

Popular Culture: the Influence and Implications on the Malay Traditional Clothing in Malaysia

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Abstract: *Traditional Malay clothing refers to the Malay traditional attires, especially for Baju Melayu and Baju Kurung. It symbolises a significant identity of Malay society until now. With the advancement on technology in present has led to the inclusion of popular culture, especially in the fashion industry that has become a worldwide phenomenon. There are various styles and trends from external culture that have become a source of inspiration for fashion style in Malaysia today. However, with the openness to accept the new fashion styles and applying it to the traditional Malay costumes, there are some positive and negative effects towards Malay clothes. This paper also explains some of the problems that may occur in traditional Malay costumes in the future time. This research aims to contain the extinction of the proper Malay dressing by following culture sides and as a guided by the principle of Islamic religion. It is closely related to the question of value, environment, behavior, needs and technology in social institutions of society now in fashion. Researchers use qualitative and descriptive research approaches through the analysis of the Malay dressing culture from traditional and modern design clothing in Malaysia based on selected research theories. This research will look into the influence and impact on the identity of Malay traditional clothing in Malaysia's with the existence of a mix external culture in the latest apparel design in relation to cultural and socio-cultural.*

Index Terms: *Malay Identity, Popular Culture, Traditional Malay Clothing, Worldwide Phenomenon.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Fashion is a culture that symbolizes the identity of the dressing style used at all times. However, a more in-depth definition of fashion is a popular use style (Kamus Dewan, 2009). The existence of fashion dressed up has been for centuries and the society has been using clothing and jewelry as a non-verbal communication to symbolize their occupation, rank, gender, wealth, social class, and organizational group. Other than that, fashion is not only includes clothing but also accessories, jewelry, hairstyles and beauty. However, in recent years, fashion is becoming more significant to women. Even though, now fashion also related to the men's in Malaysia when they are increasingly accepting, understanding and being more open to fashion (Johan Kasim, 2015).

Revised Manuscript Received on November 15, 2019.

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Retrieval Number: C12521083S219/2019@BEIESP
DOI:10.35940/ijrte.C1252.1083S219

A. Background of the Study

Clothes are well-known to be one of the basic necessities for human's life. In addition, the fashion world is now growing and influencing the individual's performance. Not only that, modern people nowadays fonder into fashion than tradition people who only used clothing as an *aurat* cover. The situation has led to various types of latest fashion design created according to the request and consumers' need so that they will not be left out with the current fashion trend. The change in fashion has caused them to start creating a new style in dressing and modifying existing outfits like traditional clothing to suit their preference nowadays. This is to ensure that they can be fashionable according to the current situation. Many of fashion trends have taken a place in modern times today. All of these changes often occur due to the rapid development of technology either in the form of printing or electronic that has spread information about the developments and changes in fashion images that are increasingly popular in the world. This diversity of media materials has provided space for designers and consumers to try out a new fashion (Fathiyyah Shafie, 2017). Traditional Malay clothing is not limited to the use of cloth and clothes only. According to Siti Zainon Ismail, (2006), it is a part of the community's customs and traditions to fulfil the life that embodies the values, norms and beauty of the Malay culture itself. This explains that clothing is a symbol of the nation culture. The most popular Malay dress is *Baju Kurung* which is a symbol of Malay culture in Malaysia, Singapore and throughout the archipelago. *Baju Kurung* is a traditional dress for the Malay community. Its traditional features are to cover *aurat* and the design functions are in line with Malaysia's weather, as well as the deductions that suit all the societies. The history recorded that *Baju Kurung* is the name given to the traditional Malay clothes for both men and women. The *Baju Kurung* was adopted as a traditional costume by Sultan Abu Bakar, who was the Sultan of Johor in the late 19th century. After that, *Baju Kurung* has variance in terms of names like *Baju Melayu* for male and *Baju Kurung* for women. The advancement of technology today has led to the transformation of politic, economy, social and cultural diversity into a country including Malaysia. The current evolution and fashion changes in Malaysia can be seen especially in the traditional Malay attire, it is in line with the fashion definition stated by Collin McDowell in Fazren Subre (2011), which explains that fashion is evolving over the time.



Popular Culture: the Influence and Implications on the Malay Traditional Clothing in Malaysia

The changes in fashion trend not only to an individual or group but also to every age and gender. All of these changes are often related to trends that are increasingly revealing the body of the wearer. If in the old days, dark colours were popular among Malays, but in the modern era, people prefer to wear unique and bright colour for clothes. This is happening because of the collision between the two cultures it is eastern culture and the outer culture like the popular culture today.

