

Pertanika Journal of  
**SOCIAL SCIENCES  
& HUMANITIES**

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*A Special Issue devoted to  
Arts and Culture*

Guest Editor  
**Najihah Mahmud**



PERTANIKA  
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# PERTANIKA JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

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**Vol. 34 (S2) 2026**

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# Preface

The social sciences and humanities continue to provide meaningful perspectives in understanding culture, identity, heritage, and community life within an increasingly globalised world. As societies experience rapid transformation through modernisation, migration, technological advancement, and changing social values, the need to document, interpret, and preserve cultural knowledge has become increasingly important. This special issue brings together scholarly contributions that examine diverse dimensions of cultural heritage, local identity, oral traditions, performing arts, architecture, and museum practices within Malaysian and regional contexts.

The studies featured in this issue highlight the significance of both tangible and intangible heritage in shaping collective memory, social values, and cultural continuity. They demonstrate how traditional knowledge, folklore, myths, customs, performance traditions, architectural forms, and public cultural spaces continue to function as important markers of identity. At the same time, these contributions show that heritage is not static, but constantly negotiated, adapted, and redefined in response to contemporary realities such as globalisation, cultural change, tourism, disaster risk, and sustainability concerns.

This special issue focuses on recent developments in social sciences and humanities research, particularly in relation to cultural heritage and identity. It covers a wide range of topics, including but not limited to:

- Oral narratives, folklore, myths, and local belief systems
- Cultural identity, customs, and intangible heritage preservation
- Traditional performing arts, music, dance, and shadow puppetry
- Vernacular architecture, public design, and representations of local identity
- Museum practices, disaster risk management, and heritage sustainability
- Community-based cultural transmission and preservation strategies

The contributions in this issue aim to advance scholarly discourse on the role of heritage in sustaining cultural identity and community resilience. It is hoped that the insights presented will serve as valuable references for researchers, practitioners, cultural institutions, policymakers, and heritage stakeholders who are committed to safeguarding cultural traditions while ensuring their relevance for future generations.

## **Guest Editor:**

Najihah Mahmud (Dr.)



*Review Article*

## **Formation and Redefinition of the Cultural Identity of the Adat Perpatih of Negeri Sembilan in the Context of Globalisation**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Globalisation fosters dynamic interactions between global and local cultures, often leading to cultural hybridisation. This study examines how globalisation has affected the *adat perpatih* of the Malay community in Negeri Sembilan, with a focus on how these transformations have reshaped cultural identity. Framed by Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity, the study aims to explore how traditional customs adapt through both continuity and rupture. A qualitative ethnographic approach was employed, incorporating in-depth interviews and participant observation, with data analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Key findings reveal that urban migration, modern lifestyles, intermarriage, and persistent stereotypes have contributed to a decline in *adat perpatih* practices among younger generations. These shifts illustrate how *adat perpatih* negotiates its relevance within contemporary society. The findings offer implications for cultural preservation strategies and highlight the importance of sustaining intangible heritage in an increasingly globalised world.

*Keywords:* Adat Perpatih, globalisation, identity, intangible cultural heritage

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Malay Archipelago is a treasure trove of customs, culture, traditions, and heritage that have been handed down through generations. "Adat" refers to traditional norms and customary laws that govern daily life and community interactions. The term is derived from Arabic, introduced by Islamic merchants to describe local traditions outside Islamic law (Van Engelenhoven, 2021).

*Adat* is further understood as a form of proper conduct, encompassing a broad spectrum of beliefs, practices, and moral codes that govern interpersonal and communal interactions.

Far from being static, *adat* is a dynamic and evolving system. It has continuously adapted over time while retaining its core values, even in the face of external influences such as urbanisation and modernisation, which have progressively weakened its presence (Simonetti, 2023). *Adat* is more than a mere collection of customs; it embodies a holistic worldview. It reflects a belief in the profound interconnectedness and continuity of all things, respect for elders, and a commitment to maintaining harmony in both nature and society.

*Adat* influences all aspects of Malay communal life, from conflict resolution (Hennidaa et al., 2020; Siregar, 2018) and property management (Fathoni et al., 2025; Febrianty et al., 2024) to rites of passage. For instance, birth rituals often involve the *buaiian*, or traditional cradle ceremony that is often referred to as *adat berendoi* or *bersandoi* (Ibrahim et al., 2022) where newborns are welcomed with prayers and blessings for health and prosperity. Similarly, wedding ceremonies, such as *bersanding*, are elaborate affairs featuring traditional attire, music, and communal feasting that symbolise the union of families.

The concept of *adat* also varies across regions. For example, in Mandailing culture, marriage customs include assigning a surname (*marga*), which is crucial in preserving lineage continuity (Ammar et al., 2023).

In Riau, *adat* is considered a foundational pillar of Malay culture, comprising four interconnected domains of customary practice that collectively uphold cultural integrity: real custom, the custom, the most traditional customs, and *Adat Istiadat* (special ceremonies) (Afandi et al., 2023).

Although *adat* is typically translated as “tradition,” “custom,” or “customary law,” Peletz (1988) argues that its significance is far deeper. He contends that *adat* governs social conduct while encompassing moral, religious, and even cosmological dimensions. According to Peletz, *adat* is a cohesive and authoritative force that permeates nearly every aspect of community life. It instructs individuals not only in acceptable behaviour but also in aspirational ideals, merging practical action with ethical and spiritual values. At its core, *adat* is regarded as an instinctive and divine principle, intricately linked with religious belief.

Therefore, *adat* plays a vital role as both a way of life and a mechanism for preserving cultural heritage. It sustains communal well-being across generations while continuously adapting to changing social landscapes. One of the most prominent examples of *adat* in Malaysia is found in two major customary systems: *adat perpatih* and *adat temenggung*. These systems illustrate how *adat* has been uniquely adapted by different Malay communities as they adopted both of these customary laws over a thousand years ago, each with its own distinctive features. For example, the *adat perpatih* is usually practised by the Malay community in Negeri Sembilan. Although the *adat perpatih* in

Negeri Sembilan is often associated with the *adat perpatih* in West Sumatra and Minangkabau, there are various versions of the arrival and emergence of the *adat perpatih* in Negeri Sembilan. According to some local scholars, the *adat perpatih* in Negeri Sembilan is currently a mix brought by Minangkabau immigrants and *adat* that has always existed in Negeri Sembilan. As a result, the *adat perpatih* in Negeri Sembilan has now been mixed and practised up to this point (Ibrahim, 2007).

*Adat perpatih* is significant in forming *adat* communities in Negeri Sembilan, especially in shaping their identity and instilling a sense of belonging. However, *adat perpatih* is occasionally challenged by civil law (Baharuddin, 2005) and modernity, in which people tend to adopt a current and modern lifestyle. Besides that, other factors such as globalisation may also lead to the loss of intangible cultural heritage, particularly *adat perpatih*. The international protections for Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), such as the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), primarily address concerns about the potential loss of intangible cultural heritage rather than exclusion. It is evident that the colonial regulations that banned many cultural activities had a severe impact on peoples and their traditions, resulting in a significant decline in worldwide cultural diversity.

Globalisation is believed to contribute to cultural erosion and may lead to cultural homogenisation, in which a single dominant culture is prioritised, making it

increasingly difficult for other cultures to sustain themselves or compete (Harding, 2018). Ultimately, this results in the dominance and widespread adoption of the prevailing culture. Therefore, the purpose of this writing is to examine the key factors contributing to the transformation of *adat perpatih* and to explore how these changes have redefined and reshaped the cultural identity of the Malay community in Negeri Sembilan in contemporary times. This study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamic relationship between traditional values and modern lifestyles, striving to uphold *adat* while engaging with the demands of present-day living.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Adat Perpatih as Customary Practices

*Adat perpatih* in Negeri Sembilan is defined by several main principles and practices, particularly related to property inheritance, customary land ownership, the importance of *adat* leaders, and decision-making through consultation or consensus (*musyawarah*). Property inheritance in Negeri Sembilan follows a matrilineal system, where the daughter inherits all the customary property of the family. In cases where the family has no daughter, some families will adopt one and send her according to her adoptive mother's *suku*. If no adopted child exists, the customary property reverts to the same *suku*'s heirs. *Suku* is a fundamental component of the *adat perpatih* system which refers to a social group tracing ancestry and family connections through maternal lineage (Radzuan, 2021).

*Adat perpatih* also emphasises the principle of *merantau*. *Merantau* refers to the voluntary migration of Minangkabau people from their native region in West Sumatra to other parts of Indonesia (Lestari, 2023). Interestingly, the number of Minangkabau who go on *merantau* is approximately the same as those who remain home. The term *merantau* encompasses both temporary and long-term migration. People embark on *merantau* for various reasons, such as to pursue economic opportunities and education as well as to gain exposure to diverse experiences and knowledge. *Merantau* has become a significant aspect of Minangkabau culture and identity, with many individuals maintaining strong ties to their homeland while residing and working in other parts of Indonesia (Naim, 1971). When the immigrants from the Minangkabau region brought their rich culture and *adat perpatih* (matrilineal customary law) to Malaysia, *merantau*, or the tradition of leaving home to seek opportunities elsewhere, became deeply ingrained in the lifestyle of the Malays in Negeri Sembilan. The practice of *merantau* was a significant influence as individuals embarked on journeys to improve their financial prospects and overall quality of life.

### **Globalisation in the Context of Cultural Heritage**

Globalisation has brought about an unprecedented level of interconnectedness, enabling the rapid exchange of cultural ideas, social values, and traditional

practices across diverse societies. This interconnectivity has played a pivotal role in safeguarding and sustaining intangible cultural heritage (ICH), particularly through digital platforms, cross-cultural collaboration, and increased international awareness. For instance, the global sharing of traditional rituals, oral histories, and indigenous knowledge systems via media and education has contributed to their continued relevance and adaptation in contemporary contexts. Digital archives and databases have made storing and accessing information related to intangible cultural heritage easier (Wendland, 2009), allowing researchers and enthusiasts to study and appreciate these traditions more extensively. Through these mediums, communities are now able to share their cultural practices and knowledge with a broader audience. This not only strengthens the sense of identity and belonging within the community but also helps safeguard heritage from being lost or forgotten.

Globalisation has led to profound and far-reaching transformations in how people live, affecting their lifestyles and beliefs as well as shaping their perceptions and cultural norms. This phenomenon greatly influences safeguarding cultural heritage and maintaining cultural identity (Sofield, 2001). While globalisation brings both beneficial and adverse effects on intangible cultural heritage, there is an undeniable threat of significant loss and potential erosion of its intrinsic value. Despite the obstacles presented, globalisation has the potential to act as a mechanism for

safeguarding intangible cultural heritage by promoting a widespread understanding of its enduring significance. This is evident from the importance of several Conventions instigated by the UNESCO, which emphasises the critical role of outstanding universal values and the involvement of the community in conserving and safeguarding both tangible and intangible heritage. UNESCO has prioritised World Heritage through its Outstanding Universal Values (OUV) in the World Heritage Convention of 1972, emphasising the cultural significance of local heritage within the community and extending its importance and values to the global community.

Recognising a UNESCO designation can raise local, national, and international awareness, contributing to the preservation of local heritage for future generations. In 2003, UNESCO launched the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, focusing on intangible cultural heritage and emphasising the community's active role in safeguarding and sustaining their cultural heritage. Both international conventions show that globalisation can have positive impacts on cultural heritage. However, contemporary cultural challenges and threats continue to significantly influence culture, identity, and national heritage.

It could not be denied that globalisation has become a powerful and pervasive force contributing to the erosion of cultural heritage. For instance, globalisation has the potential to overshadow local traditions through cultural homogenisation while

simultaneously nurturing an emerging collective identity that transcends conventional and nationalistic affiliations (Colomer, 2017). Globalisation has also brought about substantial changes to their geopolitical and cultural terrain, ultimately impacting their cultural identity and feelings of attachment. This has led to a significant shift in how the community perceives themselves in relation to the broader world, resulting in complex levels of adaptation and redefinition.

Hence, the local heritage and culture are often neglected and practised to a lesser extent, resulting in a loss of cultural diversity. Additionally, globalisation affects countries' technological and economic progress by favouring the adoption of advanced practices from developed nations over traditional ones. This shift leads to an alignment of economic activities primarily in urban areas where significant factories provide employment opportunities, prompting migration to these cities. As a result, traditional practices that were once prevalent in villages diminished over time. The conventional belief that specific geographical regions are closely linked to cultural identities is challenged by the blending of local and global influences brought about by globalisation (Colomer, 2017).

Other significant influences contributed to the shift in culture and traditions, including contemporary cultural movements, widespread tourism, societal transformations, and individuals' capacity to adjust to these shifts (Sati, 2020).

In this framework, global integration facilitates the spread of concepts, principles, and behaviours across international borders by integrating modern cultural elements from various worldwide regions. Globalisation deeply affects rural areas as people pursue improved prospects in urban environments. This pattern impacts traditional ways of life and cultural practices within these societies.

In recent decades, globalisation has led to numerous changes, especially in people's lifestyles and efforts to improve their financial situation. One significant impact of globalisation has been the migration of people from rural areas to larger cities (Tiwary, 2024), where they hope to find better job prospects to support themselves and their families. This movement has brought about a significant transformation in the social and economic landscape of urban areas, leading to a growing demand for housing, transportation, and other essential services. Despite the challenges of urbanisation, many people still seek opportunities in large cities to secure a better future for themselves and their loved ones.

In our world today, migration serves as a vital demonstration of cultures interconnected and dynamic nature. As individuals relocate, their cultural identities and socioeconomic backgrounds become significant, revealing the complex interplay between various elements that shape our world. The connection between migration and globalisation highlights this phenomenon, emphasising the intricate nature of current societies and the ever-changing nature of cultural identities.

Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge the influence of migration on the global community and to value the multifaceted nature of modern societies (Colomer, 2017).

### **Identity: Cultural Transformation and Continuity**

This study draws on Stuart Hall's (1990) theory of cultural identity to examine how *adat perpatih* is negotiated, maintained, and redefined in contemporary contexts. According to Hall, identity is constantly evolving; it is not fixed but dynamic in nature. This is because identity is shaped, formed, and transformed through historical processes and is influenced by historical events, social conditions, and cultural contexts. This theoretical perspective is particularly useful for understanding how the *adat* community in Negeri Sembilan responds to its environment while simultaneously maintaining traditional practices and cultural identity through *adat perpatih*.

In addition, Hall (1990) posits that identity is formed through both continuity and rupture. Continuity occurs when identity draws upon stable and shared features such as common histories, values, or traditions, which offer a sense of unity and a collective understanding of "who we are." These elements create a coherent connection to the past and help preserve a recognisable identity over time. However, identities are not static; they are often interrupted, transformed, or reconfigured by significant historical experiences such as colonisation, migration, globalisation, or modernisation.

These events can disrupt or challenge the original forms of identity, thereby opening up spaces for new meanings and expressions to emerge. Therefore, cultural identity is best understood as a combination of both past legacies and future transformations factors that together shape identity in the present (Yang et al., 2021).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research employed a qualitative approach using an ethnographic design to gain an in-depth understanding of the community's perspectives and lived experiences. This approach was deemed particularly appropriate for capturing the subjective meanings and cultural nuances associated with *adat perpatih*. A total of 12 informants participated in the study, comprising members of the local community who practice *adat perpatih*, as well as heritage professionals serving in heritage institutions in Malaysia. The informants ranged in age from their 20s to their 70s, representing a broad cross-section of the *adat perpatih* community in Negeri Sembilan.

To ensure depth, insight, and contextual richness of the data, both snowball and purposive sampling techniques were employed. Data collection methods included in-depth interviews, which typically lasted between 45 to 60 minutes per session, as well as participant observation. These methods were used to explore not only the current practices of *adat perpatih* but also the social changes contributing to its gradual weakening among the *adat*

*perpatih* community in Negeri Sembilan. The fieldwork was conducted over a period of five months, and all interview questions were reviewed and approved in advance by the university's ethics committee. Data saturation was achieved when information began to repeat across participants, indicating that no new themes were emerging.

Subsequently, all data collected from the fieldwork were transcribed from audio recordings into text and analysed using thematic analysis. The entire analytical process followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework (Figure 1), which includes familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the report (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Through this study, several significant themes were developed based on codes extracted from the research data. This analysis was conducted to gain deeper insights into the beliefs, practices, and lived experiences of the Malay community in Seri Menanti, Negeri Sembilan, in relation to the evolving customs of *adat perpatih*. Specifically, the process aimed to identify patterns that reflect changes in the practice of *adat perpatih* among the Malays in Negeri Sembilan, with a focused lens on the community in Seri Menanti.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study identified four main themes that contributed to the change of *adat perpatih* in Negeri Sembilan: 1) migration of *adat perpatih* members to other states,

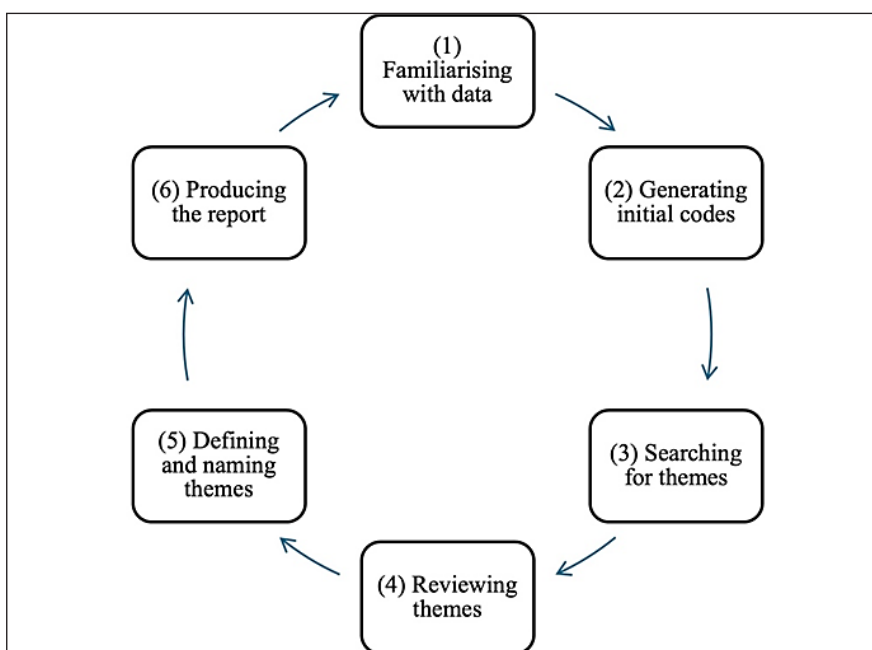


Figure 1. Six phases of the thematic analysis process by Clarke and Braun (2017)

(2) modernisation, (3) misunderstanding and stereotyping of *adat perpatih*, and (4) intermarriage with outsiders from different states. These themes suggest that *adat perpatih* is not a static system, but a dynamic cultural framework continuously shaped by internal and external forces.

In line with Stuart Hall's (1990) theory of cultural identity, which views identity as a product of both continuity and rupture, the findings reveal how *adat perpatih* negotiates its place within a modernising society. While its foundational principles remain rooted in tradition, shifts in socio-economic practices, mobility, and interethnic relations are creating conditions that challenge its conventional expressions. The impact of modernisation and globalisation, for instance, does not erase *adat*, but rather

demands its reinterpretation in light of new social realities.

Although *adat perpatih* permits certain changes—especially when practices become obsolete or misaligned with contemporary norms (Hooker, 1974; Ibrahim, 1992) these changes are not arbitrary. The need for *muafakat* (consensus) as a guiding principle for adaptation reflects the communal and deliberative nature of *adat*. This resonates with Hall's notion that identity is not individually constructed but emerges from shared cultural narratives and negotiations within the community.

Furthermore, the proverbs such as “*Sekali air bah, sekali pasir berubah*” [When there is a flood, the formation of soil changes] and “*Sekali raja mangkat, sekali adat beralih*” [When one king

dies, the *adat* will change] symbolise the Malay worldview that accepts change as inevitable, but only within culturally sanctioned boundaries. These sayings imply that while change is permissible, it must be grounded in communal agreement and must not violate the spirit of *adat* itself. This illustrates how traditional knowledge systems embed mechanisms for cultural resilience and adaptation, reinforcing the enduring relevance of *adat perpatih* even amidst disruption.

### **Merantau (Migration of Adat Perpatih Members to Other States)**

The *Adat perpatih* community and the broader Malay world have a long-standing tradition of starting a new life in different locations, known as ‘*merantau*’ (Gunardi et al., 2017). The movement of *Adat perpatih* community members from rural villages to urban areas has brought about significant changes in the customary land practices of *Adat perpatih*. Initially, there was a migration of people, or *merantau*, from West Sumatra into Malay territories, which introduced the practice of *Adat perpatih*. Interestingly, similar to the long-standing tradition of starting a new life in different locations, the *Adat perpatih* community and the broader Malay world have historically promoted *merantau* (Barnard, 2015). *Merantau* can be viewed as a brief voyage dating from pre-colonial eras (Davis, 1995) and remains prevalent today. Typically, this relocation was temporary, and the *perantau* or traveller could return home after achieving their travel objectives,

like searching for employment and other prospects in life. Upon returning, they could leverage their new wealth of knowledge to contribute to the development of their community.

A significant number of young individuals have migrated to urban areas in pursuit of higher education and improved career opportunities. It is common for them to marry partners from other states while seeking a better quality of life. Ultimately, many individuals establish themselves in a new location and start afresh. As a result, some traditional customs may not be continued. For instance, one interviewee shared that her brother initially lived with their parents in the village. However, after securing a job, he relocated and established a home in the city near his workplace (Informant 1, Interview).

Some Malays, however, return to their place of origin, as exemplified by Informant 1’s parents. After spending some time away, they felt a strong emotional and cultural pull toward their roots and chose to return to be closer to extended family and to continue observing *adat perpatih* traditions. Informant 1 explained:

*Arwah ibu bapa saya berhijrah ke Singapura sebab ayah bekerja dengan tentera British. Tapi ayah berhenti kerja secara sukarela, jadi dia tak dapat pencen. Dia buat keputusan tu sebab masa tu tak ada siapa yang boleh uruskan tanah adat kami di kampung.*

[My late parents migrated to Singapore because my father worked with the

British army. However, he voluntarily resigned, so he did not receive any pension. He resigned because no one could manage our customary land in the village (Informant 1, Interview)].

