noom. Sets of *khao chae* will be prepared for the monks before noon. The rest will be shared among the villagers. The villagers will come with containers and line up to get their shares to eat with their families, but not before offering it to their ancestral spirits. To offer *khao chae* to ancestral spirits, some families place it in the middle of the room or at the front of the photos of their ancestors or the box storing the ancestors' belongings. A joss stick is lit to invite them





**Figure 3.33** Khao chae making at Village I (Ban Lang).



**Figure 3.34** Khao chae was offered to Nang Songkran.



**Figure 3.35** Khao chae for ancestral spirits.



**Figure 3.36** Khao chae offered to monks.



**Figure 3.37** Khao chae procession.

to accept *khao chae*. After the joss stick burns itself up, they can take *khao chae* to eat.

A procession to bring *khao chae* to offer to the monks starts from the *rong than* of Village I (Lower Village). Sets of *khao chae* are prepared in nice containers. Mon youths, both male and female in Mon costumes, carry *khao chae* by poles on their shoulders and head for Wat Paramaiyikavas. The procession proceeds joyously with a *klong yao* band and dancers at the front. Upon arrival, the procession will go around the ordination hall once in an act of paying homage to the principal Buddha of the temple before offering them to the monks.

Village VII will join with Village VI (Upper Village) in the ceremony to offer food and *khao chae* to monks. The ceremony is held at the *rong than* in front of Wat Phailorm of Village VI. Many Mon workers from Myanmar or the border of Thailand come to take part in the ceremony. They often come to attend ceremonies at this temple since the present abbot is from Sangkhla Buri in Kanchanaburi. Some are in modern cloth, some wear a red *sarong* with a white line on the bottom and white T-shirt on the top which is different from the costume worn by the Mon people at Ko Kret.

### **Tradition of Supporting the *Bo* Tree**

Another interesting tradition seen on April 14 is supporting the *bo* tree (ก้าตื้น โปท้อ). The tradition is said to be of Mon origin, although it is not a tradition that everybody has to practice. It depends on one's birth day. For example, if 14 April is Friday, anybody born on Friday is suggested to support the *bo* tree. This day is neither the end of the year nor the beginning of the year, but flanked by the two important days. Being flanked in between is held as being inauspicious. So anybody born on this day should support the *bo* tree in order to avert ill fortune. Moreover, that person will gain a lot of merit. *Bo* trees are sacred trees of the Buddhist religion. Supporting the *bo* tree is as if that person helps support the religion which is a wholesome deed. The way to perform this custom is to lean a long stick with V-shaped end against the tree

trunk and make a wish for good things. The stick may be painted with curcuma to make it nicer. It is also believed that the one who supports the *bo* tree will be blessed with luck and longevity.

The tradition of supporting the *bo* tree is still practiced at Ko Kret, but by a small number of people. This tradition is also seen practiced in the northern region of Thailand, such as in Lampang, in which long and strong sticks are used to support the branches.

The activities on the third day, April 15, which has been held as the beginning of the New Year (วันเถลิงศก), are: offering of food to the monks in the morning and before noon and offering of the three pieces of cloth (ผ้าไตรจีวร) to monks, which is not different from the Thai tradition. Another activity is giving monks a bath (อาบน้ำพระ) in the Mon way. At Wat Paramaiyikavas a contemporary bathroom is built. In the room, there is a wooden tub, a bowl to fetch water from the tub and soap. The people will pour water in a long trough to let it flow into the tub in the room. Monks will come down one at a time and enter the room to take a bath.

The same tradition is practiced differently by the Mon people in Kanchanaburi. As seen in a TV documentary and heard from several people, monks will not walk on the ground to the temporary bathroom, but will walk on the backs of men lying face down, supported on both sides since walking on human backs is not easy. As told by the people at Ko Kret, the late Luang Pho Uttama, when on his visit to Ko Kret some years ago, also walked on men's backs from the pier to Wat Phailorm of Village VI. Those men were the Mons from Sangkhla Buri and beyond.

### **Ceremony of *Bun Klang Ban***

During Songkran Festival, the ceremony of merit-making at the center of the village, *Bun Klang Ban* (บุญกลางบ้าน), is held. This is an old and important tradition.



Normally, it is held after the period of Songkran until early May. Being held once a year, its purpose is to express gratitude to the ancestors by dedicating merit to them through monks, and for the happiness and prosperity of a village and its villagers. In Mon it is called *pakaosa ato kwan* (ປະເທສາອະໂຕກວານ). *Pakaosa* – merit-making, *ato* – center or middle, *kwan* – village. The place usually used to hold the ceremony is the village *rong than*.

The way to practice in the three villages is similar, but varies in some details. The ceremony begins with a food offering to the invited monks in the morning, around 7 am. The villagers gather at the village *rong than*. Most of them bring a bowl of rice, one kind of food and some desserts. If it is not convenient to prepare food, one can share with the neighbors who do by giving some money to them. Usually, everyone will drop rice in pots placed together on a table which will be offered to the monks later. Food is put in plates or bowls. The same kinds of food may be put together in the same containers. Similar to the Thai, nine monks are invited as nine is believed to be an auspicious number. Monks chant before and after having food. Food must also be prepared for the Buddha image in the same quantity as prepared for the monks. The ceremony concludes with the most senior monk sprinkling sacred water on everybody. After that the villagers will have breakfast together. It can be seen that the activity encourages cooperation and unity among the people in each village. Later, there may be ceremonies to give fragrant water to the Buddha image and the senior people.

The ceremony in general is not much different from Thai ceremonies of merit-making, except that monks chant in Pali-Mon in Village I, Village VII and Village VI, but only the upper part. At the lower part of Village VI, monks chant in Pali-Thai. They are from the village temple of Sao Thong Thaug, in which the monks cannot chant in Mon. The objective is the same, but the practices vary a little in some detail in each village.

For example, the people of Village I, in addition to food, bring with them a bowl of rice grains, a candle, water in different kinds of containers, and gooseberry



**Figures 3.38-3.41 Bun Klang Ban ceremony at Village I (Ban Lang).**

leaves (ໂປມະໝ). These things are placed at the front of the Buddha image, in a circle of a white sacred thread with one end spun around the image. Then the yarn of sacred thread is passed on to each monk. Near the end of the chanting some people light all the candles brought by the people and drop the candle wax into each water container to make sacred water. The rice, too, is held sacred after the chants. The owners will take their items back after the ceremony is completed. The rice will be thrown and water sprinkled using the gooseberry leaves inside and outside of their houses to ward off evil things or bad spirits and for the auspiciousness and happiness of their families.

Usually, there will be a request for some donation from the participants to be given to the monks. It is their custom practiced at every village.

Followed the ceremony of merit-making is the ceremony of pouring fragrant water over the Buddha image and, for the people of Village I, the statue of King Taksin of Thonburi. This is to express their gratitude to the king who granted their ancestors permission to take refuge in Pak Kret. Another ceremony is water pouring to the aged and revered persons by dropping water into their hands to pay respect to them. In return, they will give them blessings.

The people of Village VI (Ban Bon) do not bring rice grains, candles, and containers of water to the ceremony. Here, there is a large clay jar with water on a table at the front of the Buddha image and a bowl of rice. In the process of chanting, the water and rice become sacred. Another object is a small raft made of banana layers and decorated with small colored flags. On it are rice grains, dried chillies, spring onions, and a clay doll. The raft is to be floated in the river after the ceremony finishes. The rice mentioned above is for a monk to throw at houses along both sides of the path for the auspiciousness of the people and the village. After having a meal together, the people will take some sacred water from the jar to sprinkle it in their houses. The raft will be released into the river in order to discard bad luck.

Village VII is the smallest of the three villages. The area is crowded with houses and the villagers concentrate on earning their living, especially on the weekends. So the ceremony is usually held on a weekday. An interesting item is rice mixed with sand. A monk will throw the mixture along both sides of the path on the way back to the temple to ward off evil things for the happiness of the people.

It is interesting to note that on the Pak Kret side, just the opposite bank of the river, the tradition of *Bun Klang Ban* has disappeared for many years because of the change in society. The number of people has rapidly increased, as well as the need for housing. The space has been developed into modern villages to meet the demand of the people. So, there is no open space left for this ceremony.

### **Syrup Offering and Releasing of Birds and Fish**

This tradition is also seen during Songkran Festival. April is the hottest month of the year. Monks may be exhausted, particularly those with old age who may fall ill. Syrup will help refresh them and give them energy. So offering of syrup to monks is also considered an act of merit-making. In connection with the releasing of birds and fish, it is believed that this will help expand the people's lives. The tradition originated from a legend telling about a novice who is unaware that he is going to die within seven days. His master knows, but keeps it secret and gives him permission to visit his parents before he dies. On the way home he happens to see a fish struggling for water on dry ground. With compassion, he brings it to a pond full of water and it survives. Unknowingly, the merit he gains from this act makes him survive and he returns to surprise his master. He tells his master about the fish and the master knows then the reason why he survived (Suwanna Kriengkraipet, 2000: 184).

According to Uncle Thonghaw's accounts, this tradition has been practiced in Ko Kret since he was in childhood. In the old time, there was only the tradition of offering syrup. The releasing of birds and fish was included at a later time. The

tradition was held in every Mon village on any day about a week after the Songkran period. Villagers, who in the old days worked on the island, would stop working and join in the processions. The procession from Village I would go as far as Village VI. The people would stop to offer bottles of syrup to the monks at every temple on the way. The procession from Village VI also did the same until it reached Village I. It was a joyful tradition, particularly when the processions met on the way

As time passed by, the tradition needed to be adapted because of the increasing number of people who went further away from the island to work. It has been about 10-15 years that it has been agreed among the villagers to practice this tradition on the Sunday after April 15. Syrup, birds and fish will be carried in processions, which need a lot of people. Therefore, Sunday seems to be the best day since most villagers do not work and stay on the island during the time of merit-making. Bottles of syrup donated by the villagers will be prepared at each *rong than*, together with birds in cages and fish in containers.



**Figure 3.42 A parade from a Thai village.**

There have been some changes in practice since the establishment of the local administrators. The villagers cannot go as far as they did in the past because they are asked to hurry to gather at Wat Phailorm or Wat Paramaiyikavas for a parade contest, a policy to promote tourism and culture. Some money will be given as prizes. In fact, the people wish only to make merit. Furthermore, under the policy, the Thai villagers of Villages II, III, IV and V also have to practice this Mon tradition. The distance from these Thai villages to Wat Phailorm or Wat Paramaiyikavas is too far to walk, particularly for the children who join the processions, so they have to come by means of boats. The people have to wait in the hot climate for a long time for the result of the

contest which sometimes creates displeasure among the villagers. The policy makes some people, both from the Mon and the Thai sides, feel uneasy. However, they cannot disagree because they do not want to be accused of not being cooperative.

This tradition marks the end of the *rong thans* since they will remain open for that last day, and also the end of Songkran Festival. The next day the people's life will return to normal.

The sixth lunar month sees Visakha and Asarnha in the eighth lunar month. Ceremonies of merit-making are held at the village temples and are not different from the Thai ceremonies. There are ceremonies of food offering and preaching in the morning, and candle walk at nights at the temples. Wat Paramaiyikawas also holds the ceremony of Suad Phra Parit. The people will come together to pray.

### **3.2.2 Festival of Buddhist Lent (*Khao Pansa*)**

Festivals of Buddhist Lent or *Khao Pansa* on the first day of the waning moon of the eighth lunar month and the End of Buddhist Lent on the full moon day of the eleventh lunar month or *Ok Pansa* are also important for the Mon people. This period is the time of merit-making. Several religious ceremonies are seen during these three months.

#### **Candles and Bath Robes Offering**

The purpose is to provide light for monks who stay at temples during the lent period. On the first day of Buddhist Lent, after offering food in the morning, the villagers will bring big candles beautifully decorated, together with bath robes in parades to offer to the monks at the villages' temples. The Thai people who share the same belief also have this religious tradition. Candles were useful in the old times

when power did not yet exist. Now that there is electricity, the Mon people as well as the Thais still maintain the tradition, holding it as a way to make merit. However, candles are still necessary for temples in remote areas.

### ***Khao man* Offering**

Offering of *khao man* (ข้าวมัน) to monks or *tak bat khao man* (ตักบาตรข้าวมัน) is held annually on the full moon day of the ninth lunar month (ขึ้น 15 ค่ำ เดือน 9). In the past, this was a tradition held at Wat Chimplee, once a Mon temple of Village I. The villagers cooked *khao man* which was rice cooked in coconut milk together with *somtam*, beef fried in coconut milk (เนื้อวัวผัดกะทิ) and sweet coconut (หน้ากระฉีก) to offer to the monks. For uncertain reason, the tradition disappeared from this area, but, later, reappeared at Wat Paramaiyikavas at Village VII where the tradition was never held before by the villagers from Village I. This indicates that the tradition can move from one place to place. Since then the villagers come to offer *khao man* at Wat Paramaiyikavas every year during the Buddhist Lent. In the morning, they will make or buy *khao man* and its accompaniment and put them together in big containers at the temple. Then it will be nicely prepared for the monks. Some people donate money to support the activity from which they also gain merit.

### **Honey Offering**

The offering of honey or *Tak Bat Nam Phung* is one of many important traditions held in every Mon community on the full moon day of the tenth lunar month (ขึ้น 15 ค่ำ เดือน 10) since ancient time. It was derived from the story before the Buddha's time about a monk in a party of 500 Pacceka Buddhas (พระปัจเจกพุทธเจ้า) who got sick and needed honey for medicinal use. One of the monks tried to find it in a village and found a kind man who filled his alms bowl with honey.

Honey made the sick monk recovered and regained his strength. The deed the man did was so great that after his death he was reborn as a king. This tradition is not seen practiced in the Thai temples.



**Figure 3.43** *Tak Bat Nam Phung* ceremony.

In the morning, the villagers will bring honey to pour in the prepared containers for medicinal use by the monks. There is an offering of food, prayers and preaching as is usually conducted on every big Sabbath Day (วันพระใหญ่ขึ้น 15 ค่ำ). In addition, *khaotom lukyon* (ข้าวต้มลูกโยน) and *khaotom phat* (ข้าวต้มผัด) are also offered to monks. *Khaotom lukyon* and *khaotom phat* are local desserts often seen in Thailand. They are made from sticky rice with coconut milk and sugar. Banana may be added inside *khaotom phat*, then wrapped in banana leaves and steamed. *Khaotom lukyon* of Ko Kret is wrapped in some kind of leaves of indigenous plants called *pong* (ต้นพง) grown along the river banks. This kind of leaf gives good and natural aroma when steamed.

### ***Khanom Thian* Offering**

Offering of *khanom thian* (ขนมเทียน) to monks is held on the last Sabbath Day (วันพระ) or the end of the tenth lunar month (แรม 15 ค่ำ เดือน 10), generally called *wan sat* (วันสารท). *Khanom thian* is another kind of local dessert offered to monks along with other kinds of food on this day. *Khanom thian* is made with flour from sticky rice and



another kind of flour from some plant and sugar wrapped in banana leaves and steamed. In the past, the villagers made it in large containers to offer to the monks and to distribute among their neighbors.

### 3.2.3. Festival of the End of Buddhist Lent (*Ok Pansa*)

The end of the Buddhist Lent (*Ok Pansa*) falls on the fifteenth day of the waxing moon of the eleventh lunar month. Religious ceremonies, such as offering food to the monks, chanting, and preaching, are held at the temple assembly hall in every temple in the morning and before noon. *Krayasat* made from rice, many kinds of sesame and brown sugar from sugar cane is offered as dessert. The tradition followed is the offering of flowers, incense sticks and candles and after that some special ceremony will take place in the ordination hall. Monks from the three village temples will come to assemble in the ordination hall of Wat Paramaiyikavas to pray together to mark the end of Buddhist Lent.

#### Offering of Incense Sticks, Candles and Flowers



Figure 3.44 “*Chaun Thoop*” ceremony.

This tradition takes place after offering food to the monks at the assembly hall in the late morning and before the chanting in the ordination hall. Monks will walk in a line on the way to the ordination hall with bags made of cloth in their hands. Along the way, the people will put flowers, incense sticks and candles in their bags as

offerings. These offerings will be used to worship the Buddha images. The Mon people at Ko Kret call this tradition “*Chaun Thoop* (ชอนฐูป)”. In the past, the people offered only incense sticks and a candle. In later times, flowers have also been included.

### ***Krayasat* Offering**

Unlike the Thai tradition in which the offering of *krayasat* (กระษาสารท) is held in the tenth lunar month, the Mon people hold the tradition in the eleventh lunar month. People made *krayasat* themselves in the past choosing ingredients of the best quality. Its making is quite a hard work and takes a long time. At present, the people rarely make *krayasat* themselves because they do not have enough time. However, there still are some people who make it for sale.

Apart from these ceremonies, there are also Kathin ceremonies and Loy Kratong Festival in the twelfth lunar month. The way to practice is not different from the Thai way.

Another religious tradition is Maghapuja in the third lunar month which, in the past, in addition to merit-making and offering food to the monks in the morning, the people from Village I would make *khao piang* (ข้าวปีบ) to worship the Leaning Pagoda at the river bank at dawn. It was a rite practiced in the past and died away shortly after the leading person died of old age. In some communities, such as Banpong and Potharam of Ratchaburi Province, the people, apart from offering food to the monks in the early morning, also bring bundles of firewood to burn while the monks are eating to keep them warm. Since the communities are quite isolated from the center of the province, quiet and undisturbed by cars, the weather in the morning is still cold during this time. Each piece of firewood is about 2-3 metres long and 4-6 centimeters in diameter. Its bark is removed and painted with curcuma. They are tied together and

decorated with flowers. This tradition is called *Chong Oh Tan* (จ้องโอะห้ต๋าน) which nowadays is possibly practiced only in Ratchaburi (Phra Panyawutthi Rumraman, 2009: 22). This tradition has never been practiced in Ko Kret.

### **3.3. Rituals Related to Spirits**

The Mon people are very religious and have a strong faith in Buddhism, but, they still hold animistic beliefs quite strongly. This seems contradictory. These kinds of old beliefs distinguish them from the Thai communities. They still carry on the belief in unseen beings, such as ghosts, ancestral spirits, guardian spirits, house spirits, and other gods. They believe in the spirits' power of protection, the power in bringing good or bad luck, or the power to punish if offended. This kind of belief partly helps control the social order since the people have to be careful about their behavior.

