

THE CONSTRUCTION OF TRADITIONAL WATER VILLAGE HOUSE OF BRUNEIAN MALAY IN LIMBANG, SARAWAK

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Abstract

In Limbang, Sarawak, most of the Bruneian Malays live in water village area. Bruneian Malays are the main ethnic group living in the water village of Limbang River bank and the coast of the Brunei Bay since the Bruneian Sultanate time. The houses of Bruneian Malay face the river or the sea. When the tide rises, the pillars of the houses will be submerged in the water, making the houses appear as if they are built on the top of the water. The construction of the Bruneian Malay houses of the water village has its customs and beliefs. The Bruneian Malays believe that only houses built by following the regulations of traditional customs and beliefs will last long, and the well-being of the residents can be guaranteed. These sets of customs and belief systems will also determine how the houses are constructed. This article will discuss the construction of traditional Bruneian Malay houses in the water village of Limbang in Sarawak in details. The initial stages of the construction, including choosing the construction spot, calculating the month, the day and the hour for the construction will be described first. Next, construct the pillars, and the frame of the house in teamwork will be presented; and finally, Bruneian Malay customs and beliefs of moving new houses will be discussed.

Keywords: water village house, construction, adat, Bruneian Malay, Sarawak

Introduction

Bruneian Malays who reside in the water villages of Limbang, Sarawak have certain rules in choosing the spot for building houses. The building spot will be examined in detailed first before the construction, with special attention paid to the location, width and water tide level. This is to avoid the newly constructed house to be affected by the unsuitable location. For instance, if a house is built far from the river bank and has the foundation taller than six ft, the house will be lopsided in a few years after the construction.¹ In these areas, the river current is fast and can be dangerous to the house and its inhabitants.²

To choose an ideal location, the future house owner will first obtain from the elders and experienced relatives. This advice is taken for considerations when choosing a spot to construct houses that are in harmony with the tides (Ismail Ibrahim, 1996, p. 102), does not breach the taboos and most important of all, close to the house of the parents and the parents-in-law.³ A spot with these characteristics is highly valued, as the house built on the location will be inherited by the descendants of the owner (Aisah Sahdan, 1983/1984, pp. 28-29).

Bruneian Malays of water villagers usually prefer the vacant area of the river bank to build houses and easier as a main mode of transportation (Mohammad Raduan & Amaluddin Bakeri, 2001, p.p 192) to access the town and economic activities (Ismail Ali & Mohammad Raduan, 2007, pp.233). The river bank area chosen must not exceed 6 feet of water level, and must not be inside a valley in between two hills. This is because according to Bruneian Malay belief, a mountain area like this is the passage of djinns and spirits. If a house is built in this area, it will obstruct the movements of the djinns and spirits, and eventually, this will cause the house owner harassed by these beings and easily fall ill.⁴

If a piece of land suits the desired characteristics is found, it will be marked with stakes, a sign that the land is already owned by someone. The stakes will be placed in every corner, and about 12 to 16 stakes will be used. Normally the stakes are made from mangrove wood or nipa palm branches, and each stake is about 12 feet height (Ismail Ibrahim, 1996, p. 102). The height is enough for the stakes to be visible when the water level rises.

It should be explained that before building a new house in a water village, the future house owner will have to submit a written application to the village chief. The application must state the agreement of the house owner's future neighbours for the construction of the new house near their houses. The neighbours will need to sign the application letter before the letter is given to the village chief.

This rule of constructing new houses in water villages is enforced in the 1980s to avoid any possible problems between the new house owners and the neighbour.⁵ This rule of obtaining the agreement of neighbours has the result the villagers to settle in areas with their family clans.

Similar rules have been practising earlier by the Bruneian Malays of the water villages of Kampung Ayer Brunei Darussalam (KABD). Under Circular No 5/1982 set by Brunei-Muara District Office, construction of houses in KABD has to be in accord with the seven rules mentioned in the circular, and one of the rules is the agreement of neighbours.⁶ This rule is to regulate the constructions of houses in KABD so that the area will not be crowded with houses (Aisah Sahdan, 1983/1984, pp. 28-31).

