

Mystical Chants in the Bajau Society: A Preliminary Observation on the Changes in the Mindset Towards the Planting Ritual

Dikir Mistik dalam Masyarakat Bajau: Satu Pemerhatian Awal pada Perubahan Minda Terhadap Upacara Penanaman

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ABSTRACT

In the Bajau society, the farming community used to observe with great reverence spiritual rites which included chanting during the ceremonial events held prior to planting and harvesting. It was believed that the chants will help to make the land more fertile and to guarantee the well being of the rice spirit after each planting season. In practice, the farmers will usually invite a paddy 'bomoh' (shaman) to conduct the ceremony and rituals before and after the planting season. Today, the belief in these spiritual rites and chants has waned. More and more of these farmers no longer observe these spiritual ceremonies before and after planting. This paper hopes to look at the use of these chants among the Bajau farmers and the changes in their mindset towards these ritualistic chants. The perspectives taken are rooted in the Sapir-Whorf theory towards change.

Keywords: Mantra; Bajau language; Bajau culture; language and culture

ABSTRAK

Sebagai komuniti petani, orang-orang Bajau mempercayai bahawa penggunaan mantera turut terlibat dalam proses penanaman dan penuaian padi. Dipercayai bahawa mantera mampu menyenangkan semangat padi khusus untuk membantu menyuburkan dan menjamin hasil yang baik pada satu-satu musim penanaman padi. Biasanya, seorang bomoh akan dipanggil untuk melaksanakan upacara berkenaan sama ada sebelum ataupun selepas musim penanaman padi. Kini, kepercayaan berhubung dengan semangat padi sudah semakin pudar dan menghilang. Semakin ramai petani Bajau tidak lagi melaksanakan upacara memanggil semangat padi. Oleh yang demikian, makalah ini bermaksud untuk meneliti mantera dalam kalangan petani-petani Bajau dan, meneliti perubahan pemikiran terhadap penggunaan mantera. Yang berlandaskan dimensi hipotesis Sapir Whorf untuk melihat perubahan tersebut.

Kata kunci: Mantera; bahasa Bajau; budaya Bajau; bahasa dan budaya

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural activities have been the soul of the Bajau community, as with other native groups in the South-east Asian region. Although many of the Bajau people have ventured into other professions such as fishing, trading and other economic activities, their soul and world view remain very strongly influenced by the agriculture, specifically paddy planting. In the Bajau vocabulary, there are many words used to describe the activities and elements associated with the planting of paddy. Beginning from the initial stages of paddy planting – the paddy seed, the nursery, the paddy seedling – to the various stages of paddy planting – *menyemai* (planting of seed), *menugal* (dibbering), *menanam* (planting), *merumput* (weeding), *membajak* (ploughing) and *menuai* (harvesting) – and finally

to types of paddy harvested – *pulut* (glutinous rice), *beras* (rice), *nasi* (cooked rice) as well as the tools used in paddy planting for example *cangkul* (hoe), *tuai* (scythe), *lesung* (pounder) and others. There are many words in the Bajau vocabulary to symbolize the symbiotic relationship between agriculture and the Bajau people.

The dependency of the Bajau on the paddy is manifested through a complex ritual which supports the Bajau's paddy-related belief and this is quite similar to the Malays' ritual of worshipping the spirit of the paddy. Thus the Bajau folklore is abundant with various myths and legends connected to the origins of the paddy. In relation to that, this paper attempts to study the belief in the paddy spirit expressed through chants and the change in the mindset and believes of the younger Bajau generation to these forms of rituals.

THE HISTORY OF PADDY PLANTING IN SABAH

The history of paddy planting in Sabah shows a pattern of planting areas which spreads along the western coast of Sabah and these areas are monopolized by the Kadazan-Dusun and Bajau ethnic groups. According to Whelan (1970:52), the Bajau acquired the skills of paddy planting from their neighbour, the Dusun.