Informant 1, a resident of Negeri Sembilan, has been working in Kuala Lumpur. She disclosed during the interview that she had been commuting weekly to Kuala Lumpur for nearly three decades, with no intention of permanently relocating to the city.

When younger generations migrate to urban centres, it is often the case that elderly relatives are left behind. These elders are then responsible for maintaining the family homes and managing customary land. Typically, visits from their children occur only during weekends or school holidays. According to Informant 2, there has been a marked trend of outmigration from Seri Menanti, leaving many elders behind. This has led to the abandonment of numerous ancestral homes and plots of *tanah adat* (customary land). Informant 11 also noted that in her hometown, many homes and plots have been deserted, often because they are owned by women or daughters. It is uncommon to find women living alone in the village, which has further contributed to the growing number of unoccupied properties.

As the elderly population within the *adat perpatih* community continues to dwindle, it can be argued that longstanding cultural practices are being weakened and observed less frequently. This decline may have significant implications for the preservation of cultural identity and

the transmission of traditional values to future generations. These developments necessitate proactive efforts to safeguard and revitalise the community's cultural heritage. Informant 1 reported that most village elders had moved to the city to live with their children, resulting in a vacuum of cultural guidance in the community. In her view, the practice of *adat* is now at risk due to the absence of knowledgeable elders who once served as custodians of tradition. Informant 7 echoed this sentiment, recalling that during her grandfather's lifetime, many community members would visit their home to seek advice and guidance. After his passing, however, such visits ceased, and *adat perpatih* practices began to diminish significantly.

In Malaysia, the implementation of the New Economic Policy in 1971, after gaining independence, led to a decrease in village populations (Kassim, 1992). The government aimed to boost economic growth and establish a harmonious, multi-ethnic, and religiously diverse nation. During this period, the policy initiated by the government increased job opportunities in urban areas, and more Malays sought higher education due to the spread of education. Kassim (1992) further explained that rural areas experienced significant population declines due to emigration. The advancement of education has given rise to a new perspective on employment, in which very few individuals who have benefited from formal education, even up to the secondary level, are interested in agricultural jobs within the farming economy.

These jobs are now regarded as unclean, undignified, and physically tiring. Hence, to avoid working in the rice paddies and small rubber plantations, most young people in their late teens or early twenties migrated to urban areas immediately after school, searching for salaried employment, particularly in the manufacturing sector and public service. Other people who were too old to qualify for employment in urban areas relocated to land resettlement schemes that provided better economic opportunities. This population shift has resulted in many traditional villages lacking sufficient agricultural labour (Kassim, 1992).

Although *merantau* (migration) is accepted within the framework of *adat perpatih*, migration can lead to shifts in community membership, particularly when individuals choose to settle permanently in their new locations. Many have left their hometowns permanently in search of stable employment and improved quality of life. Additionally, some elderly individuals have relocated to live with their children due to the lack of caregivers in their home villages. This pattern of out-migration has contributed to the weakening of traditional communal structures and has disrupted the intergenerational transmission of *adat perpatih* practices within the community. Consequently, while *merantau* is culturally sanctioned, its current manifestations reflect broader lifestyle and family dynamics transformations that challenge the continuity of customary practices in their original socio-cultural context.

## Modernisation

In Negeri Sembilan, a significant number of Malays are increasingly inclined towards adopting a more contemporary way of life, diverging from their traditional Minangkabau customs. This societal shift is evident in various aspects, such as the transition from residing in traditional Minangkabau-style dwellings to more modern concrete and cinderblock structures (Peletz, 1994). Notable changes have been observed in the practice of *adat perpatih*, particularly in the context of customary wedding ceremonies. Today, many individuals within *adat* communities prefer a more simplified, modern approach to weddings, often foregoing traditional rituals such as the ceremonial hanging of the *tabir* (a suspended curtain-like cloth) and the *lelangit* (a canopy typically placed above a bed or ceremonial throne), as well as the formal invitation of *adat perpatih* leaders to preside over the event (Informant 1, Interview).

This shift suggests that economic considerations and time constraints have begun to outweigh the symbolic and communal significance of traditional rituals, reflecting a broader re-prioritisation of cultural values among the younger generation. Informant 3 noted that organising a customary wedding is often perceived as burdensome and complex. Similarly, Informant 10 highlighted that many individuals now favour a modern lifestyle, contributing to the declining observance of *adat* customs. Notably, the reduced presence of *adat* leaders at wedding ceremonies has been attributed to the

perceived difficulty and rigidity of adhering to traditional protocols.

The process of modernisation has also had a profound impact on the community's connection to place, particularly concerning customary land. Once regarded as a cornerstone of *adat perpatih*, customary land is losing its cultural significance, as younger generations increasingly choose to establish homes and livelihoods elsewhere. Traditional and cultural practices are evolving naturally, leading to a shift in the perceived obligation to uphold them. This evolution reflects broader changes in societal values and norms.

In the past, the failure to observe these customs was considered a serious transgression, as noted by Informant 5. However, contemporary perspectives on *adat perpatih* are more flexible, with changes in practice generally seen as acceptable, as mentioned by Informant 8. Today, there is a marked decline in the emphasis placed on adhering strictly to these customs, indicating a substantial reduction in the cultural significance of *adat perpatih* in the context of modern society.

Despite the significant changes in Negeri Sembilan, local customs and traditions, particularly *adat*, continue to play a crucial role in the daily lives of the Malay community (Peletz, 1994). This indicates that while there has been a decrease in influence, these traditions have not vanished entirely. This enduring influence is evident in various aspects such as language usage, culinary practices, property distribution methods, and the maintenance of a matrilineal social

structure, all of which serve as sources of pride and identity for the community. Peletz's observations from over three decades ago still hold true, as modernisation and *merantau* have had a noticeable impact. Additionally, the informants in this research have highlighted the enduring significance of *adat*, despite its diminished influence in certain areas of life. This illustrates what Hall (1990) describes as identity formation through both continuity and rupture, where traditional customs such as *adat perpatih* are not entirely abandoned but are selectively adapted, reflecting an evolving cultural identity."

### **Misunderstanding and Stereotyping**

Further, misunderstandings about the *adat perpatih* and its implications have been noticeable for over a decade. Persistent stereotypes surrounding traditional customs may lead to internalised doubt within the community, particularly among the younger generation. This, in turn, can result in a growing detachment from these customs, which are fundamental to the construction of cultural identity. Consequently, such disconnection may trigger an identity crisis, wherein cultural pride is increasingly challenged by the desire for social acceptance and alignment with modern values. These misunderstandings have significantly impacted perceptions regarding property inheritance among the Malays of Negeri Sembilan.

Research has shown that many references made towards *adat perpatih* by individuals outside of this cultural tradition lack accurate

understanding (Peletz, 1994). Several of the research participants confirmed these misunderstandings from outsiders. This phenomenon may be linked to historical practices, as women have traditionally inherited many assets, including houses, land, ornaments, and other possessions since pre-colonial times. Additionally, societal norms and cultural beliefs have influenced this inheritance pattern over generations.

The concept of ownership in this context is best described as temporary guardianship, as the customary assets are ultimately owned by the lineage or *suku*. It is important to note that women are expected to refrain from pledging ancestral property to external parties except within their kin group (Peletz, 1994). However, some individuals view this form of property possession negatively. This perception may arise from misunderstandings among outsiders regarding the nuances of *adat* property ownership, which can appear ambiguous or inconsistent with conventional systems. Informant 6 shared an illustrative story highlighting the complexities and challenges surrounding property rights under *adat perpatih*.

*Masa saya di Seri Menanti, saya pernah jumpa seorang lelaki asal dari Sabah yang dah berkahwin dengan wanita Negeri Sembilan. Tapi, sayangnya mereka bercerai, dan lelaki tu dihalau keluar dari rumah. Ayah saya dengan baik hati tawarkan tempat tinggal sementara di rumah kami. Lelaki tu hilang semua barang-barang dia sebab bekas isteri ambil semuanya*

*masa proses penceraian. Rumah tu pun sebenarnya dia yang beli, bukan rumah pusaka isteri pun... Sampai satu ketika, dia rindu nak jumpa anak-anak dan minta izin nak lawat mereka, tapi bekas isteri tak benarkan langsung. Dia tak dibenarkan langsung dekat dengan rumah tu.*

[When I was in Seri Menanti, I met a man originally from Sabah who had been married to a woman from Negeri Sembilan. Unfortunately, they got divorced, and he was evicted from their home. My father kindly offered him temporary accommodation at our place. The man had lost all his belongings as the woman took everything during the divorce proceedings. He used to own the house, which wasn't even his wife's ancestral home... At one point, he longed to see his children and requested to visit them, but his ex-wife denied this. She wouldn't allow him near her house (Informant 6, Interview)].

This account illustrates how misinterpretations of property rights under *adat perpatih* can cause confusion and emotional distress, especially when outsiders are unaware of the distinctions between different types of property. Informant 11 stressed that misunderstandings regarding the division of assets during divorce often result from a lack of understanding of *adat* customary law. This underscores the importance of increasing public awareness and education about these legal and cultural principles.

*Ramai orang susah nak faham adat perpatih. Sebab tu ada yang takut nak kahwin dengan perempuan Negeri Sembilan, sebab mereka risau harta akan jadi milik isteri dan rasa tak selamat. Tapi orang luar kena faham yang harta pusaka dan harta yang diperoleh semasa perkahwinan tu sebenarnya dua benda yang berbeza.*

[Many people struggle to comprehend the *adat perpatih* custom. This results in a fear of marrying women from Negeri Sembilan, as they worry about their property changing ownership and belonging to the woman, which makes them feel insecure. However, outsiders should recognise that inherited properties and matrimonial properties are distinct entities (Informant 11, Interview)].

In Peletz's (1994) work, it is argued that the *adat perpatih* community has often been the subject of stereotypes, particularly claims that it places excessive emphasis on women in decision-making related to kinship, marriage, *uxorilocal* residence, and inheritance. These perceptions have contributed to the belief that women hold disproportionate control within the system. However, Informant 6 clarified that the actual practice of *adat* should not be interpreted in such a manner. For instance, according to Informant 6 (Interview), in the case of divorce, a woman should not claim ownership of her ex-husband's assets, as these are regarded as matrimonial property. It was further explained that such property

should be divided equitably between both parties—husband and wife—following the dissolution of the marriage.

Kassim (1992) delves into the pervasive perception of property inheritance in the *adat perpatih* among the Malaysian populace, particularly those not adhering to *adat perpatih* customs. The prevalent stereotype characterises women in Negeri Sembilan as assertive and dominant individuals who wield significant control over their male family members within both the household and family dynamics (Kassim, 1992). To validate this stereotype, she scrutinised the role of women in traditional settings and investigated how changes in socioeconomic factors have impacted their status in a matrilineal society. Through her research, she identified four prominent roles that women fulfil within the *adat perpatih* community: upholding matrilineal lineage for continuity and exercising rights to ancestral land, serving as guardians entrusted with inheritance under customary law, sometimes inheriting ancestral homes along with substantial responsibilities towards their parents and matrilineal relatives. Additionally, women possess the ability to assume positions traditionally held by men but transmitted through female lines and engage in matrilocality, where their husbands move into their mother's house after marriage. These four examples highlight the importance of women in *adat perpatih* and the privileges accorded to them. They also demonstrate how a woman's status within the community becomes more secure as she grows older.

The *adat*'s core principles have remained relatively consistent over time, although strict adherence to these principles has declined. As society has progressed towards greater gender equality, the traditional role of women has diminished, leading to a decrease in the pressure to have daughters and a corresponding decrease in the economic value of customary land owned by women. This decline can be attributed to a significant portion of the land being utilised for housing matrilineal family members, resulting in smaller plots of land being distributed among the holders and limited space left for agricultural use. The challenges in managing customary lands in Negeri Sembilan, particularly the disputes over ownership among the *suku* members (Manaf, 2009). Furthermore, men are no longer solely dependent on their wives for financial support, as they have diversified sources of income, including pensions and earnings from employment. Consequently, there has been an increase in women's dependence on their husbands, as discussed by Kassim in 1992.

In contemporary times, it appears that the Malays in Negeri Sembilan perceive outsiders' views of *adat perpatih* practices to be more favourable than in the past, particularly compared to when the earlier phases of this research were conducted. This perceptual shift corresponds with the broader transformations within *adat perpatih* previously discussed. The change is further supported by the lived experiences of research participants who married non-locals, particularly men from other Malaysian states. These individuals

often no longer strictly observe *adat* customs, especially with regard to property inheritance and customary land rights. Their accounts provide valuable insights into the evolving interpretations and practices of *adat*.

Nevertheless, adherence to certain core customs persists. As noted by Informant 7, “...sekarang ini, kebanyakan daripada ahli komuniti kami lebih terbuka pemikirannya. Tapi, kahwin sesama suku masih tetap tidak dibenarkan” [...currently, most of our community is more open-minded. However, marrying within the same *suku* is still prohibited] (Interview). This statement underscores how certain foundational principles of *adat perpatih*—such as the prohibition of intra-*suku* marriage—remain resilient despite broader shifts in lifestyle and intermarriage patterns.

### **Intermarriage with Outsiders from Different States**

In today's increasingly mobile and interconnected society, intercultural marriages have become more common. The customs and traditions of *adat perpatih* have likewise undergone transformation as a result of intermarriage between *adat perpatih* community members and individuals from other regions. Many women from these villages choose to marry outside their community boundaries, subsequently establishing new households elsewhere (Kassim, 1994). This trend presents challenges for these women in fulfilling their traditional roles and responsibilities within their natal communities.

However, despite these challenges, there are still women, such as Informant 4, who continue to honour and uphold the customs of *adat perpatih* even after marrying someone from a different region. This shift suggests that *adat perpatih* is not a static tradition but a flexible system capable of negotiating modern social realities while retaining its core identity. During the interview, she commented:

*Dulu, dalam adat perkahwinan, kena ada persetujuan daripada kedua-dua belah pihak, dan kadang-kadang pasangan pun kena dari tempat yang sama tapi berlainan suku. Tapi sekarang dah banyak berubah. Orang bebas nak kahwin dengan sesiapa saja yang mereka pilih. Perubahan macam ni memang bagi kesan besar kepada adat perpatih.*

[Marriage practices, once requiring agreement from both sides and, in some cases, couples needing to come from the same place but with different *suku*, have significantly evolved. Today, individuals are free to marry whomever they choose, a shift that has had profound implications on *Adat perpatih* (Informant 4, Interview)].

This statement underscores the evolving nature of marriage norms within the *adat* framework and illustrates how core cultural systems can negotiate continuity and change in response to broader societal shifts. Given the recent changes affecting *adat perpatih*, it is essential to thoroughly examine the

measures being taken in Malaysia to safeguard and maintain *adat perpatih* for the benefit of future generations. *Adat perpatih*, a traditional practice of the Malays, has evolved significantly due to the pressures of globalisation. As these changes have influenced their practices, it is necessary to redefine and adapt the cultural identity of the Malays of Negeri Sembilan, particularly the practitioners of *adat perpatih*, to suit the present day. To address this, the people of Negeri Sembilan must carefully assess their cultural traditions and customs, specifically those that are still relevant, in order to prevent them from becoming outdated. It is crucial to revive these traditional practices so that the younger generation can value and learn from them. Raising awareness and preserving this knowledge can be accomplished through various platforms, such as digital media and creative content, which are widely available today.

The Malay community has worked on integrating local and global elements into their identity. They have introduced the concepts of ‘Melayu Baharu’ (New Malay) and ‘Melayu Glokal’ (Glocal Malay) to highlight the importance of progressing as a society while maintaining identities that encompass both local and international influences (Pawi et al., 2020). Embracing cultural hybridisation, the Malays have combined traditional practices with modern elements from around the world. This blending of cultures has enabled the Malays to form a distinct identity that mirrors local traditions and global influences. While modernisation and globalisation have

changed the cultural identity of the Malays, there is also a growing awareness and effort to safeguard and promote traditional cultural practices. This equilibrium between embracing modernity and preserving cultural heritage is shaping the evolving cultural identity of the Malays.

Despite the social transformations brought about by factors such as migration, modernisation, and the persistence of external misunderstandings and stereotypes, the Malay community continues to exhibit a strong attachment to the traditional customs of *adat perpatih*. Although not all *adat perpatih* practices are actively observed in daily life, there remains a deep sense of pride in the community's cultural adherence. The transmission of *adat perpatih* is sustained through intergenerational knowledge transfer, encompassing observation, attentive listening, experiential learning, and oral tradition. These mechanisms play a vital role in preserving *adat perpatih* for future generations and are central to maintaining the cultural identity of the Malay community (Radzuan, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Malay community in Negeri Sembilan has demonstrated notable resilience and adaptability in the face of challenges such as migration, modernisation, misunderstanding, and stereotyping. The findings affirm that *adat perpatih* is not a static tradition but a dynamic, negotiable cultural system capable of adapting to external influences, including intercultural marriage and evolving social norms.

While certain practices—particularly those related to customary marriage—have changed, the core values of *adat perpatih*, especially matrilineality and communal consensus (*muafakat*), remain intact.

The implications of this study are far-reaching. For society, preserving *adat perpatih* fosters cultural continuity, strengthens intergenerational ties, and supports a shared sense of identity amid social transformation. For academia, the study contributes to ethnographic scholarship on Malay customs, enriches discourse on cultural identity in Southeast Asia, and provides insight into matrilineal systems. Nationally, the research underscores the importance of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage as part of Malaysia's pluralistic identity, in alignment with global frameworks such as the UNESCO Convention.

This study's contributions include its in-depth qualitative approach, the application of Stuart Hall's identity theory within a Southeast Asian context, and the integration of lived experiences that illustrate the nuanced evolution of *adat perpatih*. The research reveals *adat perpatih* as a living tradition—one that integrates modern influences without compromising its foundational principles. The evolving cultural identity of the Malay community in Negeri Sembilan reflects both local continuity and global change, embodying a dynamic model of heritage resilience.

To ensure the continued relevance of *adat perpatih*, thoughtful and proactive strategies must be implemented to counter the decline

in traditional knowledge transmission. It is essential that younger generations gain a deeper appreciation of its heritage and cultural value and are empowered to sustain the practices of their ancestors. Digital platforms and community-based educational initiatives can play a pivotal role in promoting awareness, generating interest, and fostering engagement. Future research should explore how younger members of these communities conceptualise *adat* in their daily lives, and how such perceptions influence preservation efforts.

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## **Assessing Disaster Risk Management at the Kelantan State Museum, Malaysia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper investigates fire and flood risk management in the Kelantan State Museum, Malaysia. Protecting artefacts from hazards like fires and floods is crucial, as a museum plays a vital role in preserving cultural heritage. However, there is a lack of current disaster risk management practices at the museum, highlighting the need for improved protocols. Additionally, comprehensive guidelines for managing these risks are absent, leaving the museum vulnerable to potential disasters. This study aims to identify areas for enhancement in disaster preparedness and management protocols. This study delves into a qualitative research approach at the Kelantan State Museum by analysing risks, staff competencies, and existing protocols. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with four museum personnel and expert panel assessments. Additionally, this research used thematic analysis by utilising the Braun and Clark model to interpret the findings. The study identifies key areas requiring improvement in staff preparedness and institutional safety measures, particularly in managing fire and flood risks. These findings strengthen the museum's capacity to safeguard artefacts, ensure visitor safety, and improve emergency response. It also contributes to the development of more resilient disaster management strategies for cultural heritage institutions and offers policy-aligned recommendations to support sustainable preservation efforts.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The growing impact of climate change and the advancing threat of global warming increase the urgency for effective disaster

risk management to preserve cultural heritage assets both nationally and internationally. Floods, fires, and extreme weather events place these assets at greater risk, challenging efforts to protect a nation's cultural identity, historical narratives, and legacy (ICCROM, 2012a). In Malaysia's Kelantan state, climate change and severe flooding pose significant challenges. The 2014 Yellow Flood exemplifies the peril to cultural heritage assets, causing substantial damage to institutions like the Kelantan State Museum and inflicting a heavy financial burden (Clark, 2020). The Kelantan State Museum, along with other museum institutions, prioritises compliance with international standards, procedures, and ethics regarding disaster risk management. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) has set rigorous protocols for historic institutions, such as museums, to ensure the safety of structures, cultural artefacts, personnel, and the well-being of visitors or tourists (ICOM, 2017).

Greater emphasis should be placed on preserving heritage structures, such as the Kelantan State Museum, which has been in existence for nearly three decades. Prior to its transformation into a museum, this edifice served as an office block exclusively designated for the Kota Bharu Municipal Council. Since 1952, the Kelantan State Government has formed the Kelantan State Museum Committee to facilitate the development of this museum, which was later officially recognised as one of the historic structures protected by the (National Heritage Act 2005) The Kelantan State

Museum building is susceptible to a range of calamities that pose a threat to its ability to safeguard cultural treasures. Flooding poses a significant hazard, frequently affecting Kelantan during the rainy season. Floods can infiltrate building structures, causing harm to building materials like wood and brick and posing a risk to precious historical artefacts housed in museums. Moreover, historical edifices like the Kelantan State Museum, which predominantly employs wood and combustible materials in its fundamental construction, have a significant susceptibility to fire hazards in the absence of sufficient safety precautions (Hua, 2015; Nor et al., 2018).

The urgency of addressing fire safety in heritage buildings, especially museums, in Malaysia remains a critical concern. Structural deficiencies in many of these buildings pose risks to visitor safety, compounded by the country's flood-prone regions, requiring comprehensive emergency strategies. With a recent increase in fire accidents and floods, preserving invaluable collections becomes even more challenging. Climate change exacerbates these risks, highlighting the need for proactive, coordinated strategies. This study aims to bridge theory and practice, offering insights and suggestions to museums and policymakers to mitigate risks and preserve cultural heritage assets effectively. Emphasising an interdisciplinary approach, it aligns with the ICCROM (2012b)'s perspective on addressing heritage conservation amidst conflict or disaster, providing practical guidelines

and strategies. The findings aim to inform authorities, cultural heritage managers, and communities in their efforts to safeguard and maintain cultural heritage in challenging circumstances.