Since the Bruneian Malays have a close relationship with the Malays of Limbang water villages, the same rule is practised by the letters as well. Both communities are often noted to exchange ideas and thoughts with each other.

Choosing Appropriate Time to Build the Houses

Month to build the houses

A special procedure is conducted to select the auspicious months to build the pillars of the house. Bruneian Malays believe that constructing the house pillar inauspicious months will bring fortune to the newly built house and expel any possible misfortune of the inhabitants.

Alimin Abdul Hamid has pointed out that Bruneian Malays avoid building houses in months perceived to bring ill fortune:

...the months considered as not suitable to build houses are Muharram and Safar. The month of Muharram is deemed to be the inauspicious to do all kinds of work. The elders say that the month of Muharram is the month of the kings, while the first to the eighth of Safar are seen as auspicious days; after the eighth of Safar until the end of the month (the period) is considered as the month of Nas. (Alimin Abdul Hamid, 1996, p. 111)

To determine the auspicious months, elders and experienced relatives will be consulted, which in turn will refer to the advice as recorded in the *Kitab Tajul Muluk*. The Malays of Limbang claim that Bruneian Malays of KABD are more skillful in selecting auspicious months,⁷ and that they learned this knowledge from the Bruneian Malays of the water villages.

Kitab *Tajul Muluk* gives the following ways to determine the auspicious months:

... if a house is built at the beginning of the month of Muharram, chaos and sickness shall be with the house owner; he who builds a house on the month of Safar, he shall obtain countless treasures and knowledge; he who builds the house on the month of Rabiul'akhir shall encounter difficulties and have ill health; and he who builds a house on the month of Jamadil'awal shall procure treasures and slaves; and he who builds a house on the month of Jamadil'akhir shall suffer from illness and poverty, he who builds a house on the month of Rejab shall suffer from disputes and illness; and he who builds a house on the month of Syaban shall obtain the glories of the world and the hereafter; he who builds a house on the month of Ramadhan shall procure wealth and knowledge; and he who builds a house on the month of Syawal shall be swallowed by disease or his house destroyed by fire, and he who builds a house on the month of Zulkaedah shall obtain slaves and wealth, or knowledge and friendship; and he who builds a house on the month of Zulhijrah shall be given Allah gold and silver and all the halal animals like water buffalos and cows and sheep and rice and paddy and slave. (Kitab *Tajul Muluk*, n.d., p. 69)

Based on the instructions of Kitab *Tajul Muluk*, Bruneian Malays of water villages would choose to build their houses on the auspicious months of Safar, Jamadil'awal, Syaban, Ramadhan, Zulkaedah, and Zulhijrah.

Ismail Ibrahim further discusses the custom of Bruneian Malay choosing the auspicious months for building houses:

... the time for building the first pillar is based on Malay months and days according to the Hijrah years like the months of Safar, Jamadil'awal, Syaban, Ramadhan, Zdulkaedah [sic] and Dzulhijjah. (Ismail Ibrahim, 1996, p. 102)

By constructing the houses in the months deemed to be auspicious, Bruneian Malays hope their endeavour will be without flaws and will be blessed by Allah. It is believed that if a house is built in an inauspicious month,

the builder will encounter accidents like falling while building the house (Alimin Abdul Hamid, 1996, p. 111).

Day and then time to build the houses

For Bruneian Malays, choosing the day of building the house is conducted so that group work of building the house can be attended by as many nearby relatives and neighbors as possible, since building a house in the water village involves a large number of people, especially when building the pillars and the frame of the house. As in choosing the right spot and the right month, the future house owner will discuss with the elders and relatives with experiences on choosing the auspicious day.