There is a possibility that the Kadazan-Dusun, whose origins are believed to be from mainland South East Asia, brought with them the paddy planting traditions during their migration to Borneo and taught these traditions to their Bajau neighbours. The theory that the Kadazan-Dusun originated from Southeast Asia is supported by archaeological discoveries found in the areas of the Cha Cave and the Kapah Cave. The studies carried out by Bulbeck (1981) revealed that there are Mongoloid characteristics identified on the human remains found in both caves. Bellwood (1985:270) is of the opinion that the archaeological artifacts found in the Cha Cave in Kelantan do not have any connection with the Negrito tribe but are more related to the Senoi owing to the Mongoloid genetic traits revealed by the Senoi remains found in the Cha Cave. This scenario provides the possibility that the Dusun passed through and settled down in this area before moving on to Borneo and had the opportunity of acquiring the paddy planting techniques. Another possibility is that the early trade relations with China and India brought with it the widespread of the paddy planting techniques to the Malay Archipelago¹ and was brought by the Dusun to Borneo and consequently spread amongst the Bajau.

Tom Harrison (1963:189) explained that paddy was the first crop introduced in Borneo especially in the Interior. This further strengthens the assumption that the Dusun introduced this plant to the Bajau. In fact in Borneo, communities such as the Kelabit and the Malays in Bau have also indulged in paddy planting during the Bronze Age (Dongson drums and culture) around 500 A.D. (Hill 1977:11-2). Meanwhile, a group of scholars² who are experts in the geographical history of Asia said that the actual date of exploration or planting and spreading of the paddy planting activity is connected with the Indian cultural induction phase in South East Asia which began around the 1-10 A.D.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE KOTA BELUD DISTRICT

Kota Belud is one of the oldest districts in Sabah. It was founded in 1901³, and was the first district to be conferred the status of district during the colonial days. Kota Belud is situated 68 kilometers from Kota Kinabalu in the western coast of Sabah and covers an area of 1385.6 sq. kms. It shares its borders with Kota Marudu in the north, Ranau in the east, Tuaran in the south and the South China Sea in the west. According to the Population and Settlement Census of 2010, the population in Kota Belud is estimated to be approximately 398,100.

The Bajau community is the largest ethnic group here after the Dusun. Apart from these two groups, there are also other ethnic groups such as the Murut, the Suluk, the Brunei-Malays, the Bisaya, the Iranun, the Chinese and the Indians. This district is given the name The Land of the Bajaus owing to the fact that Kota Belud is well-known for its Bajau horse riders who are nicknamed the Cowboys of the East. In fact, Tregonning (1965:46) described Kota Belud as the Bajau Country as result of the domination of the Bajau people in this district and the existence of the famous Tamu Besar⁴ here for centuries.

There are 165 villages in this district and amongst these are smaller villages which do not have a head of the village (Ketua Kampung). At this moment, there are 14 Ketua Anak Negeri, 165 heads of villages led by three Heads of Districts known as Orang Kaya-Kaya (OKK). Kota Belud is divided into three sections (according to election constituencies) which are Usukan, Kadamaian and Tempasuk (Kota Belud Municipality Council 2001:1-4).

In general, the rate of social and economic development in Kota Belud is still modest. Agriculture remains as the main activity and source of income of the people. An outstanding 70% of the population are farmers and the remaining 30% are fishermen, civil servants others.

According to the Kota Belud Agricultural Department Report, this district is the main paddy planting district in Sabah and possesses the largest paddy planting area with the planting activities undertaken twice a year⁵. Farming is also another major activity in Kota Belud and the three major livestock are cows, sheep and buffaloes. This activity takes up an area of 43,158 hectares (Department of Animal and Farm Products Services Kota Belud 2001:4).

AN OVERVIEW OF THE BAJAU COMMUNITY

As mentioned previously, the Bajau is an ethnic group scattered all across the Malay Archipelago (Sopher 1965). Nagatsu (1995:19-20) further strengthened this proposition by indicating that the Bajau people can be found in areas of the Sulu Islands, various parts of Borneo, Sulawesi, Halmahera, and the Sunda Islands. This proves that the Bajau community is spread out in various places separated by geographical and cultural barriers which surround their lives. Although more extensive researches are required in order to understand the real situations surrounding this ethnic group, very few have been done and owing to this, very little is known about the existence of the Bajau people in Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines or even in Brunei.