Upon my visits to the Mon communities, such as Ko Kret, Ban Tak Daed in Pathum Thani, Photharam in Ratchaburi, Phra Pradaeng in Samut Prakan or Bangkradi in Thonburi, I have found that such animistic belief still exists in these communities. Therefore, rituals performed in order to worship spirits can still be seen even in these modern days.

Dr Sued Gajaseni gave an account of the origin of the Mons' spiritual belief that it is from a story in the Buddha's time about a rich man with two wives. The first wife is envious and kills the second wife's child. In their next lives, they keep killing one another's child in revenge. The last live, one becomes a ghost, the other a woman. The ghost tries to kill the woman's child, but the angry ghost is stopped by the Buddha who points out that revenge is a sin. Later on, she comes to live in the woman family. She can predict the weather which is useful for rice growing and thus brings the family richness. Later, she is also well respected by all the people (Sued Gajaseni, 2008: 61).

Mr. Chalernsak Pala from Village I gave me an account about Mon spirits as follows. Mon spirits can be divided into three categories: the spirits of the cities, the spirits of the communities, and the spirits of the families. The spirits of the city, such as Phra Lak Mueng, protects the city. The spirits of the communities are the guardian spirits of the villages, such as Chao Pho Noom of Ko Kret, Chao Pho Somboon of the Mon villages on Pak Kret side, or Poochao Samingplai at Phra Pradaeng, and the spirits who protect the temples. The family spirits have two types: the clan spirits or old spirits, and the spirits of the respected members of the families, such as parents or grandparents or new spirits. The spirits of the clans mean the founders of the clans. There are also other spirits, such as *krasue* (กระสือ) and wandering ghosts which many people still believe in their existence.

At the Ko Kret Mon community, importance is given to two kinds of spirits: the spirits of the communities or the territorial spirits, and the spirits of the clans or the ancestral spirits.

### **3.3.1 Territorial Spirits**

Important territorial spirits of the Mons are the guardian spirit of a village and the guardian spirit of a temple who guards the territory of a village or a temple.

#### **Village Guardian Spirits**

The village guardian spirits are believed to be the protectors of the villages. In Mon traditional belief, every Mon village has a guardian spirit who will protect the village from any danger. Normally, a shrine of the guardian spirit will be seen in every Mon village. The village guardian spirits are believed to be male spirits and are

given the noble title “*chao pho* (เจ้าพ่อ)” or *pea cu* (เพี้ยะจู้, ปะจู้) in Mon. Female guardian spirits of villages or “*chao mae* (เจ้าแม่)” are never heard of. At the Ko Kret Mon community at present there are two guardian spirits. Chao Pho Ket Kaeo Chaiyarit (เจ้าพ่อเกษแก้วชัยฤทธิ์), usually called Chao Pho Noom (เจ้าพ่อหนุ่ม), is the guardian spirit of Village I. Village VI has Chao Pho Kamphaeng Muang (City Wall or เจ้าพ่อกำแพงเมือง) or *Pea Cu Kaman Doeng* (*kaman*-wall, *doeng*-city) in Mon, also called Ming Mueng (เมืองเมือง) or Fao Mueng (เฝ้าเมือง) by some people. The spirits are believed to be high level spirits or semi-gods and are not demons. Lower level spirits or demons are referred to as *kalok* (กะลอก) in Mon. Chao Pho Noom is highly respected by the Mons both in and out of Ko Kret. History of Chao Pho Noom has not been found recorded. According to the abbot of Wat Paramaiyikavas, it was told from generation to generation that Chao Pho Noom was highly respected by the Mons since the time they still lived in their own land in present-day Myanmar. When they migrated to Thailand, they retained the belief and erected the shrine of Chao Pho Noom in their villages, with a rite to worship him held annually

### **- Chao Pho Noom**

The name Chao Pho Noom originates from the Mon name *Pea Cu Samoem Plai* (เพี้ยะจู้สะเมินปลาย). *Plai* means noom (หนุ่ม) in Thai and young in English. The word *plai* is also found in the Thai language bearing the same meaning as in the Thai famous literature Khun Chang Khun Phaen. The name Ket Kaeo Chaiyarit sounds modern and formal and has been given in the present time, but is unpopular among the Mons. Chao Pho Noom was said to be a high ranking soldier because of the title *samoem* (or *saming* - สaming in Thai pronunciation) which was the rank of Mon soldiers in ancient fashion. Furthermore, he was believed to be from the royal family and still at a young age. It is supposed he might be some kind of hero much respected by the people, and, after he died, was elevated as their protector. The shrine of Chao Pho Noom can also be seen at the Mon community in Phra Pradaeng and some other Mon communities in Pak Kret and Pathum Thani.



**Figure 3.45 Chao Pho Noom's shrine, Village I.**



**Figure 3.46 Chao Pho Kamphaeng Muang's shrine, Village VI.**

At Ko Kret, the shrine of Chao Pho Noom is at Village I on land donated by some leading family of the village. The area was isolated in the past, but is now surrounded by houses. It is a big wooden shrine, more like a house. Near the shrine is a huge, tall tree, maybe of nearly one hundred years old or more. There is no figure or any symbol representing Chao Pho. For them, it is not necessary to have a figure or any kind of symbol. They are all aware of the existence of Chao Pho. Importantly, every year, a séance session or *Ram Chao Pho* to pay homage to Chao Pho Noom will be held on the first day of the waxing moon of the sixth lunar month which is not long after the old-fashioned New Year on 15<sup>th</sup> April. The ceremony is held to be very important. The objectives, in addition to expressing gratitude to Chao Pho, are for the auspiciousness, happiness and prosperity of the community and the villagers. Importantly, Chao Pho may give predictions or warnings, for example, about the climate that may affect agriculture, flood or fire, etc.

#### **- *Ram Chao* or the Song Chao Annual Rite**

The ceremony of *Ram Chao Pho* is called *leh pea cu* (เลาะห์เพียซู้) in Mon. The first ceremony observed was on 14 April 2010 which was during the Songkran

holiday and was considered rather inconvenient. The postponement of the ceremony was suggested since the monks and musicians were very busy because of a series of ceremonies at the temple. However, the villagers confirmed that it must be held exactly on that day as it was the first day of the waxing moon of the sixth lunar month (ขึ้น 1 ค่ำ เดือน 6), the day the ceremony has been held for hundreds of years. The following year, in 2011, the ceremony was held on 3 May which was not a holiday. Normally, the ceremony is held in the afternoon after the ceremony of *Bun Klang Ban* (บุญกลางบ้าน) in the morning.

*Ram Chao Pho* ceremony is usually held around three o'clock in the afternoon. From around noon onwards, villagers old and young will be seen coming to the shrine with a tray of offerings. The offerings are ritual desserts such as *khanom tom daeng* (ขนมต้มแดง), *khanom tom khao* (ขนมต้มขาว), *thuai fu* (ถั่วฝู), *bua loy* (บัวลอย), *khanom chan* (ขนมชั้น). In addition, there are fruits, such as young coconut and *kluai nam wa* (กล้วยน้ำว้า), a kind of banana. Other fruits in season can be added. In Thailand, there are various species of bananas, but only *nam wa* is used in ceremonies. Stuck in each tray is a bamboo strip which is bent over, one family for one bamboo strip. How many times it is bent depends on the number of members in each family. Meat is not seen among the offerings since Chao Pho is believed to be some kind of god and is not supposed to eat meat. However, some people still offer a cooked pig head, chicken or duck and boiled eggs, placing them on the floor in the shrine. In addition to Chao Pho, the people believe that there are spirits of his mother and his four bodyguards living with him. Food in a small portion will be prepared on leaves and placed at the four corners of the shrine for the bodyguards. According to the teacher, Mr. Chalernsak Pala, they sometimes come to the ceremony and the people who have attended the ceremony for a long time can identify them from their characters.

Regarding the bamboo strip, Robert Halliday also recorded it upon his visit to a Mon village to observe the ceremony. He wrote, "In each vessel was stuck a piece of split bamboo bent over as many times as there were inmates in the house..." (Halliday, 2000: 11). This was what he saw nearly one hundred years ago. This reflects the transmission of belief that has never been interrupted.



**Figure 3.47 The medium.**



**Figure 3.48 The offerings.**



**Figure 3.49 A bamboo strip.**



**Figure 3.50 The music.**



Trays of offerings are put together on a long and large table. Each villager will enter the shrine to pay homage to Chao Pho with nine lit incense sticks and a bamboo strip in hands, make a wish for the good of the family, and put the bamboo strip in a container.

The offerings, such as *khanom tom daeng*, *khanom tom khao* and *bua loy*, can be ordered from Uncle Samak Krobbang's house. At present, his family is the only family in Village I who makes these kinds of offerings and gains only a small profit. Upon my second observation on 3 May 2011, which was on a Tuesday, I visited his house in the morning and found that he and his wife, daughters, son and son-in-law were busy making the offerings to fill orders. His daughters, who had moved and worked off the island, even took leave to help. They told me that they should sacrifice their time since it was an important annual ceremony. The family receives over 150 orders every year. The offerings are gathered in plastic bags and the people will come to get them to arrange on trays. Uncle Samak gives good service as he even prepares bamboo strips for them.

In the *Ram Chao Pho* ceremony, the most important factor is the medium, referred to as *tong* (โด้ง) in Mon. More than one medium are needed because Chao Pho's guests are also invited. *Tong* who is the medium of Chao Pho Noom is a woman of 72 years old named Mrs. Wilai Kriengyos from Village VII. Objects used are two long swords, two bunches of black plum leaves (ใบพริก), two coconuts, pieces of bright colored cloth, kites, a bottle of alcohol, betel-nuts, and cigarettes. Music is also important since it acts as a tool to communicate with Chao Pho and his guests. Music used in the ceremony is a band of Mon ensemble or *pi phat mon*, of which there is only one band left in Ko Kret at present. When time draws near, the audience will come to gather around the shrine and wait for the ceremony to begin. The band comes from Village VII by boat. When the instruments are ready, the musicians begin to perform. As if in trance, the mediums of Chao Pho's guests dance to the tunes and some women will dress them up with pieces of cloth prepared for them. The medium of Chao Pho Noom lives in Village VII which is quite far from the shrine. It is said

that when the time comes she cannot stay at home, but goes straight to the shrine and just walks into the audience circle. Her character seems different, looking manlike. After being dressed, the medium, now as Chao Pho, takes a seat on his chair. Several villagers will come to pay homage to him. Some give him flowers and ask him about the welfare of their own families, their business and so on. He gives them auspicious blessings in return. For some people, a suggestion may be made to observe the five precepts for their own good. It is noticeable that the language spoken is Thai, both Chao Pho and the people.

The band plays many songs, both Mon and Thai classical songs. Chao Pho does not drink, but he will give a bottle of white alcohol to the musicians to enjoy while playing music, although he does smoke. At one point, Chao Pho will dance with swords in his hands and then with bunches of black plum leaves. This is to eliminate wind, storm and evil things. The Mon people believe that black plum trees are sacred as they appear in the story of the Buddha's life. The story has it that the shadow of a black plum tree prevented the young Siddhartha from the hot sun all day on the day he was out of the palace. The sun traveled, but its shadow never changed from its position. So it is believed that it is sacred and its leaves can be used to ward off any evil thing. The leaves can be fetched from the temple Paramaiyikavas, but not without asking permission from the spirit of the temple or *Tala Than*. Chao Pho will make sacred water and sprinkle it on all the people attending the ceremony. Bananas will be put together in a large container for Chao Pho to put some *mantra* on them and they will be given away to everybody.

The ceremony concludes with Chao Pho and one of his guests, Pho Pu Chaiyasit, dancing with a coconut in their hands. His guest places a coconut on the floor and Chao Pho throws his coconut at it. As soon as the coconuts are broken, Chao Pho and his guests leave. The mediums are left unconscious and recover a few minutes after that. Upon completion of the ceremony, the people can take their trays back. The offerings in the trays will be given to the family members to eat for their own good since they are held sacred too.

It is said that sometimes Chao Pho will chase after a girl attending the ceremony. If any girl is caught by him, it is as if they have been chosen to be the next medium. By this method, Mrs. Wilai became the present medium.

In Village VI (Upper Village), the ceremony had not been held for two years since the old medium was not in good condition. In 2011, Mrs. Wilai, the medium of Chao Pho Noom, agreed to be the medium of Chao Pho Kamphaeng Muang. Here, the ceremony cannot be held at Chao Pho's shrine, but at the village's *rong than* since the shrine is deep in the wood at the back of the village. The spot seems to be the remotest spot of the village. Before the commencement of the ceremony, some people had to go to pay homage to Chao Pho at his shrine. It rained so it was very difficult to get there as the path was slippery and covered with overgrown.

At the shrine, which was only a small, old one-posted shrine, with a pair of long swords and two bunches of black plum leaves were offered to Chao Pho. The old and worn curtains and the dolls in the shape of human beings and animals were replaced with new ones. When they came back, the ceremony started. The ceremony was not different from that in Village I. Many villagers brought trays of offerings stuck with bent bamboo strips as seen at Village I.

Village VI, the lower village, also has a village guardian named Chao Pho Kamphaeng Muang and also practiced this tradition, but in the past. The ceremony has not been practiced for many years because of the lack of the leading people who know the process of the ceremony and the mediums. The shrine of Chao Pho is now on land belonging to a family.

*Ram Chao Pho* ceremony has never been practiced in Village VII since the village has no guardian spirit. The villagers who still carry on this belief can come to attend the ceremony at Village I or Village VI.

In connection with the *Ram Chao Pho* ceremony, I have been told that most of the people, both old and young, still believe in the actual presence of Chao Pho through the medium. It seems to be well understood in the Mon society and is still practiced in many Mon communities, even at present time. But, on the other hand, there also are some who do not believe in it.

### Temple Guardian Spirit

At the Mon community of Ko Kret, religious rites are often practiced alongside the rites for the unseen beings, even at temples. It is an old belief that every Mon temple also has a guardian spirit. The spirit is believed to take up the duty of protecting the temple area and its treasures. A shrine of this guardian spirit will be seen in every Mon temple.



Figure 3.51 The shrine of *Tala Than*.

The spirit is called in Mon, *Tala Than* (ตะละทาน) or *Lathan* (ละทาน) in short. The name should come from two words: *Tala* means master, lord or owner, and *than* means a place. In spoken language, *Tala Than* is shortened to *Lathan*. *Tala Than* is believed to be a male spirit, possibly a monk or a devout who observes the precepts,

so alcohol will not be used as an offering for him. The history of *Tala Than* is not known since there is no written evidence. The belief has been passed down from generation to generation.

The shrine of *Tala Than* of Wat Paramaiyikavas (Village VII) is to the east of the temple, under a tree with unusual characteristic. It is unusual because it is made up by three kinds of plants which are a *bo*, a banyan and a black plum trees stuck together tightly until they have become one. All of them are religious trees related to the Buddha's history. This shrine is a new one. The old one fell into the river a long time ago because of soil erosion. It is located at a good spot since it will not be covered by the shadow of any building. *Tala Than* is held to be sacred. *Tala Than* must be informed every time the temple wants to hold any ceremony or annual tradition. The ceremonies, such as *Wai Khru Thong Takhap* (ไหว้ครูธงตะขาบ), the erection of a contemporary crematorium for the dead monk, and so on, are included. This is to ask permission and blessings for success. Food from ceremonies held at the temple will also be offered to *Tala Than*. The abbot, before leaving for a long trip, will inform *Tala Than* every time. When elevated to a higher position, he will also inform *Tala Than* with his new fan placed at the shrine as if to let him view it. If ones want black plum leaves to use in the *ram chao pho* ceremony, they have to ask permission from him first. A *nak*, who a few minutes later will become a monk, also has to pay homage to *Tala Than* before the beginning of the ordination ceremony. Upon the completion of *looknu* making, one will be offered and lit to appease *Tala Than*. It was told to me that some problems may occur if he is not informed before conducting activities in the grounds of the temple. Many examples were told to me and confirmed that the incidents really happened.

I was told that, about 12-13 years ago, the ceremony to elevate the main spire up to the top of the crematorium built for the late abbot was unsuccessful no matter how hard the people tried. During the last try, the spire fell, broke, and had to be repaired. Perplexity and fear ran among the villagers who came to help. Eventually, it was discovered that the ceremony to worship *Tala Than* was prepared, but not

conducted because they forgot. After the ceremony to ask forgiveness, as well as permission, was conducted, everything went smoothly.

There is also a belief that *Tala Than* sometimes punishes some people whose behavior is inappropriate. For example, once thieves got off from their boat near the Leaning Pagoda late at night. The purpose was to dig under the pagoda for some treasure. They went away bare-handed as they saw an old man in white who kept walking around there. The thieves gave this account when caught some time later. The old man was thought to be *Tala Than*. A few years ago a boy climbed up the tree and urinated on *Tala Than*'s shrine. He fell ill and died some time later. These incidents confirmed the people's beliefs in the real existence of *Tala Than*. They have to be careful and do not dare do anything to offend him, showing that *Tala Than* can control the people's behavior.

Wat Phailorm of Village VI, the upper village, and Wat Sao Thong Thaug of the lower village also have *Tala Than* shrines. *Tala Than* of Wat Saothongthaung is called *Luang Ta Klap* (หลวงตากลับ) and is said to be sacred, as well as fearful. There are lots of stories about *Luang Ta Klap*, for example, the story of the former abbot who wanted to fill the pond in front of the house to make more space nearly 100 years ago. He was not successful as *Luang Ta Klap* possessed an old woman. The woman came straight to the temple and ordered him in Mon to take the soil out of the pond and threatened him with his life. The abbot had to comply. There are many such stories which confirm the people's belief.

### 3.3.2 Ancestral Spirits

Ancestral spirits in Mon tradition are the spirits, possibly the founders, of a clan and spirits of much respected members of a family, such as parents or grandparents, which can be called house spirits.