The village elders suggest that the most auspicious days to build a house are Thursday and Sunday because Kitab *Tajul Muluk* records that Thursday corresponds to the measurement of "Scale" and "Cintamani Serpent," and Sunday corresponds to the measurement of "Tiger" and "Lion." The supposed benefits of building a house on Thursday are believed to be,

.....the third measurement Lion is perfect in its name, and Allah shall bestow His blessings and great wisdom (unto the inhabitants)... the seventh measurement, the Warrior Tiger, shall make the owner of the house feared by all, and he shall be humble if the son of his household by the will of Allah becomes a warrior or a wise man... the ninth measurement, the Scale, shall (make the inhabitant) wise in religious teaching, according to the elders of the village, and according to all, (the owner) shall obtain numerous treasures and slaves, if God wills... the tenth measurement is the Cintamani Serpent, which is full of fortune and (the owner) shall obtain great and numerous treasures and slaves without even having to look for them, and they will come (to the owner) on their own if God does it so. (Abdul Rahman Al-Ahmadi 2000, p. 22)

Building a house on Thursday or Sunday is believed to be able to bring good fortune, and the construction will be joined by more people, including the future owner's relatives from KABD, which is seen as a relief for the group work and an honor to the future house owner, where he is remembered and respected by his relatives.⁸

Choosing the suitable time for building the house is determined by discussing with the elders and the relatives with experience. The purpose of

deciding the time is that the building of the pillars can be done in the most suitable time, during the low tide and completed before the tide rises. If the wrong time is chosen, the construction of the house pillars will be interrupted because the water and the mud will cover the pillars' holes and causing the measurement of the pillars cannot be conducted correctly.

Alimin Abdul Hamid has pointed out that, when choosing the suitable time to build houses the Bruneian Malays of the water villages are based on "time calculation." He explains that "...the time calculation is divided into calculation based on event numbers, and calculation based on odd numbers. According to the old people's calculation, there are two types of time: first and second".

In the Islamic time calculation of odd number, the first type of time reckoning starts from 6:00 in the morning and the second type 12:00 at noon. For every even number in the Islamic months, the first type starts at 8:30 in the morning and the second type 2:30 in the afternoon. If the pillars cannot be built during the first type of time because of the rising tide, they will be built during the second set of time as the water will be at low tide. The reverse is also true (Alimin Abdul Hamid, 1996, p. 111).

Other than the time calculation stated above, Bruneian Malays of the water villages would often choose a better time to build houses, which is after the river water is at low tide. Local villagers pointed out that this would enable the house pillar to be built more smoothly and friends and relatives who are helping to build the house would be more energetic.

It should be pointed out that relatives and neighbours will be invited to build the house two or three days before the start of the actual construction (Alimin Abdul Hamid, 1996, p. 111). The future house owner or the representative would go to the houses of the relatives and neighbours and invited them orally, as this is a sign of showing great respect in community livelihood.

When the decision is made, the chief of the family will request the neighbours' sincere assistance. This is to avoid the neighbour to feel being neglected or offended. As an act of showing respect, their help is still needed, yet it is common that even if the neighbours are not called for help, they will be a presence to offer help; this has become a custom. (Aisah Sahdan, 1983/1984, p. 37)

The excerpt above shows that the tradition of building houses in Bruneian Malays is largely based on communal spirit. Neighbourhood plays an

important role in many aspects of this tradition, including giving permission, opinions, advises and help.

Gotong-Royong in Building the House

In the water village, building a new house often starts with the ritual of erecting the main pillar important in Malay mystical thought. Before erecting the pillar, offerings like rice, coarse salt, Brunei cherries, galingale, garlic, onion, turmeric, dried pepper, cayenne pepper, Indian almond, *belacan*, pieces of gold, wok and seven-colored strings will be buried in the hole of the pillar.⁹ The future house owner will be responsible to bury the offerings. Tradition dictates that these offerings are to be buried to invite good fortune to the future inhabitants of the house and also to avoid the house owner and his family from being assaulted by diseases and evil spirits.