Museums play an increasingly vital role in promoting sustainability and contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly through community engagement and risk preparedness. Ecomuseums, for example, foster local knowledge, climate action, and social inclusion while aligning with the broader sustainability agenda (McGhie, 2022). Similarly, heritage sites such as Bam in Iran illustrate how cultural landscapes and traditional systems like the qanat can support disaster recovery, though tensions between preservation and modern regulations remain a challenge (Ravankhah et al., 2017). The importance of adaptive and interdisciplinary approaches is also emphasised in international guidance for museum preparedness in disaster-prone contexts (McGhie, 2023). As sustainability becomes central to museum practice, green architecture and environmentally responsible design are also exemplified by institutions like the Qatar National Museum and the Grand Egyptian Museum, highlighting the sector's shift toward ecological resilience (Ahmad Omran, 2022). In Italy, the National Museum System reflects a growing emphasis on cultural sustainability as both a managerial input and an institutional outcome, signalling museums' evolving social responsibilities beyond visitor numbers (Cerquetti & Montella, 2021).

Together, these studies highlight the need for museums to integrate risk management and sustainable development into their operational frameworks, strengthening their role as resilient, inclusive, and forward-looking cultural institutions.

Therefore, this study focusses on disaster risk management at the Kelantan State Museum, particularly concerning flood and fire risks, and represents a crucial effort in tackling these challenges. It aims to develop appropriate protocols to assist the museum and similar institutions in effectively managing potential floods and fire disasters in the future.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Climate Change and Global Warming

In recent years, climate change and global warming have become the centre of attention when the world has been alarmed by a series of natural disasters such as Australia's bushfires 2019-2020, Greece's 2021 wildfires, Turkey's 2020 wildfires, European floods 2021 and many more, which caused loss of human lives and property damage. However, it may not only be contributed to by climate change and global warming, such as in the case of the Australian wildfire, as it was also reported to be associated with deforestation, rising temperatures, fuel load and the decline of the practice of native burning, where many plant species depend upon fire for habitat, germination, and distribution. The situation caused soil fuel production, which showed the impact of poor management of the wildfires (Clark, 2020).

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts that as greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere rise, these occurrences will become even more frequent and extreme (IPCC, 2018). Disasters such as flooding and wildfires happen anytime and within an unexpected event, requiring a strategic plan and disaster risk management. In the case of cultural heritage properties, for example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has come out with the list of World Heritage in Danger to protect and inform the international community of conditions that threaten the characteristics for which a property was inscribed on the World Heritage List and to encourage corrective action (UNESCO, 2011).

### **International Guidelines on Disaster Risk Management**

This situation also calls for other cultural institutions to plan and manage disaster risk, such as the museum. Museum buildings, monuments, and archaeological sites are directly harmed by the increased frequency and intensity of rainfall, flooding, wildfires, and temperature swings brought on by climate change (Gombas, 2021). Disasters are commonly perceived as sudden occurrences that inflict damage within a matter of seconds, hours, or days. Conversely, some disasters unfold so gradually that their onset often goes unnoticed by observers for an extended period (Y.W.D.D, 2021). When a calamity strikes, safeguarding both the museum's artefacts and its patrons becomes exceedingly challenging, underscoring the

necessity for a robust disaster management plan (Kannan, 2003). At the international level, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) has implemented an initiative and established mechanisms for emergency preparedness and response. This effort is designed to assist museums and other cultural institutions in recovering from disasters and planning for emergency scenarios. Specifically, Articles 1.6 and 2.21 of the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums mandate that museums safeguard their collections against both natural and human-made disasters (ICOM, 2017). In response to cultural heritage emergencies, ICOM develops programs to raise awareness about at-risk heritage and post-disaster scenarios, while its Disaster Risk Management Committee mobilises museum professionals to support affected nations. This committee emphasises damage containment through preventive conservation, risk mitigation, and rapid interventions. A notable example of such proactive efforts is Japan's decentralisation of its museum infrastructure following the 3.11 Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster on March 11, 2011, aiming to reduce future disaster impacts (Maly & Yamazaki, 2020). Baek (2019) mentioned the action taken in Korea to develop natural disaster preparedness planning to prepare for serious disasters that can likely occur in the future. Pinheiro (2022) categorised fire as a disaster and characterised the museum fire as a great moment of destruction and destabilisation of a museum institution.

## Fire and Flood Management Plan in the Museum

Recent studies highlight the growing need for comprehensive disaster risk management (DRM) and preventive conservation strategies for cultural heritage. Dişli et al. (2025) and Dişli & Merve Kilit (2024) Provide case studies from Turkey, applying international frameworks such as ISO 31000 and the RE-ORG method. While Dişli et al. (2025) report medium risk levels in Konya's museums with low intervention priority, Dişli and Merve Kilit (2024) identify a more critical scenario at the Hatuniye Madrasa, which faces high risks due to abandonment and structural decay. Similarly, Foglieni (2023) emphasises institutional preparedness in libraries, archives, and museums, highlighting the importance of emergency planning, digitisation, and inter-agency collaboration. Expanding to the urban scale, Etinay et al. (2018) critique current global frameworks like the Sendai Framework and SDGs for overlooking small-scale and slow-onset disasters. The study proposes a preparedness model using the UN-Habitat Urban System Approach to strengthen resilience in built environments. Collectively, these works stress the importance of integrating site-specific assessments, institutional readiness, and policy-level coordination to protect cultural heritage from diverse risks.

Meanwhile, in Malaysia, Kelantan has also been affected by a massive flood in 2014, which has also impacted the heritage objects and institutions. Very recently, flash floods from the heavy afternoon downpour

caused a water surge and landslides in Gunung Jerai, while three districts, such as Yan, Kuala Muda and Bandar Baharu in Kedah, were also hit by the flash floods (Trisha, 2021) National Disaster Command Centre (NADMA) had reported a record number of 123,304 victims in September 2022 due to the flood calamity of the east coast monsoon 2022/2023 that had started on 7th November 2022. Furthermore, 32 fire incidents were reported in Malaysia for 2022, with the highest cases involving 653 victims in Tawau, Sabah on 18th March 2022 (NADMA 2022). This situation is seen as destructive and endangers the nation's natural heritage, heritage sites, heritage objects and institutions such as museums. Fire safety management is crucial to preserving our nation's historic structures, which house invaluable and priceless artefacts. Past research shows little evidence of disaster risk management, specifically in the National Museum of Malaysia and other states in Malaysia. Salleh and Ahmad (2009) figured out through their survey that most of the museums in Malaysia still have poor fire safety management.

A study by Zainal et al. (2021) developed a fire safety management plan for the Museum Stadhuys Complex, aiming to enhance fire safety management efficiency. Another research by Salleh and Ahmad (2009) focused on museum buildings in Malaysia, identifying fire safety weaknesses that could jeopardise both people and heritage properties. Similarly, Salleh (2011) investigated fire safety in heritage buildings, highlighting case studies illustrating various

weaknesses. In the Malacca World Heritage Sites, Akashah et al. (2016) conducted a fire risk assessment, revealing widespread fire hazards such as inadequate escape routes and insufficient fire safety measures. Recommendations included implementing a fire safety policy, improving housekeeping, and regular inspection and maintenance of fire safety systems.

Nor et al. (2018) focused on identifying essential defects in heritage buildings, revealing a high prevalence of severe defects in museum areas that could impact aesthetic value. This aligns with the findings of Roslan & Said (2017), who examined fire safety management systems in Malaysian heritage buildings. Their data indicated a low level of fire safety management, with inadequate application of fire safety equipment and systems not meeting legislative requirements. Furthermore, the conservation process often fails to adapt fire safety measures to the buildings' new functions after adaptive reuse. Many studies concluded that management teams of heritage buildings lacked effective fire safety planning and management systems.

Mydin et al. (2014) evaluated fire hazards and safety management in heritage buildings in Georgetown, Penang, highlighting the need for enhanced fire protection systems in ancestral temples due to the invaluable heritage elements at risk. Additionally, flood disaster impacts on tourism providers in Kota Tinggi were assessed, revealing significant economic and cultural losses (Hamzah et al., 2012). To address flood threats to heritage buildings

in Malaysia, a vulnerability model was developed, focusing on Kampung Baru in Kuala Lumpur (D'Ayala et al., 2020). This research suggested solutions to improve flood vulnerability and emphasised the importance of developing proper flood management guidelines to protect lives and prevent financial losses (Muzamil et al., 2022).

### **Kelantan Museum Fire and Flood Management Plan**

Previous literature has primarily focussed on the functionality of old heritage buildings regarding fire safety management, with limited emphasis on disaster risk management, particularly in the event of floods, which are prevalent in Malaysia's east coast regions. This lack of focus on disaster preparedness could impact heritage assets, including those in museums. In Kelantan, known as the 'cradle of Malay culture,' preserving tangible and intangible heritage is paramount, as highlighted by Karim et al. (2020) in their study at Kelantan Jahar Palace Museum. With around ten museums under the supervision of Kelantan Museum Corporation, building defects in Kelantan museums, such as critical issues with the apron and gas system, have been reported (Nor et al., 2018). These conditions emphasise the need for further research on crisis preparedness, especially regarding floods and fires. Effective disaster risk management planning is crucial to prevent the loss of national heritage assets and properties (Zuraidi et al., 2020). Therefore, assessing building structures for potential

hazard mitigation, disaster preparedness, and understanding potential hazards is essential for preserving museum establishments and their valuable collections.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research adopted a qualitative approach with a particular emphasis on a case study of the Kelantan State Museum, as outlined in Figure 1.

Based on Figure 1, in the initial phase, the research focussed on exploring methods to characterise demographic profiles using case study techniques. These included observations, interviews, photo documentation, and field memos to identify profiles of state museums in Kelantan. An extensive literature review was conducted, spanning books, journals, and government data.

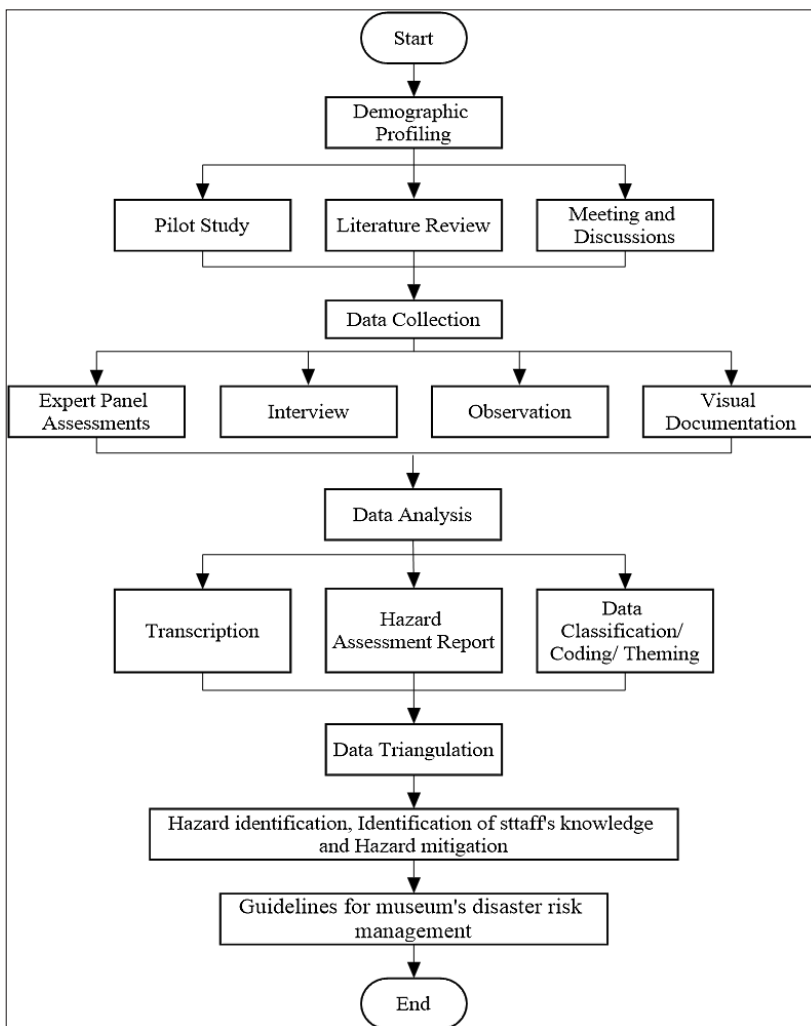


Figure 1. Research flow

A pilot visit was undertaken, guided by information from previous literature. Subsequently, data collection aimed to validate the chosen methodology using purposive sampling. Interactions with museum management during pilot visits facilitated discussions on data collection procedures, observations, and interviews with four museum staff. Data collection involved interviews, observations, and documentation of field memos, structured around thematic questions aligned with research objectives and analysed through thematic analysis. Informants' backgrounds are depicted in Table 1.

Based on Table 1, four informants comprising a Head of Museum Assistant, Curator, Museum Supervisor, and Museum Keeper were purposively selected for their in-depth expertise in museum management, ensuring rich and reliable data for thematic analysis. During this phase, field memos served as a researcher's diary to capture ideas and perceptions related to the research. Museum observations included photograph documentation of both exterior and interior spaces to understand informants' perspectives and actions comprehensively. An expert panel assessment, involving certified safety officers, chemists, and

engineers, produced an environmental inspection report focussing on occupational safety and health guidelines for disaster management at the Kelantan State Museum, specifically concerning fire and flood preparedness. Subsequently, collected data were transcribed into audio format and analysed using thematic analysis, following the Braun & Clarke (2006) method. Unique codes were formed to create themes derived from research objectives, such as hazardous conditions and disaster management guidelines for fire and flood events. The analytical investigation involved clustering and classification of data, resulting in the emergence of new codes and themes. Themes were organised to identify repetitive patterns, with repetitive themes removed and emerging themes and concept patterns developed for discussion in the findings section. Finally, a framework for disaster risk management in the event of fire and flood was developed, integrating theoretical and empirical information. The writing-up phase involved integrating and explaining fieldwork data, interview results, safety inspection reports, and observations, with occasional quotations used to provide elaborative explanations.

Table 1  
*Informants' background*

No.	Informants	Position
1.	Informant 1	Head of Museum Assistant
2.	Informant 2	Curator
3.	Informant 3	Museum Supervisor
4.	Informant 4	Museum Keeper

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Hazardous Identification

The State Museum of Kelantan faces numerous hazardous conditions that can lead to fires and floods, including issues with building wiring, ageing infrastructure, seasonal facility conditions, materials used in display cases and artefacts, limited emergency routes, blocked main drainage systems, fixture malfunctions, and the location of main doors. Outdated wiring in museum buildings poses a significant fire and flood risk, as it can lead to hazardous situations such as frayed wires and inadequate grounding. It is crucial to monitor and upgrade the wiring system to ensure the safety of the building and its occupants. The outdated wiring at the State Museum of Kelantan increases the risk of trips and short circuits, further exacerbating the potential for fires and floods.

The design and installation of museum displays also pose risks that could lead to fires (Figure 2). Observations at the Kelantan State Museum revealed that several exhibit components, including wooden and plastic cabinets, racks, and displays, were made of flammable materials.

Additionally, the age of the building contributes to fire hazards, particularly in older structures with outdated wiring systems (Figure 3) and a lack of modern fire-resistant materials. This increases the likelihood of flames engulfing the premises. Furthermore, the museum's amenities, such as lamps, air conditioners (Figure 3), and refrigerators, can potentially cause electrical trips, leading to fires.

For instance, there was a case of a fire in the museum attributed to prolonged use of the air conditioning system, as reported by Informant 1.

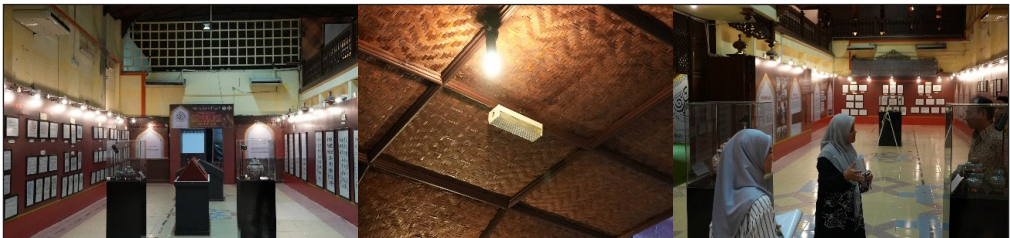


Figure 2. Exhibition materials made of paper and display racks made of wood and plastic



Figure 3. Museum amenities that could potentially cause electrical trips, leading to fires, include unmaintained lighting and outdated wiring systems

In terms of fire safety, we are still retaining some old equipment, such as the air conditioning. So, there has been a minor incident where the air conditioning was damaged and caused a fire, but we were able to control the situation (Informant 1, personal communication, 21 September 2023).

During emergencies, having multiple unobstructed escape routes is crucial for safe evacuation, directing individuals away from fire, smoke, or heat risks. However, the State Museum of Kelantan has been found to have limited escape routes, potentially endangering both visitors and staff. Moreover, the main door's location poses a flood risk, as it is situated on the main flood route, putting museum staff and visitors in jeopardy. Prevention measures must be taken to control water entry during floods. Additionally, flooding in older buildings can result from blockages in the main drainage system, causing severe damage and safety concerns. Regular gutter maintenance can prevent debris build-up and drainpipe clogging, reducing the risk of flooding. Vandalism or dropping large objects down manholes can also block sewer mains, potentially leading to water erosion and structural damage. Blocked fixture systems can cause water backup and overflow, leading to water damage and mould formation, posing health hazards to occupants. Regular water quality testing is essential to ensure residents' safety. Maintaining vigilance and proactive measures are crucial to prevent such problems in older buildings.

### **Staff's Knowledge and Skills in Disaster Risk Management**

The effectiveness of crisis management during fire and flood incidents relies heavily on the knowledge and competency of staff (Weichselgartner & Pigeon, 2015; White et al., 2001). Staff members play a crucial role in swiftly and efficiently executing coordinated actions to ensure community safety and minimise potential damage. According to informants, potentially hazardous situations may arise simultaneously in the Kelantan State Museum due to the presence of flammable materials such as paper, wood, and plastic. However, they demonstrate a theoretical understanding of how to respond to these challenges and are knowledgeable about standard operating procedures (SOP), including maintaining a comfortable and conducive workplace environment, known as the Public Sector Conducive Ecosystem (EKSA), to cope with disasters in their workplace. Moreover, their clarity in understanding job descriptions enables them to identify appropriate actions in the presence of hazardous conditions like fire and flood. The finding supports Odiase et al. (2020)'s argument on the important relationship between risk perception and risk preparedness.

Anyone can do it, but they need guidance. For every museum, each of our museum assistants... Before that, we usually conduct training at the National Museum... There's an SOP for it, so we guide them on how to handle the materials, including

the need to wear gloves and all that (Informant 2, personal communication, 21 September 2023).

According to the interview, informants are well-versed in the Kelantan State Museum's hazardous situation management plans. However, the importance of robust financial management in museums, particularly during hazardous situations, cannot be overstated. As expressed by Informant 4, the budget constraints can limit essential expenditures, with funds often kept at a basic level of RM10,000.00 and above. This financial constraint affects various aspects, including purchasing decisions and space management within the museum.

Sufficient financial resources are essential for implementing vital safety measures, training personnel, acquiring specialised equipment, and ensuring a swift and effective response to emergencies, thus safeguarding the museum's unique artefacts and cultural heritage. These findings align with Mechler's (2016) assertion that the economic benefits of investing in Disaster Risk Management (DRM) far exceed the costs, underscoring the imperative for implementing DRM measures to mitigate losses from diverse hazards. Additionally, having sufficient funds enables the museum to enhance visitor safety measures and accessibility, as highlighted by Informant 4's emphasis on considering the needs of people with disabilities in interior design proposals. Further adherence to guidelines ensures safe access and proper handling of hazardous materials, thus mitigating potential disasters effectively.

Based on the interview findings, the study reveals that the staff's implementation of fire and flood crisis control measures is only moderate. This is attributed to limited communication opportunities for distributing information among staff members. Furthermore, informants acknowledge that information on effective flood and fire control measures is disseminated to selected personnel, suggesting a lack of awareness or clarity among lower-level employees regarding their roles and responsibilities in handling such crises. "We really don't know... Okay, regarding this, it might be something for the higher-ups, perhaps as officials... from the headquarters, perhaps..." (Informant 1, personal communication, 21 September 2023). Lower-level employees often lack exposure to dangerous situations within their job scope and receive limited practical training for dealing with floods, fires, and other hazardous conditions in their work environment. For instance, while there have been some staff training sessions conducted in the past, they are infrequent and not comprehensive enough to adequately prepare staff for emergencies. Additionally, hazard assessments and briefings seem to primarily target lower-level staff, with limited involvement or awareness among higher-level employees. "As far as I know, it's meant to be implemented by us... for subordinate... like us..." (Informant 2, personal communication, 21 September 2023). Overall, there is a clear need for enhanced training programs and better communication channels to ensure that all staff members are sufficiently

prepared and informed about their roles and responsibilities in effectively managing fire and flood crises. This aligns with the findings of Alcántara-Ayala and Moreno (2016), who emphasise the importance of effective communication in increasing awareness and preparedness to address such challenges.

The museum's personnel exhibit exceptional skills in crisis management, demonstrating awareness of their roles and responsibilities in handling hazardous situations. For instance, Informant 1 highlights the potential causes of fire hazards in the museum and the presence of fire extinguishers to empower staff to control such situations effectively. "Perhaps the cables overheated or there was a gas leak, resulting in a fire. However, we have installed fire extinguishers so that our staff can control the situation if a fire starts" (Informant 1, personal communication, 21 September 2023). Similarly, Informant 2 mentions the designated charginer's ability to address electrical issues promptly, indicating a proactive approach to maintenance and safety. "...our staff member whom we refer to as the charginer. When a trip or damage occurs, he knows exactly where... the switches that need to be repaired" (Informant 2, personal communication, 21 September 2023).

However, the study also reveals a lack of initiative among staff members to enhance their ability to manage dangerous conditions in the workplace. While programs like 5S/EKSA are implemented to promote safety and organisation, staff members may not consistently engage in efforts to

improve their skills and preparedness for emergencies. Informant 4 emphasises the importance of regular reinforcement and collective efforts in maintaining a safe and organised environment. "Sometimes, they might find it difficult to recall every day... but when it's reinforced every year, the need for organising everything becomes clear" (Informant 4, personal communication, 21 September 2023). Additionally, the unexpected occurrence of floods in 2014 underscores the need for proactive measures and solutions to address potential hazards effectively. The responses from museum staff members highlight the Kelantan State Museum's proactive approach to safeguarding artefacts during flood disasters. Staff members demonstrate readiness and preparedness to protect heritage items, particularly by taking measures to lift smaller objects to higher levels to prevent damage. "Yes, artefacts... particularly heavy things, are beyond our capabilities. Smaller objects, such as textiles, must be lifted to higher levels; otherwise, they may be broken/defective" (Informant 1, personal communication, 21 September 2023). The proactive stance, as evidenced by research conducted by Maly and Yamazaki (2020), demonstrates the museum's commitment to safeguarding artefacts from natural disasters and other hazards. However, Fauzie and Sariffuddin (2017) argue that initiatives are mostly driven by individual efforts rather than collective actions. Nevertheless, these endeavours underscore the museum's dedication to preserving the nation's cultural heritage.

