

THE CATALOGUING OF MALAY NAMES - A 1961 PAPER

Ibrahim bin Ismail
University of Malaya Library

Abstrak: Makalah ringkas ini ialah mengenai penemuan satu kod peraturan, yang kurang diketahui, bagi pengkatalogan nama-nama Melayu yang telah dibentangkan dalam International Conference on Cataloguing Principles di Paris dari 9 hingga 18 Oktober 1961.

Abstract: This short article is about the discovery of a little-known code of rules for the cataloguing of Malay names which was presented at the International Conference on Cataloguing Principles in Paris from 9th till 18th October 1961.

The International Conference on Cataloguing Principles (ICCP) was organized by the International Federation of Library Associations under the sponsorship of the Council on Library Resources and held in the Unesco Conference Building in Paris from 9th till 18th October 1961. The significance of this Conference for the future of international cataloguing is now a well entrenched chapter in the annals of library science.

This important and ground-breaking Conference was attended by delegates from fifty-three countries and twelve international organizations. In all there were one hundred and five participants comprising the Organizing Committee appointed in London in 1959 and the authors of the Working Papers commissioned by the Committee. There were also present ninety-six observers from twenty-two countries. The Federation of Malaya was not represented. Singapore was represented by Mrs Wang-Chen Hsiu Chin in her capacity as the President of the Library Association of Singapore.

The Organizing Committee had provided time for sectional meetings on certain subjects which although related to the theme of the Conference were considered to be only marginal to its main purpose or too specialized in character to be discussed in the General Sessions. One of the Sectional Meeting was on Arabic, Indonesian and Malayan names on Thursday afternoon, 12th October 1961 and was attended by eight members representing six countries: Australia, Indonesia, Lebanon, Malaya [sic], Nigeria

and the United States. Mrs Wang-Chen Hsin Chin's paper bore the title **Malay Names, and Indian Muslim Names in Malaya.**¹

A universally acceptable code of rules for the cataloguing of Malay names has been the subject of debate and discussion amongst professionals and academicians for over three decades now. The code in use currently in Malaysian libraries was prepared by the Sub-Committee on the Revision of Rules for Malay Names and approved by the National Committee for Cataloguing and Classification. The National Library of Malaysia endorsed it on 22 February 1993.² Prior to this, there have been several codes prepared by individuals and groups for presentation at conferences and seminars and published in conference proceedings and in professional journals. Each new code has taken advantage of the research and discussions on Malay names that were available at the time. Each new attempt has paid tribute to previous efforts. But Mrs Wang's paper presented at the ICCP in 1961 is not to be found in the list of references of these published codes and articles. In the chronology of events, this is probably the earliest attempt at a cataloguing code for Malay names to be presented at an international conference of experts.

Mrs Wang cites a study by Raja Zainal Abidin bin Zaid, **Malay Personal Names: Singapore 1872-1883 and 1951-1955** which was submitted as an academic exercise for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours at the University of Malaya (Singapore) in 1957. She also quotes the then Prime Minister of the Federation of Malaya, YTM Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, who had suggested that Malays should adopt

surnames in order to show their ancestry. According to Mrs Wang the 'implementation of this suggestion would solve many problems for the cataloguer'.

The main point in this paper is the rule for entry which reads as follows:

'Rule: Enter Malay writers under their personal name, followed by **bin** or **binte** and their father's name. In rare cases, where there is a family name, enter under that name. If the author uses initials for his personal name and if it is not possible to complete the name, enter under the last name, as though it were a surname. **Bin** or **binte** is not always mentioned, and it is sometimes abbreviated as **B.** or **b.** When omitted, it may be difficult for the cataloguer to insert it in the right place'.

The rest of the paper touches upon special aspects of Malay names. Personal names used as single names are names of the prophets with the exception of **Muhammad** which is usually used in combination with another name. Compound names would begin with **Abdul** (which may be abbreviated to **A., Ab.** or **Abd.**); **Abu** which may be used in sixteen combinations and **Muhammad** (often abbreviated as **M., Md.** or **Mohd.**) which may be used as a single name, but there is a tendency to use it more and more in compound names and where it will appear as the first name.

On the question of spelling and especially in the roman script, there is no standardized spelling for names. Four common examples: **Husain**, **Kasim**, **Muhammad** and **Yusuf** are provided with their known variants.

Section IV of the paper is a list of Malay titles, hereditary and conferred, with the **'Rule:** Malay titles and honorific words, if

used by the author, are to be added, after the father's name'.

It is not the purpose of this short note to comment upon the merits or demerits of the paper presented by Mrs Wang in 1961. Studies on Malay onomastics have progressed tremendously since 1961 through research and with greater literary warrant. Names are an important aspect of a nation's culture and as such require a deep understanding of their history, characteristics and special features before adequate rules may be promulgated for their cataloguing. What is to be appreciated is the fact that a code of practice for the cataloguing of Malay names managed to get a hearing in an important international forum in 1961. The nascent library profession in the Federation of Malaya and Singapore, faced with the problems of handling local names with established codes of practice for western names, had to take initiatives to overcome the problems in hand in order to ensure consistency in cataloguing practice without which catalogue construction and catalogue usage would have been very difficult. It is in this light that Mrs Wang's paper of 1961 should be viewed. It is also intended that Mrs Wang's name and the title of her paper which was presented at the ICCP in 1961 will find a permanent place in the bibliography of the cataloguing of Malay names.

ⁱ Wang-Chen Hsiu Chin. Malay names, and Indian Muslim names in Malaya. *In International Conference on Cataloguing Principles Paris, 9th-18th October, 1961, Report.* London: 1963. pp. 101-103.

ⁱⁱ Zainab Awang Ngah. Malay names: current practices in ascertaining the form of headings and sources for reference. *Asian Libraries*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1996, pp. 19-33.