The Bajau settlements in Sabah can be located in the districts of Kota Belud, Tuaran, Kudat, Papar and the area around the Darvel Bay in Lahad Datu and Semporna. Several villages hold a high concentration of the Bajau people for example Mengkabong, Bolong and Tambalang in Tuaran, and Taun Gusi, Timbang Dayang and Siasai in Kota Belud. Meanwhile, the Bajau villages in Semporna are Bangau-Bangau, Pulau Danawan and Pulau Omodal⁶. Each Bajau group is named after their place of residence for example the Bajau Tuaran, Bajau Menggatal, Bajau Kinarut, Bajau Kota Belud and Bajau Semporna. These groups are basically separated by their geographical locations. The standard Bajau dialect understood by the whole Bajau community is the Hiling Sama variety which is spoken by the Bajau of Pulau Omodal. This group is believed to have been the first Bajau settlers in Sabah.

BELIEFS SURROUNDING PADDY PLANTING

The process of paddy planting in Sabah is often shrouded by various myths, legends and rituals which still influence the lifestyles of the Sabah people through their magical powers. One of these is the belief in the spirit of the paddy. The concept of the paddy spirit is discussed here in relation to the Bajau community's beliefs and is applied to other more general assumptions presented by Eastern and Western scholars who have been involved in early researches about the existence of the spirit.

THE MYTH OF THE PADDY IN THE BAJAU COMMUNITY

According to the Bajau folklore, the creation of the paddy originated from the sacrifice made by the ancestral figures of Adam (Adam) and Hawa (Eve), known in the Bajau folklore as *embok Adam* and *embok Hawa* (embok is the term used by the Bajau to address revered ancestors). The sacrifice was made in order to provide food for mankind. The Bajau legend relates the story of how the daughter of *embok Adam* and *embok Hawa* was sacrificed in order to provide her family and mankind with food. The girl was later buried and from her burial ground several plants grew. The paddy emerged from the area of her navel, the coconut from her head, the banana from her hands and several other plants grew from other parts of her body. Therefore, the paddy in the Bajau community is not merely a grain but it is also believed that the paddy possesses a spirit. The Bajau people are forbidden from abusing the paddy in any way. If the spirit of the paddy is angered by the various unfavourable behaviours of mankind, whether purposeful or accidental, the spirit will thus leave the paddy. This will cause the paddy plant to fade and die. Therefore, the paddy is very much treated with the utmost reverence.

The Bajau people also believe that spirits are not only present in objects but also in human beings. The presence of a spirit in a human being is more prevalent in his anatomy⁷. It is a popular belief among the Malay community that when a person loses his spirit, a great catastrophe will befall him. To redeem the spirit would require the help of pawang or bomoh (shamans). These mediums will carry out the necessary rituals in order to entice the spirit back into the person's body (Mohd. Taib Osman 1967:123). The spirit revival ceremonies have to be performed at frequent intervals so as not to allow the spirit to be angered and disappear once again.

The same can be said of paddy planting. During harvest, the shaman is called in order to revere the paddy spirit. It is believed that if this is not done, the paddy field will not produce a good harvest in the next harvesting season⁸. In the Bajau belief, there are two kinds of spirits; the good spirit and the evil spirit. The good spirit, for example the paddy spirit, is necessary for the human race because it brings a good harvest while the evil spirit is believed to be the cause of human maladies and sufferings (Ismail Hamid 1988:36).

The Bajau society also certain beliefs about spirits. The Bajau farmers treat the paddy spirit like

a little child which requires frequent attention and affection. This similar phenomenon can be observed in other agricultural communities in Southeast Asia.

Based on the discussion above, it can be inferred that the spirit of the paddy is a form of paddy planting culture for the Bajau community and this belief is also widespread among the Southeast Asian agricultural community.

THE PADDY MANTRA

The discussion of the mantra performed in the Bajau community will begin with the understanding that the Bajau people are Moslems, as is apparent in other Malay communities. Many of their beliefs and rituals have direct reference to the ideals of Islam. This is also apparent in the Bajau lifestyle. This means to say that no matter how ignorant they are of religious dogma, their conception is as a Moslem.⁹

The Bajau farmers have a pattern of belief which states that there are supernatural entities in this world and these entities have to be revered and given due attention. In relation to that, they utilize various exorcisms and incantations for the purpose of protecting their selves and families from any form of catastrophe caused by the supernatural. The incantations are often used in the initial stages paddy planting or at the end of the paddy planting season. The Bajau farmers refers to the paddy by two terms; *Nur Hayat Allah* (the name of the paddy before it was bestowed to mankind), *Nur Mani* (the name after bestowed to mankind)¹⁰ and *Nur Muhammad*. The Bajau farmers refer to the earth as *Nur Adam Abu Besar*. The farmers believe that the paddy seeds need to be “wed” to the soil before the planting process begins.

