

# A NOTE ON THE TOPONYMY OF THE ANCIENT KANTOLI IN PENINSULAR THAILAND

by

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During the past 80 years or so Western scholars have been concerned with the problem of identifying the ancient Kingdom of Kan-t'o-li, already mentioned as such in the Chinese annals of the Leang which date from the middle of the fifth century A.D. The generally accepted hypothesis at present is that Kan-t'o-li, a predecessor of the Kingdom of Śrīvijaya, was situated on the isle of Sumatra.<sup>1</sup> Krom and Moens, Dutch specialists on Śrīvijaya, concur.<sup>2</sup> Now an almost exhaustive treatment of the Kan-t'o-li problem is available in the recently published *Early Indonesian Commerce; A study of the origins of Śrīvijaya* by O.W. Wolters.<sup>3</sup>

Having re-examined the existing Chinese historical sources, Professor Wolters, like Coedès, assumes that Kan-t'o-li must at one time have existed on the southeast coast of Sumatra; he does not, however, suggest an exact location.<sup>4</sup> Professor Wolters' positive position on the toponymy of Kan-t'o-li is embodied in the following conclusions:

- 1) Ferrand, G., 'Le K'ouen-Louen et les Anciennes Navigations Interocéaniques dans les Mers de Sud' *Journal Asiatique* vol 14 Sept-Oct 1919, App. III; Le Kan-T'o-Li, pp 238-41. Coedès, G., *Les États Hindouïstes d'Indochine et d'Indonésie* Paris 1964, p 108.
- 2) Krom, N.J., *Hindoe-Javaansche Geschiedenis* 1931 pp 84 & 98. Moens, J., 'De Noord-Sumatraanse rijken der Parfums en Specerijen in Voor-Moslimse tijd' *Tijdschrift Voor Indische Taal-, Land-En Volkenkunde* 1955 vol 75 pt 3. For discussion of Kan-t'o-li see pp 342-45.
- 3) Wolters, O.W., *Early Indonesian Commerce; A study of the origins of Śrīvijaya* Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York 1967.
- 4) Wolters *op. cit.* In the legend for map 3 is noted: 'In no case is an exact location suggested, though the author believes that *Kan-t'o-li*, in its prime controlled the centres later known as Palembang and Jambi and that *P'o-lu* was somewhere in the extreme north of Sumatra'. On map 3 Kan-t'o-li is located on the southeast coast of Sumatra, at the present-day Jambi-Palembang area.

None of the reasons so far advanced for regarding *Kan-t'o-li* as an Indonesian kingdom is conclusive, but it does not seem rash to accept *Kan-t'o-li* as Indonesian rather than a kingdom to be squeezed *faute de mieux* into some hitherto ignored part of the peninsular coast. (p 163)

None of these considerations shows beyond doubt that *Kan-t'o-li* flourished as the chief trading kingdom of south-eastern Sumatra, but they are sufficiently serious so that it will not be misleading if henceforth in this study *Kan-t'o-li* is located on the coast of south-eastern Sumatra. (p 212)

There can be little doubt that the most important of the trading kingdoms before the rise of Śrīvijaya was *Kan-t'o-li* which deserves an honoured place in histories of Indonesia. (p 245)

It must be noted that no place by the name of Kantoli, Kantuli or Kandari is to be found in Sumatra—though a 'Kendari' is located in eastern Celebes according to *Aardrijkskundig Woordenboek* (Indonesia p 122).<sup>5</sup> This point has been noted by Pelliot.<sup>6</sup> Gerini in 1909 drew attention to the existence of a small place on the east coast of peninsular Thailand, today a railway station 32 kilometres north from Jaiya, called Khanthulī.<sup>7</sup> It is now established practice among scholars to

- 5) In the Chinese texts Kan-t'o-li that is, Kandārī, is situated on an island in the Southern Sea. See Krom *op. cit.* p 84; also Ferrand *op. cit.* p 240.
- 6) Pelliot, P., 'Deux itinéraires de Chine en Inde a la fin du VIIIe siècle', *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* vol 4 pp 131-413. For Kan-t'o-li see p 401.
- 7) Gerini, G.E., *Researches on Ptolemy's Geography of Eastern Asia* London 1901. The evidence on p 602 note 2 reads: 'At some 15 miles above C'haiyā (Jayā) as the crow flies, and 14½ northwards of Lem Sai (the Lem Sie of the Admiralty charts), the northern extremity of Bandōn Bight. There is no mention of it in the "China Sea Directory," 4th ed. 1889, vol. ii; and in Admiralty chart No. 989 the term has been perverted into *Kantre*, "Lem Kantre" (meant for Khanthulī Promontory), being the only name marked there. However the mouth of the stream debouching here is more correctly entered as *Pak Kantoollee* in the Straits Branch Royal Asiatic Society's map of the Malay Peninsula, 1887; while it is mutilated into *Pak-nam T'u-lee* in the new edition of that map published in 1898, and the stream marked *Klg. Kantre* (for Khlōng Khanthulī). In McCarthy's map nothing but *Paknam T'uli* appears, taken, of course, from older sources. The *Kanturi* Hills are first mentioned in an article initialled H.A. (= Henry Alabaster) in the *Bangkok Calendar* for 1873, p. 114. The correct name is, as I found out on inquiry,