Alimin Abdul Hamid has pointed out that,

These objects are buried to ensure wealth will come easily to the household because these objects are seen as an early wealth. They are buried to avoid serious diseases and evil spirits. Locals believe that evil spirits will avoid getting closer to the house if there are pieces of the work because the spirits thought the inhabitant would be so strong that he can smash the work into pieces. (Alimin Abdul Hamid, 1996, p. 112)

After the ritual of burying the offering has ended, the main pillar will be lifted together by the close family of the future house owner. Following the Malay maxim "carrying burden together, regardless heavy or light," the cooperation to erect the main pillar has the purpose of obtaining the blessings of family life from experienced elders (Ismail Ibrahim, 1996, p. 103).

Before erecting the pillar, the end of the main pillar will be put to face the direction where the sun rises, and then it will be lifted slowly to face the direction where the sun sets or the direction of the qiblah. As the main pillar is erected slowly, the house owner and his family members are required to recite prayers asking Allah to bless both the prophet Muhammad and the household. The hole of the main pillar is kept away from any shadows because it is believed that if shadows fall in the hole, the household will be cursed and experience ill fortune (Alimin Abdul Hamid, 1996, p.112).

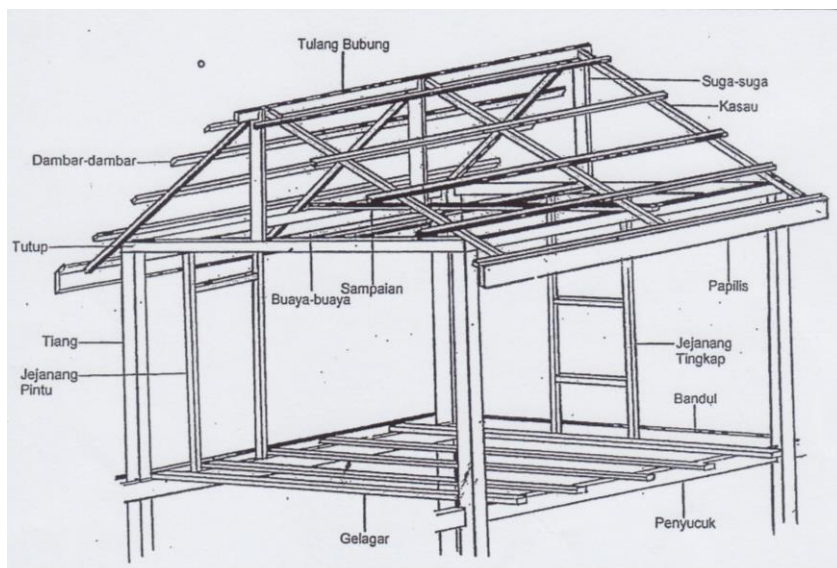
Bruneian Malays believe that the head and the end of the main pillar cannot be reversed. The part where it is to be buried is known as the "head."

The pillar is likened to a fruit giving a tree, placing the pillar in the right way, like planting a tree, will give wealth to the owner of the house.

After the main pillar is built and stabilized, the pillar was then wrapped with a seven-coloured cloth. After that, a *Haji*, imam, or an influential elder will recite prayers of blessing to the Prophet Muhammad and followed by prayers for the safety and happiness of the inhabitants of the house. After the prayer ceremony has ended, the people will take some rest and enjoy the food prepared by the house owner.

When the work of erecting the main pillar through *gotong-royong* is done, the work of erecting the second, third and the fourth pillars will be completed after ten days. After that, the fifth and the sixth pillars will be erected, and this is called *penyawahan Rumah*, i.e. making the house alive. When the builders are free, other pillars are built. If all the pillars are built, but the other parts of the house are yet finished, the pillar heads will be covered with empty tin containers. This is to protect the pillars to be affected by lunar or solar eclipse and lightning strike, which is thought to be able to damage the pillar heads (Alimin Abdul Hamid, 1996, p.112).

Figure 1: Position of the House Skeleton Parts of Bruneian Malay Water Village House



(Source: Edited from Haji Sri Hj. Putih and Abdul Munap Hj. Jumahat (2000, p. 72)).