Nevertheless, this article will only be focusing on the data of the mantra used during the harvesting season. The data will be presented as proof that the Bajau farmers still possess a strong belief towards the spirit of the paddy. *Ngetu?* or the paddy harvesting ceremony is a much awaited day for the Bajau farmers after an arduous seven-month period of working in the paddy fields¹¹. Before the *ngetu?* a special ceremony is held to obtain the *tekok parai* (the spirit of the paddy). This ceremony is held when the paddy ripe for harvest. The same shaman will be invited to obtain and to return the *tekok parai*.

Before obtaining the *tekok parai*, the *adungan* is made before the ceremony begins. During *ngetu?* five stalks of paddy is tied to a bamboo pole and a white cloth is tied around the *adungan*. A *remoson* (a

small basket) is placed beneath the *adungan* and the stalks are later covered in smoke under the *adungan*.

This ceremony is then followed by the *ngeliun*¹² whose purpose is to ensure the safety of the ripening paddy. The *ngeliun* is performed in the four corners of the paddy field and a paddy leaf is tied into a knot. This leaf acts as a protector which constraints the enemies of the paddy. Thus, an invisible protector is created for the protection of all the paddy stalks in the whole field¹³. This ceremony is performed around five o'clock in the evening. While facing the east, the shaman makes moves anti-clockwise and recites the mantra;

Mantra 1

Dami Allah dami Muhammad
In the name of Allah and Muhammad
Wal nabillah diam kaya
And prophets, may you prosper

And then followed by this;

Mantra II

Dami Allah dami Muhammad
In the name of Allah and Muhammad
Wal nabillah kitabullah
And the prophets and the Quran
Umpayakun
Thus they all perished

If we were to study the meaning of this mantra, it appears as though lines one and two have no relation whatsoever to each other. The first line ‘*Dami Allah dan dami Muhammad*’ portrays the Bajaus belief in Islam.

It is the writer’s belief that this line is a form of oath which obligates the self to obey all commands. Meanwhile, the second line which says ‘*maka mereka pun mati*’ (thus they all perished) refers to the enemies of the paddy. The Bajau farmers have a strong believe that with the blessings of Allah and Muhammad, the paddy stalks will harvest well. It is also the writer’s belief that the farmers have a great deal of hope that their crop will harvest well without any form of menace or diseases causing otherwise, and this in turn will lead to a large amount of income. This paints an image that the Bajau farmers are fond of materialistic wealth. There crave for wealth and the ability to procure anything they desire without much hassle, but the procurement of this wealth has to follow the Islamic ways and blessed by Allah. They believe that if Allah wishes a person to have

wealth he will but on the condition that this person must work hard and not remain idle.

After the mantras I and II have been read, the shaman will then choose 12 best stalks of paddy from the *adungan* in order to make the *tekok parai*¹⁴. During the selection of the best paddy stalks to make the *tekok parai*, the shaman will recite these chants;

Mantra III

Bismillah hirrahman nirrahim
In the name of Allah, Most gracious, most merciful,
Allahuma solli ala saidina Muhammad
Blessings of Allah be upon Muhammad
Berkat sahaya Nur Muhammad
By the light of Nur Muhammad
Nur Hayat Allah dan Nur Mani
Nur Hayat Allah and Nur Mani
Haksirat ya huyaman nahu
May all prosperity come onto me
Biromatika ya arhama rohimin
With your grace O Allah

The *tekok parai* has to be returned to the *ritib* (the shack where paddy are kept). In this process, the *tekok parai* has to be 'called home' from the *adungan* through the *ngerarat*, which is,