disregard Gerini's proposed identifications of ancient names, more particularly his reconstructions of ancient Chinese toponyms; nevertheless, in this instance, the evidence cannot be ignored, particularly not because the hamlet Khanthuli is situated close to ancient Jaiya where epigraphical as well as archeological evidence of the early Śrīvijaya period is firmly established.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the 'hitherto ignored

*Khanthulī* (Gaṇḍulī, so written in Siānese), which is applied to the river, to a village near its mouth, and to the hill range running closely parallel to the coast at that point. The original name may have been Malay: *Kanduri* = 'rat' in that language (in Khmer, *Kundur*, *Kondōr*); although the way it is spelled in Siamese suggests a derivation from the Sanskrit *Gaṇḍulī* (through *gaṇḍula* = 'bent', 'crooked'), a qualification probably applied to the river, which thus may have become known as *Gaṇḍulinadī*. *Kandulī* is the Bengali name for *Cometina nudiflora*, called *Kendru* in other districts. *Kandarī*, meaning grotto or cave, is another possible etymology.' In an additional note (p 603 note 1) Gerini quotes two more references to Kan-t'o-li from Chinese sources. The position of Kan-t'o-li identified by Gerini as present-day Khanthuli, is placed, therefore, north of Jaiya on the large synoptical map of 1909 that forms the frontispiece to his book.

- 8) In the latest edition (1964) of *Les États Hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie* Coedès does not entirely exclude the possibility that in the 8th century A.D. the centre of the Kingdom of Śrīvijaya may have been situated on the Malay Peninsula (Majumdar) or even at Jaiya as proposed by Wales (see page 174). The possibility during the 8th century is based on the reading of the two not-contemporary inscriptions engraved on opposite faces of the stone stele of Ligor = Nagara Śrī Dharmarāja, of which one is dated A.D. 775. These two juxtaposed inscriptions constitute the only available direct link between the King of Śrīvijaya and the Śailendra dynasty. In Jaiya I was reliably informed, however, that this so-called Ligor inscription no. XXIII—originally described by Coedès as coming from Vieng Srah—actually originated from Vat Vieng at Jaiya and that the *Candrabhānu* inscription no. XXIV of A.D. 1230 of Vat Vieng (Jaiya) came from Nagara Śrī Dharmarāja. I was informed that a mix-up occurred when the labels were switched in despatching both steles to Bangkok. Significantly, in the 2nd edition 'mise à jour' of *Recueil des Inscriptions du Siam, Deuxième Partie* (Bangkok 1961), Coedès does not exclude the possibility that this two-faced stele with the two fundamental Śrīvijaya inscriptions of which one is of Śāka 697 (A.D. 775), did indeed originate from Jaiya. 'Mais étant donné le caractère tendancieux de cette dernière hypothèse, il semble prématuré de modifier une nouvelle fois la dénomination de la stèle.' (p. 20).

part of the peninsular coast' into which Kan-t'o-li may be 'squeezed *faute de mieux*' may well be the Jaiya region.

Long intrigued by the Kan-t'o-li problem - and then stimulated by Moens' theory on the early kingdoms of 'perfumes and spice' - I made a field trip in April 1959 to Jaiya and *via* Thachana (formerly 'Nong Wai') to Khanthuli. My unpublished report notes that at the tiny railway station of Khanthuli there is nothing save a few shops amid dry bush and a sandy soil.<sup>9</sup> Later, an official investigation, mounted through the courtesy of the Director General of the Fine Arts Department and the State Railway of Thailand, yielded information concerning the origin of the name of this station. The letter from the Railway authorities, dated 5th August 1959, makes two points: the name 'Khanthuli' was derived from the old name of the place, a usual occurrence in Thailand; the people of Khanthuli recall ruins of a great wall in the forest some 15 to 16 kilometres from the station.<sup>10</sup> No

9) Though no archeological evidence was found at Khanthuli, other than that a sandy path led to the Gulf from the railway station, I discovered some evidence of the Śrīvijaya period at Thachanadit, also near the shore and only 12 kilometres south of Khanthuli and 20 kilometres north of Jaiya. Behind Wat Pinek (*Ganeśa*) which was locally pointed out as the place of origin of the *mukhaliṅga* from 'Jaiya', were found three miniature, undecorated, solid brick structures (and remnants of two others) that showed affinity in style with Wat Kew (= Vajra) at Jaiya. See also 'Rice Sickles and Rice Knives used in Thailand', *The Kamthieng House, An Introduction Siam Society* 1966. pp 49-51 & map.