**Figure 3.52** A figure of snake representing Snake Spirit.



**Figure 3.53** A casket storing ancestral spirits' clothes.

Clan spirits are inherited through the male line, i.e., the first son of a family will be the one who accepts the clan spirits. The next younger brother can be the inheritor in some communities, such as Bang Khanmak in Lop Buri (Phuthorn Phumaton, 1987: 21). Traditionally, clan spirits are represented by some personal belongings, such as pieces of cloth, a ring studded with a red gem stone, or swords. These may be kept in a basket, a casket, or just placed on a shelf, and they must be kept at the main post of the house. Traditionally, the cloth must be replaced with a new one when it turns faded or worn by time. The names may be Snake Spirit, Turtle Spirit, Chicken Spirit or Sticky Rice Spirit and so on. The origins of these names are not clear. It is believed that these may be the favorite food of the spirits. Since the real names have been long forgotten, their favorite food is used to refer to them instead. If a snake or a turtle is seen on the way, it must be killed and cooked to offer to the clan spirits. However, the killing can be avoided by saying “rotten turtle” or “stinking turtle” (or snake). There are some rules each family has to follow strictly, e.g., any pregnant woman must not be accepted to stay overnight in a family of a different clan; husband and wife who are outsiders must sleep in different rooms while spending a night in a different family. The clan spirits may cause some incidents like sickness or mishaps in a family if any violation occurs.

It is very difficult to tell how many families in the Mon community of Ko Kret still carry on this ancient belief. It cannot be concluded that any family with no spirit



Figure 3.54 Ancestral spirits' clothes on the shelf.

cloth and ring has already neglected this belief. It is possible that that family has no first son to inherit the spirit. Thus, the spirit is gone. It is also possible that the first son of that family has moved out of the island together with the spirit. However, there are two persons, Uncle Thonghaw Ngiew-ok and Uncle Samak

Krobbang, who kindly let me into their houses to have a look at the spirits' cloth. Since these two are the first sons of the families, the duty of taking care of the spirits has been placed on them. Uncle Thonghaw has a wooden casket and a wooden figure in the shape of snake. His family worships the Snake Spirit. By some reason, he did not open the casket for me to see, but told me that the pieces of cloth were kept inside. Uncle Samak, who inherited the clan spirits in 1963, keeps a red cloth and a golden ring on the shelf near the main post. His family worships the Turtle Spirit.

The rites related to the clan spirits are such as the annual rite to worship the spirit and the spirit dance or *Ram Phi* which no longer exists in Ko Kret.

An annual rite to worship the spirit is normally held around the sixth lunar month, after the *Ram Chao Pho* ceremony. Traditional food, *khao piang*, will be made as an offering. Uncle Samak still makes such food as an offering every year. According to him, he begins making it in the evening. While in the process of making, he will not talk to anyone. As soon as he finishes, he will offer the food to the clan spirits without tasting it, along with a glass of pure water. In addition, during important festivals such as Songkran or *Ok Pansa*, a food offering is also conducted. Any kind of food can be offered to the spirits.



The way to practice may be different among the Mon communities. As written by Juan Kruevichyarn, in the Mon communities in Ratchaburi, many kinds of desserts, food and some fruit are used in the annual worship of the clan spirits. Examples are *khanom luksabathot* (ขนมลูกสะบ้าทอด), *khanom nang aep* (ขนมนางแอบ), *khanom khanlao* (ขนมกันเหลา), which are not seen at Ko Kret, *khnom piakpun* (ขนมเปียกปูน), steamed rice, sticky rice, sour and spicy soup made with turtle or chicken, fish, coconuts, and bananas. In addition, all offerings must be placed at the right positions. The rite can be conducted on any day except Saturday and *wan phra* (Juan Kruevichyarn, 2005:91-93). *Khao piang* is not mentioned in Juan's book. For Uncle Samak, he conducts the rite on any day within the sixth lunar month, but the time must be in the evening.

Another rite is the spirit dance or *Ram Phi*. The spirit dance is not a performing art, but a rite which is not seen very often. When any unfortunate incident happens in a family, it may be believed that it is caused by the clan spirits being offended by some family members or the violation of the house rules. The spirits' cloth that is left worn can also cause disappointment as it means the spirits are not taken care of very well. In other words, those unfortunate incidents are punishment. Thus, it may be suggested that the spirit dance be conducted in order to ask forgiveness and to please the spirits. The rite is not easy to conduct and is also costly. Preparation of the spirit dance is very complicated as described in the article written by Dr. Sued Gajaseni. A great variety of food is needed as offerings. A roofed platform with six posts must be built and it must be large enough to hold a band for music. Several items, such as a Mon knife, long swords, banana trees, are needed. The medium or *tong* (โด้ง) is the most important part of the rite. The medium can be either male and female and must have full knowledge about the procedures of the rite. Music is also important since the medium cannot perform without it. Music used in the rite is a Mon classical band or *pi phat mon*. Traditionally the rite is held any day in the dry season, from the fourth to the sixth of the lunar month, except the days of Buddhist Sabbath (Sued Gajaseni, 2008: 63-64).

Ko Kret is one of the old Mon communities in Thailand, so there are reasons to believe that the rite used to be practiced in the old days. It is assumed that because it was held once in a long while, only when some incidents occurred in a family, it gradually faded and eventually disappeared. The rite has not been seen anywhere in Pak Kret for decades. According to my oldest key informant, Uncle Thonghaw, he has never seen this rite conducted in Ko Kret.

In the other Mon communities, such as Pra Pradaeng, Ratchaburi, Pathum Thani, Bangkradi, the rite is still practiced, but only once in a long while. In the Mon community in the North, such as in Lampang, the rite is practiced to pay respect to the ancestral spirits and it is called *Fon Phi Meng* (ฟอนผีเม็ง) (Ong Banjun, 2011: 44-48).

Apart from this, several families, particularly those in Village I, also worship the spirit of King Taksin and hold an annual offering for him alongside their ancestral spirits. This is to express their gratitude to him who gave their forefathers permission to live in Ko Kret. The pictures of the king are seen hung in their houses.

### 3.3.3 Other Spirits

In addition to the principle spirits mentioned above, the Mon people at Ko Kret also believe in the existence of celestial beings and other unseen beings.

#### - Hindu Gods Siva and Ganesa

The Hindu God Siva and Ganesa are worshipped, particularly by artists. In the ceremony to pay homage to teachers after the completion of art works, figures of these gods can be seen placed at the altar below the level of the Buddha image. These two gods are regarded as the masters of the artists. This also reflects the Indian influence which still exists in Mon culture.

Other celestial beings are *devatas* (เทพดา). Every year, on the first night of the Buddhist Lent, Phra Sumetmuni, the present abbot of Wat Paramaiyikavas, will light candles and place them on the trees in the grounds of the temple, at *Tala Than* shrine and at the Maha Raman Chedi to inform *devatas* and tree spirits of this great day in order that they will rejoice at the wholesome deeds the monks will conduct during the three-month lent. This is a practice he was taught by his late Mon monk teacher since he was a novice of only twelve years old. The Maha Raman Chedi of Wat Paramaiyikavas is also believed to be guarded by *devata*.

- *Mae Thorani*

The Goddess of the Earth or *Mae Thorani* (แม่ธรณี) is much respected by the Mons at Ko Kret. At Wat Paramaiyakavas, before the construction of any new building, or the crematorium for a monk, the rite to ask consent from *Mae Thorani* must be conducted. Communication with *Mae Thorani* can be conducted by simply lighting three incense sticks and a candle and flowers as offerings. With all these objects in hands, the conductor pays homage to her, asks her to grant her consent and help in the construction to complete without any obstruction. In a Mon firework contest, before fixing the poles in the ground, each team must ask consent from *Mae Thorani* first. The players also believe that each pole has a god taking the duty of protecting it. Before the start of the contest, they will light nine incense sticks to pay respect to the god of the pole, along with flowers and offerings, such as a bottle of alcohol or cigarettes. They will ask for victory, for the fireworks to run well with a blaze when they burst, powerful roars and without breaking or missing the targets. In Mon belief, *Mae Thorani* has a name Visundari as found in the ancient *imina* recited by a monk while pouring water on food in the rite on the seventh day to dedicate merit to the dead (Anusorn Mon Rumruk, 1985: 63).

### - **Tree Spirits**

The people still believe in the existence of tree spirits who live in and protect the old and huge trees.

Wat Sao Thong Thaung of Village VI has a shrine of the Two Top-Knotted Boys (สองกุมารจุก). The two boys are said to be tree spirits living in the enormous tree of about 250 years old and come out to play with the children sometimes. Lots of miracles are told about these two boys. For example, once they protected the ordination hall from being hit by a large falling branch. The branch is still lying at the spot it fell. The workers did not dare cut the branch since they saw two boys running up and down the trees. A lot of people, both Mon and Thai, come to ask help from them at their shrine. Anybody whose wishes are fulfilled will come back to offer things such as cloth for children, some snacks, bottles of soft drink, or toys to them.

### - **Land Spirits: *Phra Phum***

At present, a small spirit shrine can be seen in the grounds of almost every house in the three villages as the Thais have. Flowers and flower garlands are offered and, occasionally, a food offering is made. This shows that the Mon people in Ko Kret also believe in the existence of Land Spirits or *Phra Phum*. In fact, this is not Mon. The real Mon people have no spirit shrines in their houses as they already have the village guardian spirits and ancestral spirits to protect the houses and families. It is assumed that the belief has been adopted from the Thais. As the Mon people already have a strong belief in the existence of the unseen beings, the absorption of this belief into their culture should have been easy. This indicates culture diffusion. Houses with no spirit house can still be seen, but the number is less.

### - Kiln Spirits and Boat Spirits

There are kiln spirits and boat spirits which are the spirits related to their professions. Both are female spirits, generally called in Thai *mae ya nang tao* (แม่ย่านางเตา) and *mae ya nang ruea* (แม่ย่านางเรือ). In Mon they are *pakaeng pao* (ปะแก้งพาว) and *pakaeng kloeng* (ปะแก้งเกล็ง), respectively. Ones who earn their living by making pottery believe that there is a female spirit living in a kiln. The rite to pay homage to the spirit of the kiln in the past was considered important for the potters, particularly those who made earthen jars and mortars. The rite would be conducted after the jars, mortars and other earthenware were prepared to be baked in a kiln. As told by Uncle Thonghaw who himself was a former jar and mortar maker, in the old times, offerings such as cooked rice, boiled eggs, *khanom tom daeng* and *khanom tom khao*, a coconut, bananas and pieces of cloth were offered. It was believed that the spirit in return helped protect all pottery from breaking and give profitable production. The rite such as this is not practiced any more in these days because jars and mortars have not been produced for decades. Nowadays, only tree pots, water containers in various shapes and earthen decorations are produced. However, pottery makers still carry on the old belief and still worship the kiln spirit, but only with flowers and a glass of water placing at the kiln's head.

Boat spirits are believed to exist by the boatmen. Flowers are often seen tied to the heads of the boats as offerings. Anyone who wants to load a dead body into a boat has to pay homage to the boat spirit first to request her consent with lit joss sticks, flowers, and a piece of cloth as offerings.

In addition, there are many other spirits as represented by the shrines widely seen in the three villages, for example, the shrine of *Chao Mae Takien* (เจ้าแม่ตะเคียน) at Wat Sao Thong Thaug of Village VI (Lower Village), another shrine of *Chao Mae Takien* of Wat Chimplee of Village I (Lower Village, now a Thai temple), the shrine of *Pho Pu Chaiyasith* (พ่อปู่ชัยสิทธิ์) at Village I (Upper Village) closed to the house of

Chao Pho Noom, and so on. Phra Sumetmuni also mentions the Water Spirit or *Phisuenam* (ผีเสื้อน้ำ) said to exist guarding the Leaning Pagoda at the river bank.

From my field trips I have found that dolls in the shape of human are forbidden to be kept in some families which still carry on the old beliefs. The reason is uncertain. Some say that dolls are the servants of “*chao*” and they should be kept only in the shrines not in the houses. Some fear that spirits may haunt the dolls and they can make the children scared and fall sick. Some families do not take the flower called *champa* (จำปา) into their houses. All these indicate old animistic beliefs they are still carry on at the present.

It can be seen that the Mon people’s life is inseparably related to both Buddhism and the old beliefs as expressed through numerous rites they have practiced for generations. All these make up their unique character and way of life.

# CHAPTER IV

## ELEMENTS OF MONNESS IN PRESENT DAY RITUAL

### CONTEXTS AT KO KRET

As described in Chapter III, several old Mon rituals and beliefs at Ko Kret have persisted as cultural heritage, albeit with some adapted or transformed elements because of the passage of time and the condition of the society.

In this chapter, I will identify Monness reflected particularly in the physical elements in the present day Ko Kret ritual contexts, particularly the arrangement of ritual spaces, ritual objects, music and performances, ritual practitioners and participants, and also ritual food.

#### **4.1 Arrangement of Ritual Spaces**

Through participant observation in Mon rituals, Monness can be clearly identified through the arrangement of ritual spaces, particularly in Mon funeral rites.

In Mon tradition, a funeral rite can be held at home if a person dies at home of any natural cause. Normally, it is told that the people will not move the body away from the spot the person dies except for the process to cleanse the body. After being dressed, the body must be taken again to the spot where the person died.

In arrangement, a Mon bed for the dead or in Mon *cong neh* will be made and typically placed at the spot that person died. The body, after being cleansed and dressed, will be placed on the bed with the head facing the south according to Mon tradition. The Mons have strong beliefs in directions as recorded in the old manuscript *Lokasitthi*. However, it is noticeable that this is not strictly practiced. In some cases, it depends on the space in a house.

Hanging from the roof of the bed are a ring and a betel-nut cutter tied with a thread. The ring is in a position higher than the betel-nut cutter. The betel-nut cutter is at the very end of the thread, a little distance above the body. In modern time, old-fashioned betel cutters are rare to find, so small-sized scissors are used instead. This type of arrangement is never seen in Thai funeral arrangement. In Thai tradition, in the funeral rites held at homes, the bodies are put in coffins.



**Figure 4.1-4.2 Arrangement of spaces in a funeral rite.**

An image of the Buddha is important. The image will be set on an altar with the face toward the north. Some more objects must be prepared, including a lit lamp, a clay pot, and personal belongings, such as cloth, shoes, a hat, glasses, and so on. These objects will be put together in some containers and placed on the floor alongside the bed.

The seats for the monks invited to perform the rites are arranged some distance away from the bed. Their faces are turn towards the dead when they sit down.

On the day the body is taken to the pyre, a gate for the dead must be made. The gate is called *pratu pa* (ປະຕູປາ). The way to make the gate is to attach branches of trees or coconut fronds at the frame of the house door. They will be torn off as soon as the body is carried through them.

The coffin will be prepared outside the house. This is according to the old Mon belief that coffins are inauspicious and should not be taken into houses. Before placing the body inside, a mixture of curcuma and water will be poured into the coffin from a



clay pot as if to clean it, followed by a pot of pure water. Then, the two pots will be broken by throwing them on the floor. The arrangement such as this is never seen in the Thai funeral rites.

## 4.2 Ritual Objects

### 4.2.1 Objects in Funeral Rites of Mon Monks

Of all the rites of passage of the Mon people at Ko Kret, the most prominent one is the rites associated with death. Many of Mon elements have still been preserved, and Monness can be seen through various objects. In cases of birth and sickness, the present day Mon people at Ko Kret, instead of relying on village healers and traditional medication, go to hospitals for modern treatment. They have no problem in the service. Pregnant mothers are under the care of doctors. Babies are vaccinated. The village healers and traditional medication have long been considered obsolete. However, some people who still cling to the old belief go for advice or amulets from monks who have knowledge of traditional treatment or incantations. In case of death, the matter is different.

The Mon people of Ko Kret very much place importance on the rituals associated with death. Death reflects their belief in life after death and the next life and results in a series of funeral rituals which also reflect their tie with the dead. Funeral rites of important Mon monks, in particular, are huge and costly. In a funeral rite held for an important monk, Monness can be identified from several unusual objects. Some outstanding examples are as follows.

#### - Mon Coffin (*Long Hem*)

In Ko Kret, a unique Mon coffin *long hem* (โลงเหมม) will be made when a high-ranking, or a senior monk who has long years in monkhood and is highly respected by the villagers, passes away. The tradition is practiced in most of the big Mon communities in Thailand, but the name may differ. It is called *hem kao wun* (เหมมกาอวุ่น) in Pathum Thani, and *ala bok* (อะลาบ็อก, bok – the English meaning is box) in Phra Pradaeng.

It is a Mon-shaped lidded coffin with a narrow bottom and wide mouth. It is not available at any shop nor prepared in advance, but made when a monk dies. The coffin is beautifully made and intricately decorated with hundreds of English golden papers perforated with Mon patterns, the method said to be of Mon art. It has small windows and a base. The lid is decorated with up to nine glorious spires. The number of the spires indicates the rank and the importance of that monk. This type of coffin will never be used by laymen.



**Figures 4.3-4.4 A Mon style coffin built for a dead monk.**  
(Courtesy of Wat Paramaiyikavas)

This ancient tradition has been practiced since the Mon people still had kings. Originally, the objective of making this coffin was to store the remains of the kings, royalties, high-ranking court officials and high-ranking monks. Without royalties, the monks are held to be the most important institution of the Mon society. Therefore, at present the coffins are used only for high-ranking or senior monks. In the cremation ceremonies, the coffins will be burnt with the monk's remains. Since they are made only when monks die, the opportunity to see the tradition is rare. The last time the *long hem* was made in Ko Kret was when the senior and highly respected monk, Phra Khru Sangharak (aged 103) of Wat Paramaiyikavas, died in 1994. In the past, some Mon monks in Ko Kret had the skill in making Mon coffins. At present, there is only one person, a retired officer Lieutenant General Chativat Ngamniyom, who possesses the ability to make such coffins. The knowledge of Mon art was transferred to him by his Mon monk teacher.

The function of this kind of coffin is not only to rest the remains of a monk. It is an indication telling how important that monk was. It also displays some cultural heritage in the aspect of art transmitted for generations, including the wisdom of the people. Above all, this reflects the close tie between the community and the temple which is a prominent characteristic of Mon society.