Mantra IV

Ilaratin nabi Muhammad s.a.w
To the prophet Muhammad
Niat Nur Baitullah and Nur Mani
With Nur Baitullah and Nur Mani
La illa ha inlallah Muhammad rasulullah
There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah
Allah hu akbar
Allah the almighty
Kun solli Allah saidina wa ala alihi
Allah bless the prophet Muhammad
Wa sabbihni ajmain
And all his companions
Nur Baitullah dan Nur Mani
Nur Baitullah and Nur Mani
Na la ilaha in lallah
There is no God but Allah
Allah hu akbar
Allah the almighty

During the recital of this mantra, the paddy stalk is held and when the recital is over, one of the stalks is broken off followed by the other 11 stalks in the *adungan*. The *tekok parai* contains 12 stalks of paddy¹⁵. All the *tekok parai* are then tied together using paddy leaves and this mantra is recited

Mantra V

Bismillah hirrahman nirrahim
In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful,
Seri Nur Allah sinta perjanjianmu
The beauty of Nur Allah and love your vow
Dari awal sampai akhir
From the beginning to the end
Assahadu an lailah ha inlallah Muhammad rasulullah
I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah

After the recital, all the *tekok parai* are wrapped in a piece of white cloth and placed in a *remoson* under the *adungan*. Then, the *adungan* is smoked with incense and the next mantra is recited

Mantra VI

Bismillah hirrahman nirrahim
In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful
Sandari manandari dang Siti Aisyah
To awaken Siti Aisyah
Meniduri Aisyah
To put Aisyah to sleep
Minta perjanjianmu dahulu
Remember your past oath
Dari awal sampai akhir
From the beginning to the end
Liun meliuni liput meliputi
The many will cover the universe
Hai Mikail ambamu akan
O the angel of prosperity, your humble servant will
Menjunjung mengumpul padi ini
Collect all the paddy harvest

The mantras are recited during the process of retrieving the paddy spirit, i.e. before the actual harvesting begins. Upon a close scrutiny of the mantras, they portray the elated feelings of the farmers towards the good harvest. The expression of elation can be seen through the lines

Berkat sahaya Nur Muhammad (By the light of Nur Muhammad), Nur Hayat Allah dan Nur Mani (Nur Hayat Allah and Nur Mani), Haksirat ya huyaman nahu (May all prosperity come onto me), Seri Nur Allah sinta perjanjianmu (The beauty of Nur Allah and love your vow), Dari awal sampai akhir (From the beginning to the end), Sandari manandari dang Siti Aisyah (To awaken Siti Aisyah), Minta perjanjianmu dahulu (Remember your past oath), Dari awal sampai akhir (From the beginning to the end), Liun meliuni liput meliputi (The many will cover the universe), Menjunjung mengumpul padi ini (Collect all the paddy harvest).

The writer believes that if all these lines were separated, it presents a chain of praises towards

the spirit and the paddy plant. The farmers believe that if the paddy spirit is not retrieved and 'called home', it will disappear. When this happens, there is a big possibility that the next harvest will not be a good one.

The line that contains the name of the paddy, *Nur Hayat Allah* shows that the Bajau farmers never forget the role of the paddy in the planting process. They believe that the prosperity given by Allah is a sign that all Bajau farmers will be given a good harvest to maintain their livelihoods. This is why the names of the paddy have to be recited often in order to 'remind' the spirit that the same process will be performed in the next planting season.

The praises towards the paddy and the spirit of the paddy can also be observed from the line *seri Nur Allah sinta perjanjianmu, dari awal sampai akhir* (*The beauty of Nur Allah and love your vow, From the beginning to the end*). This praise is for all paddy plants. They believe that the 'happiness' of the paddy plant will lead to a good harvest. This shows that the paddy spirit holds true to its promise, from the beginning of the planting season until the harvesting season. The Bajau farmers express their thanks to the paddy spirit for keeping its promise of a good harvest if it is revered and cared for.

One of the names given to paddy spirit is Dayang Siti Aisyah. Before the paddy spirit is returned to the *ritib*, through another mantra, the spirit is praised for the second time. At this point, the praises are a form of hope from the farmers. The spirit (Dayang Siti Aisyah) is reminded of the promise of a good harvest made during the beginning of the planting season and the abundance of harvest is able to cover the entire universe. This is shown in the phrase *liun-meliuni* which is a Bajau adaptation of the English word 'million'. This is then adapted to the harvesting process which symbolizes the abundance of prosperity.

