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Parang

Unique traditional arts and handicrafts

Brunei has been widely known for its unique traditional arts and handicrafts handed down from one generation to the next. Products of such arts and handicrafts flourished at the height of the Brunei Empire during the 15th and the first half of the 16th centuries.

Most of Brunei's traditional handicrafts feature the use of gold, silver, iron, copper and brass. Some of the high-end custom-made handicrafts are being kept among private collectors while some are displayed by local museums.

Time was when the handicrafts produced on commercial scale were sold in retail outlets and small-scale ones by individuals living in Kampung Ayer.

Nowadays the business of producing handicrafts is no longer confined to the Kampung Ayer area but has spread widely throughout Brunei.

In this September 2013 edition of Brunei Today, we will highlight one of the traditional handicrafts that has experienced continual demand among the local population: the parang (a blade that is similar to a machete).

Parang is a useful tool as it could be used for cutting the grass and shrubs, chopping woods, slicing meat and large-sized fish and so on. Each Brunei household owns at least a parang.



From one generation to the next

Our correspondent has met one of the producers of parang, Awang Tuah Haji Sabtu, who lives in Kampung Tanjung Nangka of Mukim Sengkurong in the Brunei-Muara District. Awang Tuah has been producing parang since he was 10 years old.

During the interview, Awang Tuah was accompanied by his elder brother, Awang Haji Mohammad, who assisted in providing insight of parang production.

"Awang Tuah helped our father frequently in melting and hammering the iron according to instruction. Father noticed my brother's diligence, meticulousness and commitment and consequently handed down the skill to him," said Awang Haji Mohammad.

"His interest and confidence that parang production has commercial potentials has persuaded him to engage in this enterprise fulltime," he said.





Well known among locals

For his commitment in this area of expertise, he is well known among locals and frequently receives custom-made orders for parang of various measurements.

As a fulltime entrepreneur he is equipped with a host of equipment and materials that enable him to produce parang of superb workmanship. Materials include wood (for the hilt and scabbard), glue, ropes, varnish, and so on.





Recycled iron

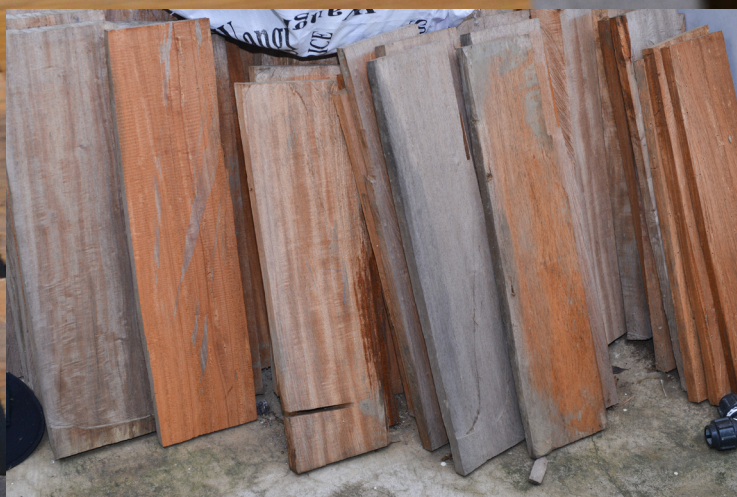
According to Awang Tuah, he uses recycled iron from coil springs, which is a challenge to obtain given the limited supply of such commodity available at the Brunei market. Consequently he also has to source the iron from abroad, although sometimes clients do bring their own batch of iron for this purpose.



Wood of local trees

Wood for hilt and scabbard is based on local trees such as ubah, ranggu, pangkal, kulimpapa and asamjawa in which the wood grain of each appears more elegant when varnished.

Other essentials such as glue, ropes and steel plates are bought from hardware stores.





Parang is a useful tool as it could be used for cutting the grass and scrubs, chopping woods, slicing meat and large-sized fish and so on.



The selling price of each parang depends on the size and workmanship quality.

Prosess in making Parang



Process of making a parang (Refer to the photographs)

1. Heat is being used to bring the metal to malleable state.
2. The metal reddens and subsequently knocked into shape by repetitive hammering on the anvil.
3. The metal edge is subject to grinding in order to produce a sharpened blade.
4. The tang is the bit of a blade that is being fitted into the hilt.
5. By the time the metal is shaped into a blade, it is then subject to heat treating. At this stage, the blade is heated evenly and cooled slowly.
6. Wood is being used to make the hilt and scabbard.
7. Steel plate is fastened at the upper part of the hilt in order to minimise the risk of wood splitting.
8. Rope is tied to the scabbard to make it easy to carry by the user.



Making the hilt and scabbard









Parang still have value and high demand

According to Awang Haji Mohammad, his younger brother could produce ten parang each day. The selling price of each parang depends on the size and workmanship quality: a typical parang costs between B\$70 and B\$100.

Locals also buy high-end parang as showpiece items that are encased and displayed in the living rooms of their homes.

In addition to individuals, even government institutions sometimes make bulk purchasing: Awang Tuah earns about B\$1,000 each month from this business.



