

# SOUTHERN THAI /KHLÒK/ : AN ETYMOLOGICAL SPECULATION

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## Introduction

In Southern Thai dialects, there is a word which is alternatively pronounced as [khlòk]<sup>1</sup> or [khlòk]. Its meaning as given in a Southern Thai Dialect Dictionary<sup>2</sup> is 'a type of weapon which has a sheath.' A Malay Dictionary (Kamus Dewan) reveals a similar word whose meaning is given as 'a type of short sword with a curving blade'. Another citation given in the same dictionary indicates that the word is also found in Jakarta, having the meaning 'a type of short sword.'<sup>3</sup> A Thai article written by a Buddhist monk in Southern Thailand<sup>4</sup> states that a short sword known as /khlòk/<sup>5</sup>, although difficult to find (in Thailand) nowadays, still exists in a museum in Pathalung Province, at Wat Phuphaphimuk. The sword was described as having a crescent shape. Thus it is speculated in this paper that this short sword is the same item; i.e. the weapon mentioned in the Southern Thai Dictionary for the meaning of the word /khlòk/, and that this word and the Malay word *golok* refer to the same thing. This word /khlòk/ does not occur in Standard Thai and is not in the Royal Thai Academy Dictionary. It is believed in this paper that this word is borrowed from the Malay word *golok*; i.e. /goloʔ/ in Standard Malay, with /g/ transformed into a Thai /kh/<sup>6</sup>, and combined with the /l/ of the second syllable of /goloʔ/ to form an initial consonant

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1. See Intarachat, Pitsamai. 'Unsur-Unsur Bahasa Melayu dalam Bahasa Thai Selatan,' in *Dewan Bahasa*, jilid 24, Ogos, 1980, for the earlier appearances of this word.
2. *Potchanaanukrom Paasaa Thin Tai*, Withayalai Khruu Songkhlaa, 1971.
3. *Kamus Umum Bahasa Indonesia* has the same word with the same explanation given for the second meaning in *Kamus Dewan*, thus revealing the existence of this item in Indonesia also.
4. Thaan Chaokhun Phra Thep Sarn Suthi, *Thephasarn Ban Haa*, Wat Phuphaphimuk, 1970.
5. For convenience, the phonemic representation /khlòk/ is used to represent the two possible phonetic realizations: [khlòk] and [khlòk]. The vowel /o/ is chosen as the base due to the Thai conventional writing, where the vowel sound of this word in Thai writing (กณ) corresponds to /o/ rather than /ɔ/.
6. The voiced velar stop /g/ is not one of the phonemes in Thai, although for some Southern Thai (normally Malay-Thai bilinguals in Southern Thailand), [g] does occur in words borrowed from Malay. The reader might note that a district on the Thailand side of the Malaysia-Thailand border in Narathiwat Province in Southern Thailand named /suŋǎi koiók/ (from Malay *sungai golok*), retains its Malay name. However, the Malay *golok* is written in standard Thai as กณ /kolók/, since to Thai ears the /g/ corresponds roughly to the voiceless unaspirated velar stop /k/ of their language.

cluster /khl-/, and the Malay final glottal stop /ʔ/ is replaced by a Thai /k/. Thus the Malay *golok* becomes a monosyllabic Southern Thai word /khlòk/.

### The Different Meanings of /khlòk/

/khlòk/ has three different meanings in Southern Thai : a sword, cashew nut, and the male sexual organ. The development of the meanings is speculated to be as follows :

1. The primary meaning, from which other meanings are derived, is a type of sword, formerly used in Southern Thailand. This type of sword is called /miit khlòk/, where /miit/ = knife.<sup>7a</sup>

There is some evidence to suggest that this type of sword can be traced as far back as the Srivichai Dynasty in Thailand<sup>8</sup>, following archaeological findings which reveal a type of cabalistic design (usually written on a piece of cloth)<sup>9</sup>. This type of cabalistic design is written in ancient Khom scripts, and it has a finished design resembling a /khlòk/ sword and, accordingly, is known as /jân nà<sup>ʔ</sup>mô daam khlòk/ (= a /khlòk/ cabalistic design). Thus, it is believed that this kind of sword had already existed in the Srivichai period, since the scripts used were the Khom scripts,<sup>10</sup> already in popular use at a time when Srivichai was at its height.

2. A further extended meaning of the word /khlòk/ is for the cashew fruit which is plentiful in Southern Thailand, India and elsewhere. The top of the cashew fruit has a /khlòk/ shaped pod which contains a nut inside. It is found that there are at least three different names for this kind of fruit in Southern Thai dialects, namely :

a) /húa khlòk/, where /húa/ = head; /khlòk/ is the word whose original meaning is a type of sword-like weapon.

b) /jâa ruàŋ/, where /jâa/ is a shortened form for the word /phrà<sup>ʔ</sup>jâa/ = an honourable title; and /ruàŋ/ = the former name of King Ramkhamhaeng.

c) /mà<sup>ʔ</sup>mùan hím<sup>ʔ</sup>mà<sup>ʔ</sup>phâan/, where /mà<sup>ʔ</sup>mùan/ = mango;<sup>11</sup> /hím<sup>ʔ</sup>mà<sup>ʔ</sup>phâan/ = another name for the Himalaya Mountains.