Normally a newly built house has 16 to 20 pillars.¹¹ After every single pillar of the house is erected, the skeleton of the house, which includes bearers, floor joists, band joists, ceiling joists, ridge beams, rafters, collar beams, studs, ridge boards, door and window jambs will be built stages by stages.¹² The position of the skeleton parts of traditional Bruneian Malay houses is shown in Figure 1. After the skeleton of the house is built, roofing, flooring, setting up walls, doors, windows, loggia, verandah, and a stairway will be commenced, again stages by stages. It should be noted that the building of the house through *gotong-royong* is done until the setting of attap roof. The building of pillars and skeleton of the house would take a bout a month.

There are, but a few old houses built fully according to the *adat* and the traditions as explained above. These houses belonged to older people, who follow the guides and practices. Very few traditional ways are followed now; however, when the newer houses belonged to younger generations were built. Because of that, the old houses of the water village belonged to Bruneian Malays in Limbang, Malaysia shares many similarities with their counterparts in the water village of Brunei Darussalam; these similarities include the materials used in house construction, sizes of the house, design, and architecture. On the other hand, the newer houses of, the younger generations display characteristics influenced by modern architecture.

Constructing the Houses

The construction of a Bruneian Malay water village house can be divided into three categories; the first is that the house is to be constructed following the stages, the second the house is to be built and completed at one time; the third is that the house will be bought by the owner after it is completed. There are more houses belong to the first category, because the villagers will build houses according to their ability from time to time.

Most of the houses of the water village take a long time to be built completely. According to Kassim Matali, a house if built according to the stages would take 3 to 10 years to be completely built.¹³ The building starts from the main components of the house, like the living room, kitchen and bed rooms. In certain parts of Borneo, the traditional water village house consists of two part only the main part (*rumah ibu*) and kitchen (Mohammad Raduan Mohd Ariff, 1998, p.p 35). Other parts like additional bed rooms, common room, store room, loggia, and verandah will be built later by stages according to the need and ability of the house owner.

Normally the building of the additional parts of the house or renovation is conducted to beautify the house, to add the number of the rooms

or the size of the house. The renovation is done especially when the son of the house owner is married. According to the customs of the Bruneian Malays, a married son will usually stay with his parents for a few years until he can build his house (Mohammad Raduan Mohd. Ariff, 1998, p. 115).

Other than that, a house is renovated to enlarge the living room and the bed rooms if the house owner needs to accommodate visiting relatives. It is a tradition of the Bruneian Malays that the relatives would stay in the house for a few days if they come to visit the house owner.

Most of the houses built in stages are built through *gotong-royong* by the house owner. *Gotong-royong*, or a communal act to accomplish the same goal, is only conducted in the initial stage when building the pillars and the house's skeleton. The latter stages like roofing, flooring and setting up the wall are conducted by the house owner himself.

There are also houses built in the manners mentioned above, but skilled workers are hired or contracted. In fact, some house owner would directly hire these workers once the pillars and skeleton are built through *gotong-royong*. For the house owners who wish to save the hiring cost, they would help the workers when the construction is conducted, an indication that *gotong-royong* is still practised by the Bruneian Malays in house building.

Only a small number of house owners fully hired or contracted workers to build their houses. These houses are built and completed at one time, and all of them belong to newly wedded couples. Newly wedded couples would prefer to have their houses built at one time once they have enough money. These houses are small, generally 40 ft x 30ft, and cost between RM20,000 to RM50,000. For the newly wedded couple, this cost is within their capability. To build a bigger house like the older houses requires higher cost, which is between RM50,000 to RM120,000.

Much of the money spent building the new house are from the house owner's saving, and part of them from the contributions from his parents, parents-in-law, and siblings. It is common among Bruneian Malays that the family members and relatives would help the house owner to build the new house, and this can be seen from the communities of Kampung Seberang Kedai (KSK) water village.¹⁴

In KSK there are 104 houses and each house is presided by the head of the family. 78.8% of these heads of family obtained their money to build the houses from their parents, 53.8 from their in-laws, 76.9% from relatives in KSK and 73.1% from other relatives in Bruneian water villages. This division of the source of money is shown in Table 1. The table shows that only a small number of house owners obtain their money from a bank loan and that only constitutes 5.8%, the same percentage of those who received help from Program

Pembangunan Rakyat Termiskin (PPRT), or the Development Programme for the Hardcore Poor.