B. Problem Statement

Fashion is one of the adaptations of imitation as well as equality in terms of shape and usability. According to Birtwistle and Moore (2007), the success of a new fashion is based on the acceptance of fashion reforms in the early stages of the life cycle. For example, the invention of traditional Malay dresses in the past shows the hallmarks of politeness which is the identity of the Malay community (Zubaidah Sual, 2015). The mode of application is influenced by Islam that has begun to absorb in Malaya since the time of the Malay Sultanate of Malacca. However, with external influences and circulation, traditional Malay dress identity has undergone with various changes and its identity as the Malay culture is getting lost. According to Ezlina Alias (2016) in Nur Hayati Endan:

“Idea-idea baru ini mungkin diveduk dari rekaan luar Negara yang tidak bersesuaian dengan budaya masyarakat kita, justeru itu wujudlah pelbagai rekaan seperti Baju Melayu hipster, jubah tanpa lengan, jubah pahlawan dan sebagainya. Fesyen seumpama itu boleh menghakis warisan pakaian Baju Melayu”. (Ezlina Alias, 2016).

"These new ideas may be drawn from foreign designs that are not harmonious with the culture of our society, therefore there are various designs such as Baju Melayu hipster, sleeveless robes, robe warriors and so on. That kind of fashion can corrode the legacy of Baju Melayu (Ezlina Alias, 2016). The online business is also a new popular culture in Malaysia and becomes a phenomenon. Although there are traditional outfits that are sold online, but with the emergence of modern clothes inspired by the name of the traditional Malay attire it also leads to be a bad culture. This is because with the emergence of modern outfits with external influences it will deteriorate the traditional apparel identity. According to Sri Qamariah Mohd Samsir (2016) in Nur Hayati Endan writing:

“Ja mungkin sampai ke satu tahap hingga generasi Melayu akan datang tidak lagi mengenali pakaian tradisional dan identiti budaya Melayu kerana dilambakkan dengan pakaian rekaan moden” (Sri Qamariah Mohd Samsir, 2016).

"It may come to a point that the next generation of Malays will no longer recognize our traditional clothes and Malay cultural identity because of being to obsess with modern designed clothes (Sri Qamariah Mohd Samsir, 2016).

C. Aims

The aim of this research is to study the influence and impact of the implementation of popular culture in Malay traditional costume.

D. Research Objective

1. There are three research objectives to be achieved based on the research problem.

2. To identify the influence of popular culture in the addition of design and the new transformation of traditional Malay clothing.
3. To study the effects of external influences on the Malay dress culture.
4. To produce a special guide in recognizing traditional Malay clothes and the creation of modern clothes in order to generate and retain the authenticity of Malay culture.

E. Research Question

There are a few questions to be answered in conducting this research,

1. What are the characteristics of popular influence in the addition of the latest design and processing in traditional Malay dresses?
2. What is the impact on the implementation of outside influences in traditional Malay clothing?
3. What is the guidance in recognizing Malay clothes and the steps to maintain the authenticity of Malay clothes and culture in the creation of new modern clothes?

F. Methodology

This study is undertaken as a qualitative research that involves ethnographic studies of Malay society and the many influences that have helped in shaping it. The research is also based on the analysis of historical evidence as a primary data and literature review as a secondary data to gather as much information as possible to this research. In addition, researcher also visit to the National achieve, museum and private library in peninsular of Malaysia in order to get the relevant proofs. Other than that, also referring to the literature reviews such as from fashion book, fashion magazines, fashion bulletin, newspaper, internet, journal articles to help researches to get a concrete understanding towards the area of research. In addition, this research also will conduct an interview session with the potential interviewers such as practitioners, fashion designer, curators, cultural observers and academician for a clear and in depth understanding on the research topic.

i. Related Theories

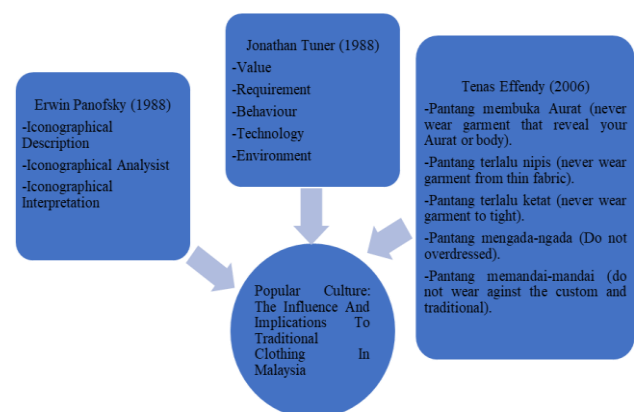


Figure 1: Theoretical conceptual framework to be used in this research investigation.