7. This is probably due to being an archaic loan; that is, the final /k/ in archaic Malay becomes /ʔ/ in modern Malay (cf. Dempwolff 1937 : 17 whose idea is restated in Collins, James T. 1981). I would like to thank Dr. David Thomas for reminding me of this possibility.

7a. Unless specified, all the pronunciations given are Southern Thai.

8. Srivichai was formerly believed to have had its spheres of influence in Palembang in Sumatra and Central Java. Later archeological and historical evidence indicate that its influence spread also to where it is now known as Chaiya, in Surat Thani Province in Thailand. It was believed that here was a centre of Buddhist studies, a place of artistic and cultural heritage (Musikakhama, 1972).

9. Thaen Chaokhun Phra Thep Sarn Suthi, 1970 : 4.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Notice that the top of this fruit also has the shape of a mango.

It should be noted that the first and the second names for the cashew fruit are used exclusively in Southern Thai dialects; the third name is also used in standard language.<sup>12</sup> So it is speculated that the adoption of the names for this fruit has come in three stages. The term /húa khlòk/ gained its name first as an extended use of the original meaning of /khlòk/. The second name, /jâaruàŋ/, is presumed to have gained its use later in the time of King Ramkhamhaeng. Tradition has it that during the years 1273–1293 when King Ramkhamhaeng was spreading his influence from the north of his territory to the South, he stopped his military troops at what is now known as Pathalung Province during the season when the cashew fruit ripened. The king enquired from his southern subjects about the name of this fruit, which was not found in Sukhothai, the capital of Thailand in those days. His southern subjects, with the intention of pleasing the King, answered that the name of the fruit was /jâaruàŋ/.<sup>13</sup> The third name is not considered a dialectical term, since it is a common term from Standard Thai, a word of Sanskrit origin. The reason for the adoption of this name is not clear, since cashew trees are also grown in Southern Thailand, therefore, the name for the cashew need not have any connection with the Himalaya Mountains. However, it is stated in *Thepsarn Ban Haa* that this name is believed to have come about at a time when Indian epics were being popularized in Thailand,<sup>14</sup> and that the introduction of this word was designed to avoid the association with the existing vernacular use of the word /khlòk/ for the male sexual organ (see further discussion on the third meaning of /khlòk/). This opinion is still disputable since the name /jâaruàŋ/ should have already been in existence before the name /hímmâ'phâan/ came about. However, it should be noted that this phenomenon is common in Thai where there are certain names of fruits and vegetables that may have suggestive vulgar meanings in the vernacular terminologies, which are later replaced by acceptable names, mostly sacred names, or names from Hindu epics, to counter the alleged offensive connotations of the former terms.

On the Malay side, a finding from my Malay room cleaner in the University of Malaya,<sup>15</sup> Kuala Lumpur, and a few Malay fruit sellers in Kuala Lumpur reveals that the fruit is known as *janggus*.<sup>16</sup> An entry from *Kamus Dewan* on the word *janggus* indicates that the fruit is also known as *jambu golok*, *jambu monyet*, *kajus*, and also

12. The word is pronounced /má'múaŋ hímmâ'phaan/ in Standard Thai.

13. My speculation is that /jâaruàŋ/ probably gained its use after the spread of the story.

14. And this was after King Ramkhamhaeng's reign.

15. I was doing my Malay Linguistics doctorate degree in Malaysia under an ASEAN fellowship at the time.

16. In fact, the answers obtained ranged from /jagus/, /jakus/, to /janggus/, and some gave /kajus/ and /gajus/, the last two of which are believed to have been influenced by the English 'cashew'.

*gajus*.<sup>17</sup> From this, it can be deduced that the name /húa khlòk/, used to refer to a type of fruit, is also loaned from the extended use of the Malay word *golok* (i.e. *jambu golok*). It also supports the earlier speculation that the Southern Thai name /húa khlòk/ for the fruit existed prior to the other two names : /jàarúan/ and thus also /mà'mùan hím-mà'phaan/.

3. The Southern Thai /khlòk/ is also used dialectically and jocularly for the male sexual organ. It is interesting to note that in Southern Thailand there is a character in the shadow plays featured as a man carrying the /khlòk/ weapon.<sup>18</sup> His appearance always provokes laughter from the audience, who probably grasp the double meaning automatically. And this double meaning is also found in the Malay word *golok*.

### Summary

The etymological speculation of the Southern Thai /khlòk/ can be summarized as follows : /khlòk/ is a loan-word from Malay, having the basic meaning 'a type of sword'. Two extended uses of the word follow : for a type of fruit and as a vernacular term for the male sexual organ. The finding from the Malay side on the usages of *golok* indicates that the two extended meanings of /khlòk/ in Southern Thai are also loans.

### REFERENCES

- Collins, James T., 'Kajian Dialek Daerah dan Rekonstruksi Bahasa Purba', *Simposium Dialek*, Bangi, UKM, December, 1981.
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17. *Kamus Dewan* does not give these equivalents in the entry for the word 'golok'.

18. This character also occurs in the Indonesian and Malay shadow plays or *Wayang Kulit*.