Even though the houses are now built by hired or contracted workers, about 95% of these workers are locals, the rest are workers from other water villages of Brunei Darussalam. The wages of local workers are lower compares with those from other places, and local workers are considered to have the same ability as workers from other water villages. There are also relatives from other water villages in Brunei help the construction without taking any wages.

The wages of the workers are normally paid in installment, and the minority of the house owners who hired workers from other water villages pay the wages in installment as well. The wages are paid in Malaysian ringgit, and the wages are paid not on working day basis, but based on the size of the house the workers built. Wages of contracted workers is usually between RM5,000 to RM8,000.

If the house bought by a house owner is already built, there is only a little involvement of local villagers. These readily built houses are mostly bought from friends or relatives who moved to other water villages or the land. This is rather different from the villagers of the Brunei water villages, where they would buy houses in the housing area on the land provided by the government. The housing area is created to form a planned, beautified housing area (Mohammad Raduan Mohd. Ariff, 2000, p. 52).

Setting up Doors, Windows, and Verandah

The doors used by Bruneian Malays in the water villages of Limbang are made from wood. The wooden doors can be divided into four types, namely normal wooden doors, carved doors, normal wooden doors with iron grills and carved doors with iron grills. For more modern houses, glass sliding doors, with or without iron grills are used, and some of these houses can already be seen in the water villages now.

Many of the doors used are double doors. The door frames are made from the wood plank with the measurement of 2" x 3". The size of the door is usually 3ft x 7ft. The doors are made from wood, and they are set straight and attached to the frame with nails. Bruneian Malays believe that when hammering the doors, the nails cannot be hit forcefully. The nails must be hit slowly for three times before they can be hit with more strength. This is believed to be able to make the door strong and protect the house owners from thieves.¹⁵

As for the windows, many Bruneian Malays now cease to use the type of windows known as *tabok bertongkat*.¹⁶ Some houses prefer a combination of

both naco and sliding windows, others glass and naco windows, or naco and door windows. Only a small number of the houses use sliding windows, door leaf windows or glass windows. This means the houses located on the land show more modern influence on the types of the windows chosen, rather than the door.

Table 1: Capital for House Building

Capital for house building	Total	%
OS, MFBR, and MFLR	11	10.6
OS, MFP, MFPIL, MFLR and MFBR	11	10.6
OS, MFP, and MFPIL	10	9.6
OS, MFP, MFPIL and MFBR	8	7.7
OS and MFP	7	6.7
OS, MFP, MFPIL and MFLR	7	6.7
OS, MFP, and MFBR	7	6.7
OS, MFPIL, and MFBR	7	6.7
OS and MFP,	6	5.9
OS, MFP, and MFLR	5	4.8
OS and PPRT	5	4.8
OS, MFPIL, and MFLR	4	3.8
OS and MFBR	4	3.8
OS and BL	4	3.8
OS	4	3.8
OS and MFLR	3	3.0
SIRH	1	1.0
Total	104	100

- OS = Own Saving
- MFP = Money From Parents
- MFPIL = Money From Parents-In-Law
- MFLR = Money From Limbang Relatives
- MFBR = Money From Bruneian Relatives
- BL = Bank Loan
- PPRT = Program Pembangunan Rakyat Termiskin
- SIRH = Staying in Rented House

Like the door frame, the window frame is also made from a wood plank of 2" thick x 3" wide. The size of the frame is 6ft wide x 4ft long. Because many houses use naco glass windows, the window frame is divided into two or three parts; each part is 2ft wide x 4ft long or 3ft wide x 4ft long. Because these houses use "modern" type of windows, there is now guidances or taboos

concerning setting up the windows. All windows are decorated with curtains with various designs and colours that suit the modern taste.

The Bruneian Malay houses of the water villages are equipped with staircases. The staircases are set either at the verandah or the jetty. If the staircase is set at the jetty, the material to build the staircase would be harder woods like ironwood, as part of the staircase would be soaked in water.