High-ranking persons also use Mon lidded coffins, but with no spires. Another type of Mon coffin is one for an ordinary person which has no lid, and the bottom is only made with long pieces of wood. This type has long disappeared from Ko Kret. The coffins thus can be considered as indications of hierarchy in Mon society.

In the present days, some Mon monks whose ranks are high enough have the right to receive the royal coffins which is held as a great honor. The royal coffins will be returned to the palace when the cremations are complete. These are some examples of transformed elements.

#### - *Prasat*

*Prasat* in Mon tradition is a pyre temporarily built as a site to cremate the remains of a monk. Monks in Mon society are highly regarded by the villagers. In other words, they are considered the leaders of the communities. They teach both *dhamma* and worldly subjects to the people and children, give useful suggestions, and sometimes help relieve conflicts. Furthermore, they are the Buddha's followers and observe 227 precepts, so they are held noble. It is also because of their traditional belief that monks are from heaven. With these concepts, it is considered inappropriate to cremate their remains at the sites used by the people.

Apart from making special coffins, the Mon people express their gratitude by arranging special pyres called *prasat* to honor them. To cremate the bodies at this special site, the remains must be left dried. This is also to wait for the *prasat* to be completed, which may take months. Using the former abbot of Wat Paramaiyikavas as a case, when he died, his remains were treated and placed in his cell where the people could come to pay homage. He was left in that condition while the construction of the

*prasat* was underway. After the completion of the *prasat*, the cremation ceremony was held.



**Figure 4.5 Mon *prasat*.**  
(Courtesy of Wat Paramaiyikavas)



**Figure 4.6 The people helped in the elevation of the main spire.**  
(Courtesy of Wat Paramaiyikavas)

The completion of this special pyre also depends on the unity of the villagers since the construction needs a great number of people. By nature, the Mon people are enthusiastic in making merit. So they are more than pleased to help, believing that they will earn a lot of merit. In building the *prasat* for the late abbot of Wat Paramaiyikavas, the villagers from three villages came to lend their hands in every kind of work under the guidance of the principle artisans. The construction of this special coffin and pyre reflects the Mon people's reputation for their enthusiasm to make merit. The tradition of building the special coffins and the temporary pyres for dead monks has been preserved and passed down for generations among the Mon communities in Myanmar and Thailand, including Ko Kret.

The pyres built to cremate the remains of Mon monks will be beautifully built in Mon architecture. Usually, they are decorated with thousands of perforated golden papers in Mon patterns. This tradition reflects the people's faith, religiousness, and the bond between monks and the communities.

#### **- Mythical Bird *Hassadeeling***

The mythical bird *Hassadeeling*, with an elephant head living in *Himapan* forest will be seen adorning parts of the temporary pyre for Mon monks. It is connected with

the old belief influenced by the Indians that this bird possesses magical might and is able to reach heaven. The bird will be an efficient vehicle to convey the souls of monks back to heaven. The temporary crematoriums may be seen placed on the imaginary *Hassadeeling* in some communities.

### ***-Looknu***

*Looknu* also plays an important role in the funeral rites of Mon monks. They are one of many aspects that indicate Monness. Traditionally, in the old days, Mon fireworks were intended to be used to cremate the remains of monks. In a cremation ceremony of a monk, the Mon fireworks would be ignited and aimed at the artistic Mon coffin mentioned above. They caused a fire when they hit the coffin. It is the traditional Mon way to cremate the monks, a way that is quite unusual and not seen in any other ethnic communities in Thailand. The Mon people adopted the concept from the cremation ceremony of the Buddha. In the cremation ceremony of the Buddha, the heavenly fire burned without being ignited by anyone. The fire from the Mon fireworks is supposed to be the heavenly fire. It is one in many ways the Mon people honor the respected monks who are the Buddha's followers.

Several activities indicate unity among the Mon people, including the activity of firework making which is quite interesting. Making this type of fireworks is a hard and time-consuming work, and needs a lot of strong men to join in.

Mon fireworks are different from Chinese fire crackers. They may be compared to the Isan rockets or *bang fai*, but their duties are different. Isan rockets are shot into the sky to worship God *Thaen* (๓๓๓๓) to ask for rain.

Being developed from the traditional weapons used to fight against the Burmese, the Mon fireworks display the ancient wisdom of the Mon people since in making them knowledge about chemicals, as well as carpentry, is required. The last step, the decoration, will be left in the hands of the artisans. Perforated golden papers are used to make them look nicer.



**Figure 4.7** Explosive substances used to make *looknu*.



**Figure 4.8** The process of making *looknu*.



**Figure 4.9** Worshipping the post protector before the contest started.



**Figure 4.10** *Looknu* ran along a wire when fired.

The tradition of using Mon rockets in cremating the remains of monks around here has been abolished for decades because of many reasons. In modern days, the cremations are held in the grounds of the temples. The limitation of space is one of the reasons. Importantly, as happened in the past, the power of the shots was so violent that it broke the coffin apart, making the dried remains fall and scattered on the ground, giving an unfavorable sight. Therefore, such practice became out-of-date and hence abolished. However, Mon fireworks are still in existence, only their role has changed to be one of the symbols of the funeral rites of Mon monks. They are still made, not to be shot at the coffin, but to offer to or to worship the dead monk by circling them in processions around the *prasat*, before being taken to the contest in the field. The cremation ceremony of a monk is, in Mon belief, as if to send him back to heaven, or a home coming day. So, it is considered a joyful occasion, not a sad one.

In addition, there are also Mon firework annual contests among the Mon communities in Nonthaburi and Pathum Thani. Mostly, the temples sponsor the makings. This may be one of the reasons why traditional Mon fireworks still exist. During my fieldwork, I found a lot of skilled Mon firework-makers and witnessed the process of making them. It is costly and takes a great deal of time. Only men are involved in this task.

It is worth to note that, in the north of Thailand, the people will not use their hands to cremate the monks. What they use is *bok fai lo* (บอกไฟหล่อ) made in the shape of bird. When ignited, the *bok fai lo* will run along a wire right at the *prasat* and causes fire because of some explosive powder contained in it (Sa-nguan Chotesukharat, 2010: 186).

#### **4.2.2 Objects in Funeral Rites of Mon Laymen**

Through participation in the funeral rites at Ko Kret, I have found the elements which are traditional Mon, the elements that have been transformed and some elements integrated with Thai culture.

Mon funeral rites, particularly of laymen, are full of didactic purposes related to Buddhism. The funeral rites are based on three old Mon texts *Lokasamutti*, *Anisamsa Kammathan* and *Kala Kalee* (ka-la-ka-loy in Mon pronunciation) combined. These texts give instructions on the disposal of a body that dies of different causes, the funeral arrangements and the reasons are mentioned in Chapter III.

In the past, if someone died from natural cause at home, they held a funeral rite at home. For ones who died elsewhere or died from unnatural causes (accidents, committing suicide, murdered, etc.), taking the bodies back to the houses was forbidden. They had to be taken to the graveyard to be buried immediately, and without any religious rites. At present, they practice differently. It is more in the Thai way, that is, religious rites are also held for those dying from unnatural causes at temples and the bodies will be cremated. Example was given in Chapter III about two men who died in a boat accident. They were not buried immediately, but taken to the temple, put in coffins and religious rites were held for them. Later, the bodies were cremated. According to the texts, dead children under ten had to be buried as well. Now, they are all cremated. The Mon people here have been forced to change. The community is more crowded. Space is needed by the living. So, there is not enough space for the dead and burying is no longer possible.

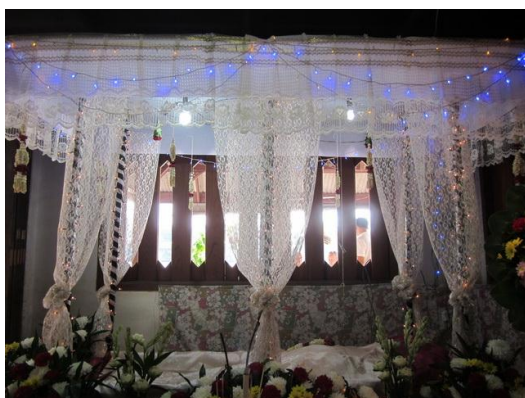
Funeral rites at present are held mainly at temples since it is more convenient. The said temples are Wat Paramaiyikavas of Village VII and Wat Saothongthaung of Village VI. When holding a funeral rite at a temple, the body is kept in a coffin as generally done by the Thais since it is easily available. I never saw a Mon-shaped coffin for the people during my fieldwork. Looking at the surface, it is possible to think that Monness no longer exists. However, looking deeper, some other elements can be found.

### - *Cong neh*

At present, some families still hold funeral rites at home, although it is more convenient at a temple. In the rites held at home, there may be the opportunity to see something never before seen in the Thai funeral rites, which is a Mon bed *cong neh* (ငံး နေ) or *tiang chana* (เตียงชนะ), or, roughly translated, a bed of victory. It is called a bed of



victory because it contains the teachings that encourage one who lies on it to overcome the four *phums* which are *Apayaphumi* 4, *Sugatiphumi* 7, *Rupaphumi* 16 and *Arupaphumi* 4 (Sued Gajaseni, 2008: 65), and, eventually, reach *nibbana* (Phra Maha Charoon Yanacharee, 2006: 39). An account of this Mon bed is mentioned in the old Mon book *Kala Kalee* translated from Mon by Phra Maha Charoon Yanacharee, but it is short and the detail of the making is not given. It is possible that Dr. Sued Gajaseni got the details of the making and the meanings from some other source.



**Figure 4.11-4.12 Mon beds *cong neh*.**

In Mon tradition, the *cong neh* will be built to hold the body of a person who dies of natural causes at home. The ancestors of the Mons gave every part of it religious meanings for the profit of their descendants. To make the bed, they enacted considerable rules about the height, length, width, amount of wood to use in each part, which is related to the religion. For example, its four bases mean four *phums*; six posts represent six *arammanas* which the people should refrain from (Sued Gajaseni, 2008: 65), twenty pieces of thin bamboos at the roof means twenty heavens of Brahma (Sued Gajaseni, 2008: 65). These details, I supposed, are expanded by their ancestors from those given in the text. It is one way to instill religious beliefs in their children to keep them close to the religion – the way that portrays their wisdom.

In Mon tradition, the dead will be exposed to the eyes of the guests for teaching purposes. By this way of arrangement, they may realize the impermanence which is the truth and nature of life, look at themselves and think of the way they should lead their lives. Unlike for Thais when they hold a funeral rite at home, where the dead is kept in a coffin.

The villagers who know how to make this bed will come to help when needed in the belief that, in doing so, they will gain great merit. It is worth noting the versatility of the villagers here, particularly in Village I. In the old days, bamboo was used in making the bed. At present, bamboo no longer exists on the island. The villagers have adjusted by making use of any wood they can find, for example, wood from an old bed, or by buying it. This may result in less strictness in numbers since it is more difficult to make wood into the size they want. It may be possible that they forget or omit some old rules for their convenience. But, in principle, it must have six posts and the roof.

This Mon way of funeral arrangement, although rarely seen nowadays, can still be seen once in a while. The arrangement such as this has appeared a few times in Ko Kret in this past 15 years. The last two times were in 2011 at Village I and Village VI. This indicates that ethnic conscious is still sustained in the Mon people around this area.

#### - A Ring and A Betel Nut Cutter

These two items always appear when the Mon *cong neh* is used.



**Figures 4.13-4.14** Traditional arrangement of the dead's personal belongings.

From the roof of the bed, a ring and a betel nut cutter are tied with a thread and hung down to a position over the dead person's stomach. In old Mon tradition, these two objects are considered important personal belongings of the people, so they are used as parts of their funeral rites. A betel nut cutter was one of the important personal belongings of the Mon people in those days when betel nut chewing was in fashion.

Nowadays, it is out-of-fashion, but it is still kept. Since at present betel nut cutters are difficult to find, the people have adjusted by using small scissors instead.

The ring is said to represent the *cakkhu yan* (จักขุญาณ) – the understanding of the absolute truth – and the scissors at the end of the thread are supposed to be used as a tool to destroy all kinds of defilements or *kilesa* (Sued Gajaseni, 2008: 65). Sometimes a banana cone with flowers and a betel nut inside, or a roll of a betel nut, is seen above the ring and scissors. The hidden meaning is that the chewing betel nut is very close, but the dead cannot reach and eat it. In addition, it shrinks in a short time. It signifies the transience of life. This is to teach the people to control themselves and not to be misguided by all kinds of *kilesa*. Every human dies and can take nothing with them. Even though a betel nut is within reach, they cannot take it. This is a didactic message conveyed through the funeral rites and the dead.

In the old days, the scissors were useful. When the distance between the scissors and the body became very close, it indicated the time the body should be taken away to the pyre.

### - *Poeng Hamao*

Dr. Sued Gajaseni referred to *poeng hamao* (เป็งหะมาว) as *krabung winyan* (กระบุง วิทยาน) (Sued Gajaseni, 2008: 66). I roughly translate as *the basket of soul* in English. According to him, it is a set of the dead person's personal belongings, such as trousers, a shirt, a blanket, glasses, put together in a bamboo basket to be placed alongside the dead according to Mon tradition.

But Phra Sumetmuni, the abbot of the Mon temple Paramaiyikavas, gives an explanation of *poeng hamao* differently. According to him, it includes a clay pot, three rice balls mixed with sugar which in the past were put in the pot and changed every day. It is said that, in the past, the people cooked rice for the dead using this pot. The meaning of *poeng hamao* is rice of the dead (*poeng-rice*). This is also the perception of

the people here. In my point of view, this is not uncommon. The traditions of each Mon community may have some differences, particularly in detail.



**Figures 4.15-4.18 Poeng hamao.**

The pot is placed on three rocks in a bigger bowl and there must be a rattan holder. The pot represents the fragility of *sankhara*. These three rocks mean the three worlds: *kamabhava*, *rupabhava* and *arupabhava*. All these are mentioned in the Mon text *Kala Kalee*.

These days, normal food prepared for the guests is offered to the dead. But traditional preparation is still maintained, i.e., they still place *poeng hamao* alongside the dead. The people also put rice grains and dried food, such as chili, garlic, onions, salt, in the pot. No one can give an answer as to when this tradition began. Rice balls may be rarely seen, yet they still exist and are seen once in a while.

Preparation such as this and the concept of adding religious meanings to the ritual objects for teaching purposes differentiate the Mons from the nearby Thai communities.

### - The lamp, the Water and the Coconut

These three objects are also mentioned in the old texts. In Mon funerals, light seems to be very important to the dead. It is presumed that the lamp is as if to provide light for the dead, to let them go with light, not with darkness. In the past, the lamp was lit all the time. Now, for fear of the fire, the people put it out at night after the chanting finishes and light it again in the morning; it must be well taken care of in that it is lit all the time, until the day the body is taken to be cremated. Therefore, lamp wicks and a bottle of oil may be seen in readiness along with other objects.



**Figure 4.19** A lamp, a glass of water and a coconut.

A glass of water for the dead must also be prepared and one must take care, not to let it dry up.

Coconut juice is considered the purest among waters in the world so it is fit for washing the face of the dead before cremating. The text *Kala Kalee* compares the pureness of the coconut juice to the pureness of the mind of an *arahant* who reaches the state of attainment and will no longer be disturbed by any kind of defilements.

At Pak Kret, which is a large and diverse community, it may be thought that traditional arrangement such as this must have disappeared for a long time. Unexpectedly, I found that it is still maintained. Once, I saw such preparation and objects at a funeral rite at Wat Sanam Nue and knew at once that the dead lady was ethnic Mon.



## - The Path and the Gate for the Dead



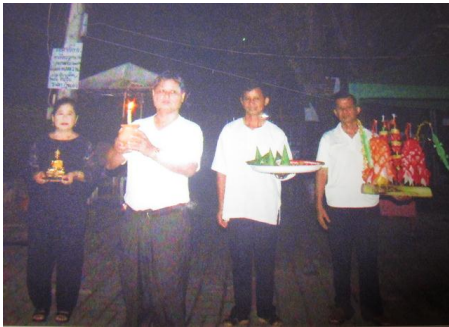
Figures 4.20-4.21 The paths for the dead.

In Mon tradition, the dead cannot be taken through the door of the house. To take the body out of the house, a special path or gate must be created. In the old times, one side of the house was torn off to make a path for the dead. At that time tearing off the wall was possible since most houses were small and material like palm leaves were used in building. To avoid tearing off the wall, there is an alternative, which is to make a special path by attaching coconut fronds to the house door, called *pratu pa* in Thai. These coconut fronds will be torn off and thrown away as soon as the body is taken through the door. This tradition is still practiced in the Mon community at Pak Kret, including in Ko Kret.

### 4.2.3 Objects in the *Toh Ayong Kyaj* Rite

The Mon *Toh Ayong Kyaj* (ເທະອະຍັງຄຢາຈ) rite or local accent *Toh Ayong Jaat* (ເທະອະຍັງຈ້າດ), is so special and rarely seen in this technological era, yet it can still be seen once in a while in the Mon communities in Thailand. The objective of the rite is to dedicate merit to the dead who are respected relatives, such as parents, by offering an image of the Buddha to a monk. The complexity of the rite is remarkable and it shows the bond, love and good wishes the children have towards their dead parents.

Objects needed for this rite are complicated. For example, there are 80 small-sized candles, 4 middle-sized candles, 1 big-sized candle, which must be lit one after another all night. The people must take turns to care of them, not to let them extinguish. In the early morning, there will be only the big-sized candle that is still lit. It will be



Figures 4.22-4.27 Objects used in the *Toh Ayong Kyaj* rite.

taken to the temple with other objects. The rite will be performed at the temple by the monks.

Other objects are some kinds of grass, such as Bermuda grass or *ya praek* (หญ้าแพรก), and lalang grass or *ya kha* (หญ้าคา), and leaves of *bo* tree. Bermuda grass will be tied with a *bo* leaf. Seven bunches are needed. Forty-five stems of lalang grass will be attached with cottons soaked in oil. Curcuma mixed with red lime, seven coins, forty-nine rice balls are included. Some sweets must also be prepared to represent food offered to the Buddha by Suchada.

