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ADDITIONAL REMARKS TO *SLING* 137(1): 83–84 AND 138(2): 75–78¹

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In the course of etymological – and more generally linguistic – work, there may sometimes be a tendency to ignore more marginal reflections including those which proved to be speculative and indeed even those that were subsequently recognized as erroneous (e.g. the countless popular or folk etymologies that are in circulation). When the author of these lines occasionally turned to the Chinese term *Āhōng* [阿訇] (= “Imām”, Muslim scribe [also as honorary title] etc.) (Knüppel 2020), he also dealt with onomastic interpretations in this meaning context in an addendum (Knüppel 2021) – admittedly without knowing that he would stumble again later over this term in completely different contexts. Some reflections on the first Western document as well as interpretations of Malay titles from the Chinese environment of Southeast Asia connected to it are now given here in addition to the two short articles.

On the one hand, it should be mentioned here that the term first appears in Europe (or to be more exact, in the German-speaking world) in the *Vorbericht* [“Preliminary Report”] to von Strahlenberg’s work. There, a source to whom von Strahlenberg owed the manuscript of Abū’l-Ġāzī Bahādur Ḥān’s *Šajara-i Turk* is apparently mentioned by his title (*Agun*):

Wie ich mich aber absonderlich an ihren vornehmsten Priester, Agun Asbackewitz genannt, so ein gar freundlicher Mann war, adressirte, wurden mir unter andern seiner Uhrkunden, die er hatte, auch zwene Manuscripta von ihm hervorgezogen, eines betreffend die Persischen Dynastien, das andere aber die Tatarey, welches

¹ The article was written as a result of socio-linguistic field research among Chinese Muslims in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia during the summer of 2022.

letztere er nur Tzingis oder Zingis item: Kitap oder Buch nannte, beyde aber aus der Stadt Turckestan erhalten hatte [...].²

Sezgin had already correctly interpreted the title and name as *Āchund Özbekoğlu* (Sezgin 2003: 130).

On the other hand, the etymologization of the Malay *agung* ~ *agong* as a component of titles given to rulers and other dignitaries by Chinese Muslims as well as those familiar with Chinese Islam, as being either of Chinese (and indirectly Persian) origin or of Persian origin mediated by Indian influence is of interest. Indeed, *agung* ~ *agong* is found in the title of the King of Malaysia, *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* (since 1993: *Seri Paduka Baginda Yang di-Pertuan Agong*), his consort, *Seri Paduka Baginda Raja Permaisuri Agong*, and his deputy, *Ke Bawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Timbalan Yang di-Pertuan Agong*.

In this instance, however, *agung* ~ *agong* means ‘great, supreme, principal etc.’,³ even if it is – as in Chinese (and previously in Persian) – a title. What is astonishing about this etymology is that although the Chinese title *Āhōng* is well-known among the Chinese Muslims of Southeast Asia, it is not in use – neither as an honorary title for scribes nor in the meaning of ‘Imām’. It is difficult to determine the explanation for this folk etymology. However, apart from the supposed apparent similarity of the words, it is probably based on the fact that leaders are sometimes viewed as Imāms, even if they are not Muslim clerics. Of course, the fact that members of many Chinese Muslim communities in Southeast Asia have lost much of their knowledge of specifically Chinese Muslim terminology, which in a predominantly Muslim environment has given way to Arabic and Persian terms, but also English translations and Malay “equivalents”, has had an effect here (sometimes there has even been a widespread loss of one’s own mother tongue – for example in areas of Indonesia).⁴

References

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² ‘But when I addressed their most distinguished priest, called Agun Asbackewitz, who was a very friendly man, I was also given, among other things, two manuscripts by him, one concerning the Persian dynasties, the other the Tartary, which he only called Tzingis or Zingis item: Kitap or Book, but both of which he had received from the city of Turckestan [...]’ (von Strahlenberg 1726: 34).

³ Marsden (1812, col. 12a): “اڠوع *agūng* principal, chief, head”; Wilkinson (1901, col. 28b): “اڠوع *agong*. Jav. Great; mighty; powerful; dignified, stately. The word is also used for ladies, apparently with the mere meaning of ‘beautiful’”; Mayer (1906, col. 6b): “Agoeng (Jav.), groot, voornaamste”; Shellabear (1912, col. 2a): “*a’gong* (Jav.), great, in certain phrases [...]” etc.

⁴ The author will comment on this in more detail in this journal shortly.

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