Staircases set at verandah are made from softer woods like *meranti* and *kapur*.¹⁷ Holes will be made on these staircases to place the treads; therefore they have to be made from the same type of woods. The size of the scantling is usually 2" thick x 4" wide. Normally the number of the treads is an odd number like 3 or 5; the treads will be inserted through the holes made on the staircases. The upper and lowermost holes of the staircases are filled to ensure the treads cannot be removed.¹⁸ Now, this technic can only be seen in very few smaller houses, as newer houses use iron nails to secure the staircase treads.

The staircases located at the jetty would use wooden scantling with the size of 2" thick x 3" wide. These staircases are made from hard wood, and the threads are set by using the *leap notch* technic. The notches are nailed to ensure each tread is fixed and does not come off. Normally a staircase of the jetty has 5 to 7 tread.

Bruneian Malay elders believe that the "head" of a new staircase needs to be dressed in a *kopiah*, or short, rounded cap made from nipa leaves. The *kopiah* will be placed on the staircase for 2 or 3 days (Alimin Abdul Hamid, 1996, pp. 115-116). This is believed to be able to ensure the safety of the inhabitants and preventing accidents like slipping or falling from the staircase.

The Adat of Moving to a New House

After the house is built, the next step is choosing the right day and time to conduct house moving ceremony. Friday would be chosen. Friday is considered to be the most auspicious day in the Islamic calendar to conduct house moving ceremony, and more divine blessings (*barakah*) will be received to this day.

The house owner and his family would move to the new house in the afternoon, as they would have works to do in the morning. The close relatives of the house owner would help him and his family to move their possessions from the old house to the new house, though this is already conducted little by little before the actual move in day.

At the night time, with the help of the close relatives, the house owner will hold a safety prayer feast (*kenduri doa selamat*) and a *dhikr* ceremony in the new house. The feast is held to bring blessing and as an expression of

gratefulness for obtaining a new house; inviting neighbours and relatives to the feast is considered to be an act of respect as well.

Like most of the Muslims in Malaysia, the feast is held after the *Maghrib* or the *isha'a* prayer. Before the feast begins, the house owner will make preparations to welcome the guests. The floor will be adorned with carpets of different colours and designs, the curtains will be replaced with new ones, and the same thing goes to the sofa, tablecloth, and television cloth and so on.

This is considered an act of respect to the participants of the *dhikr* and prayer ceremonies. Food like white rice, meat cooked in gravy, fried *tahai* with *sambal* sauce,¹⁹ prawns with *sambal* sauce and mixed vegetables will be served. Different types of *kuih* or dessert food like *kuih cincin*, *kuih koya*, *penyeram* and *madu kesit* will be served too. These are all favourite traditional dishes of Bruneian Malays.

The house owner must sleep in the new house for three days continuously, as Bruneian Malays believe that this will prevent ghosts of devils, as well as any misfortune from entering the house. The relatives who stay in the new house for the first time will have to do the same thing; else they will experience misfortune as well (Ismail Ibrahim, 1996, p.107).

The house moving *adat* and belief of the Bruneian Malays, according to Alimin Abdul Hamid,

In Malay society usually, before a new house can be inhabited there will be *dhikr* and safety prayer ceremonies and feast for relatives and friends of the same village. For those who sleep in the new house, they will sleep there for three days continuously. (Alimin Abdul Hamid, 1996, p.116)

It is customary for Bruneian Malay relatives to bring gifts in the form of cash when attending the feast. Ismail Ibrahim explained that "...when the time has come, relatives and friends will visit the house and bring gifts in the form of cash to the house owner" (Ismail Ibrahim, 1996, p. 104).

The gift is intended to ease the burden of the new house owner, and it is a continuation of mutual support practised by the Bruneian Malays.

Conclusion

The Bruneian Malays of the water villages in Limbang, Sarawak, as we see, still maintain the traditional customs, or *adat*, and beliefs of house building. These

customs and beliefs resemble those practised by the Malays who live in the water villages of Brunei Darussalam.