The most important object is an image of the Buddha together with a model of Chetawan temple, a small alms bowl, a pair of small centipede flags, and a pair of small umbrellas as decorations. Sometimes two Buddha images in gold and silver colors are used. The procedure of the rite starts at home in the evening by the children and continues at a temple in the presence of four monks in the early morning.

The said objects and numbers involve the religion. The plants they use are those associated with the Buddha when he was near enlightenment, so they are considered auspicious. Everything and every step has religious meaning. For example, stems of lalang grass soaked with oil give bright light when lit, meaning the light of wisdom or *paññā*. The mixture of curcuma and red lime in a tray represents the river Neranjara where the Buddha reached enlightenment. The chimes that occur when the coins hit the tray represent the chime of Suchada's tray being dropped in the river by the Buddha when it hit the trays belonged to the previous Buddhas under the water. The rite is an imitation of the night the Buddha discovered the truth of life and became the Buddha. It seems that it is as if the image becomes the Buddha at the end of the rite.

The objects used in the rite are known to the Thai people, however, such rite, such practices and concepts are not in existence in the Thai tradition. The rite shows a close tie between the Mon people and the religion. They link many things to the religion which is their outstanding characteristic. The way of ritual practice distinguishes them from the nearby society.



At present, there is a tendency for such rites to decline because of their complexity in terms of practices and necessary objects. The way of practice needs patience since it lasts the whole night until dawn.

#### **4.2.4 Objects in the Rite on the Seventh Day**

For the Mon people at Ko Kret, the religious rite to dedicate merit to the dead on the seventh day has been held the most important. They will not hold the 100<sup>th</sup> day or 50<sup>th</sup> day rites as the Thais do since it is not their tradition. The rite on 100<sup>th</sup> day originated in the reign of King Rama V. He held it for his beloved wife Queen Sunanda (Somphob Phirom, 1996: 152). The Mons at Ko Kret still follow their old tradition.

The way to practice the rite is very interesting. Objects that attract interest and should be mentioned are as follows.

##### **- Gold and Silver Images of the Buddha**



**Figure 4.28 Buddha images in gold and silver colors.**

In Mon tradition, one image of gold and silver of the Buddha are seen every time the rite to dedicate merit to the dead on the seventh day is conducted. They are the most important offerings in this rite and the best things to offer to monks for the benefit of the dead. The people can offer only one image or two in gold and silver. In the old days, the people made the images themselves using clay stored for pottery making, and imperfection in the shapes might occur sometimes. Nowadays, images in various styles are available at the shops. If two images are used, they must be in gold and silver colors. Again, there is the concept about light since the gold image represents the sun, and the

silver image represents the moon. The Mon people will not let their loved ones go in darkness. The light may mean *nibbana*. Offering of images is held important since it is believed that the dead will gain a great deal of merit which will result in a good rebirth.

### - Offerings to Monks

In addition to the Buddha images, there are other offerings made to the monks to dedicate merit to the dead. The said offerings are things they think will be of use to monks, such as many kinds of necessary medicine, yellow robes, canned food, a bottle of syrup, toothbrushes, tubes of toothpaste, soaps, detergents, spoons, plates. Although one may think these things are truly common, the uncommon part lies in the number of them which is surprisingly great. The way they are arranged is special as all the items are put together in a huge container. In addition, there are items like a gas stove, an electric fan or a television set sometimes. It seems that they try to offer as many items as possible to monks to dedicate as much merit as possible to the dead.

### - Food to Offer to the Dead



**Figure 4.29** Preparation of food to be offered to the dead.

In this rite, food to offer to the dead is also prepared. The way to arrange the food is quite unique as many kinds of food are included, including desserts in a big bowl neatly made of banana leaves. The size of the bowl is about 8-9 inches in diameter. To offer food to the dead, water will be gradually and ceremoniously poured on the food while a monk utters a remarkably long speech of dedication according to Mon tradition, which is called *imina*. The end of the rite portrays their old animistic

belief as this bowl of food will be brought to be placed on the ground at the forked road for other ghosts to have their share. This is also an act of giving or *dana* according to the Buddhist belief that they uphold very religiously.

#### **4.2.5 Objects in the Rite to Inter the Ashes and Bones of the Dead**

For the Mon people, either dead or alive, they desire to be close to the Buddha. Thus, after the cremation, the remains will be taken to be buried at spots in the vicinity of the religious symbols, such as pagodas or *bo* trees, in the grounds of temples. Burying the remains is the old way, but still exists. Nowadays, burying is inconvenient since space is less available. Most of the Mon people at Ko Kret, therefore, choose to inter the remains of the dead in niches prepared at temples. Although the way has been adjusted, the old principle is still followed – burying. The Mons at Ko Kret still follow the old custom, that is, they do not keep the remains of the dead at home, nor throw them in the water as the Thais do.

The rite to inter the remains can be conducted on the seventh day or later, or at the people's convenience. If they cannot yet set the appropriate date to conduct the rite, they will leave the remains in the care of the temple.

In the rite, several objects are used. But, three of them that should be mentioned are a ladder, colored flags and flowers.

##### **- A Ladder**

Of all the objects needed in this rite, a ladder is the most interesting, as well as most unexpected to be seen in any rite. I have been told by Phra Sumetmuni that, for the Mons, there must be a ladder in this rite. It is a small-sized wooden ladder with four steps, which is related to the traditional concept about numbers: even numbers are numbers of the dead. The Thai people share the same belief. At home, the steps are in odd numbers.

In practice, the ladder is to be leant against the outside of the niche. If the remains are to be buried in the ground, it will be leant against the inside of the hole. The

ladder acts as if it is the means for the dead to go up or down to their resting place. For convenience, Wat Paramaiyikavas provides the ladder, particularly for the people of ethnic Mon who come to conduct the rite at the temple. For the Thais, the ladder is never seen included in this rite.



**Figure 4.30 A ladder and colored flags.**

The use of the ladder of the Mons at Ko Kret is not found recorded in any written form. As far as I have been told, it is a tradition that the Mon people here have carried on practicing for a long time. The detail such as this is quite a rare occurrence. It can be seen only when there is a death situation.

The concept of using a ladder does not exist in such Thai rites. The way of thinking and the practice exposes the people to Monness which is still maintained, and thus differentiates them from the neighboring Thai communities.

#### **- Colored Flags**

The Mon people here have ways to express their good wishes to the dead. Giving colored flags to them to use as offerings is one in many examples. Colored flags are made of thin colored papers attached on bamboo sticks. These flags are for the dead to use to worship the Buddha's top-knot believed to be enshrined inside the Chulamani Pagoda in heaven. Colored flags represent the people's good intention towards the dead. They are in many mediums that can make the dead gain a lot of merit. The flags may seem unimportant, but, for the Mon people here, they have their role and are needed in this rite.

### - Ritual Flowers

The Mon people here use different kinds of flowers in some rites. Some symbolize something, such as *dok khem* used in the *wai khru* ceremony symbolizes wisdom. In this rite, flowers will also be prepared for the dead to use to offer to the Chulamani Pagoda. Any kind of flower can be used, except lotuses. In Ko Kret, roses are often used because they are beautiful and easily available. The reason for not using lotuses in this rite is connected with the old concept generally perceived among the Buddhists that lotuses are the purest flowers most appropriate to offer to the Buddha. Thus, it is considered inappropriate to use them in the rite related to death which is held inauspicious. This old concept has been strictly followed by the Mons at Ko Kret.

#### 4.2.6 Objects in the Ram Chao Pho Rite

The Ram Chao Pho rite is an important annual rite of the Mons at Ko Kret and beyond. The purpose is to show gratitude to the village guardian spirit or Chao Pho who protects the village and its people from any danger. In the Mon community of Ko Kret, the rite is held every year only in Village I. Village VI holds it once in a while depending on many factors. Village VII has never practiced this rite since it has no guardian spirit.

The way to conduct the Ram Chao Pho rite in Village I and Village VI is the same, although the two villages have different guardian spirits. Village I has Chao Pho Noom or *Pea Cu Samoan Plai*, while Village VI has Chao Pho Kamphaeng Muang or *Pea Cu Kaman Doeng*. Objects used in the Ram Chao Pho rite may be divided into two types. The first one is edible offerings, most of which are sweets made with flour, coconut and sugar. Examples are *khanom tom daeng*, *khanom tom khao*, which are compulsory. Other sweets may be added, such as *khanom thuai fu*. It is noticeable that an image of the Buddha is not seen in this rite since it is a rite related to spirits. Meat is not used and there is no animal sacrifice. In fact, these offerings are also used in some Thai rites, such as the rite to pay respect to Thai classical music teachers. So, it is hard to identify Monness from these offerings.

Considering other objects present in this ritual, some of them are worth mentioning that show traces of Monness through them and the practices.

#### - **A Pair of Swords**

The swords are Chao Pho's personal belongings. Shortly after Chao Pho arrives, he will dance with the swords in his hands. It is not only in the Ram Chao Pho rite that the swords are used. In the Ram Sam That rite (รำสามทาด) which has already disappeared from Ko Kret, they are also needed. In fact, they convey some meaning. For the religious meaning, they symbolize the tools to cut off all defilements, and the loops mean all that cause of worries. Regarding the worldly meaning, it is believed that they are tools to prevent all hazards that may harm the villages

#### - **Bunches of Black Plum Leaves**

Two bunches of black plum leaves (ใบหน้ำ) are needed in this rite. They come from black plum trees grown on the island. This kind of tree is related to the Buddha's life, so it is considered auspicious. After the swords dance, Chao Pho dances with the leaves in his hands. The leaves are said to symbolize auspiciousness and prosperity and they can help keep out all hazards.

#### - **Coconuts**

In the Ram Chao Pho rite, two old coconuts with hard shells are used. They are supposed to be two cocks. Chao Pho and one of his guests who come to join in the rite will take turn in throwing the coconut at the other's coconut on the floor. This is said to be a game of cock fighting. The broken coconut is as if to signify the end of the rite, and Chao Pho and his guests depart. When one of the coconuts is broken, the mediums are seen to faint or fall on the floor, and, shortly after that, regain their consciousness.





Figure 4.31 Leaves and swords.



Figure 4.32 Chao Pho Noom performed swords dance.



Figure 4.33 Leaves dance.



Figure 4.34 The coconuts.



Figure 4.35 The “cockfight” was going to start.



Figure 4.36 The rite concluded.

### - Bent Bamboo Strips



Figures 4.37-4.38 Bent bamboo strips.

Stuck on each tray of offerings is a thin and bent bamboo strip. It is just bent, but not broken. How many times it is bent depends on the number of members of each family. It is the way the people make it known to Chao Pho how many members they have in their families in the hope that Chao Pho will protect them and give all of them his blessings. It is a tradition the Mon people here have practiced for a long time. Robert Halliday also had an opportunity to see it practiced at some Mon community nearly one hundred years ago and recorded it in his writing (Halliday, 2000: 11). The tradition is evidently older than his time and has been retained until these days. The bamboo strips are not unusual, as the Thai people also used them to bind something together in the old time. The distinctiveness lies in the people's interesting way of practice as well as their traditional belief.

#### 4.2.7 Objects in the *Bun Klang Ban* Rite

In the *Bun Klang Ban* rite, there are a few ritual objects to consider. The practices of the three villages are different in some parts.

#### - Rice, Water, Gooseberry Leaves

On the day the *Bun Klang Ban* rite is held, apart from food, the villagers, in Village I in particular, will bring four items to the rite: rice, water, a candle and gooseberry leaves. All these will be placed in a circle of sacred thread at the front of the Buddha image. The sacred thread will be passed to nine monks present at the rite. Every



monk holds the thread while chanting. In the middle of the chant, the people will light the candles and drop wax in the water to make it sacred. After the chant, all these are held sacred. The owners can bring them back.

At home, the rice will be thrown in every corner of the house. The leaves will be used as tools to sprinkle water both inside and outside the houses. All this is for the auspiciousness and prosperity of the families. In addition, it is believed that all the evil things will be warded off by means of these sacred tools.

### - Rice or Rice with Sand

In Village VI, both the Upper and Lower villages, as well as Village VII, rice mixed with sand or only rice is seen in a plate placed in front of the Buddha image. To make it look nicer, the villagers sometimes mix petals of various colors in it. It may seem simple, but it cannot be overlooked. In the same way, rice or rice with sand in the plate becomes sacred after the chant is completed and it is believed to have the power to ward off evil things. The practice is that, on the way back to the temple, the presiding monk will throw a few handfuls of rice or rice with sand from the plate held for him by a male villager along both sides of the path in the village. This is for the auspiciousness, prosperity and safety of the villages and the people.

### - A Raft Made of Banana Trunks



**Figure 4.39 A raft.**

In the *Bon Klang Ban* rite at Village VI, the upper village, a raft made of banana trunks, decorated with colored paper flags and flowers can be seen. On it is food such as rice, onion and garlic, dried chili or salt contained in plastic bags. In addition to the food, there are dolls roughly made of clay in the shape of humans and animals. This raft

is to be floated in the river after the *Bun Klang Ban* rites or Ram Chao Pho (if there is any) is completed.

The floating of a raft is also another rite. The purpose is to ward off bad luck for the benefit of the village and its people. In a sense, the rite is as if to please the spirits with food and clay dolls so that they do not disturb the people. The provision is for them, and the dolls are supposed to be their servants. Seeing the floating raft, the Mon people will not pick it up knowing that it is for the spirits. The rite confirms the superstitious belief which still remains in the present day Mon community of Ko Kret.

At the Mon community of Ban Tak Daed in Pathum Thani, the raft is much bigger with loads of offering. A raft with offerings such as this is another traditional tool the Mon people at Ko Kret used in the belief that it helps keep away the evil elements.

In Village I, the floating of a raft may be seen once in a while, particularly at the suggestion of Chao Pho Noom.

#### **4.2.8 Other Symbolic Objects**

There are some other symbolic objects used in some rites in the Mon community of Ko Kret. Three things I will mention are as follows.

##### **- Centipede Flags**

In the Mon communities, centipede flags are part of the rite on the first day of Songkran Festival. The origin has a connection with the event on the day the Buddha came back to earth from Tavatimsa Heaven. Upon his arrival, the poor people raised rags attached to sticks to welcome him and to express their gladness at seeing him again. Hence, it is taken as their tradition.

The flags are created in the shape of a centipede, every part of which carries religious meaning. The duty of the centipede flags is to be the offerings of the Buddha

represented by the relics enshrined in the temples' main pagodas. The flags will be taken by the villagers, in processions, to be fixed on the *hamsa* posts at the Mon temples on the first day of Songkran Festival. They are religious offerings, not decorations. The tradition is practiced in every Mon community in Thailand during Songkran Festival. The centipede flags are one of many objects reflecting the nature of the Mon people as to their earnest belief in Buddhism.

### **- V-Shaped Stick to Support a *Bo* Tree**

Objects which might raise curiosity in some people are sticks leaning against a *bo* tree in a temple area during Songkran Festival in the Mon communities in Thailand. In fact, the Mon people use them to support a *bo* tree according to the old belief. It is one of many ways of merit-making. The action symbolizes support given to Buddhism to make it last long. The one who conduct the rite is believed to gain a lot of merit and bad luck will be warded off.

The Mon rite of supporting a *bo* tree takes place on the second day of Songkran Festival. The stick is unique as it must be in V-shape at one end implying an act of supporting. It may be painted in yellow color from curcuma to make it look nicer. The way to conduct the rite is only leaning it against the tree trunk while making a wish for the good of that people. Traditionally, the one whose birth day is in accordance with the second day of Songkran Festival is advised to conduct the rite. For example, if the second day of Songkran is on Saturday, anyone born on Saturday should conduct the rite. This is the old belief. In practice, everyone can do it for auspiciousness.

### **- Red Color**

Visiting the Mon temples at Ko Kret, one will see the pagodas wrapped with a long piece of red cloth. For the Mon people, red is considered the most auspicious color, so, in the rite to wrap a pagoda, a long piece of bright red color is always used. In the Thai tradition, golden yellow cloth is used to wrap a pagoda. Red cloth will also be seen as decorations, for example, at the *rong than* at Songkran Festival. The idea about color of the Mons is similar to that of the Chinese since red for the Chinese is also held to be

auspicious. This may be because it is considered bright, prominent, powerful, and gives a feeling of joy.

### 4.3 Music and Performing Arts

In some Mon rites, music plays an important part. Examples are the *Ram Sam That*, *Ram Phi*, and *Ram Chao Pho* rites. The first two rites do not exist in present day Ko Kret, while *Ram Chao Pho* is still practiced annually. In such rites, the majority of actions the practitioners conduct are dances, which is impossible to perform without music. I will look into Mon music of Ko Kret in ritual contexts in the aspects of musical instruments and songs to see whether there are some Mon elements remaining in these days.

#### 4.3.1 Musical Instruments

In the Mon community of Ko Kret, Mon music found preserved and passed down from generation to generation is the traditional music ensemble called *pi phat mon* ensemble. In fact, its emergence in Thailand is dateable to as far back as the Ayutthaya period when the Mon people fled their country to live in Thailand and in later times spread its influence to Thai musicians.



Figure 4.40 The *khong mon*.



Figure 4.41 The *pi mon*.



Figure 4.42 The *ranat ek lek* (at the bottom left) was adopted from the Thai.

The musical instruments in the *pi phat mon* ensemble are such as the *ranat ek* (ระนาดเอก), the *ranat thum* (ระนาดทุ้ม) and the *khong mon* (ฆ้องมอญ), which are the percussion instruments. The others are the wind instrument *pi mon* (เป็มอญ), the drum called *ta phone* (ตะโพน) and a set of drums called *poeng mang* (เป็งมวง). In the *Ram Chao Pho* rite, this traditional *pi phat mon* ensemble is used as part of the rite. The said instruments have been used in the *pi phat mon* ensemble since the old days, both by the Mon in present day Myanmar and in Thailand. In later times, the *pi phat mon* ensemble in Thailand has become bigger as more musical instruments have been added. For example, when the *ranat thum* (ระนาดทุ้ม) and the *khong wong lek* (ฆ้องวงเล็ก) were invented in the reign of King Rama III, the Mon musicians also added these two instruments in the *pi phat mon* ensemble. The Mon *khong wong lek* or small-sized gong is in the shape of a crescent moon as the old gong; the *ranat thum* is not different from that used by the Thai musicians. Again, in the reign of King Rama IV, metal percussions like the *ranat ek lek* (ระนาดเอกเหล็ก) and the *ranat thum lek* (ระนาดทุ้มเหล็ก) were invented, the Mon musicians also adopted these two instruments in the *pi phat mon* ensemble (Phairoj Boonphook, 1995: 167).