ii. Conceptual Explanation

The conceptual term will explain in general the theoretical concepts employed in this study with the purpose of knowing and identifying the definitions of the term so that it is in parallel with the basis of the discussion.

a) Iconography Theory by Erwin Panofsky (1972)

Erwin Panofsky provides an overview of the artistic appreciation of art in three basic components, namely; iconography, iconography analysis and iconographic interpretation.

b) Institution Theory by Jonathan Tuner (1988)

Meanwhile, Turner sees a culture in a social system built up of five key components it is values, needs, behaviors, technologies, and environments to form social institutions in the context of Malaysia's modern art. Values refer to an authority for the sense of trust or perception. It can be a stake in a social institution. The value or norm exists because of the rational consideration factor in religious law and any matter done around a member in the society. Laws, customs, abstinence and treatment in certain societies are largely dependent on the needs of the community. For example, the teachings of Islam as a monotheistic religion limit the scope of a more restricted artistic culture and fulfil the religious will of art. In addition, the need in the context of the development of art or design in Malaysia can be divided into three parts. Firstly, it is a designer's tendency that meets the demands of sociology for himself as a fashion designer. Secondly, as an economic need for the advice of life and the third, as a cultural necessity; the tendency towards cultural interaction in the society. In addition, fashion designers can also be categorized as a painter or artist: Often to described as a creative person. Every human being in a culturally organized group always want to show its existence in this world. In addition, they want to show themselves as civilized individuals. The presentations of the art form of his work physically demonstrated and clarifies the identity of the individual in the culturally based community group are represents. The needs of aesthetic express, fully absorbing the need for other activities. With a sense of belonging and artistry, the individual will also try to fulfil the social needs towards social life and also carry out his responsibilities as a cultural member of the community (Abdul Halim Husain, 2007). While from the technological point of view it is seen as an important element in the formation of community culture, as it moves along with the development of human life. Basically, technology has been created ever since so it is now aimed to help and facilitate various aspects of life, both at work and communicating, so as to solve various bizarre questions that arise in the community's lives. Technology not only helps and simplifies humanity but also offers new ways of doing activities that can affect the culture of a society in which already existed. It explains culture as a framework of behavior for people who have values such as truth, beauty, justice, humanity, wisdom and influential as a framework to form a human life views that are realistic to enjoy and also become part of the community's choice to determine his attitude towards the various agendas and events in life.

c) The Ethics of Malay Clothing by Tenas Effendy (2006)

In the past life, the Malays are very concern in terms of dressing. In order to be very careful in defining customs on how to wear clothes and greatly uphold the value of religion and culture in their dressing style. In the meantime, the Malays are always trying to choose the clothes that suit their positions, trying to wear good and true attire, and try to keep them from breaking all the barriers in dressing, and trying to show commendable behavior in his daily life. What are meant by the prohibition in dressing in Malay is all the prohibitions or restrictions set by Islamic teachings and customs in which Malay cultures treated for those who wear Malay clothes. The rehibition on the teachings of Islam among others, such as never expose *aurat*, not too tight or rare. Whereas abstinence by custom is mostly treated to custom clothing which is full of various customary rules, including the right and cannot be used, the way of wear, the place of wear, the apparel, the clothing color, and so on.

The Ethics of Malay Clothing have five components:

I. Pantang membuka aurat (never wear garment that shows aurat or body)

Every Malay individual is obliged to cover their *aurat*. This principle is very important because clothing that does not cover the aurat is considered as lowering the human dignity, violate the Islamic faith and the Malay custom. The behaviour of people who wear clothing that does not cover the aurat is largely prevented and examined both by Islam and by the Malay customs based on Islam.

II. Pantang terlalu nipis atau jarang (never wear garment from thin fabric)

The ethics of Malay dressing are overly wearing garment from thin fabric that cause the wearer's body shape to be seen through, especially for women. Tradition people say the thinner of his shirt, the thinner of his faith. In the customary phrase is said, "apabila berkain baju terlalu tipis, di situlah tempat setan dan iblis". In addition, it is said, "apabila memakai baju terlalu jarang, malu tak ada aib pun hilang", or, "sesiapa memakai tembus mata, tanda dirinya di dalam nista".