## Hazard Mitigation

In the event of crisis management during floods and fires at the Kelantan State Museum, it is essential to emphasise the significance of having clear and proper guidelines for fire and flood management. The quality of hazard mitigation plans is shaped by numerous factors, including resource availability, political backing, local expertise, experience, educational levels, and knowledge (Frazier et al., 2013). Informant 1's account underscores the experience gained from dealing with the 2014 flood, emphasising the need to open a flood operation room and prepare for potential floods during the monsoon season. "We had to open our flood operation room, and it is truly disheartening to know that floods were approaching Kota Bharu, and all of us had to be prepared" (Informant 1, personal communication, 21 September 2023). Additionally, staff are responsible for relocating artefacts to higher ground and securing them.

Informant 2 emphasises the necessity of annual training sessions to enhance staff awareness and readiness in handling flood and fire crises. However, it is noted that there are currently no specific written guidelines established within the museum institution, as mentioned by Informant 2. "I personally believe that there should be an annual training session to enhance our awareness of our surroundings and readiness to handle crises related to floods and fires" (Informant 2, personal communication, 21 September 2023). This absence underscores the immediate need for

attention and the development of comprehensive written guidelines to ensure staff preparedness and effective crisis management protocols, as affirmed by Informant 3. "We have yet to establish written guidelines thus far" (Informant 2, personal communication, 21 September 2023).

These expert suggestions provide valuable insights into enhancing disaster risk management in museum establishments. A breakdown of each item is listed in Table 2:

The proposed guidelines for disaster risk management at the Kelantan State Museum cover various aspects of fire safety and emergency preparedness. Enhancing the placement and signage of fire safety equipment, along with providing clear guidelines for their usage, can significantly improve response efficiency during a fire emergency. Installing emergency lighting, especially in areas without natural lighting and on stairways, is crucial for ensuring safe evacuation routes during power outages. Switching to LED lamps from fluorescent lamps and Compact Fluorescent Lamps (CFLs) with ballasts can reduce the risk of fire and explosion, making the museum environment safer for both visitors and staff. Placing fire extinguishers in viewing rooms ensures that these critical firefighting tools are easily accessible in case of an emergency. These recommendations underscore the importance of proactive measures to mitigate fire hazards and enhance emergency response capabilities within the museum premises. By implementing these guidelines, the

Kelantan State Museum can better protect its valuable artefacts, ensure visitor safety, and minimise potential damage during fire emergencies.

The proposed safety improvements outlined in Table 2 align with national-level disaster preparedness frameworks. NADMA (2024), Instruction No. 1, outlines a comprehensive disaster management mechanism across all phases and specifies the responsibilities of technical, response, and support agencies in mitigating risks, including within heritage institutions. Concurrently, Strategy 1.5 under Pillar 1 of the National Fire and Rescue Policy

(DKPN) 2021-2030 advocates the development of programmes that enhance self-regulatory compliance in premises management (Ministry of Housing and Local Government Malaysia, 2021). These directives support proactive measures such as improving emergency signage and lighting placement, ensuring safe evacuation routes, and displaying exit plans—key steps identified in Table 2 as necessary for the Kelantan State Museum. Such actions are critical for addressing site-specific vulnerabilities and strengthening institutional preparedness through policy-aligned risk reduction strategies.

Table 2  
*Proposition on guidelines for disaster risk management at the Kelantan state museum*

No.	Items	Descriptions
1.	Fire signs	Improve the location of fire signage for better visibility and guidance during emergencies Enhance the placement method and signage for fire extinguishing equipment, along with clear guidelines for their usage
2.	Additions and replacements	Add emergency lighting in areas without natural lighting, particularly during power outages Install emergency lighting on stairways to ensure safe evacuation routes Replace emergency exit signs with illuminated signs for visibility during power outages Replace fluorescent lamps with Light-emitting diodes (LED) to reduce the risk of fire or explosion Place fire extinguishers strategically in viewing rooms for immediate access during emergencies
3.	Plans	Create emergency exit plans and display them in prominent locations for public awareness and guidance Install illuminated emergency exit signs at the main entrance and exit doors to ensure visibility during emergencies
4.	Flooding	Provide mechanisms for easy relocation of items to higher levels to prevent damage during floods Implement measures such as floodgates, water barrier tubes, and sandbags to prevent water ingress through doors and piping channels Ensure the main electrical supply switch is promptly turned off to mitigate electrical hazards during flooding

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper sheds light on the hazardous conditions facing the Kelantan State Museum, particularly concerning fire and flood risks. Outdated wiring, flammable exhibit materials, and limited emergency routes pose significant threats, necessitating urgent attention to mitigate potential disasters. Despite some level of staff awareness and crisis management knowledge, there are notable deficiencies in practical training and communication, highlighting the need for improved staff preparedness and clear guidelines. Furthermore, financial constraints and the absence of written guidelines exacerbate the challenges faced by the museum in effectively managing fire and flood crises.

Due to that, proactive measures such as enhancing fire safety signage, installing emergency lighting, and creating emergency exit plans can significantly improve response capabilities. The Malaysian Fire and Rescue Department should conduct periodic, rigorous, and comprehensive risk assessments to identify potential threats to the valuable national heritage assets housed within the Kelantan State Museums. Given the study's indication that the museum is highly vulnerable to risks that could endanger its rich historical and cultural artefacts, prioritising effective safety measures is essential. Additionally, flood prevention measures such as providing mechanisms for relocating items to higher levels and implementing flood barriers are essential for mitigating flood risks. In summary, the proposed guidelines for

disaster risk management provide valuable insights into enhancing safety measures and emergency preparedness at the Kelantan State Museum. By implementing these recommendations, the museum can better protect its artefacts, ensure visitor safety, and minimise potential damage during fire and flood emergencies. Ultimately, proactive measures and comprehensive planning are imperative to safeguarding cultural heritage and preserving it for future generations.

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## **Adaptations of Movements and Elements in Randai Dramatists: A Case Study in Jelebu, Negeri Sembilan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the adaptation of movements and elements in *Randai* performances by dramatists in Jelebu, Negeri Sembilan, examining how traditional forms have been modified through cultural, creative, communal, and innovative processes. Originating from West Sumatra, Indonesia, *Randai* is a Minangkabau folk theatre that blends music, dance, *silat* (martial arts), and storytelling, typically staged in a circular formation. Introduced to Negeri Sembilan through cultural migration, *Randai* has since undergone significant localisation. The study addresses the lack of appreciation for the artistic value of Malaysian martial arts particularly *Randai* and scarcity of visual documentation in existing literature. Adopting a qualitative case study approach, the research is based on field observations and semi-structured interviews with performers and cultural practitioners. Findings reveal that *Randai* in Jelebu incorporates varied movement influences including *silat Gayung Patani*, *silat Gayung Malaysia*, *Seni Silat Tanah Bahru*, and animal-inspired gestures drawn from the tiger, monkey, and eagle. These adaptations not only enhance performance aesthetics but also reflect local identity, communal values, and the creative localisation of a previously foreign form. The study underscores how movement functions as a core medium of innovation, allowing *Randai* to remain relevant while preserving its cultural roots. In conclusion, the transformation of *Randai*

in Jelebu illustrates how traditional performance can evolve dynamically through regional expression. This article foregrounds movement as the foundation of *Randai*'s contemporary identity, positioning it as a living heritage shaped by ongoing adaptation, creativity, and localised martial artistry.

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## INTRODUCTION

Negeri Sembilan possesses a distinct cultural identity shaped by Minangkabau migration from West Sumatra between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Abdullah, 1980; Mohd Taib Osman, 1989). This migration introduced *Adat Perpatih*, a matrilineal socio-cultural system still practiced in inheritance, kinship, and governance, positioning the state as a focal point in Malay cultural anthropology.

Within this framework, Jelevu—particularly the *Suku Beranang* community—serves as a living repository of Minangkabau-derived traditions, including *Randai*. Locally, *Randai* has been adapted through the incorporation of regional dialects, indigenous narratives, musical instruments such as the *tromba* and *rebana*, and distinctive silat movements (Norhayati Ahmad, 2010). Its performance is sustained through community rituals, intergenerational training, and cultural transmission.

*Randai* in Jelevu functions not only as entertainment but as a vehicle for communal values and memory (Mohd Anis Md Nor, 1994). This study's focus on Jelevu's clan-based society offers insight into how *Randai* is dynamically preserved and localised, contributing to wider discourses on Malaysia's intangible cultural heritage and the role of community agency in cultural adaptation.

### Background of the Study

*Randai*, rooted in the term *merandai*—meaning to search or explore—originates from the Minangkabau traditions and is distinguished by agile silat-based movements

(Netrirosa, 2010). This multidimensional art form fuses storytelling, music, song, martial arts, and theatrical dialogue within a circular staging format (Pauka, 2016). Traditionally performed during communal rituals and festivities, *Randai* functions as a vessel for transmitting folklore, moral teachings, and cultural memory through the interplay of narrative and physical expression.

The integration of martial arts (silat) into *Randai* dramatisations is essential to its performative identity. Often used to convey *kaba*—traditional Minangkabau epic tales—*Randai* draws influence from classical Malay noble comedy, reinforcing its function as both entertainment and pedagogy (Netrirosa, 2010). *Randai* was introduced to the Malay Peninsula through the migration of Minangkabau people, particularly after 1932 in *Labuah Basilang*, and earlier via trade routes between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Abdullah, 1980; Mohd Taib Osman, 1989).

In Negeri Sembilan, *Randai* has undergone distinct local adaptations, shaped by cultural, linguistic, and aesthetic assimilation. Norhayati Ahmad (2010) highlights changes in musical composition, silat choreography, and linguistic delivery, including the use of local dialects and instruments such as the *tromba* and *rebana*, alongside the influence of silat traditions like *silat Gayung Patani* (Norhayati Ahmad, 2013), *silat Gayung Malaysia*, *Seni Silat Tanah Bahru*, and animal-inspired movements like those of the tiger, monkey, and eagle. These changes reflect *Randai*'s responsiveness to local sociocultural dynamics.

Today, *Randai* remains a living tradition in West Sumatra and Negeri Sembilan, performed during weddings, markets, and communal celebrations (Indrayuda & Samsuddin, 2021). In Jelevu, the *Suku Beranang* community continues to preserve *Randai* through oral transmission and community-based performances. Their role is crucial in sustaining the form's relevance, adapting it in ways that reflect contemporary life while retaining ritualistic and communal functions.

Contemporary *Randai* narratives are increasingly diverse, drawing from folk legends, historical memory, literature, and modern social issues. In Jelevu, these adaptations often blur the line between fiction and reality, reflecting lived experiences. The region's strong cultural communalism makes it a compelling site to examine how *Randai* continues to evolve—demonstrating that cultural sustainability is best achieved through adaptation rather than static preservation.

### Statement of the Problems

The issue arising in this study is the lack of appreciation and understanding of the artistic value of Malaysian martial arts, particularly *Randai* by the community. Many people are unaware of the existence and origins of *Randai*, despite its long history and introduction to the region. According to a prior study by Rosidi (2022), the issue of apathy from various parties towards this art form is not new. This is partly because artistic expressions easily change according to trends and circumstances.

Before conducting this study, there was limited visual documentation of *Randai* in the form of books, although several *Randai* videos are available on social media platforms like 'YouTube'. However, the information provided in these videos is often insufficient and lacks accurate explanations, especially for the younger generation, including the researchers. Therefore, it is important to conduct this study to produce comprehensive documentation of *Randai* to ensure that this heritage does not disappear easily. This study can also serve as a reference for future generations in their efforts to understand cultural heritage in Negeri Sembilan and beyond.

### Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve two main objectives. First, it seeks to examine how *Randai* dramatists in Jelevu, Negeri Sembilan have adapted traditional movement practices originally rooted in the Minangkabau performance tradition. The focus is on how physical gestures, choreographic structures, and bodily expressions have been modified to reflect the socio-cultural realities of the local community, including adaptations in narrative flow and spatial orientation.

Second, the study aims to analyse the performance elements that have been reinterpreted by *Randai* dramatist in accordance with local cultural and creative contexts. This includes an exploration of components such as music, singing, costumes, narrative structure, and stage configuration. These elements are assessed in terms of their artistic innovation,

cultural relevance, and contribution to the preservation and evolution of local identity.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Theoretically, it contributes to the fields of performance studies and ethnomusicology by documenting and critically analysing the localised adaptations of *Randai*—a traditional Minangkabau performance genre—within the cultural context of Jelebu, Negeri Sembilan. By examining the restructuring of movement vocabularies and performative elements, the study offers valuable insights into processes of cultural adaptation, elements, transmission, hybridisation, and innovation within traditional theatre forms.

Practically, the research provides important implications for local practitioners, cultural advocates, and policy makers by illuminating the creative strategies employed by *Randai* dramatists in balancing traditional aesthetics with contemporary relevance such understanding can inform efforts in cultural preservation, community-based arts education, and the revitalisation of heritage performances within modern contexts.

Moreover, by focussing on a specific geographical and socio-cultural setting, this case study facilitates a deeper understanding of how local identity, collective memory, and performance aesthetics intersect in sustaining and transforming a traditional art form. The findings may also serve as a comparative reference for future studies on

the adaptation of traditional performances across other Malaysian or Southeast Asian communities.

### **Organisation of the Paper**

This study is structured into five main sections to systematically address its research objectives and offer a comprehensive analysis of the adaptations of movements and elements in *Randai* performances in Jelebu, Negeri Sembilan. The first section, the introduction presents the study's background, problem statements, research objectives, significance and the overall organisation of the paper, thereby establishing the rationale for examining the localised adaptations of the *Randai* tradition. For the literature review, it will explore relevant scholarly works and theoretical frameworks, including traditional *Randai*, performance theory, cultural adaptation, identity, hybridity, embodiment, and community. It identifies gaps in existing literature and positions the study within academic discourse on performance and Southeast Asian cultural practices.

The methodology outlines the qualitative case study design, detailing data collection methods—such as semi-structured interviews, observations—and analytical procedures. The findings and discussion section present thematically organised data aligned with the research objectives, focussing on how *Randai* dramatist in Jelebu have adapted movement vocabularies and performance elements in relation to local values and creative expression. Finally, the conclusion summarises the key findings,

highlights their implications for cultural sustainability and performance studies, limitations and proposes recommendations for practitioners, scholars, and policymakers, as well as directions for future research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The adaptation of *Randai* in Jelevu represents a dynamic cultural negotiation, reflecting the interplay between the traditional Minangkabau performance heritage and the distinctive socio-cultural environment of Negeri Sembilan. These adaptations are evident in the integration of the Negeri Sembilan dialect, modifications in physical movements to accommodate local capabilities, and the reconfiguration of narratives to reflect community-specific issues, values, and histories.

In its place of origin—West Sumatra—*Randai* remains rooted in tradition, emphasising epic tales, circular formations, and the stylised martial art of Minangkabau silat. However, in other regions such as Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, *Randai* has undergone modernising shifts, incorporating multimedia elements, contemporary music, and proscenium staging. In states like Perak and Melaka, the performative aspect of *Randai* has largely been diluted, with emphasis placed more on storytelling and dialogue, while traditional dance and music elements have either been commercialised or significantly transformed.

Scholars such as Mohd Anis Md Nor (1994) have highlighted the importance of spatial and communal contexts in shaping the evolution of traditional dances.

Likewise, Shamsul Amri Baharuddin (2005) emphasised that local cultures are not passive recipients of external influences; rather, they actively and selectively adapt cultural forms to suit local needs. Rachmi Diyah Larasati (2013) has also noted that transformations in traditional art forms often respond to socio-political conditions and the politics of identity formation.

The theoretical lens of cultural hybridity, as posited by Homi K. Bhabha (1994), is particularly relevant here. Bhabha's concept of the "third space" highlights the emergence of hybrid cultural expressions resulting from the interaction between two distinct traditions. *Randai* in Jelevu exemplifies this hybridity, functioning as a unique cultural product formed through the synthesis of Minangkabau heritage and Negeri Sembilan locality.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1995) view on cultural preservation through recontextualisation further enriches the analysis. According to her, the sustainability of cultural practices depends on their ability to evolve contextually. *Randai* in Jelevu district illustrates such active preservation, as it adapts its form while retaining foundational values such as moral instruction, social cohesion, and the reinforcement of customary beliefs.

Performance identity theory suggests that traditional art is not merely a form of entertainment, but a vehicle for cultural expression and social identity formation. In Jelevu, *Randai* serves as a performative symbol of local identity, encapsulating communal norms, matrilineal customs (Adat Perpatih), and collective values.

Richard Schechner's (1985) theory of performance as ritual further reinforces this notion by suggesting that performance acts as a transformative social process. Within *Randai* in Jelevu district, the integration of traditional songs, silat, and circular choreography reaffirms cultural memory and creates a shared ritualistic experience.

The ethnomusicological approach outlined by Azmi, Idris, and Kechot (2022) will also be employed in this study to examine the interrelationship between music and cultural elements such as custom, belief, and identity. This framework is particularly relevant for analysing how movement and music in *Randai* near Jelevu district have been adapted within the local sociocultural context.

Victor Turner's (1982) concepts of "community" and "liminality" also apply meaningfully. The *Randai* stage becomes a liminal space where both performers and audiences engage in collective identity negotiation. The coexistence of traditional and contemporary elements reflects how identity is continuously shaped and redefined within performative contexts. Notably, the emphasis on ritualistic and communal values in Jelevu distinguishes it from urban *Randai* performances, which are often more aesthetically driven and commercially oriented.

Cultural adaptation in *Randai* in Jelevu district involves not only aesthetic transformation but also meaningful community engagement. The original circular formations and martial movements drawn from Minangkabau silat are now

infused with local dance vocabulary, including Negeri Sembilan-style *pencak silat*. Linguistically, the Minangkabau dialect has been blended or substituted with the Negeri Sembilan dialect to enhance accessibility and cultural resonance.

Narrative adaptations are equally significant. Rather than focusing solely on Minangkabau legends, contemporary *Randai* in Jelevu features local tales, historical events, and social commentaries relevant to the community. This transformation not only rejuvenates the tradition but also ensures its relevance to new generations, aligning cultural expression with the realities of a changing society.

The notion of performativity, as theorised by Judith Butler (1990) and Richard Schechner (1985), underscores how identity and tradition are enacted and re-enacted through performance. *Randai* in Jelevu district, the choices made in choreography, dialogue, and thematic focus are not merely artistic but reflect deeper processes of cultural reaffirmation and transformation. The inherently participatory nature of *Randai*—through responsive dialogue, song, and audience interaction—further transforms the performance into a living space of negotiation and meaning-making.

Finally, the core of *Randai* in Jelevu district lies in the negotiation of cultural identity. As a community inheriting Minangkabau tradition yet shaped by Negeri Sembilan's unique historical and cultural context, Jelevu dramatists carefully decide which traditional elements to preserve

and which to reinterpret. These creative decisions reflect both communal aspirations and a desire for cultural sustainability. Through such performances, local history is reclaimed, cultural pride is nurtured, and new expressions of belonging are continuously shaped.

In conclusion, the adaptation of *Randai* in Jelevu is best understood through the interrelated frameworks of cultural hybridity, performativity, and identity negotiation. These concepts illuminate how *Randai* is not simply preserved but dynamically reimaged, reinforcing its role as a vibrant, living tradition that reflects the evolving identity of the Jelevu community.

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative ethnographic case study approach to examine how movements and performance elements in *Randai* have been adapted by dramatists in Jelevu, Negeri Sembilan. Rooted in the interpretivist tradition, this approach allows for an in-depth exploration of cultural practices within their specific socio-historical and performative contexts. The methodology is informed by principles of naturalistic inquiry (Berg, 1995; Marican, 2005), which emphasise field immersion, reflexivity, and the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participants.

Ethnography, as defined by Creswell (2005), enables researchers to study a group's education, beliefs, behaviours, and language in natural settings. In this study, the ethnographic lens is applied to observe and

interpret the cultural adaptation of *Randai*, focusing on processes of transformation in choreography, music, narrative, and performance style. Research questions are oriented toward understanding how local identity, cultural continuity, and innovation intersect within *Randai* practices in Jelevu.

The selection of Jelevu as the research site was guided by several contextual and methodological considerations. Firstly, Jelevu remains one of the most culturally vibrant districts in Negeri Sembilan, with communities that actively uphold *Adat Perpatih* and traditional arts. Local art groups serve as agents of cultural transmission, offering a living context in which *Randai* continues to thrive. Secondly, the presence of *Suku Beranang*, a dominant clan in Jelevu, plays a central role in maintaining *Randai* as a tool for cultural communication. Their regular involvement in performances and cultural education enables the study to explore clan-based influences on artistic adaptation.

Thirdly, Jelevu's communal and tradition-bound structure presents a rich ethnographic setting for data collection. It allows the researcher to establish sustained interactions with participants, facilitating access to embodied knowledge and situated cultural meanings. Lastly, the lack of detailed academic documentation on *Randai* in Jelevu presents a research gap that this study aims to address, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of Malaysia's intangible heritage.

Data were collected through observation and semi-structured interviews. Observation

was conducted during adaptation of movements by *Randai* dramatist near Jelebu. Interviews also were conducted with a purposive sample of informants including *Randai* dramatists (directors, dancers, actors, scriptwriters), cultural instructors and community who is familiar with *Randai*'s evolution. Sampling was designed to ensure diversity in terms of gender, age, and role within the performance ecosystem.

Semi-structured interviews provided flexibility to explore specific themes while maintaining comparability across participants. Interview questions were organised around several core themes: involvement in *Randai*, artistic motivations, adaptation strategies, elements, perceptions of tradition and innovation, and reflections on *Randai*'s role in shaping local identity. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, while field notes, photographs, and audio-visual recordings were used to supplement observations and enhance contextual understanding. Where possible, interviews were conducted in informal and familiar settings to encourage openness and reflexivity.