This is seen to mean that the farmers wish for a good harvest as a result of their hard work and labour during the past seven months (prior to the advent of modern technology). Nevertheless, an interesting thing to look at here is that the Bajau farmers never forget the omnipotence of the Almighty. In the last part of the Mantra VI verse, the gratitude towards the Almighty is shown in the form of a medium, an angel who is sent down to bring prosperity to the farmers. This can be found in the line '*hai mikail ambamu akan menjunjung megumpul padi ini*' (O the angel of prosperity, your humble servant will collect all the paddy harvest). This is a reflection of gratitude which is not only expressed towards the

paddy spirit but also to the Creator who created the paddy seed. The end of the mantra is a request for the spirit to return 'home'.

The mantra is an indication that the Bajau is a group of people who holds true to their word and promises. Every promise must be fulfilled. An individual who breaks a promise no longer gains the trust of the community. It is a societal norm that there will be certain individuals who do not live up to their promises and they are usually shunned by the society. To a Bajau, a promise is the symbol of one's personality and character. When all the magical rites have been performed, the shaman will then return the *tekok parai* to the *ritib*.

DISCUSSION

The Bajau agricultural community does not escape the cluster ethos, which is actually a form of worldview. It presents the dominant values and attitudes of the Bajau agricultural community. Owing to the fact that the very essence of the Bajau community evolves around agriculture, specifically paddy planting, the Bajau lifestyle is very much influenced by and dependent upon the land. The Bajau agricultural sentiment has created a tendency which is strongly influenced by their belief in the paddy spirit.

The paddy is the focus of attention and social activities of the Bajau farmers. There are taboos and ceremonies associated with the various levels of paddy production. In paddy planting for example, the planting activity begins with the preparation of the nursery and ends with a ceremony of gratitude. All these are part of a chain of agriculture that must be experienced. For the Bajau farmers, the paddy not only guarantees life but also has a life or spirit of its own which must be treated with reverence in order for it to remain alive. Its growth is observed with the utmost care and it is also given special names which refers to the developmental stages of a human being.¹⁶

In relation to that, a closer observation will show that the mantras contain phrases such as *Bismillah* (in the name of Allah), names of prophets and the Bajau magical verses. This phenomenon resembles the processes which occur in the Bajau system of belief. It is rather interesting to observe how the paddy myths are blended into the Islamic elements alongside the existence of various supernatural powers envisioned by various terminology.

These characteristics show that the Bajau's form of belief has undergone an evolution through the patterns of traditional beliefs, the experience of history, the effects of Hinduism and finally the acceptance of Islam as their religion. In these patterns and experiences, there also exist certain environmental elements related to their lives.

These environmental elements are also used as a symbol of the society's integration with life. For example, the use of *gadung* (the place where paddy is kept), *gairaku* (my house) and *alamku* (my environment) refer to the concept of home for the members of this society. There are words or phrases used in the mantras which shows the people's worldview towards their way of life. The content of the mantras also captures the preservation of ancient beliefs for instance the beliefs in spirits and ghosts. The pattern of ancient belief as such is based on the need to adapt the environmental elements to the people's lifestyles.¹⁷

It is a well-known fact that the Bajau does not possess a writing system which is able to transform the verbal prayers, mantras or chants into a written form. They are merely passed on from generation to generation in the form of oral interactions. The secrets of how these powerful words can entice the spirits, ghosts and other supernatural elements will forever remain with the performer of these rituals, the shamans.

The traditional belief, which is the root of the mantras in the Bajau community, is a creative strength which symbolizes the other realm, fantasy and the daily experiences of the Bajau community. Nature is a major source of inspiration from which the Bajau people draw their understanding of the multidimensional world and this is later expressed in the words of the mantras, prayers, poems and verses (*pantun*).

In general, attitude is the main factor which shapes the Bajau worldview. Attitude refers to the positive aspects connected with their lives. The main pillar of life is religion. As mentioned before, the Bajau people are Moslems which means that their faith in Islam is a strong one. Nevertheless, prior to their acceptance of Islam, they were inevitably influenced by and were believers of animism. As a result, the influence of animism still exists even though Islam is now their religion.