III. Pantang terlalu ketat (never wear garment that is too tight)

Malay clothes are also heavily tanned so it reveals the curves of his body. The customary phrase says, "apabila memakai terlalu ketat, agamanya hilang binasa adat", or also said that, "sesiapa berbaju terlalu sempit, imannya malap jiwanya sakit". The phrase further affirms, "tanda melayu memegang adat, pantang sekali berbaju ketat", atau dikatakan, "tanda orang teguh beriman, pakaian sempit dia jauhkan".

IV. Pantang mengada-ada (do not overdress)

What is meant by do not overdress is abstinence of making and wearing a Malay dress with no reference to the three abstinence above and wearing it all over.

V. Larangan Memandai-mandai (do not wear garment against the customs and tradition)

What is meant of this abstinence is that it is forbidden to make or wear garments at all times without understanding and caring for the prohibitions and provisions of the customs. The Malay traditions says that “bila berbaju memandai-mandai, tanda dirinya buruk perangai”, or it is said, “apabila berpakaian memandai-mandai, aib tersingkap malu terburai”. These rules do not mean to prohibit the development of fashion and designer's creativity in making Malay dresses, but simply to keep the clothes by not eliminating their original symbols and values as Malay society identity. They also say, “di dalam pakaian Melayu ada pakaian lahir dan ada pakaian batinnya”, or said that, “di dalam baju kurung banyak makna yang terkandung”.

G. Significant of study

The study of the changes and the addition of traditional Malay clothing designs in Malaysia is very important as it has a huge impact in protecting the authenticity of traditional Malay dresses in which comes with values of Malay politeness and motif while also highlighting the Malay style dressed in international fashion without changing the characteristics traditional clothing that eliminates the original value. In addition, this research is important for academic purposes. This is because, this research is an improvement from existing research in relation to traditional Malay clothes because fashion is a culture that changes all the time and the changes of the new Malay culture need to be updated at all times. So that, the ethics of Malay dressed is not tarnished with the implementation of popular culture value. Through this research, it is hoped that it will be used as a guide and reference for future generations in recognizing the variety and ornamentation of traditional Malay clothes and appreciating the arts and cultural heritage of Malays so that every artwork and creation of our ancestors will be hereditary throughout the ages, more detailed study references in the future.

H. Scope of Study

This study focuses more on the emergence of new cultures found in the creation of modern garment designs that inspired by the traditional Malay clothing designs in Malaysia. This is because, with the openness and enthusiasm in creating modern designs, the design of the tradition of Malay clothing created by our ancestors will be lost in the ages. Therefore, researchers will study the implications of Malay traditional clothes that are innovated with the latest styles based on the current fashion styles such as popular cultural nowadays.

I. Literature Review

I. History of Dressing in Malay Society

Before the influence of Islam, the Malays clothing was influenced by the religion of Hindu-Budhha. They are just a simple dress. The men only use two strands of cloth, one to cover the head and the other as a sheath. For the women, three pieces of cloth are used as a *sarong* cloth, *kemban* cloth and a scarf cloth. The difference status can be seen through the use of expensive fabrics. Around the 7th century, there was a Muslim influence in the way of how the Malays dress, brought in by the Arabs. The absorption and transition of the influence of Islam takes place in stages

and this process takes quite a while. In the 7th to the 13th century, Islam spread widely in Malay land. However, their application still has Hindu-Buddhist influence. The Malay community started to dress up politely, wearing a short tunic-shaped dress with green cotton and the bottom was wrapped with silk cloth.

In the Melaka Malay kingdom, the process of evolution of Malay clothing is considered to be the highest level. The men began to wear *Baju Melayu* while the woman began to wear *Baju Kurung* with cloak to cover their heads. There are various types of traditional Malay attire that have gone through evolution. This traditional dress style has been worn by the palace and the nobility and then became the people's comrades. Finally, the way of dressing up among royals are almost the same and only different types of fabrics and accessories come to their own taste.

II. Malay Traditional Clothing

Traditional clothing is one of Malaysian's cultural heritage. According to the National Heritage Department has classified the traditional clothing is an intangible heritage. Meanwhile, according to Cahyono (2006), the garment is a tool that is used to cover the body parts that coincide with the prevailing norms of society. In addition, every race in Malaysia has its own unique dress and it symbolizes the identity of the community. In the 20th century, the Malay women at that time were dressed as *kemban* and is *sarong* or long cloth covering the body and leaving the shoulder part exposed. However, after the acceptance of Islam as the main religion of Malay land, it has brought a major change in which the fanciful fashion fades and enhances more modest and elegant fashion culture with the creation of traditional Malay *Baju Kurung*. *Baju Kurung* consists of two parts: blouse and long skirt. The blouse or the body part of the shirt and it loose and has a distinct length either between the hip and knee level. Traditionally, *Baju Kurung* has long sleeves, but after the absorption of popular and modern culture in the design of traditional Malay clothes has created a new form in silhouette Malay clothes such as body cuts, sleeveless floral blouses and etc. While the skirt of the *Baju Kurung* is long to ankle and has a fold on the edges to facilitate the wearer to move and sit. To complete this traditional dress, the female usually wearing a scarf in the head. Meanwhile, for males, Malay men's traditional dress is *Baju Melayu*. It is made up of loose long sleeves worn with pants and equipped with a draped tied of *sampin* or short sleeve fabric tied at the waist band. In order to complete this dress, the Malay men wear headdress known as *songkok*.