Ethical protocols were observed throughout the research process, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality. Participants were given opportunities to review their interview data, and member checking was conducted to ensure accuracy and integrity of interpretations.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006)

six-phase framework: (1) familiarisation with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) identification of themes, (4) theme review, (5) definition and naming of themes, and (6) final report writing. Key themes that emerged included '*movement adaptation*', '*creative negotiation*', '*preservation of tradition*', and '*cultural identity*'. Manual coding and reflective memo-writing were employed to trace emerging patterns, supported by triangulation of data sources.

The theoretical frameworks underpinning the analysis include Cultural Preservation by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1995) and Cultural Hybridity Homi K. Bhabha (1994) and Performance Theory (Schechner, 1985; Turner, 1982). These frameworks conceptualise *Randai* as a site of cultural negotiation and identity formation, where tradition and innovation coexist. Cultural adaptation is examined through shifts in language use, costume, choreography, and musical forms, while performance theory situates *Randai* as a ritual space for cultural expression and transformation.

To ensure trustworthiness, strategies such as data triangulation (semi-structured interviews and observation), reflexive journaling, and prolonged engagement in the field were implemented. These methods support the study's aim to offer a contextually grounded and nuanced understanding of how *Randai* in Jelebu is being adapted, reimaged, and sustained by its practitioners amidst changing socio-cultural landscapes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Adaptations of Movements in Randai Dramatists

Originally, silat encompassed techniques such as *gayuang*, *sambuik*, *tangkok*, and *lapek*, but due to its combative nature, these movements were gradually refined into stylised, dance-like forms more suitable for public performance (Elias et al., 2015). This refinement contributed to the emergence of art forms like *pencak silat*, *sewah dance*, and *gelombang*, all of which became foundational to *Randai*. The evolution of Minangkabau martial and literary arts gained momentum in the 1920s when Malay nobility introduced theatrical performances across the Malay Archipelago (Brandon, 1989), influenced in part by Dutch colonial theatre or *toneel* (Mohd Anuar Ramli, 2006; Zulkifli, 2017).

The migration of Minangkabau people to Negeri Sembilan (Hall, 1971), especially to Jelebu (Mustafar & A'zmi, 2023), facilitated the localisation of *Randai*, embedding it within local customs and social structures (Azmi et al., 2021). Emerging from the oral storytelling tradition *bakaba*, *Randai* preserved folk epics like

*Si Tongga Maget Jabang* and absorbed elements from *basijobang* and Dutch drama (Kechot, 2009). Today, groups like *Randai Rantau* and *Laman Bangkinang* (Kechot, 2009) continue to promote its legacy. Though rooted in martial arts, *Randai* now emphasises choreographed *bunga silat* movements for communal storytelling and cultural transmission (Hum & Kuniang, 2015).

The *bunga silat* sequence forms the foundation of movement adaptation in *Randai* dramatics, where martial origins are stylised for performative aesthetics. The first movement, known as *a'liff* (Figure 1), symbolises the starting point of all steps and is named after the initial Arabic letter in Islam. It requires the performer to stand upright with feet together, hands by the sides, spine and head aligned—signifying discipline and readiness.

This is followed by the *kudo-kudo* or *balapeh* movement (Figure 2), comprising three stances: front, middle, and back. The performer transitions from the *a'liff* stance into a bent-knee position, extending the right hand forward while the left hand rests on the thigh.



Figure 1. *A'liff* sign movements



Figure 2. *Kudo-kudo / balapeh* movements

These stances mirror traditional combat positions, but within *Randai*, they are slowed and rhythmically coordinated.

The *gelek* movement is then introduced, allowing directional shifts in the performance (Figure 3). It appears in two forms—static and lifted. In both cases, the torso rotates to change direction, maintaining fluidity within the *kudo-kudo* frame. The lifted version

adds dynamism by incorporating a foot lift, allowing expressive transitions across stage space.

Next, the *gantuang* movement (Figure 4) involves lifting the left leg to waist height while the right hand extends forward. The hand must remain below shoulder level, adhering to cultural etiquette. This gesture blends martial formality with performative poise.

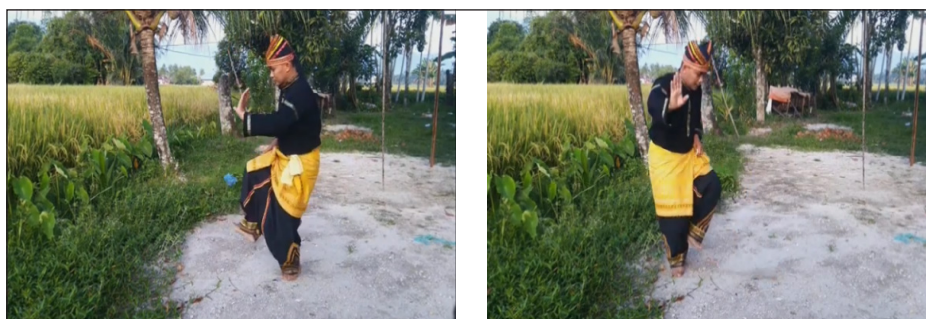


Figure 3. *Gelek* movements



Figure 4. *Gantuang /gantung* movements

The *simpir* or sweeping movement (Figure 5), typically defensive in combat, follows the *gantuang* movement. Here, the foot slides outward while the hands open in expressive gestures—one at chest level and the other pointing downward (*cukap*), signifying alertness.

The *cross* or *lintang* movement (Figure 6) expands on the previous gesture, with both hands raised and heels slightly lifted. This movement has three body levels—high, mid, and low—each offering dramatic emphasis during conflict scenes.

The *tampuah* movement (Figure 7) serves as an opening stance for attack. It adopts the middle *kudo-kudo* base with one hand thrust forward and the other guarding the chest, symbolising intent and balance.

Other adapted sequences include a *gelek-gantuang* (Figure 8) combination, *sintak* (a step backward to evade) (Figure 9), and *palintang sutor* (Figure 10), which incorporates a rotating arm movement ending in a seated position—emphasising theatricality over aggression.

The *sembah* gesture (Figure 11), adapted for *Randai*, signals respect through upright or seated forms. It reflects ceremonial values rather than combative action.

Finally, the *galembong* movement (Figure 12) concludes the performance. The wide-legged stance and rhythmic slapping of traditional trousers (*seluar galembong*) produce audible cues. This signature movement showcases the performer's timing, strength, and artistry, highlighting how traditional combat elements are transformed into performative expression in *Randai* dramatics.

The movement elements in *Randai* performances in Negeri Sembilan have evolved beyond their original Minangkabau form through a variety of local adaptations (Kechot, 2009; Pauka, 1998). These changes are not limited to physical gestures but extend to language, music, narrative structure, and costume, all contributing to the unique identity of *Randai* in Jelevu. The adoption of the Negeri Sembilan dialect, replacing Minangkabau language, enhances the performance's local resonance, reflecting a broader cultural transformation (Brandon, 1989; Hall, 1971).

Musically, instruments like the *tromba* and *rebana* have been incorporated or blended with traditional Minangkabau instruments such as the *talempong* and

*gendang panjang*, producing rhythmic arrangements that align with local preferences (Brandon, 1989; Pauka, 1998). Local folk songs, including *Anak Itik Tok Wi* and *Burung Pungguk*, further contribute to the musical and narrative layers of the performance (Kechot, 2009). These musical components harmonise with stylised martial art movements—particularly *bunga silat*—

ensuring cohesion between movement, melody, and story (Asriati et al., 2019).

*Randai* in Jelebu differs thematically from its Indonesian counterpart, which often draws from canonical *kaba* literature such as *Cindua Mato* and *Sabai Nan Aluih*. Instead, it foregrounds regional legends and historical episodes relevant to Negeri Sembilan (Brandon, 1989; Pauka, 1998).



Figure 5. *Simpir* movement



Figure 6. Cross motions



Figure 7. Open / *tampuah* movement



Figure 8. *Gelek* and hanging movements



Figure 9. *Sintak* movements

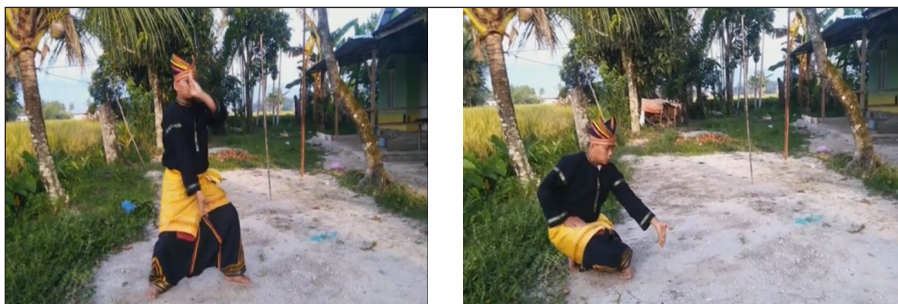


Figure 10. *Palintang sutor* movements



Figure 11. Sembah / sambah movement



Figure 12. Galembong movements

Costumes also reflect hybridisation, combining Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan aesthetics through adjustments in material, colour, and embroidery, aligning with local resources and tastes. These layers of adaptation illustrate a dynamic process of cultural negotiation and hybridity (Butler, 1990; Bhabha, 1994).

Mazlan and Shamsudin (2018) identify three primary groups within the *Randai* community in Negeri Sembilan: local performers, Minangkabau descendants from Indonesia, and outside contributors. This diverse composition reflects the inclusiveness and adaptability of *Randai*, sustaining its relevance across generations.

Supporting institutions have further reinforced this evolution. 'Laman Merewah' functions as a training and archiving centre for *Randai*. 'Persada Negeri Sembilan' promotes *Randai* at both state and national platforms, while KESET (Negeri Sembilan Theatre Association) encourages creative integration between *Randai* and contemporary theatrical forms (Mohd Faizal Musa, 2011; Norhayati Ahmad, 2010). Collectively, these organisations play a vital role in preserving and revitalising *Randai* as a living cultural practice amid ongoing social change.

In addition to the organisations mentioned above, there are also several individuals involved in *Randai* performances. These individuals are detailed in Table 1.

Scholars view *Randai* as a living tradition that continues to evolve within its cultural context. Mohd Anis Md Nor (1994) highlights its function as a medium of cultural communication among the Minangkabau diaspora in Negeri Sembilan, while Norhayati Ahmad (2010) emphasises its role in reflecting social change and hybridity.

Table 1

*Several individuals involved in Randai performances near Jelevu (Jabatan Kebudayaan dan Kesenian Negara Negeri Sembilan, 2020)*

Name	Role/Skill	Background	Performance/Contribution	District Focus
Sahrill	Young choreographer, <i>Randai</i> dancer	New generation, active in innovating <i>Randai</i> choreography	Creates both modern and traditional <i>Randai</i> choreography	Jelevu
JKKN Negeri Sembilan Group	Official state cultural troupe, active <i>Randai</i> performers	Comprised of talented youths from various districts, including Jelevu	Performs <i>Randai</i> at state and national festivals	Negeri Sembilan (main focus: Jelevu)
Mazdar Abd Aziz	Veteran <i>Randai</i> artist, actor and educator	Senior figure who has extensively documented <i>Randai</i>	Promotes <i>Randai</i> through traditional performances and teaching	Jelevu and Negeri Sembilan
Kamarul Ibrahim	Actor and <i>Randai</i> practitioner	<i>Randai</i> arts veteran with extensive experience	Lead actor in various <i>Randai</i> performances	Jelevu
Zuhairi	<i>Randai</i> arts practitioner and choreographer	Experienced in <i>Randai</i> dance and silat movements	Develops and preserves the original <i>Randai</i> style	Jelevu
Mat Desa Rahman	Artist and community figure in <i>Randai</i>	Known as a traditional <i>Randai</i> arts activist	Significant contributor in <i>Randai</i> training and performances	Jelevu
Norlela Ishak	Female <i>Randai</i> performer; skilled in traditional music and event coordination	Performs in <i>Randai</i> music ensembles; plays traditional instruments like rebana and tromba	<i>Randai</i> musician, singer, cultural coordinator	Jelevu

Mazlan and Shamsudin (2018) frame *Randai* as more than entertainment, seeing it as a site of cultural identity and social unity.

Mohd Faizal Musa (2011) regards *Randai* as a vessel for oral tradition, reinforcing community cohesion. Khor (2007) and Tan (2015) underline its role in nurturing intergenerational connections, while Ismail and Ahmad (2013) demonstrate how community participation in *Randai* strengthens local identity. Lee (2019) introduces the notion of cultural transformation, showing how performers creatively reinterpret tradition to suit contemporary needs.

These perspectives illustrate that adaptations in *Randai*—particularly movement—are responses to broader cultural dynamics. In Jelevu, these transformations are embedded in local language, music, and storytelling. *Randai* thus remains rooted in tradition while adapting to modern contexts, sustained by cultural institutions, artists, and community actors committed to preserving its relevance and meaning.

### **Randai as a Dramatic Tradition: Adaptation of Elements in Contemporary Performance**

In Negeri Sembilan, particularly in Jelevu, *Randai* has evolved through creative adaptations that reflect local cultural values and modern sensibilities while retaining its core dramatic components. Central to *Randai* is its narrative structure, conveyed through *kaba* or epic tales performed by actor-dancers (Brandon, 1989; Pauka, 1998). One frequently staged tale in Jelevu

is *Rangkayo Mudo*, which follows a young man's journey in search of success—echoing the *Adat Perpatih* value of youth mobility and resilience (Asriati et al., 2019; Hall, 1971; Kechot, 2009).

Dialogic acting enables performers to embody roles through expressive speech and movement, often incorporating reflective and didactic dialogue to convey communal values (Kechot, 2009; Schechner, 1985; Turner, 1982). Dance elements, especially *gelombang* performed in a circular formation, symbolise unity and group coordination (Kechot, 2009). The *tukang goreh*, who leads both vocally and choreographically, is key to maintaining rhythm, structure, and emotional pace—drawing on *silat* and traditional Malay dance forms to create a stylised hybrid of movement.

Literary components such as *gurindam* are also integral to narration and scene transitions (Brandon, 1989; Pauka, 1998). These poetic verses, delivered in stylised Malay, evoke emotion and mark shifts in tone or atmosphere. Commonly recited titles include *Dayang Daini*, *Simarantang*, *Talipuak Layua*, and *Indang Kurinci* (Kechot, 2009), which require a performer with vocal strength and nuanced understanding of narrative flow (Asriati et al., 2019).

Music in *Randai* emerged organically from within the ensemble. Vocal interjections or *aba-aba* such as *hep*, *tah*, and *tih* are paired with body percussion and traditional instruments like *caklempong*, *bangsi*, and drums (Asriati et al., 2019; Pauka, 1998). These establish mood and indicate transitions.

In modern practice, expanded musical ensembles are occasionally introduced to increase emotional intensity (Kechot, 2009). The *tukang goreng* also functions as a dramaturge, modifying tempo and dynamics to match audience engagement (Brandon, 1989; Pauka, 1998).

Traditionally, *Randai* is performed outdoors in front of the *rumah gadang* and often continues through the night during communal rituals or festivities (Kechot, 2009; Schechner, 1985; Turner, 1982). This spatial-temporal setting reinforces the performance's link to communal identity and ritual life (Hall, 1971).

Islam also has deeply influenced *Randai*'s evolution. Historically, *Randai* served as a platform for Islamic preaching (Kayam, 1984), with performance elements such as the opening prayer gesture and the *a'liff* stance—where dancers stand still and composed—symbolising spiritual submission and discipline. Movements that were formerly animistic or animalistic in nature have been recontextualised into floral and geometric forms to align with Islamic aesthetics and values (Elias et al., 2015). However, in certain localities, animal-inspired gestures—such as those reflecting the movements—continue to be retained as part of the performative vocabulary.

The term *Randai* is believed to derive from the Arabic *ra'yan li da'i*, suggesting its role in spiritual and moral guidance (Azmi et al., 2021). Vocal calls like *hep* and *tah* may also reflect Sufi breathing techniques, particularly from the Naqshbandi tradition. In terms of content, pre-Islamic myths have

been slowly replaced with Islamic moral tales and ethical parables. Nevertheless, *Randai* maintains its folk roots through communal involvement and symbolic storytelling (Azmi et al., 2021).

In Jelebu, *Randai* reflects a dynamic interplay between inherited tradition and local reinvention. Elements such as language, costume, and instrumentation have been localised to suit the Negeri Sembilan context. Dialects replace Minangkabau speech, local folklore supplements *kaba*, and costumes blend Minangkabau and Negeri Sembilan designs—marking a hybridised aesthetic.

This adaptation is not viewed as a deviation but a process of cultural negotiation and sustainability. *Randai* is reimagined through community practices and institutional support, including training centres like 'Laman Merewah' and organisations such as 'Persada Negeri Sembilan' and 'KESET', which facilitate both preservation and innovation (Mohd Faizal Musa, 2011; Norhayati Ahmad, 2010).

The relevance of *Randai* extends beyond performance. It has implications for cultural policy, advocating for tradition-based innovation, and for education, offering experiential avenues for moral and cultural learning. From a performance studies perspective, *Randai* challenges essentialist views of authenticity, showcasing how tradition evolves in response to lived realities.

In essence, *Randai* dramatists in Jelebu embody an integrated performance

system—interweaving narrative, gesture, sound, and spirituality—allowing the art form to flourish as a conduit for both cultural heritage and contemporary expression. Through selective reinvention grounded in local identity and community collaboration, *Randai* continues to thrive as a meaningful, living tradition.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Randai* in Negeri Sembilan represents a culturally rich and aesthetically refined traditional art form that continues to evolve through localised adaptation. The integration of movements such as *silat Gayung Patani*, *silat Gayung Malaysia*, *Seni Silat Tanah Bahru* and the replacement of animistic or animal-based elements with floral-inspired gestures reflect efforts to harmonise the performance with Islamic values and local sensibilities although in certain localities, animal-inspired gestures continue to be retained. But, for instance, the *a'liff* movement symbolises a shift towards spiritual introspection, replacing earlier forms that lacked Islamic influence.

This study highlights the need to preserve *Randai* as a cultural legacy that embodies historical values, identity, and social transformation. A bottom-up, community-centred approach reveals how the *Randai* tradition remains relevant by adapting to changing contexts without losing its essence.

To ensure its continuity, the younger generation must develop an appreciation for *Randai*. Collective efforts—especially by policymakers, cultural practitioners, and

communities—are essential to safeguard this intangible heritage before it fades beyond recovery. Preservation today ensures relevance tomorrow.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study offers concrete strategies for sustaining and revitalising *Randai* as a living cultural tradition. For artists and practitioners, community-based adaptation workshops can serve as training platforms for new performers to engage with updated *Randai* movements and narratives that respond to contemporary issues. Additionally, digital platforms such as 'YouTube', 'Tiktok' and other social media should be leveraged to document and disseminate adapted performances to a wider and more diverse audience.

For educators and academic institutions, the development of teaching modules based on *Randai* adaptations as case studies can enrich curricula in performing arts and cultural studies. Collaboration between universities and local arts communities can further strengthen community engagement initiatives. Meanwhile, cultural and heritage institutions are encouraged to establish a digital archive that includes videos, scripts, photographs, and oral histories of adapted *Randai* performances. Recognising *Randai* in Jelebu district within national heritage planning will further emphasise its role in shaping Malaysia's multicultural identity.

For future research should focus on digital archiving as a critical tool for documentation, education, and long-term preservation. Technological integration

ensures intergenerational accessibility and knowledge transfer. Cross-cultural collaborations—especially with Minangkabau communities in Indonesia or international artists—could further enrich Randai’s adaptive potential through cultural dialogue and exchange. Ultimately, this study should inform strategic planning by heritage institutions such as the National Heritage Department or the National Art Gallery, ensuring that *Randai* is not only preserved but actively nurtured as a dynamic and evolving cultural legacy.

### **LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

In the Malaysian context, cultural heritage is often shaped by political and institutional forces—through national representation, funding priorities, and heritage policies. Local art forms such as *Randai* in Jelevu district are not immune to these dynamics. Adapted performances frequently provoke questions of authenticity and authority: who decides what constitutes 'legitimate' heritage, and should preservation entail conserving tradition in static form or allowing recontextualisation that reflects contemporary realities. Government bodies often prioritise original forms for tourism and national branding, restricting community agency in creatively reimagining traditions. This tension between preservation and innovation is a central theme in *Randai*'s evolution.

Preservation is often narrowly defined as replication, yet this approach fails to

acknowledge shifting social realities. In contrast, adapted *Randai* in Jelevu exemplifies cultural continuity through transformation—where movement vocabularies, performance structures, and narratives are reshaped in response to urbanisation, education, and generational shifts. This study challenges rigid preservation models, advocating instead for community-centred and context-sensitive frameworks that reflect lived experiences.

To deepen the study’s conceptual grounding, relevant theories from cultural politics (e.g. Homi Bhabha, 1995; Stuart Hall, 1971) and performance studies (e.g. Richard Schechner, 1985) may be applied to frame adaptation as a legitimate strategy for cultural survival. Contrasting institutional discourses with community perspectives allows for a richer narrative that highlights the rationales, tensions, and negotiations behind adaptation. This reflexive analysis positions the researcher as both documentarian and cultural advocate.

Key terms from performance studies—such as embodiment, performativity, intercultural performance, and liminality—enhance analytical precision, while concepts from ethnomusicology—such as musical syncretism, transmission, contextual listening, and cultural sustainability—highlight how music and movement operate within evolving cultural landscapes. These terminologies anchor the research within relevant disciplinary discourses.

Ultimately, integrating these frameworks is not merely stylistic—it affirms the study’s academic rigour, epistemological awareness, and potential to contribute to

global dialogues on intangible cultural heritage. By embedding *Randai* in Jelebu district in broader scholarly conversations, this research not only uplifts a local tradition but also informs critical discussions on adaptation, identity, and sustainability in Southeast Asian performing arts.

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## Elements of Culture in the Folklore of Kelantan: A Preliminary Survey

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### ABSTRACT

Malay oral narratives are a literary heritage that symbolises the uniqueness of Malay community in translating their worldview in relation to occurrences of life. This creative storytelling is not merely for entertainment but also as a source of education. This study discusses elements of cultural heritage in the folklore of Kelantan with a focus on the districts of Tumpat and Pasir Mas. In conjunction with various sources of story comprising mythical, legendary, aetiological, and ritual, this research aims at exploring different dimensions of Kelantan's cultural heritage transmitted orally from generation to generation. The research methodology used is qualitative, which utilises interviews and library research. There were five (5) informants interviewed to obtain data in the form of folklore or folktales told by these informants. The data was then analysed thematically based on specific themes. The research findings reveal information pertinent to culture, historical resonances, and communal significance contained in the 11 oral narratives of Kelantan. Results of the study indicated that cultural aspects of Kelantanese folklore can be identified by their stories, which focus on both tangible and intangible heritage elements. The cultural elements in the oral

narratives of Kelantan may contribute to a deeper understanding of the Kelantanese cultural landscape and emphasise the importance of oral narratives as a collective cultural repository that has its own characteristics. Thus, there is a need for a sustainability process to preserve the literary heritage of Kelantan for future generations.