The Bajau community tries to adapt each social act related to animism with the teachings of Islam. This results in the existence of certain Arabic phrases or words in their mantras and chants. The writer believes that the content of the mantras shows

an intimate relationship between the Bajau farmers, animistic rituals and religion.

Nonetheless, the writer wishes to state that the strings of mantras discussed in this article do not represent the general worldview of the Bajau community, whether in the west or east coast of Sabah. As this study was conducted in Kota Belud, the worldview discussed here is that of the Bajau in Kota Belud who are involved in agricultural activities.

It is important to note that there is no similarity in the forms of mantras used among the paddy shamans in Kota Belud. Therefore, the mantra data presented earlier is part of the expressions inherited and passed on from generation to generation.

It is quite apparent that the relationship between a Bajau individual and nature is a rhythmic blend which cannot be separated. However, the Bajau people often attempt to adapt nature to their own needs and requirements. This is expressed through the words of the mantras in the Bajau language. This means that the community's experiences are completely kept in their cognitive capacity and this cognition is later realized through language, for example the mantra.

It can therefore be concluded that the Bajau interprets the natural elements for example the environment, social acts and economy into their rituals.

The belief in the spirit of the paddy has created a generation gap between the older and the younger Bajau generation. This is mainly because the younger generation has been exposed to a modern education system and very few of them are victims of illiteracy. The young people no longer see agriculture as the heart of the Bajau's livelihood.

Many of the younger generation no longer believe in the spirit of the paddy and think of it as an outdated believe which does not need to be preserved. Now, it is a rare occasion to witness the paddy spirit ritual being performed. The role of the shamans is also becoming less prominent in the society and almost moving to the point of extinction. Another reason for this gradual disappearance of a traditional ritual is the strong faith in Islam which does not encourage such rituals because the foundation of Islam states that prosperity and wealth is the will of the Almighty. Apart from that agricultural activities have become more modernized with the use modern technology and machines.

The writer believes that the paddy planting ritual has come to the end of its glory. The Bajau people

have made a firm decision to abandon this traditional belief inherited from generations.

CONCLUSION

Although the belief in the paddy planting ritual still exists in the form of remnants from the past, the passage of time and paradigm shifts have caused the belief to be dismissed in a gradual pace. The acquisition of knowledge, especially through education, has caused the younger generation of the Bajau community to change their way of thinking and to refuse any attempts of preserving this traditional belief.

The older Bajau generation can only watch this imminent decay helplessly. A respondent observes this with much apprehension. According to him;

“Saya takut nantinya, tiada lagi orang yang mahu menjaga semangat Padi dan semangat padi akan merajuk dan tidak mahu datang lagi Ke sawah orang Bajau. Risau nantinya tiada lagi sumber makanan Bagi orang Bajau.”

[I'm afraid that one day there will no longer be anyone who would Look after the paddy spirit, and the spirit will go away upset and Angry. It will refuse to visit the Bajau paddy fields anymore. And Then the bajau people will not have anything to eat]

The older generation can only lament this change in belief, for they are helpless against the passage of time and the advent of information technology in agriculture, which definitely have no qualms about ‘upsetting’ the spirit of the paddy.

NOTES

- ¹ Archaeological evidence proves that the Malayo-Polynesian people came to the Malay Peninsula towards the end of the Neolithic period, which is between 1500-2000 B.C. They brought with them the paddy planting techniques, the use of buffaloes and cows in farming, and the Malayo-Polynesian customs (Heine-Geldern 1935:307).
- ² Among the great scholars in this field are three western scholars and the texts which refer to this subject are *Rice in Malaya: A Study in Historical Geography* (Hill 1977); *Nagara and Commandary* (Wheatley 1983) and *Satingpra I: The Environmental and Economic Archaeology of South Thailand* (Stargardt 1983).
- ³ According to Evans (1955: 48), the Bajau settlement located in Tempasuk (Kota Belud) in 1901 shows a solid pattern of settlement, which points to the possibility that this

settlement has been established 200 years before. This is not surprising because historical sources obtained from the Ling Dynasty (502-566 A.D.) show that the Brunei-Chinese trade relations have existed since 516 A.D. Apart from that, Sabah and Sarawak were originally under the rule of the Brunei Sultanate until they were handed over to the British North Borneo Chartered Company in 1881 and James Brooke in 1839. Kota Belud was once a trade passage between China and the Brunei empire and this is proven by the discovery of several ceramic artifacts from the Sung Dynasty (96-1279 A.D.), the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368 A.D.), the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 A.D) and the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912 A.D), as well as some Thai trade ceramics traded from the 14th to the 16th centuries and the Vietnam trade ceramics.