10) The letter is as follows :

(translation)

No. 1/5370/2502.

State Railway of Thailand

5th. August 2502.

Subject : The Name of Kanthuli Station  
 To : The Director General of Fine Arts Dept.  
 Reference : The letter of Thai State Railway No. 1/3751/2502  
 dd. 4th. June 2502.

Reference to our above mentioned letter regarding the appointment of the name of Kanthuli Station on the Southern Railway.

further enquiry was made. The learned station master informed me that Kanthuli (坎竹里) is the same word as 'Kandhārī' and means 'perfume dust'. It seems that in Chinese phonetics 'Kandhārī' would be 'Kan-t'o-li'. The local pronunciation is often heard as 'kanthurī'. Products which, according to the Chinese annals, were exported from Kan-t'o-li are not unique to Sumatra; some derive also from southern Thailand, though not at present from Khanthuli. These products are styrax benzoin dry, gum benzoin (kam yān กัมยาน), gharu wood (*Aquilaria* spp.), pepper (I saw pepper being dried in the sun at Jaiya and also red pepper), areca nuts—produced in great quantity and exported for excellent quality. Camphor is lacking, but in Thachana, 12 kilometres south of Khanthuli, is a hardwood locally called the camphor tree, *ton kārahūra* (ต้นกะหร่า) from which planks are sawn.<sup>11</sup> Again, though not all products attributed to Kan-t'o-li are found today in this area, it may be argued that in ancient days Kan-t'o-li acted as an entrepôt. Admiralty Chart Number 989, published in London in 1880 and revised to 1947, shows the coast north from Nakhon Si Thammarat. This is the chart, but for revisions, cited by Colonel Gerini. Figure 1,

Now we have received the reports from the officers concerned, after their investigation, that the name of this station was appointed from the popular calling of the villagers which may come from the word 'Kanthuri' (Letter 'L' to 'R') meaning the stone-bar in the water, because that place was previously next the sea, or from the word 'Kanduli' which is the name of the Malayan guardian spirit of the hill (CHEAW CHOA KAK) in front of the station, or from the word 'Kanpairi' applied to the mountains which afforded protection from the enemy in ancient times. But no one can confirm that the old town was situated here; though there is said to be ruins of a great wall in the forest about 15-16 km. from the station. The eldest chief of the district and the village there confirmed that the name of Kanthuli was the name of that place previously. If it was changed, it was done some time ago. We are.

Yours faithfully,

[Signed Nai Pun Skuntanak]  
Deputy Chief of Traffic Section  
Signed for the Director

11) Not to be confused with the shrub that yields the product camphor.