The *pi phat mon* ensemble is also very popular among Thai musicians. This indicates cultural diffusion which is natural and often seen happening among neighboring communities. However, the old *pi phat mon* is still used in the *Ram Chao Pho* rite and this indicates Monness is still preserved in the community of Ko Kret. The bigger band is played on many occasions and the sound is much louder.

The shape of the *khong mon* is unique. It looks like a crescent moon in a vertical position, with a crafted mythical half-woman and half-bird on one side. It is generally called Kinnari, but, at Ko Kret, it is Nang Hong (นางหงส์), meaning female *hamsa*. Its bare breasts are covered with a long piece of white cloth. Before performing, offerings, such as flowers, a candle, joss sticks and a piece of white cloth, must be prepared in order to pay homage to the teachers, some of which are believed to be gods, and for the success of the performance. The white cloth will be tied around the drum called *ta phone*.

In Mon tradition, the *pi phat mon* ensemble can be used in both auspicious occasions, such as welcoming ceremonies or wedding ceremonies, as well as those considered inauspicious, such as funeral ceremonies. For the Thai communities, the *pi phat mon* will be seen performed only in funeral ceremonies.

At present, there is only one *pi phat mon* ensemble left in Ko Kret. The name of the ensemble is Somchitr Silp. The beautiful instruments have been passed down to the present generation from their ancestors' time. The musicians are males as in the old times. The ensemble Somchitr Silp has played an important part in preserving Mon cultural heritage.

As for Mon string instruments, they are not found in Ko Kret at present. The string instrument, such as Mon *jakhay* in the shape of a crocodile as seen at the museum at Bangkradi community, is not found here. The said instrument is the origin of the Thai musical instrument known as *jakhay* (จะเข้) (Montree Tramod, 1995: 70).

#### 4.3.2 Songs

Mon classical songs presently are quite great in number. Mon classical songs have unique melodies giving inspiration to Thai composers to compose Thai classical songs carrying a Mon accent. Examples are *Khaek Mon* (แขกมอญ), *Khaek Mon Bangkhunphrom* (แขกมอญบางขุนพรหม), *Mon Dudao* (มอญดูดาว), *Mon Ram Dap* (มอญรำดาบ), *Mon Yat Le* (มอญยาดเล็), *Ratri Pradapdao* (ราตรีประดับดาว) and so on. The Mon musicians also play Thai classical songs along with Mon classical songs on many occasions. The adoption of Thai classical music by the Mon musicians has happened in the same way as the adoption of Mon classical music by the Thai musicians. As mentioned before, the transfer of culture and art can naturally happen in neighboring communities.

In the rite such as *Ram Chao Pho* which is held important for the Mons at Ko Kret, the *pi phat mon* ensemble and ritual Mon songs are needed since without music Chao Pho and the other spirits cannot dance. Examples of the ritual songs in the rite, as told by a musician, are *Mon Ka Choen* (มอญกะเชิญ) used when Chao Pho arrives, *Thayae*

*Mon* (ตะแอมมอญ), *Ram Dap* (รำดาบ) used when Chao Pho dances with swords in his hands, *Sat Bai Mai* (ซัดใบไม้) used when Chao Pho dances with leaves in his hands, *Ram That* (รำถาด) when Chao Pho dances with a tray of offerings in his hands, and *Hap Klui* (หาบกล้วย). These songs are rather formally used in accordance with Chao Pho's attitudes. Besides, normal Mon and Thai classical songs are played as if to please Chao Pho and his guests while dancing.

The songs used in the performing art of Mon dance or *mon ram* are all Mon songs.

### 4.3.3 Performing Art of *Mon Ram*

At present it is found that there has been the absorption of the Thai performing arts into the Mon performing arts. The Mon performers also practice Thai performing arts. In a diverse society such as this, it is unquestionable that cultural diffusion is possible.



Figures 4.43-4.44 The performing art of *mon ram*.

The most famous Mon performing art still remaining in most Mon communities is *mon ram* (มอญรำ) or *pua ha poen* (ปัวหะเป็่น), and it is said that *mon ram* of Ko Kret is the most beautiful for its graceful movements. In Mon tradition, *mon ram* can be performed both in auspicious and inauspicious ceremonies. It carries different duties on different occasions. In auspicious rites, such as *Ram Chao Pho*, the dance can be performed in order to please the spirits. In the community of Ko Kret, *mon ram* is often seen performed to welcome important guests. For example, in 1946, it was performed to welcome King Anand and his younger brother (now King Bhumibol). In 2009, upon the

visit of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, the Mon people of Ko Kret were proud to perform *mon ram* to welcome her. In the funeral rites of high-ranking or senior monks, the dance is performed to pay homage to the dead monks. In the funeral rites of respected people, it is often performed to express their love and respect to the dead.

The *mon ram* performers at Ko Kret are all females. There are some males who are interested to practice this art in some other communities. *Mon ram* of each community may have some differences. For example, *mon ram* of Ko Kret has ten steps, while that of Bang Sai Kai has nine. The uniqueness of the movements of the bodies and feet allows the audience to distinguish *mon ram* from the Thai performing arts. The music used for this performing art is the *pi phat mon*. Ten songs are used in performing. The names are as follows:

- *Yak Chang Hapoen* (ยากจ้างหะป็น),
- *Ka Ba San* (กะบ๊ะซาน),
- *Dom Tho* (ดอมทอ),
- *Kha Wua To* (กะว้าวตอห์),
- *Khawua Khanom* (กะว้าว ขะนอม),
- (the name of the 6<sup>th</sup> song is unknown),
- *Ka Yan* (กะยาน),
- *Ha Wai* (หะว้าย),
- *Miang Plai Ha Lia* (เมี่ยงปล้ายหะเลีย),
- *Pak Mia* (ป้ากเมี่ยง) ((Phairoj Boonphook, 1995: 169).

However, these names have nearly been forgotten. The musicians only call them the first song, the second song, the third song, and so on. Each performer wears a long skirt or *phathung* (ผ้าถุง) and long sleeve blouse with a long piece of cloth around the neck, with the two ends let down in the front. This is the Mon female costume. At Ko Kret, *mon ram* performers are of different ages. *Mon ram* of Ko Kret has been well preserved and transmitted to the following generation.



## 4.4 Ritual Practitioners and Participants

### 4.4.1 Gender of Ritual Practitioners

As in Thai rituals, most of the Mon practitioners are males, especially in the religious rituals. They are those who know the procedures of the rituals very well. They are typically the senior and respected persons of the villages or monks. In religious rituals, male practitioners dominate the leading role because they have to conduct various activities near monks. It can be said to be the division of duty between males and females. Women mostly take up the kitchen work such as food preparation to offer to monks and guests. In the ritual to worship the spirit of a clan, male practitioners play a major role since according to the old Mon tradition the first son of a family is the one to inherit the clan spirit. Although the tradition has faded with time, it can still be seen.

However, in the annual *Ram Chao Pho* rite held to please the village guardian spirits who are male spirits, the practitioners acting as the mediums are females. Only females have taken up this duty since the old days. Male mediums have never existed. These female mediums will perform their duty until they are too old for this activity.

In the séance dances done for entertainment among the villagers, for example, *Phi Kradong* (ผีกระด้าง) and *Phi Sak* (ผีสาก), in other Mon communities, the dancers are also female. The séance dances such as these are not only seen in the Mon communities. They can be seen too in some other ethnic communities, for example, the Lao community in Uthai Thani Province in the central part of Thailand. In the past, the Mons at Ko Kret also had these kinds of séance dances, for example, *Phi E-chu* (ผีอีจู้), *Phi Linglom* (ผีลิงลม) in which the mediums were male, or *Mae Sri* (แม่ศรี), but they have disappeared for decades according to the senior villagers.

In the case of the participants, the limitation is because of the characters of the rites. For example, the funeral rites and religious rites are supposed to be adult matters, thus the participants are adults only. For other auspicious rites, such as village merit-makings and the annual rite of *Ram Chao Pho*, there are no limitations on gender and

age of the participants. In connection with the rite held privately in a family, for example, the *Toh Ayong Kyaj* rite, only the adult members of the family participate in the rite. In the annual *Ram Chao Pho* rite, participants are villagers of different ages.

#### 4.4.2 Costume

Clothing seems to be less important for the Mon villagers at Ko Kret. Normally, the Mon people at Ko Kret dress casually when they go around on the island. Men may be seen wearing only knee-length pants and topless, women in plain clothing. They will dress appropriately in accordance with the occasions or their professions and also for the religious rites. Thus, there is no need for the practitioners as well as the participants to wear Mon costume. Nevertheless, at Ko Kret, Mon costume is still used, but only for some formal occasions, for example, the visits of important guests in which the people will wear their ethnic costume in the welcoming ceremonies. During Songkran Festival, the people also wear Mon costume.



Figures 4.45-4.46 Costumes of Mons at Ko Kret.

The costumes of the Mon people in the communities of Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani and Phra Pradaeng are in the same style. Traditionally, a man wraps the lower part of the body with a long piece of cloth in various colors, with some part of it gathered and left hanging at the front as called in Thai “*loy chai* (ลอยชาย)”. The top is covered in a short sleeve shirt. A long, narrow piece of cloth will also be hung around the neck with its two ends let down at the back. This is said to be the old Mon costume and the old way of wearing Mon cloth. A woman wears a long *sarong* and a long sleeve

blouse with a long piece of cloth with its two ends hanging down at the front. She also wears a hair bun, but it is not as high as a Burmese woman's. The Mon women's costume, in fact, began to change since the early Rattanakosin period as described in Sunthorn Phu's poems.

Mon men at the communities mentioned before do not wear a red sarong with a white line and a shirt or T-shirt, mostly in white. This is the way the Mon people in Myanmar and those in the communities along the western borders like Kanchanaburi and Ratchaburi, including the Burmese-Mon labors in Thailand dress themselves. The said costume is the newly constructed identity politically used to differentiate themselves from the Burmese.



**Figure 4.47 Costumes of Mons from Myanmar.**

This new-styled costume first began in Myanmar in 1970 by Mr. Ongmu a medical student from Rangoon University and his friends in order to revive the Mon identity (Mons in Siamese Soil, 2009: 177). Later on, this style spread to the Mon communities along the Thai borders.

In the *Ram Chao Pho* rite, many pieces of bright-colored cloth will be prepared on a tray. The practitioner, i.e., the female medium when in trance being possessed by the village guardian spirit, will choose a cloth from the tray and it will be put on her body in accordance with the old Mon tradition and in a male style. This is the way the Mon people at Ko Kret have practiced for a long time and it has been well preserved to the present day.

### 4.4.3 Language

In Ko Kret, monks who are present as practitioners in any rites still chant in the Mon style Pali language, particularly monks from Wat Paramaiyikavas in Village VII and Wat Phailorm in Village VI. In addition, most of the villagers who participate in the religious rites can also pray in Mon-Pali under the encouragement of the present abbot of Wat Paramaiyikavas who is enthusiastic about Mon cultural preservation. Some of Mon style chants are very rhythmic.

In fact, monks at Wat Paramaiyikavas have conducted the chanting and praying in the Mon-Pali language for a long time. According to historical accounts, King Chulalongkorn and his grandmother Princess Sudaratrajprayura funded the restoration of this temple, then in a dilapidated condition, in 1867-1877. In the celebrations to mark its completion, he gave his kind suggestion to the then abbot to preserve the language by chanting or praying in Mon-Pali. The successors in consequence have held it the royal command and, to express their gratitude to the king and his grandmother, have taken it as their duty to preserve the tradition from then until now (History of Wat Paramaiyikavas, 1997: 42).

The tradition is one in many characteristics from which Monness can be identified. Not only Wat Paramaiyikavas, but some other Mon temples around the areas of Pak Kret, such as Wat Phailorm, Wat Sanam Nue, Wat Thong Khung (วัดทองคู้ง); and in Pathum Thani, such as Wat Chankrapor (วัดจันทร์กระพ้อ), Wat Sam Lae (วัดสำแล), Wat Samakkhiyaram (วัดสามัคคีอาราม), monks still chant in Mon-Pali. There still are a great number of Mon monks in this part, so Mon style chanting can be preserved.

Mon-Pali pronunciation, although different from Thai-Pali, is not too difficult to understand. Those versed in Thai-Pali will find it different, but understandable.

## 4.5 Ritual Texts

The ritual text, as far as it can be found, is the text *imina bot yai* (อิมินาบทใหญ่) to be recited by a monk while ceremoniously pouring water on food meant to be dedicated to the dead in the rite to make merit on the seventh day of a funeral rite. The text is very old and has been passed down from generation to generation since ancient times. It is known among the Mon communities in Thailand. The content portrays the best wishes the living can express to the dead. For example, they wish for the dead to be reborn in 16 heavens, not in hell; in a king's family or a rich family, not a lowly or a poor family. Or they wish for the dead to meet with perfect happiness, treasure, beauty, etc. At the end, the Goddess of the Earth is invited to witness the dedication. The content is amazingly long and quite a great deal of water is needed.

The text is in Mon, but there is also a Thai translation. The former abbot of Wat Paramaiyikavas made a short version, but it is still quite long. In the past, monks at this temple recited the text in Mon. At present, the Thai version is often used since ones who know Mon are less in number.

## 4.6 Ritual Food

Two examples I would like to mention are *khao chae* and *khao piang*.

### 4.6.1 *Khao Chae*



Figure 4.48 *Khao chae*.

Ritual food of the present day Mon community of Ko Kret worth mentioning is *khao chae* (ข้าวแช่) or *poeng songkran* (เป็งสงกรานต์) in Mon. This can be called festival food as it is made during Songkran Festival. Its origin comes from the legend telling of a rich man who offers finely cooked rice to the gods wishing for a son in

return. His wish is fulfilled. According to Mon tradition, the people will welcome Nang

Songkran with a set of *khao chae* as an offering on a small altar on the morning of Songkran Day, i.e., 13 April. In addition, this food will be offered to the monks, also to Chao Pho Noom, Tala Than and the ancestral spirits. The people will eat it after it is offered to the ancestral spirits. The legendary *khao chae* is seemingly the best among all kinds of food the Mon people can offer to the gods and monks. The Mon people of Ko Kret, particularly in Village I, and also the other communities, have kept on practicing this tradition for a long time.

The complexity of *khao chae* making is amazing and several experts are needed. In Village I of Ko Kret, there still are many experts. All of them are women with long-time experience. Rice will be chosen carefully and washed many times to perfect cleanness before cooking. Men may help in this step. The rice is served in scented water and eaten with a few accompaniments. The way to eat it properly, as told by an old Mon lady, is eat some accompaniments first, followed by a spoonful of rice.

*Khao chae* is said to have been spread among the Thai community through the royal court since many Thai kings and elite palace men of the past had consorts who were ethnic Mon.

#### 4.6.2 *Khao Piang*



Figure 4.49 *Khao piang*.

Another example is *khao piang* (ข้าวเปียง).

This is the mixture of sticky rice, grated coconut, black sesame, salt and sugar. The purpose of making *khao piang* is to offer to the ancestral spirits. Normally, the people make it around the sixth of the lunar month or after Songkran Festival. According to Mr. Samak Krobbang,

who makes it as an offering for the ancestral spirits every year, there are some rules in the making of *khao piang* which are related to the old belief. It must be made in the evening and the maker must not speak to outsiders nor answer their questions while making it. The reason told to me is that other spirits might know and come to snatch it. So it is made secretly inside the house to prevent it from being seen or heard. This

reflects the old animistic belief that still exists, and this may be the reason why Mr. Samak Krobbang never responded to my request to see him make it at his house. Anyhow, he was so kind as to demonstrate the process of making it to me once at Wat Paramaiyikavas. Although it is rare to be seen nowadays, it can still be seen.

#### **4.7 Transforming Elements of Monness**

In the present day Mon community at Ko Kret, some elements of Monness have been transformed mostly because of social changes. They have to adjust their traditions to suit the present social conditions. Examples are given as follows.

In the funeral rites of monks, the use of Mon fireworks to cremate the remains of monks has been abolished for decades since the temporary pyres are erected in the grounds of temples. The space is not sufficient to shoot this kind of firework. In addition, Mon fireworks are so powerful that the coffin and the remains can fall to the ground creating an undesirable scene. However, they still make the fireworks to express their gratitude and to worship the dead monks. They carry them in processions and after that shoot them in a contest held in the field. They make a model of the pyre and shoot the fireworks at it for some prizes and it is a joyous contest. In Ko Kret nowadays, only small-sized fireworks are shot because the field is not wide enough.

For a high ranking monk, when he dies, that temple can inform the palace of his death and a royal coffin will be provided for him in accordance with his rank. In addition, a royal fire will be prepared for him in the cremation ceremony. It is held a great honor to receive such preparations from the palace. While this may indicate acculturation, it is possible that it will affect the use of the Mon *hem* coffin which will be used less and less. Eventually, it may vanish.

In the old days when the bodies were still cremated at the pyre, a piece of white cloth would be tossed back and forth thrice across the rising blazes by two men at each side of the pyre. Three tosses of the cloth represent attachment, aversion and ignorance which should be abstained from. Uncle Thongmian Sukhkrit (ทองเมี้ยน สุขกริต), one of my informants and a former undertaker, told me that he did this at the cremation of his

father many years back. Modern crematoriums at temples made this tradition impossible because there was no space for this procedure. Thus, this tradition disappeared.

Nowadays, ones who die in accidents are no longer buried immediately without religious rites as practiced in the old days. There are no burial grounds any more in Ko Kret. The dead are cremated from one up to three days, and religious rites are held for them as practiced by the Thais. This reveals Thai cultural influence.

In the past, when someone in a village died, the people would help build a Mon style coffin with no bottom. Nowadays, coffins generally available at the shops are used and are not in Mon style. This is because wood is rare to find. Moreover, the people who can make them are less in number. The change of material used in building a Mon bed for the dead, "*cong neh*", can also be seen. At present, pieces of wood sold at the shops are used in place of bamboo because there is no longer bamboo in Ko Kret. The use of pieces of wood makes it easier to make the bed, but it results in the less strictness in numbers according to the old tradition.