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## INTRODUCTION

Oral narratives are one of the folk literary heritages disseminated orally. The transmission is a form of direct communication, face-to-face, that requires a two-way interaction between a storyteller and a listener. Oral narratives are an important record in human civilisation as they describe the thoughts of society in a nation. It is through oral narratives that a cultural heritage is preserved, as they contain values, beliefs and ways of life; thus, they may become references for the young generation. According to Abu Bakar and Sujud (2013), the concept of folklore or oral narratives that is orally transmitted from one generation to another may point to the idea that the narratives belong to the society 'collectively'. In other words, oral narratives belong to the society that symbolise a collective cultural identity of a society (Abdul Rahman, 2015).

Oral narratives for a society may consist of myths, legends, fables or stories of certain figures or events (Rahmat, 2006). These stories symbolise cultural identity of a place or nation. Furthermore, the contents are often related to culture, environment, place, time, and beliefs that may form the worldview of a society as conveyed by a storyteller. In other words, a society's culture is depicted through its folk tales.

Oral narratives are also culturally and spatially bound. It is no surprise that there are similar patterns of Malay oral narratives in different places throughout the archipelago. In the past, these stories were meant to educate, besides their function as

a source of entertainment. Various moral values and didactic lessons conveyed are for exemplary purposes. It can be summed up that Malay oral narratives function as a literary heritage that portrays local genius or wisdom of the community in interpreting their worldview in a creative way.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs an ethnographic method to obtain data on folk tales through a qualitative approach of interviews and library research. The primary source obtained is through interviews with individuals such as village heads, villagers, and old folks. The secondary data are from various digital sources, particularly from databases such as Web of Science, Google Scholar, Scopus, and Science Direct. Apart from this, relevant folktale books are also consulted. These secondary sources were chosen based on the keywords such as folk tale, history of Kelantan, Malay literary heritage, and heritage sustainability. The interview data were analysed using a thematic approach. For the secondary data, a textual analysis is employed in order to reinterpret and discuss relevant concepts or ideas. The document analyses may contribute to the research findings, which are based on the keywords in the study. Places for the fieldwork in this research are limited to two districts in Kelantan: Tumpat and Pasir Mas.

The stories analysed in this study include both primary oral narratives gathered through fieldwork interviews and other stories already familiar within the local oral tradition. While six stories were collected

directly from informants in the districts of Tumpat and Pasir Mas, additional narratives, such as Puteri Endong and Sumpahan Tragis Ikan Kekacang, were selected based on their continued presence in communal storytelling and cultural memory.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in folklore theory and cultural anthropology, focussing on the symbolic meanings and cultural functions of oral narratives. This approach views folklore as a medium through which communities express, preserve, and transmit their collective memory, values, and practices. By examining these stories as functional elements of social life, the study highlights how they reinforce cultural norms, articulate communal beliefs, and contribute to the continuity of Kelantanese heritage.

The folktales of Kelantan were collected from the two districts, namely Tumpat and Pasir Mas. There are six (6) stories from Tumpat and five (5) from Pasir Mas. The analysis results show that these stories can be categorised into myth, legend, humour, *hikayat*, fable, aetiology, and mystics.

The fieldwork in Tumpat has resulted in a collection of six (6) stories, taken from informants in different villages in the area. The stories are Jebak Puyuh, Ajaibnya Sebatang Pokok Suci, Sang Sisik Si Berduri Putih, Beruk Belaan Mistik, Si Pengamal Lapan Roda Kebenaran, and Tenggelamnya Jong Emas Selehor. Meanwhile in Pasir Mas there are five (5) stories has been collected namely Sumpahan Tragis Ikan Kekacang, Puteri Endong, Pemujaan Mistik, Belaan Anak Kerak, and Belaan Hantu Raya. The informants are as in Table 1.

Oral narratives or folklore are part of a literary treasure that contains cultural elements. Folklore is a form of two-way communication commonly used by lower-class society, in which it involves a face-to-face interaction. It develops among the people who own these stories collectively, and they reflect their thoughts and cultural identity. In other words, folklore also proves that there is a relation between culture, tradition, and history of the community (Mat Piah, 2006).

Customs and traditions define the cultural landscape of human civilisations by dictating social interactions, ceremonial

Table 1  
*List of informants*

Informants	Age	Sex	Locality	Role
1	60's	Male	Pasir Mas	Head of Village
2	65	Male	Pasir Mas	Villager
3	85	Male	Tumpat	Villager
4	61	Male	Tumpat	Villager/ Businessman
5	75	Male	Tumpat	Villager/ Pensioner

observances, and the commemoration of key life events. These cultural traditions, entrenched in history and profoundly embedded in societal norms, are inseparably connected to folklore, which serves as a reservoir of collective wisdom and creative expression across groups. Based on the research, it was found that there was a relationship between folklore and the embodiment of cultures, which involves customs and traditions in the Malay world, specifically in the folktales of Kelantan. The collected folktales had revealed their values, beliefs, and common identity, including rites of passage, festive celebrations, and communal rituals. 11 folktales were collected in the field, with six (6) in Tumpat and six (6) in Pasir Mas. *Jebak Puyuh*, *Ajaibnya Sebatang Pokok Suci*, *Sang Sisik Si Berduri Putih*, *Beruk Belaan Mistik*, *Si Pengamal Lapan Roda Kebenaran*, and *Tenggelamnya Jong Emas Selehor* all gained at Tumpat. Meanwhile, in Pasir Mas, there are five (5) stories has been collected, namely *Sumpahan Tragis Ikan Kekacang*, *Puteri Endong*, *Pemujaan Mistik*, *Belaan Anak Kerak*, and *Belaan Hantu Raya*. The collected folk stories in the research area include a variety of kinds, such as myths, exemplary stories, animal fables, and legends.

According to Mat Piah (2006), exemplary stories are folk tales that have didactic components, convey a strong moral message, and provide valuable lessons. These exemplary stories tend to be pitched at kids, and their contents are filled with strong moral values based on social,

cultural, or spiritual themes. The folktales of Kelantan that are exemplary stories consist of *Jebak Puyuh*, *Ajaibnya Sebatang Pokok Suci*, *Sang Sisik Si Berduri Putih*, *Beruk Belaan Mistik*, *Si Pengamal Lapan Roda Kebenaran*, *Tenggelamnya Jong Emas Selehor*, *Sumpahan Tragis Ikan Kekacang*, *Puteri Endong*, and *Pemujaan Mistik*.

Animal fables are a popular traditional Malay folktale. These stories feature animals that can communicate and think like humans. The animal stories also serve as a moral lesson (Fong Peng & Ishak, 2009; Mat Piah, 2006). Examples of such stories based on this research are *Sang Sisik Si Berduri Putih* and *Beruk Belaan Mistik*.

Mat Piah (2006) further highlighted that myths in folktales are stories that are considered true and sacred. Myths are associated with God's deeds concerning the creation of man and nature, which typically occurred in the past. They are regarded as sacred and are associated with religious ideas as well as behaviours. Myths in folktales frequently feature supernatural entities and events with characters including gods, goddesses, supernatural beings, and sometimes legendary heroes. The analysis found that stories such as *Ajaibnya Sebatang Pokok Suci*, *Sang Sisik Si Berduri Putih*, *Beruk Belaan Mistik*, *Si Pengamal Lapan Roda Kebenaran*, *Tenggelamnya Jong Emas Selehor*, *Sumpahan Tragis Ikan Kekacang*, *Puteri Endong*, *Pemujaan Mistik*, *Belaan Anak Kerak*, and *Belaan Hantu Raya* are classified as myths. This is demonstrated in the story of *Pemujaan Mistik*:

*...dio mitok air tlogo untuk buat air tawar tu jah dio jampi baco gitu lah tuke urut...*  
 [She requested well water to create "air tawar" (blessed water), and the traditional massage healer would recite incantations over it] (Informant 5, 2021).

This also is illustrated in the story of *Beruk Belaan Mistik*

*...biaso jamu di buat ore sakit main mokyong tengoh male sapa pagi dio bwat tepi pata tepi kolam... bwat plepah...* [A feast is frequently prepared for someone who is sick during a Makyong performance, which is held from night to morning, on the beach or beside a pond, to relieve the discomfort] (Informant 4, 2021).

Folktales, in summary, are typically inseparable from a society's culture and traditions. Thus, folktales are cultural artefacts that reflect a society's values, beliefs, and customs. Their stories teach moral lessons and mirror society norms, offering insights into familial structures, gender roles, and community dynamics (Mohd Bakhir et al., 2018). These stories contain echoes of historical events, physical settings, and local traditions, which preserve cultural memories and origins for future generations. Folktales also use symbolism and metaphor to convey deeper meanings, which are often based on cultural themes and philosophical ideas.

Culture is a type of behaviour inherited from generation to generation. Daily behaviour may turn into societal practices,

thus eventually form what is called culture. Abdul Kadir (1988) defines culture as human relations to their life surroundings. A similar meaning is also supported by Manterys (2018), who further contends that culture is a product of human activities practised by a community. The word 'budaya' (culture) in Malay comes from a combination of two Sanskrit words, 'Buddhi' and 'Daya'. Buddhi means intelligence of mind and reason, whereas Daya may refer to the sound mind that determines human behavioural patterns. The same definition is also discussed by Yusof (2010), who further maintains that culture is related to good deeds and a sound mind. 'Budi' may adhere to the perfect ideals, and 'daya' may mean reasonable mind and intelligence.

Furthermore, the term, 'budaya' from an etymological perspective is from two separate words, 'budi' and 'daya' (Baharom, 2009). The term 'budi' refers to the sound mind of the community in solving any conflicts. 'Daya' is related to the ability in the context of power practised in the community to solve daily problems (Subramaniam, 2015). Thus, budaya (culture) can be defined as having brought benefits to human life because it covers a wide range of positive aspects in developing soft skills, together with the ability to engage in human activities positively and effectively solve conflicts, driven by a sound mind. Endraswara (2006) has summed up culture into six (6) main categories:

1. Culture is a term that covers various aspects such as law, social norms, arts, morals, and other skills possessed by every member of a society.

Thus, culture is a medium that shapes the complexity of human life.

2. Culture can be regarded as an essential item in a heritage tradition.
3. Culture is believed to be a way of life covering aspects of behaviour, habits, values, and life aspirations and all these turn culture into normativity.
4. From a psychological aspect, culture can be seen as a form of human adaptation to his or her surroundings.
5. Culture is also a method or guideline for a society to make judgements between what is right and wrong, thus distinguishing man from animal.
6. However, it should also be noted that the definition of culture is still incomplete and less systematic.

Kaplan and Manners (1972) suggest that culture is not stagnant, as it keeps changing, and it is susceptible to changes. The acceptance of foreign culture makes the local culture more robust, with adjustments that have to be made in accordance with local features, thus resulting in cultural assimilation. Basically, culture can be divided into two: material and immaterial culture. Material culture or tangible cultural heritage refers to the instruments created by humans used in daily life. Immaterial culture, also known as intangible cultural heritage, on the other hand, is related to ways of life in communal life, such as beliefs, arts, customs, and laws.

Kamus Dewan (2005) defines tradition as habits inherited from generation to generation, practised habitually by a community. In other words, tradition

refers to the norms or practices related to customary laws in a community. The term tradition may also refer to the living heritage developed in a community in two ways, either spontaneously or created (Ningsih, 2019). Piotr (2007) explains that human life can never be separated from practising tradition, although sometimes it could be contradictory to what a practitioner wants. Piotr also identifies five (5) functions of tradition:

1. Tradition is a wisdom inherited from generation to generation, and it provides a beneficial fragment of history.
2. Tradition becomes a legitimate source for worldview, conviction, confidence, social institutions, and available rules and regulations.
3. Tradition as a collective symbol attesting to the origins of a nation with its available customary laws and regulations.
4. Tradition provides a platform for the community to express its feelings to escape human despair and anxiety brought by modernity.
5. Tradition functions as a proof that the simpler ways of the old days are less complicated, thus it can be treated as a source of inspiration in seeking solace, particularly in facing conflicts or crises.

The study found a relation between history, culture, and tradition in Kelantan folklore. From a historical viewpoint, the formation of Kelantan has its own uniqueness and cultural identity. Cultural elements and traditions in the folklore of Kelantan can be identified as either tangible

or intangible culture. These elements can be found in folktales of Kelantan, where had been discovered in the stories which contents rites of passage, festive celebrations, and communal rituals.

According to the informants, there are several stories about rites of passage in the folklore of Kelantan. The rite of passage is an event or ceremony that occurs throughout the human life cycle, from birth to death (Løyché, 2022). In *Puteri Endong*, the rite of passage is evident when the protagonist undergoes a ceremonial bathing ritual upon reaching adulthood. This reflects Malay customs tied to age and social status:

*Dio dimandikea dengea air limau dan bungo rampai sebagai tanda puteri doh cukup usio* [She was bathed with lime water and floral sprinkles as a sign of coming of age] (Informant 2, 2021).

In the Malay culture, a rite of passage is a sequence of events or rites that mark key transitions in an individual's life, typically from one social status to another. These ceremonies are deeply embedded in Malay culture and history, and they are frequently associated with significant events that begin as early as birth, followed by marriage and death. Among the ceremonies are *cukur jambul* (head shaving), *berkhatan* (circumcision), *berendoi* (cradle-rocking ceremony), *aqiqah* (Islamic ceremony to celebrate the birth of a child), weddings (merisik, bertunang, and kenduri) and funerals (tahlil). All these ceremonies involve tangible and intangible heritage. Cultural objects include yellow sticky rice,

incense, yellow cloth, and religious books/objects. While intangible heritage includes charms and spells. Based on the analysis, research found that stories in the folklore of Kelantan related to the rite of passage are *Puteri Endong*, *Belaan Anak Kerak*, *Jebak Puyuh*, *Beruk Belaan Mistik*, *Si Pengamal Lapan Roda Kebenaran*, *Sumpahan Tragis Ikan Kekacang*, and *Pemujaan Mistik*. According to Informant 1, the story of *Belaan Anak Kerak* contains aspects of intangible heritage, such as charms and spells:

*...dio amek air gitu gak dio baco-baco pahtu dio amek berah kunyit dio tabur-tabur gitu lah.* [After reciting incantations over some water, she sprinkled turmeric rice on the surface] (Informant 1, 2021).

Whereas cultural, ceremonial or festive celebrations are frequently used to mark various rites of passage, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death in Malay and local society. Malays also believe the celebrations are necessary for life protection and well-being, combining spiritual, communal, and cultural elements. These festivities feature a rich tapestry of rituals, customs, and traditions that reflect the local culture. According to Mat Noor et al. (2013), their festive celebrations are not only enjoyable times for socialising and commemorating key life events, but also provide an opportunity to seek spiritual blessings, communal bonding, and preserve cultural identity. Special meals are typically provided during local celebrations as

emblems of their culture, rituals, customs, and traditions. Pulut Kuning (yellow sticky rice), ayam panggang (roasted chicken), telur rebus (boiled egg), and various kinds of rice are examples of dishes typically provided to symbolise our local traditions, customs, and some rituals. On the other hand, some of the dishes, like *Pulut Kuning*, are often used to express gratitude for accomplishments and appreciation for guests. These culinary elements hold substantial cultural value, contributing to the ambience of the occasion, and strengthening the community's cultural identity and values. *Tenggelamnya Jong Emas Selehor, Pemujaan Mistik, Belaan Hantu Raya, Beruk Belaan Mistik, Si Pengamal Lapan Roda Kebenaran, and Sumpahan Tragis Ikan Kekacang*, for example, have been observed used this type of dish in their cultural celebrations as illustrated in the story, *Belaan Hantu Raya*:

*... mace akhir tahun musim tengkujuh kena rehat la kea... tanam ubi ko padi bilo nok gi ko laut smula bwat pulut kuning la smaye hajat. smaye smaye pulut-pulut, dio kato pagi esok kito bwat smaye hajat deh di tepi pata. Pulut tu sapo make? kito lah hok make tu... [like during the year-end monsoon season, need to take a break...cultivate cassava or rice before returning to the sea. They make yellow glutinous rice as part of a solat hajat (prayer of intention) just before they return. They will perform the solat hajat by the beach tomorrow morning. Regarding*

the sticky rice, who will eat it? It will be us who eat it] (Informant 4, 2021).

On the other hand, in folklore, communal rituals are collective ceremonies or practices conducted by a community, which are typically symbolic and culturally significant. These rituals serve a variety of goals in the community, including developing social relationships, upholding cultural identity, and celebrating significant occasions. Thus, communal rituals are inseparable from folklore, as they are frequently accompanied by tales, myths, or stories explaining their origins. These rituals can take several forms, including religious ceremonies, seasonal festivals, rites of passage, and community festivities. Based on analysis, communal rituals were found in the stories of Kelantan folktales, especially in *Pemujaan Mistik* and others such as *Ajaibnya Sebatang Pokok Suci, Sang Sisik Si Berduri Putih, Belaan Hantu Raya, Puteri Endong, Jebak Puyuh, Beruk Belaan Mistik, Si Pengamal Lapan Roda Kebenaran, and Sumpahan Tragis Ikan Kekacang*. In *Pemujaan Mistik*, communal rituals accompanied by myths and magic are described as follows:

*...kade-kade stengoh tu dio ado unsur-unsur pemujaan mace kemenye pulut kuning telur. dio bwat pemujaan lah pemujaan gano tu dio tahu lah keno sireh spiok baru lah crito bendo tu dio bwat-bwat sireh make ko dio sdiri tu gak. [Sometimes, it included aspects of ceremonial offerings, like as eggs, yellow glutinous rice, and burning*

incense. Only they knew what kind of rites they carried out. The story would only be told if there were betel leaves and lime. Even the betel was prepared for their own use] (Informant 5, 2021).

Hence, based on this explanation, it can be concluded that Kelantan folklore collected in this study includes cultural aspects that are potentially seen through rites of passage, cultural, ceremonial, and communal rituals. The cultural aspects are shown in Table 2.

Therefore, folklore is a rich tapestry of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, involving both tangible and intangible elements such as artefacts, traditions, performing arts, rituals, traditional knowledge and language manifestations.

In this research, these factors constitute the cultural fabric of communities, which can be observed by rites of passage, communal rituals and cultural ceremonials as summarised as in Table 3.

The story *Sumpahan Tragis Ikan Kekacang*, among others, is a case in point that references festive food rituals explicitly. Such scenes demonstrate culinary elements that carry deep ritualistic and symbolic meanings:

*Pulut kuning dan ayae panggang disediakan sebagai juadah peringatue untuk roh yang disumpah jadi ikae.* [Yellow sticky rice and roasted chicken were prepared as offerings to honour the cursed soul turned into a fish] (Informant 3, 2021).

Table 2  
*Cultural elements in the folklore of Kelantan*

Stories	Type			Cultural Elements		
	Exemplary	Animal Fable	Myth	Rites of Passage	Cultural Ceremonial	Communal Rituals
<i>Jebak Puyuh</i>	•			•	•	
<i>Ajaibnya Sebatang Pokok Suci</i>	•		•		•	
<i>Sang Sisik Si Berduri Putih</i>	•	•	•		•	
<i>Beruk Balaan Mistik</i>	•	•	•	•		•
<i>Si Pengamal Lapan Roda Kebenaran</i>	•		•	•	•	•
<i>Tenggelamnya Jong Emas Selehor</i>	•		•			•
<i>Sumpahan Tragis Ikan Kekacang</i>	•		•	•	•	•
<i>Puteri Endong</i>	•		•	•	•	
<i>Pemujaan Mistik</i>	•		•	•	•	•
<i>Balaan Anak Kerak</i>			•	•		
<i>Balaan Hantu Raya</i>			•		•	•

Table 3  
*Tradition and culture in the oral narratives of Kelantan*

<b>Folklore</b>	<b>Tangible Culture</b>	<b>Intangible Culture</b>
<i>Sumpahan Tragus Ikan Kekacang</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Traditional Malay village</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A mystical belief</li> <li>● Taboos</li> </ul>
<i>Puteri Endong</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Gardens and swings</li> <li>● Ancestral bracelet</li> <li>● Traditional Malay house</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A mystical belief of spirit</li> <li>● Customary laws</li> <li>● Taboos</li> </ul>
<i>Pemujaan Mistik</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ceremonial objects/ offerings (pulut kuning, ayam golek, garam, and limau nipis)</li> <li>● Copper bowl</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Main Teri (Malay performing arts)</li> <li>● Rituals</li> <li>● Incantation/ spell</li> <li>● Malay funeral tradition</li> <li>● Collective communal action (kenduri)</li> <li>● Taboos</li> </ul>
<i>Belaan Anak Kerak</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Yellow cloth (enchanted)</li> <li>● Incense</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Traditional medicine/ Witchcraft</li> <li>● Rituals</li> <li>● Pregnancy taboos</li> <li>● Malay wedding ceremony - Solemnisation</li> </ul>
<i>Hantu Raya</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ritual instrument (Bamboo)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Malay martial art (Silat)</li> <li>● A Mystical belief</li> <li>● Cosmology</li> <li>● Rituals</li> <li>● The power of invulnerability</li> <li>● Animism</li> </ul>
<i>Jebak Puyuh</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Bird traps</li> <li>● Malay house</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Trapping birds</li> <li>● Traditional medicine/ Witchcraft</li> <li>● Rituals</li> <li>● Jungle taboos</li> </ul>
<i>Ajaibnya Sebatang Pokok Suci</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Bodhi tree</li> <li>● Sacred cloth</li> <li>● Buddha statue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Rituals</li> <li>● Animism</li> <li>● Traditional medicine</li> <li>● A mystical belief (the sacred water spirit)</li> </ul>
<i>Sang Sisik Si Berduri Putih</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Thai Buddhist temple</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Religious education</li> <li>● Rituals</li> <li>● Incantation/ spell</li> <li>● Jungle taboos</li> <li>● A mystical belief (the sacred water spirit)</li> </ul>

Table 3 (continued)

Folklore	Tangible Culture	Intangible Culture
<i>Beruk Belaian Mistik</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fish trap (Bubu)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Rituals</li> <li>● Witchcraft</li> <li>● Incantation/ spell</li> <li>● Taboo</li> </ul>
<i>Si Pengamal Lapan Roda Kebenaran</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Religious books (Buddha Teachings)</li> <li>● The Noble Eightfold Path</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Buddhist education</li> <li>● Rituals</li> </ul>
<i>Tenggelamnya Jong Emas Selehor</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Jong (Malay Ship)</li> <li>● Antique treasures / Artifacts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Witchcraft</li> <li>● A ceremony of noat</li> <li>● Collective communal action (Gotong-Royong)</li> </ul>

Analysis of the study also discovered a relationship between the gathered folklore and the Malay community's customs and culture. The collected folk stories clearly demonstrate these similar cultural characteristics. They practise local customs in self-sustaining economies (farming, rice cultivation, herbalism, etc.), believe in mystical components, traditional medicine, supernatural creatures, rituals and worship, self-defence techniques, and other practices. Furthermore, syncretic elements—that is, the blending of Islamic, Hindu-Buddhist, and animistic beliefs—are clearly present in the folklore of the studied area.