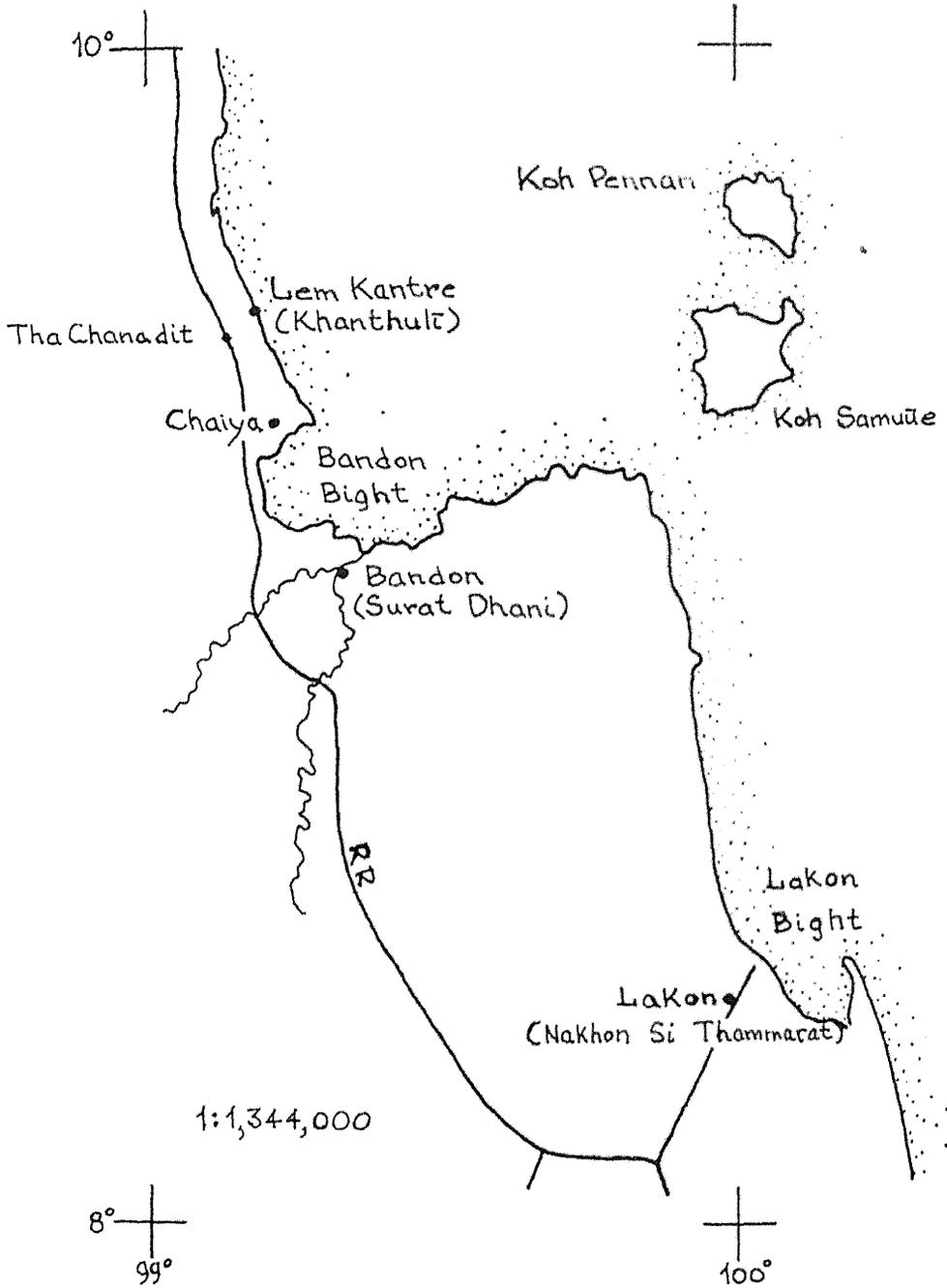


Figure 1  
Position of Lem Kantre (Khanthulī); East coast, peninsular Thailand

derived from this chart, shows the position of Khanthuli on the east facing coast of the peninsula. As Gerini observes, Khanthuli is corrupted to Lem (promontory) Kantre. The shallows immediately before Lem Kantre are characteristic of this emerging coast and the active siltation of harbours by sand transported by currents may partly account for the abandoning of Jaiya and similar entrepôts.

A review of the geographical position of Kan-t'o-li is warranted and an identification with the present hamlet called Khanthuli on the east coast of Thailand is favoured. This hamlet (*tambol*) is in District (*Amphur*) Tha Chanadit, Province (*Changvat*) Surat Dhani. Until 1915 Khanthuli and Tha Chana were in Muang Jaiya.<sup>12</sup> The implications of Gerini's proposed identification cannot now be discussed, but it is to be emphasized that the Chinese sources consider Kan-t'o-li the forerunner of Śrīvijaya.<sup>13</sup> Siting Kan-t'o-li on the east coast of peninsular Thailand, then, seriously questions the validity of Professor Wolters' argument concerning the origins of Śrīvijaya.

12) Following common practice, no diacritical marks have been used when romanising Thai toponyms. It should be noted however that Khanthuli correctly romanised becomes Khanthulī, while the official romanisation of the railway station's signboard *in situ* reads Kanthuli (กนฺทุลล). Tha Chana (ท่าชนะ) is correctly romanised as Thā Chana or 'landing of victory'; Jaiya becomes Jaiyā (ไชยา).

13) From one implication it would follow that as early as the middle of the 5th century A.D., a Buddhist king reigned in an area north of or around the bay of Bandon in present-day peninsular Thailand. The name of this ruler has been reconstituted as Śrīvaranarendra (or Īśvaranarendra) and he sent an envoy named Rudra, the Hindu, to the imperial court of China with presents. As his successor, reigned in 502 A.D., the Buddhist king Gautama Subhadra. See Ferrand *op. cit.* p 241 and Coedès *op. cit.* p 108.