Advices of elders and experienced relatives are still revered when one selects the location and time to build the house, and the tradition of house-building is maintained through this way. What taking advices of the elderly is seen as a way to maintain the relationship between the older generations with, the younger ones as well.

This mutual support, essential in Bruneian Malay culture, can be seen clearly in the house building tradition, such as the help of the relatives provided in the ritual of building the pillars and house skeletons, as well as in the feasts celebrating the house moving where the relatives would contribute cash to the new house owner.

The traditions of house building in water villages of Limbang resemble those practised by Bruneian Malays in Brunei Darussalam; as both communities have a blood relationship. The mutual help between these two communities includes house building; this brings many benefits to both sides, and it contributes to strengthening the relationship between the communities living in the borders of Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam.

Endnotes

¹ Interview with Hj. Ahmad Jamaluddin, who is 77 years old and a long time resident of Seberang Kedai water village. His father is one of the first villagers of the water village. Before 1990 he worked as a full-time house builder. Now he is retired. The interview took place in his house on 9 April 2001.

² Interview with Hj. Ahmad Jamaluddin, 9 April 2001.

³ Interview with Hj. Kassim Matali, a permanent resident of Seberang Kedai. He is a seller of vegetables at Limbang market and a part time house builder. The interview took place at his house on 4 April 2001.

⁴ Interview with Hj. Bongsu Mat Salleh, a permanent resident of Seberang Kedai. He is a full-time fisherman and a part time house builder. The interview took place in his house on 1 March 2001.

⁵ Information obtained from an interview with Tuan Haji. Ibrahim bin Kadir, the village chief of Seberang Kedai water village, Limbang. The interview took place in his house on 20 April 2001.

⁶ To understand the seven rules regulated by Pekeliling No.5/1982, Pejabat Daerah Brunei Muara, see Syed Hashim Abdullah Alhabsyi (1983/1984, p. 57).

⁷ Information obtained from interviews with several villagers of different water villages of Limbang, including Haji Mastri Basar of Kampung Bukit Kota, Haji Mail Saleh of Kampung Pemukat, Haji Uting bin Pasang of Kampung Baru Berawan, Pengiran Kudah bin Pengiran Tengah of Kampung Bukit Kota, and Haji Mat Jais bin Hitam of Kampung Seberang Kedai.

⁸ Interview with Haji Ibrahim Kadir, 20 April 2001.

⁹ Interview with Haji Ibrahim Kadir, 20 April 2001. For more information, see Mohammad Raduan Mohd Ariff (1998, p. 114) and Alimin Abdul Hamid (1996, pp. 111-112).

¹⁰ for a more detailed explanation on Bruneian Malay house building, see Abdul Rahman Al-Ahmadi, 2000, p.194).

¹¹ For more information on the pillars of a water village house, see Amaludin Bakeri (2002, pp.167-168).

¹² For more explanation on the house skeleton, see Ismail Ibrahim (1996, pp. 103-106).

¹³ Interview with Haji Kassim Matali, 4 April 2001.

¹⁴ Kampung Seberang Kedai is the largest water village in Limbang. In 2001, Kampung Seberang Kedai had 104 houses with 1020 population. For a detailed explanation, see Amaluddin Bakeri (1996, pp. 76-114).

¹⁵ Interview with Haji Bongsu Mat Salleh, 1 March 2001.

¹⁶ For a detailed explanation on 'Tabuk Bertongkat', see Alimin Abdul Hamid (1996, p.115) and also Ismail Ibrahim (1996, p.106).

¹⁷ For a detailed explanation of the types of wood used in house building, see Hamidon Abdul Ralim (1988, pp. 13-14).

¹⁸ For a detailed explanation on the staircases of Bruneian Malay water village houses, see Alimin Abdul Hamid (1996, pp. 115-116).

¹⁹ Tahai is a type of sea fish served either grilled or dried under the sun, traditionally eaten by Bruneian Malays. It is normally fried with *sambal* sauce or cooked with boiled tamarind.

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