The gathered traditional tales also reveal the identity of the Malay population, however indirectly. We can learn more about the customs, history, and culture of the Malay people by listening to these oral histories. Folklore, in turn, serves as a cultural heritage custodian, allowing these customs and traditions to be preserved,

transmitted, and interpreted by future generations.

## CONCLUSION

This article has highlighted selected folktales that serve as rich case studies for understanding Kelantanese culture. The narratives explored, such as *Puteri Endong*, *Jebak Puyuh*, *Pemujaan Mistik*, *Beruk Belaian Mistik*, and *Sumpahan Tragis Ikan Kekacang*, were chosen for their vivid portrayal of cultural values, ceremonial practices, and traditional beliefs. Through these stories, the study offers deeper insight into the symbolic and social functions of folklore within the local community. Folklore stands as a vivid tapestry woven from the strings of human experience, creativity, and society. Its relevance exists not just in maintaining the cumulative knowledge but also the heritage of varied areas in promoting a much deeper understanding of human nature as well as

the world around us. Through the stories and customs, folklore works as a bridge attaching the past to the future, improving our lives with very useful lessons, understandings, and sense of belongingness. We shall then honour folklore in all its types as they may depict the abundant variety of human expression and ensure that the timeless wisdom contained within these narratives continues to inspire, educate, and unite us across time and space.

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## Gandrung Dance as a Source of Banyuwangi Imaging Ideas

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### ABSTRACT

In an era of heightened global competition for tourism and investment, cultural identity has emerged as a critical component of regional branding strategies. This research investigates the multifaceted role of the Gandrung dance in Banyuwangi, Indonesia, examining its function beyond that of a traditional performance to serve as a symbolic and communicative vehicle for shaping regional identity. Employing a qualitative phenomenological methodology, the study gathered data through extensive interviews, direct observation, thorough document analysis, and critical media reviews. Thematic analysis, informed by the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, was further enhanced by the application of Kavaratzis's city branding framework to delineate Gandrung's influence across primary, secondary, and tertiary communication channels. The findings indicate that Gandrung's efficacy as a branding symbol is rooted in its historical significance, unique visual characteristics, media adaptability, and profound emotional impact. Furthermore, the study elucidates how Gandrung's evolution from a socially marginalised art form to a regional emblem mirrors larger trends in the negotiation of cultural legitimacy, governance, and identity. Although its strategic utilisation has yielded substantial economic and social advantages, ensuring the enduring viability of Gandrung as a cultural symbol necessitates concerted initiatives to uphold authenticity and community empowerment. This study contributes to

the ongoing academic conversation regarding the integration of performing arts in place branding and offers actionable guidance for policymakers, designers, and cultural stakeholders involved in leveraging tradition for contemporary regional development.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalisation, where technological advancements in information and communication have diminished geographical barriers, regions must adopt innovative strategies and perspectives to enhance their competitive edge. This is particularly crucial as numerous Indonesian regions have actively engaged in place branding over the last decade, leveraging their unique resources. This competitive landscape necessitates distinct regional images and characters to attract tourism, investment, new residents, and foster economic growth. A region's image, a composite of perceptions, thoughts, and impressions derived from its products, services, environment, arts, and culture, serves as a powerful asset and a guide for future development (Widayati et al., 2020; Wiryawan, 2009). However, cultivating a deep-rooted image and fostering emotional connections requires sustained, active efforts through planned, integrated, and continuous communication, a process known as imaging. Imaging involves strategic communication practices to shape the perception of a region and its inhabitants (Merrilees et al., 2009). As of 2023, 113 out of 514 Indonesian regencies and cities have undergone imaging, identified by their logos and taglines. The conceptual basis for these efforts stems from local distinctiveness, encompassing arts and culture, natural environments, agricultural and marine resources, flora, endemic fauna, trade and services, architecture, and historical elements. These elements

contribute to territorial marketing and collective branding, distinguishing regions from competitors (Roostika, 2019).

Among the various Indonesian regions engaging in place branding, Banyuwangi Regency in East Java has distinguished itself by effectively employing the Gandrung dance as a central element in its regional imaging strategy. Using Gandrung dance as a source of Banyuwangi imagery ideas is exhilarating and different from premium assets in other forms already known. Dance itself has elements of motion and expression to make it look flexible. Flexibility refers to the norms and principles of arrangement of how to treat art under the rules of the culture in which the art was formed and developed (Kartika, 2016). A planned, integrated, and sustainable visual identity for the art of Gandrung dance in a series of Banyuwangi imaging activities plays an important role in building audience perception. However, perception is related to image formation, so its including how messages are driven. Such as various associations, memories, hopes, and many other feelings that drive people's behaviour (Anholt, 2007). Imaging that refers to the audience's perspective in translating signals sent through a communication process consisting of the sender, message, media channel, and message recipient (Kapferer, 2008).

The incorporation of cultural performances into place branding initiatives is a well-established practice. Examples include Japan's use of Kabuki for heritage tourism, Andalusia's integration of Flamenco into its cultural economy, and

Brazil's adoption of Capoeira to shape its international identity (Boudreau, 2019; Dicks, 2020; Richards, 2011). Nevertheless, Banyuwangi's distinctiveness lies in its comprehensive integration of the Gandrung dance across public infrastructure, educational systems, digital communications, and policy frameworks. Instead of solely commercialising the dance for tourism, the region imbues Gandrung into the daily visual and institutional experiences of its populace.

While traditional performing arts are increasingly recognised in destination marketing, the transformation of a single art form into a comprehensive regional visual identity remains underexplored, particularly within the Southeast Asian context. Existing scholarship often frames traditional performances within heritage preservation (Timothy & Boyd, 2003) or cultural commodification (Shepherd, 2002), rather than as instruments for identity engineering and competitive differentiation. This research seeks to address this gap by analysing the Gandrung dance as both a cultural expression and a strategic visual idiom employed to construct and convey Banyuwangi's regional image. The findings of this research offer valuable insights for urban planners and regional policymakers tasked with constructing regional identities by integrating local distinctiveness, such as dance, into their imaging strategies.

This study's discussion is grounded in theories of identity, the presence of visual assets, and communication activities. The concept of identity serves as the

foundation for image formation and regional differentiation. Identity is not static; it is a construct shaped by history and culture, viewed as both a structure and a dynamic process (Hauge, 2005; Wardhani et al., 2020). It resides within collective memory and physical markers that represent a region (Yananda & Salamah, 2014). Existence refers to the emergence or manifestation of something, characterised by flexibility and potential for development rather than rigidity (Bagus, 1996; Zainal, 2007). Kavaratzis's (2004) theory of image communication, encompassing primary, secondary, and tertiary communication, is also applied.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research utilised a qualitative, descriptive-analytical methodology with a phenomenological orientation to investigate the role of the Gandrung dance as a foundation for regional imaging in Banyuwangi. This methodological choice was deemed appropriate for revealing the inherent cultural significance within traditional artistic expressions and examining their strategic deployment in the construction of regional identities (Creswell, 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Data acquisition involved multiple methods: in-depth interviews, participant observation, archival research, and visual examination. A sample of 15 key informants, deliberately chosen for their direct involvement in the conceptualisation or interpretation of Gandrung's public presence, included government representatives, Gandrung performers,

cultural specialists, graphic designers, and event coordinators. These interviews were conducted from January 2021 to January 2024, with all conversations audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed.

This study utilised a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach with a phenomenological orientation to explore the function of the Gandrung dance as a basis for regional imaging in Banyuwangi. The research employed thematic analysis, specifically the interactive model by Miles et al. (2014), which encompasses data condensation, presentation, and conclusion verification. Findings were validated through triangulation, cross-referencing interview data with documentary evidence, media coverage, and archival records. Additionally, a visual analysis, guided by Kavaratzis's (2004) city branding framework, was performed to evaluate how cultural identity is constructed and conveyed through primary, secondary, and tertiary communication channels. This framework facilitated an assessment of Gandrung elements' representation across public spaces, institutional media, and digital platforms, offering a comprehensive understanding of its aesthetic and symbolic integration into Banyuwangi's imaging strategy.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In an interview conducted on July 20, 2023, Abdullah Fauzi, the cultural guard of the Banyuwangi Tourism and Culture Office, explained that the emergence of Gandrung art is deeply rooted in the historical struggle of

the Blambangan people against VOC troops in 1771. He remarked, "Gandrung emerged from the grassroots, from the people, as a symbol of the struggle to preserve Banyuwangi's identity". Fauzi, emphasising that the guerrilla origins of the dance were an expression of resistance during turbulent times. According to his account, the journey of Gandrung performances began as a guerrilla endeavor—with dancers traveling from village to village, and their poetic songs carrying messages of struggle and serving as a reminder of the cruelty of colonial forces.

Initially, Gandrung performances featured male dancers dressed in women's attire, accompanied by simple musical instruments (Figure 1). This form gradually evolved, marking the end of the "Gandrung Lanang" era with the retirement of Marsan in 1895. As noted by Setianto (2019), "Semi initiated the shift from male to female dancers." Influential figures such as Sumitro Hadi further propelled this transformation by reimagining the dance for younger generations, introducing innovative elements like Jejer, Paju, and Seblang scenes that were absent in the earlier Gandrung Marsan era (Anoegrajeki & Effendy, 2007).

Over time, two distinct variants of Gandrung emerged in the Banyuwangi community: Gandrung Terob, or professional Gandrung performed in a staged arena (usually under a roof or tent), and the Jejer Gandrung dance—a refined composition rooted in the Gandrung Terob style, created in 1974 by Sumitro Hadi. Regent Samsul Hadi later established the Jejer Gandrung



Figure 1. A Group of Gandrung dance performances (Photo by Barry)

dance as the official welcoming performance in Banyuwangi Regency (Anoegrajekti, 2016).

Gandrung's artistic life, deeply embedded in and supported by the community, plays an essential role in the social fabric of Banyuwangi. Its performances attract audiences from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, serving as a vehicle for peaceful and unifying interaction. Moreover, Gandrung art has significantly influenced the broader art scene in Banyuwangi—manifesting in various forms such as dances, songs, and architectural ornaments (Dariharto, 2009).

### **The Basis for Choosing Gandrung Dance as a Source of Banyuwangi Imaging Ideas**

Gandrung is the most famous traditional art in Banyuwangi. Its popularity began in the early 20th century, during what is known as the Gandrung Semi era, and continued to flourish after Indonesia's independence as the dance became intertwined with both cultural and political expressions in the

region. In its early days, Gandrung was performed at various events organised by political organisations and cultural institutions, with strong associations to the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) and frequent appearances at PKI campaigns and Lekra-sponsored events (Raharjo, 2016). However, following the tragic incidents of the September 30 Movement in 1965, a vacuum emerged in its practice. During the New Order era, regional cultural policies revived the dance, and under the leadership of Regent Djoko Supa'at Slamet, Gandrung's popularity soared. As recalled by renowned Gandrung dancer Sumitro Hadi, "Gandrung artists were not only recorded and nurtured, but also given space to perform at regional events and even invited to the State Palace."

In 1974, Sumitro Hadi created the Jejer Gandrung dance composition. Reflecting on this innovative moment, he stated:

In 1974, I attended a young dance choreographer training at TIM, and I wondered why there was no dance from Banyuwangi that was promoted

as outstanding. I chose Gandrung and created an adaptation for students, which was subsequently adopted as the welcoming dance.

Regent Djoko Supa'at Slamet subsequently mandated that the dance be taught in schools as a form of social dance and performed en masse, and since then, the Jejer Gandrung dance has become widely known and accepted (Setianto, 2019). At that time, Gandrung also served as a form of entertainment during political campaigns, effectively conveying messages about development and government programs (Raharjo, 2016).

In the post-reform era, the emphasis of Gandrung shifted towards entertainment and tourism, aligning with the Banyuwangi government's tourist initiatives. Regent Samsul Hadi established Gandrung as the official mascot of Banyuwangi tourism in 2002 and introduced the Jejer Gandrung dance as a welcome performance in 2003, followed by a program requiring all Banyuwangi schools to establish Jejer Gandrung dance groups (Anoegrajekti, 2016). The widespread installation of Gandrung statues across the region further solidified its status as a tourism icon. Under Regent Abdullah Azwar Anas, a mass performance called Gandrung Sewu was launched as a cultural commodification initiative, with every cultural event beginning with a Gandrung dance to greet guests. As Dariharto stated in one interview, "Gandrung has become the icon of Banyuwangi," underscoring the dance's

role in forging a strong local identity and promoting economic development both locally and internationally.

As a traditional dance, Gandrung has become a source of immense pride for the people of Banyuwangi. Its uniqueness lies in the distinctive costumes and traditional songs that accompany the performance. A key element is the headpiece known as Omprog—crafted from cowhide and adorned with motifs resembling the head of Antasena with a snake-like body, accented by a gold tassel and decorative flower strands. In an interview conducted on July 20, 2023, Gandrung dancer Rizka remarked, "That magnificent Omprog is an essential element in the Gandrung dancer's costume. Without Omprog, our appearance feels hollow and lifeless," suggesting a deeper ontology of embodiment in performance. This aligns with Turner's (1982) theory of ritual symbols: performance costumes are not aesthetic choices but carriers of sacred presence. Furthermore, in an interview on January 21, 2024, Dariharto emphasised that Gandrung's classical music is unique and unparalleled, while Abdullah Fauzi noted that the traditional Gandrung poems—expressed in free verse and sung in the distinctive Osing language—vividly capture the struggle of the Blambangan people against colonial invaders (Krisnawanta, 2019).

### **Gandrung: Rooted Traditional Art**

In the 1960s, the association of Gandrung performances with heavy alcohol

consumption led to a significant decline in its dignity and moral standing, so much so that many event organisers no longer wanted to invite the dance (Setiawan, 2019). Sumitro Hadi recalled, “In the past, society regarded Gandrung as a dance lacking dignity; its dancers were often insulted and considered lower-class individuals,” underscoring the widespread negative stigma. Gradually, religious segments branded Gandrung as immoral, relegating it to the margins where it could only flourish among marginalised communities (Setianto, 2019). Reflecting on this period of decline, Sumitro Hadi noted, “Over time, this dance gradually came back to life and was even incorporated into campaign programs, slowly restoring its presence in the public eye.” Gandrung then experienced a revival as it became interwoven with the political struggle; the dance was frequently featured in political events—especially those of the PKI—which led some of its artists to join Lekra (Folks Art Institute). “When we performed in PKI campaigns, we were often directly involved in political activities that led us to the G.30-S incident in 1965.” Sumitro Hadi recalled. Although nearly all elements of art and culture disappeared from the mainstream entertainment scene after that incident, one observer remarked, “Gandrung is like embers still glowing beneath the ash—hidden yet alive in the hearts of the people.” Ultimately, the people of Banyuwangi embraced Gandrung as an integral part of their cultural identity, proving that this art form has deep roots in the collective spirit of the community.

### **Gandrung: Art with High-selling Power**

The dance moves, make-up, costumes, and music in the art of Gandrung embody an extraordinary artistic aesthetic value. Sumitro Hadi once remarked, “It is truly shameful if this extraordinary beauty were to suffer the same fate as other art forms like *Tledak* or *Bumbung* in Bali,” emphasising the need to preserve its unique allure. In response to concerns about its declining status, Hadi took proactive measures by creating the Jejer Gandrung dance composition—a variation deeply rooted in traditional Gandrung (Setianto, 2019). Supported by the Banyuwangi Regional Government, his initiatives have borne fruit, as evidenced by the growing participation of children and students who are gradually enhancing the dance’s artistic image.

Gandrung has evolved into a tourism icon for the government of Banyuwangi, embodying the leading spirit in promoting both the growth of the tourism sector and the region’s authentic identity. Through vibrant performances and festivals, Gandrung—steeped in regional culture—is marketed as a commodity to attract tourists. Its integration into daily life renders the art form both exotic and endearing to outsiders (Anoegrajekti & Effendy, 2007). In addition, Erwin Prastyo, a graphic designer for Banyuwangi’s marketing communication media, remarked in an interview on January 21, 2024, “Gandrung’s visualisation is not only aesthetically pleasing but also highly adaptable as a visual element in print and electronic promotional media.”

Gandrung dance plays a crucial role in enhancing Banyuwangi's tourism appeal. Abdul-lah Azwar Anas, the Regent of Banyuwangi, stated on detik.com that local tourism increased from 500,000 visitors before the imaging plan to 4.3 million today, with international tourists rising from 4,500 to over 100,000. Furthermore, Banyuwangi received the Awards for Excellence and Innovation in Tourism from the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) during the 12th UNWTO Awards Forum in Madrid, Spain, in 2016 (Effendi, 2017). The domino effect of Gandrung dance performances and festivals is significant. In an interview conducted on January 21, 2021, Budianto, the initiator of the Gandrung Sewu festival, revealed, "We not only showcase the dance, but also create opportunities for local entrepreneurs. Every edition of the Gandrung Sewu festival has a tangible economic impact on the transportation, culinary, and creative sectors in Banyuwangi." This creative economy, driven by the tourism sector, has propelled Banyuwangi's Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) from IDR 32.4 trillion in 2010 to IDR 60.2 trillion, and the income per capita from IDR 20.8 million to IDR 37.7 million per year—a testament to the power of effective imaging (Setianto, 2019). The latest Gandrung Sewu Festival, revived in 2023 after the pandemic and reimagined with a unique three-day concept, achieved a turnover of more than IDR 7 billion (Werdiono, 2023). This event, now part of the National Event Calendar of Tourism and held from September 14 to 16

at Marina Boom Beach, Kampung Mandar Village, Banyuwangi District, highlights the transformative impact of Gandrung on the regional economy.

### **Constructing Cultural Identity: Gandrung as an Anchoring Symbol**

The research identified four primary themes contributing to the Gandrung dance's selection as the central symbol for Banyuwangi's regional branding efforts: its historical significance, the sense of collective pride it fosters, its unique visual characteristics, and its adaptability across various media platforms. These themes were consistently reinforced through discussions with individuals involved in the arts, government, and design sectors.

Gandrung is not just a performance; it is a living narrative of resistance and community memory. This cultural rootedness strengthens its legitimacy as a symbol. Fauzi, the cultural guard of the Banyuwangi Tourism and Culture Office remarked, "It emerged from the people, not from the elite." Here, Gandrung serves as a bottom-up identity marker, contrasting with top-down branding icons often found in urban reimagining projects (Dicks, 2020).

From a communication perspective, the dance's visual identity—most notably the Omprog headdress—offers semiotic clarity and continuity, allowing it to function across formats: from ritual performance to graphic icon. As graphic designer Erwin Prastyo observed, "Its form is versatile—it can move from stage to signage to screen without losing meaning." This underscores

Gandrung's symbolic economy: its iconicity sustains both emotional resonance and marketing utility.

### **Implementation of Gandrung Dance in Banyuwangi Imaging Communication Activities**

The implementation of Gandrung dance in Banyuwangi's imaging communication activities is the result of a well-planned perceptual engineering strategy that blends traditional methods—such as inscribing local cultural symbols—with modern information technology like WhatsApp status updates and Instagram Stories. This deliberate fusion of old and new facilitates a creative collaboration among various societal stakeholders, including local artists, government agencies, and community members. As one creative team member noted, “We combine traditional methods with digital platforms to ensure that the rich culture of Banyuwangi is conveyed dynamically and vibrantly,” emphasising that every element, from physical artefacts to social media updates, plays a crucial role in shaping the region's unique image.

According to Barry (2024), this collaborative process mirrors that in media and performing arts, where every contributor—from the visionary government planner to the grassroots community—is integral to producing quality work. The resulting image reflects the cultural richness and creativity inherent in Banyuwangi. In one interview, a local artist stated, “Every inscription and every post on

our Instagram Stories tells the story and showcases the beauty of Banyuwangi, bringing the region's image to life in people's minds,” demonstrating how traditional symbols and modern media work hand in hand. Furthermore, physical artefacts such as traditional inscriptions and sculptural representations of Gandrung not only serve as tangible expressions of the region's identity but also enhance the overall impact of the communication strategy. This integrated approach ensures that the visual and cultural narrative of Banyuwangi is both authentic and appealing to diverse audiences.

To investigate the contribution of these integrated strategies to Banyuwangi's regional image construction, Kavaratzis's city branding model provides a valuable analytical framework. This model delineates three interconnected communication channels essential for forging place identity: primary communication, encompassing the tangible aspects of a place such as its physical environment and governance; secondary communication, which involves deliberate promotional activities like marketing and media outreach; and tertiary communication, which captures the public's understanding derived from external sources such as news reports, online discussions, and personal recommendations. Utilising this model facilitates a structured analysis of Gandrung's role, not only as a cultural emblem but as a strategic vehicle for articulating, disseminating, and perceiving Banyuwangi's distinct identity.

### ***Banyuwangi Imaging Primary Communication Activities***

Landscape arrangement, infrastructure development, administrative policy implementation, and event organisation are key primary imaging communication activities that shape Banyuwangi's image as a "Gandrung City." The deliberate development of public spaces and the configuration of the physical environment—infused with Gandrung elements—serve to reinforce this regional identity. As a distinctive artistic expression, the Gandrung dance enhances the visual appeal and ambience of Banyuwangi for both residents and tourists. Key features of this physical transformation include the Sritanjung Park area, the Blambangan Cultural Arts Centre (Gesibu), the Gandrung Terracotta Park, green open spaces (RTH), and a park that divides the main thoroughfare. Figure 2 illustrates the integration of Gandrung dance elements into landscape-related communication strategies.