J. Findings

The revolution of the fashion is seen as growing today and at the same time men's fashion is increasingly competing with women's clothing. If only decades ago, changes could only be seen in women's clothing such as changes in design and patterns on the clothing available in the market, while men's clothing only remained in the original or small changes, especially in menswear perhaps because there was not much room to change on men's clothing as it is found in women's clothing.





Figure 2: The original shape, cut, and style of traditional *Baju Melayu* in Malaysia.

However, in line with the achievements and progress achieved by Malaysia, the changes of style and fashion in today's Malay society can be seen as a clash of classic and modern styles. In fact, there have been various changes where Malay clothing has been diversified whether it still retains the same design as modern touches, the use of patterned fabric or the use of vibrant colors and so on.



Figure 3. The style of modern *Baju Kurung* in Malaysia with the element of popular culture like more on bright colour, slim fit cut, volume silhouettes and element of motif on the garment. With the passing of time, a variety of modern designs have emerged and have been embraced by the Malaysian fashion designer including modern Malay clothes with the influence of popular culture. Modern clothes are traditional clothes that have been given with new breath as time has passed. This outfit is well-worn by all ages because of its flexibility and easy-to-wear features. Modern clothing has a more modern design and pattern than the original pattern and design with the addition of layered fabric, volume and exterior features in the garment. The latest techniques, methods and patterns have been applied to this dress to ensure that it complies with the tastes of its wearers. This dress has also been modified to look more attractive and has its own

charm. Wan Abdul Kadir (1988) explains that, popular culture is an element of the culture of interest and attention given to the local community. These cultural elements are a useful tool for all members of the community, where young people are the users or their members. In the traditional community, these popular cultures are not expanding and widespread because they claim to possess regional features that are not acceptable to other communities. However, in the modern era today society that has undergone rapid development in technology, economy and basic amenities has contributed to the spread of popular culture. This situation has led the entrepreneurs to create more diverse based on cultural elements. Based on the findings of the study, it is found that the traditional design of Malay clothes changed according to external and internal influences. Among the influences that changed the original design of the Malay shirt design were the presence of Western, Indian, Chinese and fashionable tastes. According to Hairudin Harun (2006), cultural practices in society can change through the change of time that opens up opportunities to influence that come from outside of a society's original cultural space and when cultural clashes begin to undergo processes of change. However, this positive change of fashion can also lead to a negative effect on the future of Malay society. This is because the original identity of the Malay community has been misunderstood by today's modern dress culture where there are some local fashion designers and people who prefer to wear Malay clothing in violation of Malay fashion etiquette and among Muslim community. This is where it can be seen today especially in the festive season of Islam where festive clothing created today is sometimes too tight, highlighting the wearer's body shape which can lead to bad attitude. At the same time, this change has brought down the dignity of Malay people who are known with good manners.



Figure 4: The overdress of style *Baju Melayu* with using thin material fabric.

K. Conclusion

As a conclusion, this research is very important to protect our national identity based on the existence of Malay traditional costume in Malaysia.

Popular Culture: the Influence and Implications on the Malay Traditional Clothing in Malaysia

Other than that, with a study on the influence of popular culture on the design of traditional Malay clothes can give a bit of a pictorial and awareness to the community to dress by following the customs and culture of the true Islamic Malay community. Researcher have found that the implementation of Popular Culture there have been changes the features of the original design of the traditional Malay clothes and known as modern *Baju Melayu*. This situation given many negatives point to the new society because the new design sometime looked overdesign and not symbolic as characteristic of Malay itself.

In addition, this study will also enhance and improve the study on Malay clothing in Malaysia. It is not wrong to modernize a garment as long as it is still maintained dignity as a modern Malay. That why any changes, adaptations and arrangements made for the modern Malay costumes should not avoid from its original identity and the aesthetic of the Malay costume.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research was supported in part by UiTM under grant No. 600-IRMI 5/3/GIP (001/2019).

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