In the case of the centipede flags, in the past, it was the duty of the villagers to make and take them to offer to the pagoda in which the Buddha relics were enshrined. At present, Wat Paramaiyikavas has funded the making of them in order to preserve the tradition. The temple has an artisan and the villagers can come to help. A few days before Songkran Day, the villagers will come to collect them and carry them in a procession from the village to the temple on 13 April. This is because the people mostly focus on earning their living and have no time to make them. At Phra Pradaeng community, the people can order them at the shops. At Ban Takdaed in Pathum Thani, the people still retain the old tradition. They help make the flags and take them to the temple.

Another example is the Mon tradition of supporting the *bo* tree during Songkran Festival. Since nowadays the tradition is less practiced, Wat Paramaiyikavas prepares the sticks for the people in order to promote the tradition, as well as attract the tourists' attention since a great number of tourists come to make merit or enjoy their time at Ko



Kret during Songkran Festival. So the people who practice the tradition are both Thais and Mons. This activity just started in 2012.

Some changes have also occurred in the context of beliefs. A few decades back, the people had their children wear a topknot in accordance with their old tradition in the belief that they would not be disturbed by ghosts and thus would be healthy. When the society grew more modern, the number of the children wearing a topknot grew less. The reason this tradition has become less popular may be because the children were often teased by other children at schools. The passage of time, modernity and modern education has played a large part in the change of their ideas.

According to the old tradition, the Mon people will not erect a shrine of *Phra Phum* in the grounds of their houses. This is because they already have the guardian spirit of the village and ancestral spirits as their protectors. Living longer in the Thai environment, cultural absorption between the two sides has naturally happened. Several Mon families at Ko Kret at present time have adopted the cult of *Phra Phum* and erected a shrine of *Phra Phum* in the grounds of their houses. But there still are some who uphold the old tradition.

In the old Mon tradition, women were forbidden to step into the ordination hall or *ubosot* of a temple because it was the area where monks conducted the religious ceremonies or *sanghavas*. Later, this tradition was abandoned and women have been allowed to enter the ordination hall. In an ordination ceremony, traditionally parents would only accompany their son who was going to be ordained to the entrance of an ordination hall. About 25 years ago, Wat Paramaiyikavas started to allow the parents and relatives to see the ceremony inside.

In a socio-cultural aspect, the most obvious example should be their costume. Mon costume at present will be seen only during Songkran Festival or the welcoming ceremonies when there are some important visitors. In fact, the change occurred since early Rattanakosin period as observed by the famous poet Sunthorn Phu. The people are in usual clothes in everyday life. Women wearing a hair bun are rarely seen. However, some old women still wear the old hair-do when they attend religious ceremonies at the temples.

Their occupations are also different from the past. The new generation has no longer taken interest in pottery. In modern times, they have received education in the Thai educational system. Many of them have tertiary education, both in Thailand and abroad. They work as employees, officials, officers, teachers, etc. Some ethnic Mons have gotten involved in politics and have positions as important leaders of the country. The third Prime Minister Field Marshal P. Phibun Songkhram was an ethnic Mon-Chinese from Nonthaburi. Another one was Mr. Anand Payarchun, the eighteenth Prime Minister of Thailand, whose ancestors were Mons from Ratchaburi.

Clay pottery is still seen, but made and sold as decorations and souvenirs, not for use. The size has been reduced. Some villagers who sell refreshments use clay containers instead of glasses and the tourists can keep them as souvenirs. The large size ones are less produced.

In the case of food, both Thai food and Mon food are consumed in the Mon community at Ko Kret. Examples of Mon food seen daily are *kaeng matat* (แกงมะตาด), *kaeng krachiap* (แกงกระเจี๊ยบ), *kaeng no kala* (แกงหน่อกะลา) which is a kind of plant in the ginger family, *raw banana curry with pork* (แกงกล้วยดิบใส่หมู), *Mon soup* (แกงจืดแบบมอญ หรือซูปมอญ), *mi krop* (หมี่กรอบ), *pla ra* (ปลาร้า), *alat boe* (อัดตบอ หรือพริกกับเกลือ). Examples of desserts are *hantra* (หั่นตรา), *khanom phakkat* (ขนมผักกาด), *kalamae* (กะละแม). *Khao chae* (ข้าวแช่) and *khao piang* (ข้าวเปียง) are the kinds of ritual food.

For Mon music “*pi phat mon*,” Thai musical instruments such as the *ranat thum* (ระนาดทุ้ม), the *khong wong lek* (ฆ้องวงเล็ก), *ranat ek lek* (ระนาดเอกเหล็ก) and *ranat thum lek* (ระนาดทุ้มเหล็ก) have been adopted since in the reigns of King Rama III and King Rama IV as explained before. They play both Thai and Mon classical songs. In the case of Mon dance or *mon ram*, it is found that it is also popular among the Thai students in Ko Kret and Pak Kret as well. The Fine Arts Department used to send some dancers to study *mon ram* of the Mons at Ko Kret.

Tourism promotion in recent time may be considered a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it brings wealth to the people. On the other hand, it affects some of their traditions negatively. A clear example is the tradition of syrup offering to the monks during Songkran Festival to use as refreshment in the summer time. This tradition is a Mon tradition normally practiced only by the Mon people of Village I, VI and VII. Before tourism boomed, the people from Village I would parade pass Village VII to Village VI. In reverse, the people in Village VI would parade pass Village VII to Village I. They stopped at every temple on the way to offer syrup to the monks. It was a joyful occasion as told by some aged people. In recent time, under the local administrator's policy, the people from the Thai villages (Village II, III, IV and V) have to arrange the parades too. It was explained to me by Mr. Nowarat Ngiew-ok, Deputy Head of Village I that they wanted to make it the tradition of Ko Kret with no division between the Thais and the Mons in order to promote tourism. Apart from this, the local administrators hold a parade contest with prize money. The Mon people cannot go as far as in the old days any more since they have to be at the contest in time. The people have had to adjust themselves to the new policy. Many are unhappy seeing that money may harm the people's unity, but they have to comply. In addition, they are told to dress according to their preference, so some people are seen improperly dressed or in fancy outfits. The use of amplifiers by some groups of villagers makes it a noisy tradition. The transformation of values of the tradition is seen from these elements.

Traditionally, the Mon people take fish and birds in the parades to release at the temples. But at present, they have to release them first. They cannot release them at the contest as advised as they will all die. So some people turn to use plastic birds and fish in the parades instead of living ones.

In addition, tourism has caused a great deal of changes in the Mon society at Ko Kret. Some houses have been adjusted to be gift shops, restaurants or coffee houses to meet the demand of the tourists. Many families lease the areas in their houses to vendors. Tourism also causes problems rubbish since there is a huge use of plastic glasses. Some tourists are careless and have a disregard of hygiene. The community is crowded and noisy at day, particularly at weekends. But it will be quiet again in the evening when they are off the island.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 Summary of the Research

This thesis is to identify the persistence and transmission of Mon beliefs and rituals at present day Ko Kret and to trace the Monness of the Mon people at Ko Kret through rituals and beliefs, and also to identify the transforming elements and aspects in Mon society-culture at Ko Kret.

Data used in this thesis was obtained from both document and fieldwork. In Chapter II, in the context of history, data was acquired from books. Data concerning the background of the community of Ko Kret, and Mon traditions and rituals persisting in today Ko Kret, was acquired through qualitative field research at Village I, Village VI and Village VII, Ko Kret.

Participant observation was the main method used to obtain first-hand information. The writer tried to participate in various events as much as possible all year round. Visiting the community frequently was useful for learning about and watching the daily life and activities of the community's members. Informal conversations with the key informants and villagers also helped acquire useful data.

In order to compare with the other Mon communities, visits were made to Bangkradi in Thonburi, Ban Pong in Ratchaburi, Ban Tak Daed in Pathum Thani and Phra Pradaeng in Samut Prakan. The mentioned methods were considered significant and helpful in acquiring in-depth data about the ethnic Mon and other ethnic groups in Thailand.

The research found that the Mon people in the community of Ko Kret have maintained their identity very well. Monness can be traced in many aspects. The Mon language is still spoken and understood by some members of the community and can be written by some monks. Monks at Wat Paramaiyikavas and Wat Phailorm chant in

Mon-Pali. Mon texts can be found. The most important text is the Mon Tipitaka kept at Wat Paramaiyikavas. Others are displayed in the temple museum. Some are possessed by the monks.

The Mon people have been described by the Thais to be merit-making mania. This is not far from the truth. They hold different rituals all year round. The religious rituals are not much different from those on the Thai side. Maghapuja, Visakhapuja, Khao Pansa, and Ok Pansa are their important religious rituals. The traditions *Tak Bat Nam Phung* (honey offering to monks) in the 10<sup>th</sup> lunar month and offering of incense, a candle and flowers on the day lent ends are said to be of Mon tradition. In addition, there are offerings of local desserts, such as *khaotom lukyone* or *krayasat*, to monks and also offerings of *khao man*. In addition, there is the Loy Kratong tradition and Kathin ceremony.

The Songkran Festival seems to be important and a period when the people enjoy making merit. Many people are seen wearing old Mon costumes, which is different from the new-constructed costume worn by the Mon people living along the borders or working in Thailand at present. A series of merit-making takes place from 13 April onwards until the end of the month. Mon traditions seen during this period are, for example, the offering of centipede flags, offering of *khao chae*, and supporting the *bo* tree. The ceremony to offer the centipede flags to the Buddha is held in most of the Mon communities in Thailand. The tradition was revived about 12-13 years ago. Although it is a revival, such revival was done because of their knowledge of the value of their tradition and the wish to preserve it. It is told that in the past it was the duty of the villagers to make the flags. Now it has changed. To preserve the tradition, Wat Paramaiyikavas supports the making of the flags and gives them to the villagers. The villagers take them in a procession to the temple on April 13.

*Rong than* (ဝံၵ်းၵံၵံ) is part of the Mon tradition. It is a gathering place for the villagers to conduct many activities, such as cooking, having meals together and holding religious ceremonies. The villagers will open a *rong than* in their village during Songkran Festival. In Village I, the villagers will gather at the village *rong*

*than* to make *khao chae* to offer to the monks and distribute among the villagers on 14 April. The tradition of supporting the *bo* tree is practiced on this day as well. This is to ward off all the unluckiness for the happiness of that person. But it is less practiced nowadays. The tradition of *rong than* can also be seen at funeral rites for monks.

During this period, the villagers will hold an annual ceremony of merit-making at the center of their villages. In Thai this is called *Bun Klang Ban* (บุญกลางบ้าน). It is an old and important tradition of the Mon people. At Ko Kret, the people have practiced the tradition continuously since the old time. The objectives are to dedicate merit to their ancestors and for the good and happiness of the villages and villagers. It is very interesting to see the villagers of Village I bring water, rice, a candle, and some kind of leaves to the ceremony. After the ceremony finishes, these items are believed to be sacred. The owners will take them back to throw inside and around their houses to ward off anything evil. In Village VI and VII, sand or sand mixed with rice is thrown by monks along the path for the same purpose. These indicate their old superstitious belief that is still in existence.

In addition, there is the offering of syrup to the monks. Fish and birds are also carried in processions to be released. In the past, the tradition was practiced only by the people from the Mon villages. Recently, the Thai people from the Thai villages have also been asked to take part according to the local administrators' policy to promote tourism. They arrange a parade contest with some money as the prize which has changed some people's attitude and damaged the value of the tradition.

The Mon people of Ko Kret especially place importance on funeral rites. In the context of funeral rites, Monness is obviously expressed through several ritual objects. These objects also reflect the traditional concepts that still remain. The funeral rites for monks and persons are held differently. Funerals for monks, particularly those of high rank, are grand and costly. Traditionally, a temporary pyre is built as a cremating site which takes months to complete. This kind of pyre is called a *prasat*. This is built because of the belief that monks are pure since they observe hundreds of precepts. They carry on the Buddhist religion and the Buddha's teaching, so it is inappropriate to cremate their remains at the pyres used by the people. Also, a

traditional Mon coffin is built to store the remains. The coffin is called *long hem* by the Mons of Ko Kret. However, it needs not to be built every time. Transformation can be seen in that, now, high ranking monks have the right to request coffins from the Royal Court according to their rank, which is considered a great honor. However, a traditional pyre must be built.

The community of Ko Kret has held the funerals of monks in this way since the past. Each time, the villagers come to lend their hands in every sort of work. It is one way to make merit.

For the dead who are laymen, funeral rites are held both at temples for the convenience of the relatives and at home. Funeral rites held at home, in particular, are very interesting since traditional elements can still be seen. A six-posted Mon bed or *cong neh* (a bed of victory) is the most obvious and outstanding in my opinion. It seems to be a normal bed, but, in fact, it is not just a bed. Religious meanings are behind every part of it for didactic purposes.

In addition, there is a banana leaf folded in cone shape with some flowers inside, or a betel nut in a betel leaf, a ring, and a betel nut cutter, hung over the body. The phenomenon such as this, although seen only once in a while, can still be seen. Coffins are used when funerals are held at the temple. At present, box-shaped coffins are used. Mon coffins in which the lower part is narrower than the upper part are no longer seen in the community of Ko Kret.

In addition, the tradition of placing rice and dried food in a clay pot on three rocks can still be seen. These are supposed to be food for the dead. Also, a lamp, a coconut, and three rice balls mixed with sugar, also food for the dead, are prepared. Other objects are personal belongings of the dead, such as clothing, a blanket, glasses, that will be arranged on a tray. All these are placed alongside the dead.

To take the dead out of the house, a special path must be made. Such a path is made by fixing coconut fronds or any branches on the door frame. The plants will be removed immediately and later discarded after the body is taken through. This special exit is an alternative for the villagers instead of dismantling one side of the house

since the Mon people will not take the dead through the normal door. The coffin is outside the house. They will never take it under the house roof. This is an old belief practiced for a long time. If the body is to be taken in a boat, the rite to worship the spirit of the boat must be performed first to ask permission from her. At the end, rice will be thrown around the house so that the dead cannot come back. All these show the superstitious beliefs retained in their way of life.

On the seventh day after that person has died, and after the cremation, the Mon Toh Ayong Kyaj rite may be seen. This is a rite to offer a Buddha image to the monks. It is believed that the dead will gain great merit from this rite. The rite mirrors the night Siddhartha discovered the Truth and became the awakened one or the Buddha. The rite must be performed before the sun rises. Several objects are used to perform this rite. The rite shows a tight relationship between the living and the dead as the way to practice is complicated and needs patience. This may be the reason why the people tend to omit it.

On this seventh day, merit-making will be arranged in dedication to the dead. This is considered the most important. An image of the Buddha will be offered to the monks along with a huge number of necessities. In the rite, a food offering for the dead and other spirits is prepared in a big bowl made of a banana leaf. Water will be poured little by little on the food while a monk makes a distinctively long speech in dedication. Then the bowl is taken to a forked way and placed there for the spirits.

Apart from this, there is the rite to inter the ashes. In the past, the ashes were buried in the grounds of a temple. Now niches on the temple walls are made for this purpose. Traditionally, the Mon people do not dispose of the ashes in the waters nor keep them at home. This is the way they still practice nowadays. The remarkable object in the said rite is a small four-stepped ladder which acts as a means of leading the dead to their resting place.

As for Mon classical music, a kind of ensemble called *pi phat mon* is still played. It is seen played both on auspicious occasions, such as wedding ceremonies and welcoming ceremonies, and inauspicious occasions, such as funerals. *Pi phat mon* was adopted by the Thai people, but it is played only at funeral ceremonies. In



addition, Mon dance or *mon ram*, the old performing art of Mon women, has been transmitted down to these days. It can be performed in both auspicious and inauspicious occasions just as *pi phat mon*.

The people are Buddhist but, at the same time, have retained their old belief in spirits and superstitious beliefs. They still have village guardian spirits. Village I has Chao Pho Noom as the guardian spirit. His shrine is easily seen. Chao Pho Kamphaeng Maung is the spirit guarding Village VI. His shrine is in the woods at the back of the village which is hard to access. Village VII has no guardian spirit. Nobody can give me the reason. The most outstanding is Chao Pho Noom of Village I. The rite to worship him has been held annually for a long time. It is a rite that cannot be omitted. The objective is to express their gratitude to him for his protection. In the rite, some villagers ask questions with a hope for positive answers. The questions may be about health, trade, luck or possible danger that might occur in the village. Chao Pho Noom is known to be male, but the person who has acted as the medium is a woman since the old time. The objects, such as double swords, a bunch of black plum leaves, and clothes, are arranged for Chao Pho. An ensemble *pi phat mon* is used and it was found that both Mon and Thai songs are played.

Each family in the village will have a tray of offerings for Chao Pho. Each tray consists of edible items mostly used in the rituals, such as a bunch of bananas, a young coconut, red and white colored desserts made with flour. The most interesting object is a thin bamboo strip bent and attached in every tray. It is bent in accordance with the number of the family members so that all of them will be protected by Chao Pho. It is as if they communicate with Chao Pho using a bamboo strip as the medium. This is the way they have continuously practiced since the old time.

In Mon belief, every Mon temple has a guardian spirit called *Tala Than* or in short *Lathan*. The house of *Tala Than* is mostly to the east of the temple. *Tala Than* of Wat Paramaiyikavas, for example, is well respected by both the villagers and the monks. Food from any rites held at the temple must also be offered to the spirit. A monk-to-be will have to pay respect to the spirit as if to inform him of his ordination. Before any construction in the temple grounds, the spirit must be informed. If not, they believe the construction may not be successful.

Furthermore, the belief in ancestral spirits has persisted as a few families worship the Snake Spirit or Turtle Spirit. One family has a shelf to keep cloth. Another family even keeps a figure of a snake and a box storing the cloth. Some families still stick to the old customs, for example, they do not accept ones outside the families to spend a night in their houses for fear that it will displease the spirits; or when they buy a whole chicken for cooking, they must offer it to ancestral spirits first before cooking it; some do not keep dolls at home.