- ⁴ The *Tamu* is a form of market which functions as a place of trade and barter during weekends or certain days of the week. The location of the *Tamu* is agreed by the people in the area. The *Tamu* is also a tool of racial integration for the multiethnic groups in Sabah.
- ⁵ According to the statistical report from the Kota Belud Agricultural Department (2001), a total of 23,476 hectares of land have been used for planting; paddy – 12,339 hectares, rubber – 5097 hectares, Cocoa – 1770 hectares, Fruits – 1071 hectares, Coconut – 611 hectares, Others – 2994 hectares.
- ⁶ There is a vast difference among the Bajau people in the Eastern coast of Sabah. In Semporna for example the Bajau Laut (Sea bajau) is divided into two groups; the bajau Laut in the areas of Bangau-Bangau Village and the Bajau people of the Omadal Island, Bum-Bum Island, Danawan Island, the Kabongan Village and several other areas. These two Bajau groups may display several physical similarities, for example in appearances, occupation and language. Refer to Yap Beng Liang (1993).
- ⁷ According to Winstedt (1925:65), the Malays believe that spirits can be found in a baby's placenta, in each part of the human body, sweat, hair and fingernails, in someone's shadow and name, in a person's and animals' bath water and in one's footsteps. Spirits also exists in plants, beads, the earth and steel.
- ⁸ Owing to the belief in the spirit of the paddy, there are several ritual performed. The purpose for these rituals, for example the planting rituals, is to ensure a good harvest. For further information, refer to Faridah Mohammad 1979. Kepercayaan Tradisional Institusi Bomoh dan Peranan Jampi dan Mantera dalam Kehidupan sehari-hari di Johor, Academic Practice, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- ⁹ Several western scholars, among them Snouck Hurgronje (1906), Richard Winstedt (1972) and J.C. Van Leur (1967), gave the impression that the spread of Islam in the Malay Archipelago was widespread but not in depth, and this view is related to the evaluation that the Malays might have had a shallow knowledge of Islam because they still had a strong inclination towards believes they had prior to Islam. For further information, refer to Mohd.Taib Osman, Bunga Rampai Kebudayaan Melayu, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1988.
- ¹⁰ The same statement is made by Winstedt (1920:121) that the paddy spirit is called *Nur Hayatullah* before it is sent to Earth and *Nur Maniah* when it reaches Earth.
- ¹¹ In the old days, the period of paddy planting is six months according to the Moslem calendar, which begins with Muharram and ends with Jamadilakhir. Now the paddy

planting process only takes four months to complete but the Bajau farmers still maintain Muharram as the first month of the paddy planting cycle.

- ¹² The *Ngeliun* refers to the act of walking around the area of the paddy field where the harvest will take place while reciting some chants or mantras and the *ngeliun* chant has to be read all the way from the first corner of the area to the last corner.
- ¹³ During the *ngeliun* ceremony, the Bajau farmers do not like it if there are other farmers in their area of the paddy field, because it is feared that the farmers might fall sick after the ceremony.
- ¹⁴ The paddy stalks chosen for the *tekok parai* are stalks which are well selected and the stalks need to have the large amount of dew on the leaves.
- ¹⁵ The *tekok parai* has 12 stalks and this follows the 12 months of the year. This is because in the old days, the paddy is planted only once a year.
- ¹⁶ The same phenomenon is observed among the other farmers in Malaysia, for example in the Kadayan community, the Murut, the Dusun and the Lotud (cf., Raymond Emus 1982; Patricia Regis & Judeth John 1993).
- ¹⁷ The magical rituals are referred to as critical ceremonies as they are performed as a way of overcoming the various crises in life. In magic, the attitude towards the supernatural is said to be manipulative, which means that the supernatural power is enticed into obeying the commands of the ritual performer. Those who normally perform these rituals are shamans or people who have the ability to communicate with the supernatural (Mohd. Taib Osman 1989:155).

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