In Mon tradition, the people do not erect a spirit shrine for “Phra Phum” in their houses as they already have ancestral spirits to protect them. Living in a Thai environment, they have adopted the cult of Phra Phum. However, it was found that some still follow the old way, i.e., they do not have Phra Phum shrines in their houses.

It is evident that Mon traditions are based on three main components: the Buddhist religion, the social value of gratitude, and animistic beliefs. These three components not only help enhance the order and unity in their society, but also strengthen their culture and traditions. Monness still runs through their ways of living and thinking despite the fact that they have been “a people without a country” for over 200 years. Transformed elements are caused by the passage of time, the environment and waves of rapid changes which are hard to withstand. However, attempts have been made to preserve their heritage.

## **5.2 Discussion: Factors Determining the Transmission of Mon Beliefs and Rituals in the Mon Community at Ko Kret**

The factors determining the transmission of the old Mon rituals and beliefs at the Mon community of Ko Kret can be related to these following areas.

### 5.2.1 Ethnic Consciousness

The most important factor, I believe, lies in their ethnic consciousness that still remains in them. Ethnic consciousness results in the continuity of the practices according to their tradition.

At present, a lot of people no longer speak Mon, and do not know about Mon history as much as the academics, but they still perceive that they are ethnic Mon. Monness expresses itself in their beliefs, rituals and other aspects. Mon elements can be identified in the rites, such as the traditional funeral rites of monks and laymen, Songkran Festival, Bun Klang Ban, Tak Bat Nam Phueng, Tak Bat Dok Mai Thoop Tian or the annual Ram Chao Pho rite. Old animistic beliefs have still been carried on. They believe in the guardian spirits of the villages, for example, Chao Pho Noom and Chao Pho Kamphaeng Muang. They also have guardian spirits of the temples called *Tala Than* and ancestral spirits. They still follow some old rules. They do not accept ones outside their families to spend a night in their houses without informing the ancestral spirits. For some families, if they buy a whole chicken, they will offer it to the ancestral spirits first before cooking it. They neither take a coffin, nor keep the dead remains in their houses. They do not dispose of the remains of the dead in the water.

Mon music, *pi phat mon*, and the performing art of Mon dance, *mon ram*, are preserved and transmitted. Mon ritual food such as *khao chae* (ข้าวแช่), *khao piang* (ข้าวเปียก) and daily food as *alat ber* (อัดเบอ – พริกกับเกลือ), *kaeng krajiab* (แกงกระเจี๊ยบ), *kaeng matad* (แกงมะตาด), *mi krob* (หมี่กรอบ), and desserts, such as *hantra* (หั้นตรา) and *khanom phakkad* (ขนมผักกาด) as described before, can still be seen.

Apart from monks, some people, although they cannot write Mon, can still speak Mon well, although the number is small. Many villagers, although they do not speak Mon, can pray in Mon while attending religious ceremonies. They practice praying in Mon by reciting the Mon language written in Thai provided by some Mon monks.

In modern times, many Mon people at Ko Kret are well educated. They receive high level education or go abroad to further their studies. Some of them work among the Thais, but still with an ethnic consciousness which will present itself occasionally. The late Dr. Sued Gajaseni, who had some relationship with the Mon community at Ko Kret, worked among the Thai leading doctors, but often came to visit Ko Kret to talk with Mon monks he knew or to practice Mon music or language. The artisan Lieutenant General Chativat Ngarmniyom is another good case. Before retirement, he was a high ranking military officer in the Royal Thai Military. He worked among Thai officers, but back home he practiced Mon arts with his Mon monk teacher. He now preserves Mon arts and crafts and has completely devoted himself to work for Wat Paramaiyikavas after his retirement.

The Mon community at Ko Kret emphasizes cultural promotion and the strength of the community under the guidance of Phra Sumetmuni, the abbot of Wat Paramaiyikavas, and some leading persons in the belief that Mons will not vanish if Mon cultural heritage is well preserved and transmitted.

### **5.2.2 The Role of the Local Leaders**

Also important are the roles of the local leaders who are knowledgeable about and have a good understanding of their own origin and cultural heritage. Without these leaders, some rituals may have disappeared. As happened in the past, the ritual of making *khao piang* to worship the Leaning Pagoda of Wat Paramaiyikavas at dawn was neglected after the leader died.

It can obviously be seen that there are quite a lot of key people in the Mon community at Ko Kret who play an important role in cultural preservation and transmission. Examples are as follows.

#### **- Phra Sumetmuni**

Phra Sumetmuni (พระสุเมตมุนี), 61, is the current abbot of Wat Paramaiyikavas in Village VII. Apart from being a spiritual leader, he takes a leading role in supporting

and encouraging the people to conserve Mon cultural heritage. Oral tradition is often used by him to disseminate knowledge about the Mon to the people. In religious ceremonies, he often repeats that Mons had a great civilization and had their own language and culture, as if to remind the people not to forget their origin. Instead, they should be proud of their history and help preserve and teach their children to preserve Mon heritage.

He supports various kinds of cultural activities. For example, he allows the area of the temple to be used to hold several cultural activities, particularly at Songkran time. He set up a building in the temple area to be used for Mon fireworks making. He even funded the making of fireworks in order to preserve the tradition. The making of the centipede flags used in Songkran Festival is also supported by the temple.

In 2007, Wat Paramaiyikavas, with cooperation from the Bank of Saving, established a Learning Center to disseminate knowledge about Ko Kret, the Mons of Ko Kret and their cultural heritage to the people and the tourists. Later, because the former curator left the monkhood, the Learning Center has rarely been open because they cannot yet find a suitable curator.

Phra Sumetmuni still preserves the language by chanting in Mon-Pali as in the old time and as wished by King Rama V when he came to restore the temple. Monks who are ordained at this temple must practice praying in Mon-Pali too. He also encourages the people to practice chanting in Mon-Pali. Sometimes he preaches using Mon and some people, although less in number, still understand. He often speaks Mon with the people who still know the language in order that they will not forget. Recently, he made an attempt to transmit the language heritage by opening a Mon language class at the temple to teach the children as in the past. The children were from the temple school. Unfortunately, the class stopped since the great flood in 2011.

It can also be said that he is the first to promote cultural tourism in the Mon community at Ko Kret to help increase the people's income after a series of floods many years ago.

- **Mr. Watcharin Rochanapanich**

Mr. Watcharin Rochanapanich was the Chief of Pak Kret District during 1997-2002. He cooperated with Phra Sumetmuni to improve Ko Kret and the living condition of the people after a series of floods before he came, leading to the revival of some Mon traditions, particularly Songkran Festival, and cultural tourism promotion in order to help increase the people's income. Even after his retirement, he occasionally comes back to participate and also to support several activities.

- **Lieutenant General Chativat Ngamniyom**

Lieutenant General Chativat Ngamniyom (พลโท ชาติวัฒน์ งามนิยม), nearly 66, is a retired military officer, living in Pak Kret. He possesses knowledge of Mon arts and crafts transmitted to him from his late Mon teacher who moved to Wat Sanam Nue from a Mon community in Samut Sakhon. In fact, he lives at Pak Kret, but has become the main artisan working unpaid for Wat Paramaiyikavas for a long time. He is an expert in building Mon coffins and temporary pyres used for monk's funerals, making Mon fireworks and the local art of golden papers perforating into patterns used as decorations. He used to teach a short course on the art of golden papers perforation to the students from the schools in Pak Kret. The project was organized and funded by some state enterprise. When the project finished, the students left and did not come back. According to him, it was quite difficult since the equipment used for this activity was not available in any shop. He had to make it himself. He wants to transmit his knowledge, but still cannot find a student. He used to teach some villagers, but they did not come regularly.

- **Mr. Thonghaw Ngiew-ok**

Mr. Thonghaw Ngiew-ok (นายทองหล่อ งิ้วออก), a former potter of 83, belongs to Village I. He knows some Mon language. He is a senior ritual specialist who knows the procedure of the rites and can often be seen taking a major role in several rites.

His sons work elsewhere and are not involved in this activity. There are some other neighbors who can possibly take over this duty when Mr. Thonghaw is away. One of his nephews also has the potential to take over his duty in the future.

Importantly, for decades Mr. Thonghaw has dedicated his land to be used as the gathering place of the villagers during Songkran Festival every year. It is a suitable place for the activities such as *khao chae* making or Bun Klang Ban. At present, the community is crowded and the land is all owned. The tradition of *rong than* or the rite Bun Klang Ban can disappear if the owners of the land no longer give permission to use their vacant land as the gathering places of the villages. At Pak Kret or at Klong Glua community, the Bun Klang Ban rite has long disappeared since no open space was available.

As a former skilful potter and jar maker, he often demonstrates pottery making to groups of visitors who are interested in studying pottery of the Mons at Ko Kret. In the past three years, he was invited many times by potter villages in Sawannakhet in Lao People's Democratic Republic to give advice on kiln building and pottery.

- **Mr. Chalomsak Pala**

Mr. Chalomsak Pala (นายเฉลิมศักดิ์ ปาลา), early 50s, belongs to Village I and is a teacher at Wat Bo School (โรงเรียนวัดบ่อ). He is one of the key persons in the preparation of the important annual Ram Chao Pho rite. His young daughter is a good dancer and can often be seen in cultural activities. He can speak and write Mon. He tries to disseminate knowledge about Mon by showing a map depicting the ancient Mon kingdom on his house wall or other symbols, such as *hamsa* flags or wearing Mon costume while selling goods from the Mon on weekends. At school, he often gives his students information about the Mon.

- **Mr. Samak Krobbang**

Mr. Samak Krobbang (นายสมัคร กรอบบาง), about 73 from Village I, has made offerings with the help from his wife and children for the Ram Chao Pho rite

continually for many years for little profit. If he and his family decided to end this business, it might result in the inconvenience of the rite.

- **Mr. Surachat Chayakon**

Mr. Surachat Chayakon (นายสุรฉัตร ชยากร), 49, belongs to Village I. His family is the owner of the land on which the shrine of Chao Pho Noom is located and the ritual ground where the Ram Chao Pho rite is annually held. He is also one of the key persons who helps in the arrangement of the Ram Chao Pho rite and other religious rites at Wat Paramaiyikavas.

- **Captain Phairat Ratanaudom**

Captain Phairat Ratanaudom (นาวาเอก ไพรัตน์ รัตนอุดม รน.), early 50 from Village I, is enthusiastic about Mon heritage preservation, particularly the Mon game called *saba* (สะบ้า). He is Mr. Thonghaw Ngiew-ok's nephew and can speak Mon. He has good knowledge about the game and plays it very well. He has trained several teenagers of Village I. At Songkran Festival, he leads these boys and girls to demonstrate this tradition at Wat Paramaiyikavas. He even provides Mon costumes for them from his vast collection. He and his uncle have tried to instill in them the awareness of their tradition, as well as to get them close to the religion by making them the *khao chae* bearers in the *khao chae* procession and offer it to the monks. However, they sometimes take a long time to dress themselves and have to be forced to form the procession.

- **Mr. Somchitr Ronkhao**

Mr. Somchitr Ronkhao (นายสมจิตร รนขาว) of Village VII inherited a Mon classical music band, *pi phat mon*, from his ancestors. The band has been transmitted from Mr. Yam (แหมม) his grandfather to his father, and his father to him. The name of the band in the past was Yamsilp (แหมมศิลป์) derived from his grandfather's name. At present, it is known as Somchitr Silp and it is the only *pi phat mon* band left in Ko Kret. The



musicians from the Fine Arts Department have come to study Mon songs at his house. In addition to cultural show on weekends, his band plays an important part in many rites, such as some religious rites, some celebrations, funeral rites and the Ram Chao Pho rite. His band consists of Thai and Mon, both old and young musicians. They are both friends and relatives. Therefore, an inheritor may not be too difficult to find.

- **Mrs. Prung Wongchamnong**

At the age of about 83, Mrs. Prung Wongchamnong (นางปรุง วงศ์จันทร์) can still walk about 300 metres from her house in the west of Village VII to Wat Paramaiyikavas School in the east of the same village once a week to teach the performing art of *mon ram* to the girl students. *Mon ram* of Ko Kret has been continually transmitted from generation to generation since their first settlement at Ko Kret. Mrs. Prung Wongchamnong is not the only *mon ram* teacher of the community, but she is the most senior at present. In the past, there were several *mon ram* teachers in the Mon community at Ko Kret. Mrs. Chamnai Thongpetch (นางจำหน่าย ทองเพชร), who died of old age, at 89, as mentioned in Chapter III, was among them. Another one is Grandma Sa-ad Lamyathong (คุณยายสะอาด ลำไยทอง) who is now 92-93 years old and has stopped teaching for many years. Several good *mon ram* dancers in the community trained *mon ram* with them. Some of them transmit it to the present generation by teaching at schools or at their own houses.

### 5.2.3 The Role of Mon People at Ko Kret

The people are willing to participate in all activities. By nature, they are religious and enthusiastic in making merit, so cooperation and donation will not be declined when requested. Some people have moved to live elsewhere, but come back to take part in the activities since they still realize the importance of their traditions. Examples are Mr. Samak Krobbang's daughters who come to help his father make the offerings for Chao Pho Noom as ordered by the neighbors every year.

Of all the villagers in the three villages, those of Village I are the most active in cultural activities. For Village VI and VII, the villagers seem to concentrate more on earning a living by selling goods to the tourists. Their business is profitable since most of the tourists like to take this direction, although it is much quieter in Village I. For example, the villagers in Village VII choose a day during the week to hold the Bun Klang Ban rite since they are very busy on the weekends. The rite to worship Chao Pho Kamphaeng Muang of Village VI cannot be held every year since the leading lady is old and not in good health.

#### **5.2.4 The Role of Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations**

The Provincial Cultural Center of Nonthaburi, which is now under the Provincial Cultural Council (สำนักงานวัฒนธรรมจังหวัดนนทบุรี), helped to arrange the museum of pottery collection at Wat Paramaiyikavas about 20 years back. Another non-governmental organization is the Government Savings Bank which supported the establishment of the Learning Center at Wat Paramaiyikavas as mentioned before. The OTOP Center at Village I was established with the help of the Community Development Office of Pak Kret District (สำนักงานพัฒนาชุมชนอำเภอปากเกร็ด) aiming at the dissemination of knowledge about Mon pottery.

#### **5.2.5 Geographical Feature of Ko Kret**

Ko Kret is an island. Around 9 or 9.30 p.m., when the ferries stop their service, Ko Kret is as if it were cut off from the outside world. The connection with the world resumes around 5.30 a.m. Furthermore, there are no night entertainment places. As a result, Ko Kret is left quiet and undisturbed from the evening onwards. This is a big contrast as compared with Pak Kret, just a stone's throw away, where the traffic is heavy from morning until night every day. Some people used to run a guesthouse to respond to tourism, but the business did not go well and it was closed.

Ko Kret's geographical feature also affects the community settlement. The people's houses are close to each other and clustered along the river banks, which in the past contributed to traveling and pottery trading. The inner areas are for

agricultural purposes. By these factors, the community is physically close together which makes it easy to communicate or spread news or announcements about various events. It is also easy for gatherings to conduct various activities such as *khao chae* making, Bun Klang Ban, or funeral rites.

The fact that Ko Kret is an island contributes very much to tourism. The people can express Monness to attract the interest of the tourists through channels such as food, costume or language. The word Mon is used to attract the tourists. They make the ritual food *khao chae* to sell and name it *khao chae mon* or *khao chae raman*. Some shops have Mon names written in Mon (and Thai) script. An owner of a shop is sometimes seen in Mon costume. A red flag with a figure of *hamsa* in the middle, a Mon map and Mon history, and sometimes Mon words are attached to the house walls to be clearly seen. It is as if they want to take the opportunity to spread Mon culture and identity to the tourists. At the same time, tourism may affect Monness as mentioned at the end of Chapter IV. Improper cultural management can also damage and affect the traditions practiced and that have been passed down for generations.

### **5.3 Contribution to Mon Studies**

This thesis is written in English and it is hoped that it will be one of the very few English texts providing information about the Mon community at Ko Kret. Many years ago, a PhD student from Germany came for information for his doctoral degree research. However, he only studied the Mon language Tipitakas, a possession of Wat Paramaiyikavas. It is my hope that this thesis may be of some use to foreigners who are interested in learning about old Mon beliefs that are still retained and practiced at the Mon community of Ko Kret. I also hope that it will be useful for comparative studies with other Mon communities in Thailand.

This thesis provides data and analysis on Monness through the persisting Mon rituals. Thus, this thesis contributes to Mon Studies in different aspects as compared

to those previously written which were mostly about land use, clay pottery, tourism, administration and so on in the Mon community of Ko Kret. This thesis provides current and in-depth information about the persistence of Mon rituals and beliefs and the analysis of Monness through ritual objects. Observations have been done all year round in Village I, Village VI and Village VII which are the Mon villages in Ko Kret.

As long as Monness is preserved, Mon will still exist. However, the world is moving on, leading the people into an unknown future. Thus, no one knows for sure for how long the Mon people will be able to preserve their ethnic identity and to what extent they will submit themselves to the changes.

#### **5.4 Suggestion for Further Research**

For those who wish to do research on the Mon community at Ko Kret, there are many more aspects to be investigated. For example, they may investigate the cultural aspects of language and food. Regarding language, both written and spoken Mon used at Ko Kret is different from that used in the modern day. Comparative studies may help identify the differences which will contribute to Mon Studies. Comparative studies of the Mon language at Ko Kret and at the communities in other regions should also be done. In the case of food culture, it would be equally interesting and enjoyable to survey Mon food that has persisted today and its evolution. Particularly, at present, there still are several people who can be informants.

The attitude of the youth towards their cultural heritage and the governmental sector policy on Mon cultural conservation or the involvement of governmental and non-governmental organizations is also very interesting and should be analyzed, the result of which indicate the tendency of the Ko Kret Mon heritage to be maintained in the future.

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

The author Chayanut Intudom was born at Pak Kret District, Nonthaburi Province. Starting her primary and secondary schoolings in Nonthaburi, she furthered her high school and tertiary levels in Bangkok. She graduated B.A. (Thai Language) from the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University; and has worked at the Office of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn's Personal Affairs Division.