Infrastructure projects that embody the character of the Gandrung dance include the construction of landmarks featuring Gandrung dancer motifs at strategic locations—such as regional borders, residential gates, crossroads, and tourist destinations. In addition, the artistic influence of Gandrung has been integrated into the architectural aesthetics of various buildings, including sports stadiums, government offices, and transportation hubs. Figure 3 demonstrates how Gandrung dance elements are applied as part of



*Figure 2.* The form of the Gandrung dance is an aesthetic element of green open space (Photo by Paku Kusuma)

primary communication activities within the infrastructure category.

Banyuwangi's local administration has enacted several policies regarding the Gandrung dance. These policies include integrating the dance into extracurricular education, designating it as the official tourism mascot, using it as a welcoming dance, and incorporating it into government office signage. Additionally, employees in the tourism sector and state civil servants are encouraged to wear traditional attire to further promote the region's cultural heritage. Figure 4 illustrates an example of how Gandrung dance elements are employed in key policy-driven communication activities.

The Banyuwangi Regency Government has launched numerous cultural arts-themed events and festivals that prominently feature the Gandrung dance.



Figure 3. The landmark of a Gandrung dancer is located on the shore of Watu Dodol (Photo by Paku Kusuma)



Figure 4. Government office signboard using the dancer figures (Photo by Paku Kusuma)

Among these are the Gandrung Sewu Festival, the Ijen Valley Festival: Meras Gandrung, student art performances, and the use of the Gandrung dance as the opening performance to welcome official guests. These events are directly tied to the rich traditions of Gandrung and serve multiple functions. Not only do they act as tourist attractions that boost local tourism, but festivals like Gandrung Sewu also provide an effective avenue for

community consolidation. This strategy has successfully fostered a deep appreciation for Banyuwangi's native arts and culture among the younger generation. As one event coordinator noted, "Gandrung Sewu unites our community and instills a strong sense of pride in our cultural heritage." Figure 5 illustrates how Gandrung dance elements are incorporated into key communication activities within the event planning category.



Figure 5. Gandrung Sewu Festival 2023 held on Marina Boom beach, image by Public Relations of the Banyuwangi Regency Government

### Banyuwangi Imaging Secondary Communication Activities

Secondary communication activities for shaping Banyuwangi’s image are executed through targeted advertisements and promotions aimed at capturing attention and persuading tourists to visit the region. A wide array of print and electronic media channels is employed, ranging from free platforms to paid services. These include posters, banners, billboards, souvenirs, social media platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram), web marketing, Android applications (e.g., "Banyuwangi in Your Hand"), audiovisual media (such as YouTube channels), and public relations campaigns. Figure 6 illustrates how the Gandrung dance is depicted within these secondary communication efforts.

### Banyuwangi Imaging Tertiary Communication Activities

Tertiary communication in Banyuwangi’s imaging strategy primarily relies on word-of-mouth interactions. Visitors



Figure 6. Tourist destination promotion billboard, image by Public Relations of the Banyuwangi Regency Government

share their experiences and satisfaction through oral narratives, written reviews, and digital media, rapidly disseminating information that shapes public perceptions of Banyuwangi.

Such communication is further amplified by testimonials from influential figures. For example, notable endorsements from public figures like West Java Governor Ridwan Kamil and renowned artists (e.g., Ayu Ting-ting, Suliyana, Andhika Pratama, Uya Kuya, among others) significantly contribute to promoting a positive image of Banyuwangi. In addition, diverse narratives from community members enrich the overall evaluation. One verified testimony from the Instagram account @Banyuwangi\_Tourism in 2019 states: "Banyuwangi is not merely a tourist destination; it is a living celebration of our rich cultural heritage, where the dynamic movements and profound symbolism of the Gandrung dance continue to inspire both locals and visitors." This transcript, empirically analysed through thematic coding, illustrates how various communication platforms effectively reach a vast audience and influence the public mindset.

Moreover, tertiary communication also occurs via news coverage and programs on

online news portals and national television channels. Journalists are compelled to report on Banyuwangi's abundant art and culture, scenic beauty, and the organisation of numerous unique, high-quality events. Table 1 details the distribution of media reports related to the Gandrung dance in Banyuwangi across selected online outlets.

The extensive circulation of news, reviews, and testimonials via mass media not only fosters positive perceptions and enhances visibility but also stimulates tourism, attracts investment, and promotes socio-economic development across various sectors. Importantly, this comprehensive media coverage contributes to establishing a robust regional image for Banyuwangi with minimal expenditure.

### Visual Symbolism, Legitimacy, and the Politics of Identity

The visual components of the Gandrung dance, including its attire, choreography, and musical style, are imbued with profound symbolic significance that extends beyond

Table 1  
*Media Reports about Gandrung Dance in Banyuwangi*

Year	Detik.com	Kompas.com	CNN Indonesia.com	Jatim.antaranews.com
2023	550	5	8	3
2022	515	11	13	15
2021	379	17	15	14
2020	239	9	14	4
2019	165	7	6	7
2018	117	8	-	7
2017	77	3	-	5
2016	33	6	-	1
2015	22	7	-	-
Total	2,097	73	56	56

mere performance aesthetics. Paramount among these is the Omprog, a distinctive headdress widely recognised as embodying the dancer's core identity. As noted by Gandrung performer Rizka, "Without Omprog, the performance feels hollow," underscoring its function not merely as adornment, but as an embodiment of presence and authority.

Historically, Gandrung faced a period of moral scrutiny in the 1960s, with associations to alcohol and perceived impropriety leading to its social stigmatisation. However, such associations are better understood as part of a broader moral narrative used by certain religious and political groups to marginalise expressions of local culture (Setiawan, 2019). Instead of accepting these assertions as factual historical accounts, it is more accurate to interpret them as manifestations of symbolic marginalisation and cultural repression. Consequently, the subsequent restoration of Gandrung within the public domain—achieved through policy interventions, educational initiatives, and public celebrations—signifies not only a resurgence of its aesthetic appeal but also a renegotiation of its cultural legitimacy under evolving power structures.

The strategic utilisation of Gandrung in regional branding has yielded tangible socio-economic advantages beyond its cultural significance, catalysing Banyuwangi's tourism growth, festival economy, and creative industries. Its inclusion in educational programs and public ceremonies fosters cultural continuity and resilience across generations.

Nevertheless, these positive outcomes prompt crucial considerations regarding sustainability and authenticity, suggesting that Gandrung's value should be preserved as a living cultural heritage rather than solely as a promotional tool. Achieving this equilibrium necessitates deliberate cultural governance that safeguards community participation while engaging external stakeholders, ensuring that the construction of identity remains internally consistent with the values of its people and outward-facing.

## CONCLUSION

The Gandrung dance serves as a crucial cultural vehicle for Banyuwangi, shaping, disseminating, and reinforcing the region's identity. Its efficacy as a symbolic element in regional branding stems from its historical significance, visual distinctiveness, and emotional impact. The Kavaratzis city branding model illuminates Gandrung's successful operation across primary, secondary, and tertiary communication pathways. Furthermore, Gandrung's revival after periods of suppression highlights the fluid negotiation of cultural legitimacy amidst evolving political and moral contexts. While Gandrung's incorporation into education, tourism, and public life has spurred economic growth and cultural resilience, it also poses a risk of commodification if not managed ethically.

Based on these findings, recommendations include the development of a cultural branding framework by regional planners and policymakers that balances promotion with preservation,

ensuring systematic documentation and transmission of Gandrung's artistic heritage. Creative practitioners should be encouraged to innovate within authentic cultural boundaries, producing visually compelling designs rooted in tradition. Educational and cultural institutions are urged to integrate Gandrung as a pedagogical tool for learning local history, language, and values, in addition to performance practice. Future research should focus on cross-cultural comparative studies to understand the global use of traditional performing arts in place branding and community responses to their commodification. Finally, cultural governance must prioritise participatory approaches, centering the local community in decision-making to preserve Gandrung's integrity and sustainability as a living cultural identity.

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## **Local Beliefs and Thoughts on Origin Myth in the Kg. Gajah Sub-district, Perak: A Cultural Studies Approach**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Origin myths constitute a genre of folklore that records a society's cultural legacy and is essential for delineating the historical context of a location. This study is to examine the local beliefs and views of myths in Kampung Gajah, Perak, utilising a cultural studies framework. Furthermore, it aims to investigate the function of origin myths in safeguarding the cultural heritage of the Kampung Gajah community. This study aims to investigate the beliefs and perspectives of the local population in Kampung Gajah, Perak, about origin myths using a Cultural Studies framework. A qualitative research design was employed, utilising purposive sampling to identify six informants for semi-structured interviews, supplemented with observations and document analysis. To verify the validity of the community's oral narratives, interviews were audio-recorded and analysed thematically, ensuring both depth and dependability of the data. The analysis was guided by Barker's (2003) Cultural Studies theory, which outlines five conceptual approaches to understanding the formation of culture within communities through mythic narratives. The findings suggest that the local population's beliefs and identities are shaped by origin myths that have been preserved and transmitted orally across generations. These myths serve as historical narratives, contributing to the construction of communal identity and cultural values. This research highlights the significance of minor, often overlooked communities with strong oral traditions, offering insights into how

origin myths function to preserve cultural heritage and foster a collective identity.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Myths are traditional narratives passed down orally or in written form from generation to generation, primarily intended to explain the origins of natural phenomena, human

existence, animals, places, institutions, or cultural practices. Myths were often regarded as true and sacred stories within the belief systems of early societies. According to Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka (1997), a myth is an old story believed to be true, especially regarding the origin of a phenomenon or a legendary figure. Hashim (1986) defines myths as folk stories that involve extraordinary beings and events beyond the logic of human understanding, categorising them into two main types: origin myths and heroic myths. Gove (1986) further describes myth as a traditional story, often of unknown origin, associated with religious beliefs or natural explanations. O'Sullivan et al. (1996) assert that myth serves as a medium through which individuals express and connect with key concepts central to cultural identity. Additionally, Thompson (1977) views myths as traditional materials, typically transmitted orally, that bridge imagination and reality.

As one of the oldest forms of oral literature, myths in the Malay traditional context serve not only as entertainment but also as vehicles for conveying moral values and aesthetic teachings. Myths function as a reflection of the collective worldview of a community. Traditional authors frequently use them to elevate the status of characters or institutions such as kingship and governance (Zakaria et al., 2013). In modern contexts, myths remain relevant as cultural heritage that communicates the values, worldview, and identity of the society that created them.

A significant component of traditional Malay society is the belief in the life that passes through them. One definition of

belief would be something one trusts. However, belief is fundamental in the interaction between people and their creator and between people with different priorities. Lewicki and Wiethoff (2002) say that belief is an individual's conviction with the capacity to act depending on the words, deeds, and choices of others. In other words, it is a positive anticipation, assumption, or cognitive idea in daily life. From belief comes the perspective one adopts in different contexts. Habibah and Rahil (1990) holds that cognitive thinking is how individuals control objects in their surroundings. In terms of thinking, a person would notice the link between stimuli to pursue their objectives through observation. Still, thought falls into two primary forms: directed and undirected. While undirected thinking lacks goals and leans more toward daydreaming, directed thinking consists of knowledge and happens in reasoning, critical thinking, and creativity.

The researcher in this work has applied a cultural studies methodology that Barker (2003) developed. Barker (2003) presents eight concepts of cultural processes: cultural and practice marking, symbolism, materialism, expressiveness, power, popular culture, text and imagination, and subjective identity. The subjective and identity dimensions of this inquiry are crucial. Barker (2003) proposes that subjectivity and identity pertain to the trajectory of human activity in cultural study. Conversely, identity has become the foundation of cultural studies. Barker (2003) asserted that the subjective and identity approach in cultural studies constitutes a

discipline that seeks to address enquiries concerning the formation of human identity, including how individuals are constructed, how they self-define as subjects, and how they identify through emotions about gender, race, and age. The researcher in this study will examine the perspectives of the community, namely six residents of the four historic villages, about this oral narrative, utilising the subjective and identification technique that influences the creation of origin narratives.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous researchers, including Mohd Fahmi (2017), have examined cultural values in folklore, specifically in his analysis of the folktales of the Temiar Orang Asli community in Gua Musang, Kelantan, which addresses the origins of this community. The research indicates that a collective of marginalised individuals from many communities initiated the Orang Asli. Being a secluded and separated culture, they are among the oldest communities living in the forest areas and avoid socializing or meeting with outsiders. Their survival in the wild depends on organic resources. However, their life also depends on metaphors, nature, and explicit and tacit historical meanings that coexist forever with ancient tales, origin stories, and genealogies passed on from their predecessors. This investigation helped the researcher to discover the special folktales full of fantastic ideas, particularly the Temiar Orang Asli tribe's origin myths. Notably, this study revealed their great intellectual capacity. This earlier research

has also incorporated numerous elements or lines of Temiar Orang Asli's origin of life based on their tribes and lineages.

Comparable research was conducted by Ahmad et al. (2015), who investigated the unique nomenclature of the communities inside the Tanjung Dawai State Legislative Assembly. The origins of these unique village names have prompted experts to conduct investigations. Moreover, a place's name might encapsulate its original environmental characteristics that may have changed due to technological advancement and the passage of time. This study can also demonstrate the richness of the legacy, culture, events, economics, and identity of the historical society. This study elucidates the origins of the unique village names in Merbok and Bujang, purportedly drawn from the oral traditions of the inhabitants, providing insight into the historical context of the area before contemporary modernity.

In a comparable year, another study conducted by Norazimah et al. (2019) asserts that genesis stories are mythological narratives that surpass human rationality. She further elucidated that origin myths, esteemed in ancient civilisations, are narratives from the past characterised by fantastical elements. This study unequivocally shown that genesis narratives are oral traditions. Additional studies investigating the origins of myths also contribute to attracting visitors to the nation's tourism sector, so enhancing its economy. The findings assert the discovery of additional origin narratives from Lenggong, encompassing atypical tales, myths, and legends. The tourism sector

of Lenggong Valley primarily relies on these origin legends, leading to the creation of various reproductions and commemorative narratives to illustrate the origins of the place's name. Nonetheless, each of these narratives contains unchanging legendary elements. They possess numerous intriguing narratives for fellow academics to expand their understanding of folk literature, drawing from the folktales and origin stories provided by the previous scholar (Hassan & Mohd Isa, 2017).

Previous research on Cultural Literary Theory by Muhammad Irfan (2013) emphasised the cultural components. This study provides insight into cultural literary theory, particularly for the Malay community, highlighting the intrinsic connection between literature and culture rooted in societal truths and lived experiences. Zainab (2006) elucidated in her research that the representation of human culture and its environment is significantly influenced by literary works. The argument also addresses the authenticity and use of oral storytelling. While some academics contend that oral traditions are less trustworthy than written records because of their fluidity and sensitivity to change over time, others like Walter J. Ong (1982) emphasise the performative and communal elements of oral stories. Ong contends that oral traditions are active processes of cultural transmission that support social cohesiveness and collective identity rather than only the preservation of the past. Oral stories concerning the beginnings of the village names in Kampung Gajah are

not only historical histories but are also contemporary customs that still influence the feeling of self in the community. These stories are an essential link between generations since they guarantee that the values, beliefs, and history of Kampung Gajah are actively remembered and actively participated in daily life.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The researcher has chosen a qualitative design for this study as the method of research procedure. This research utilises observations, semi-structured interviews via audio recording and document analysis. Observation was also obtained by documenting the environment of the recognised folktales within a group. To guarantee accurate information, the researcher visited each Kg. Gajah community possessing knowledge of the origin story and performed semi-structured interviews. Table 1 shows the list of informants interviewed during data collection.

The interview recordings were subsequently transcribed into written material, which was then subjected to thematic analysis to ensure coding and theming aligned with the research objectives. Documentation analysis involves examining images related to research documents and information gathered during data-gathering activities.

This study employs purposive sampling aimed at elder individuals in the Kampung Gajah Sub-district who possess knowledge of the oral tale of the myth's origin. Several communities in the Kampung Gajah sub-district were chosen, including

Table 1  
*List of informants*

Informants	Age	Sex	Locality	Role
A	70	Male	Kampung Gajah	Villager
B	87	Male	Kampung Selat Pulau	Villager
C	78	Female	Kampung Kota	Villager
D	60	Male	Kampung Geronggong	Head of Village
E	48	Male	Pasir Salak	Curator Officer Kompleks Sejarah Pasir Salak
F	52	Female	Kampung Pasir Garam	Villager

Kampung Geronggong, Kampung Pasir Garam, Kampung Selat Pulau, and Kampung Gajah. For data validation purposes, a curator from Kompleks Sejarah Kuala Kangsar was questioned. For data validation purposes, a curator from Kompleks Sejarah Kuala Kangsar was questioned. The study location is depicted below:

The outcomes of the thematic analysis will be directed towards cultural studies, emphasising the influence of oral tradition on cultural memory and identity. This notion is endorsed by Barker (2003), who contends that artistic endeavours, narratives, and social interactions perpetually construct identity. In the context of Kampung Gajah, the origin narratives serve as a form of cultural memory, allowing the community to forge a shared identity. Narratives and cultural artefacts embody the values, beliefs, and historical awareness of society.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Views and Beliefs of the People about Oral Narratives as a Heritage Story

Oral narratives are accounts transmitted throughout generations. Oral narratives constituted the paramount literary forms

before the advent of writing systems, as they were perpetuated through oral transmission without any written records. Amoamo (2011) asserts that renowned notions about natural disasters or historical events are prevalent in mythology. According to the Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka (2010), myths in Malay are defined as narratives from ancient times that are considered authentic, particularly those involving components about the early history or origins of a tribe, events, natural phenomena, and similar subjects. Moreover, according to the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (2010), myths are characterised as fabricated narratives, specifically tales concerning humans or inaccuracies. Although the tale is considered true regarding events from antiquity, such as the origins of the cosmos, humanity, or a nation, (Hassan & Mohd Isa, 2017) define myths as narratives linked to local cultural stories.

Since antiquity, oral narratives transmitted from ancestors to subsequent generations have served as a form of expression. Something that must be transmitted across generations. The transmission of cultural heritage across generations is often intangible,

encompassing folk stories or oral histories conveyed verbally without written documentation, rather than being limited to physical activities or objects that may be perceived by sight or touch. The researcher will investigate the perspectives and convictions of the residents of the small district of Kampung Gajah regarding the origin narratives of the seven ancient villages located along the Perak River's banks. The researcher selected an individual to determine the historical significance of the name's origins. Interviews with six informants—village residents—revealed that nearly all the narratives shared by locals regarding the origins of the village names were believed to be transmitted through generations.

The origin of the name of the village Kota is from this city (while pointing to the fortress next to his house). This is the fortress. The fortress used to be a man's land. My father and grandfather told me that in the middle of this fortress, there was a city. The city used to be built like a palace, but it wasn't a palace; it was like a place for the big people to take shelter. Then it was surrounded by a fortress. This fortress stretches from here to the Selat Pulau school behind your house. In the past, when there was a war, the big people would stay in the city. The soldiers would guard the outside. To build this fortress, there wasn't even a hoe. They used to use a stick to take soil from the river and then bring it here to make it a fortress (informant C, Interview).

According to informant C, their origin stories were inherited from their ancestors.

Before writing systems were developed, locals entertained themselves with the fascinating folktales of their forebears. Additionally, it might inspire society to recognise and value oral storytelling. Thus, it brings up important issues for the Malay community. These oral histories offer valuable insights into the preservation of intangible cultural property because they are grounded in the lived experiences and historical consciousness of the local community. By recording and examining these origin stories, this study contributes to the preservation of non-material traditions that are in danger of disappearing due to modernity. These stories also contribute to the subject of Cultural Studies by providing factual proof of how legendary storytelling influences collective memory, cultural identity, and socio-symbolic structures within Malay society. Thus, the study reinforces the significance of indigenous oral traditions as both a cultural resource and a scholarly lens through which to understand the dynamics of meaning-making in localised settings.

### **Culture as a Practice of Meaning-making: The Role of Origin Myths in Shaping Community Identity**

The origin narratives of Kampung Gajah, including the legend of the colony named after migrating elephants, function as cultural practices that generate and disseminate meanings, allowing the community to comprehend its history, environment, and identity. These legends are deeply embedded in the societal fabric and represent

more than mere captivating narratives. They function as conduits of significance that connect the community to its natural environment and the present to the past. Source of information A asserts, "The elders informed us that Kampung Gajah was named after elephants that migrated to this location" (Informant A, Interview 2022). This narrative elucidates the reasons for our village's uniqueness" (Precillia, 2024). This narrative underscores the significance of folklore in shaping cultural identity. Research on Kumun Debai, Desa Domas, and the Dayak community (Dismas, 2023; Precillia, 2024; Wulandari & Rosalina, 2021) unequivocally demonstrates that this subject reverberates across multiple cultural contexts.

As a cultural activity, folklore is fundamental in developing and preserving cultural identity, as the Kumun Debai people clearly show. Folklore is a means for passing local knowledge and values from one generation to the next and a source of cultural expression via many forms, including proverbs, folktales, songs, and traditional rites (Precillia, 2024). In Kampung Gajah, the tale of the migratory elephants also serves as a uniting agent, tying the society together under a standard narrative that clarifies their relationship to the environment and their past. This is consistent with Hoffman and Moya (2024), which implies that even if they do not function as superstimuli, group myths can establish shared knowledge and group limits. Thus, the history of Kampung Gajah not only offers a historical narrative but also

helps the community members develop their sense of identity and belonging.

Another important element of these origin stories is the link between the community and their surroundings. For example, the toponyms of the five villages in Desa Domas show a strong focus on natural aspects like water and trees, which are fundamental to the society's way of life (Wulandari & Rosalina, 2021). Analogously, the name Kampung Gajah, derived from migrating elephants, emphasises the historical and continuous interaction of the community with their natural environment.

There are several stories about the origin of the Elephant Village. All are jungle huts. There are no buildings like the ones we see today. In the past, this Elephant Village was not called Elephant Village, in the past, people called it Elephant Village because in the past, this Elephant Village was full of elephants who camped here. The elephants came from the single hill in front of them. People called the single hill because it was the only hill there. That's why people called it the single hill in the past. I heard stories from people in the past, the elephants came from a single hill because there was no food there, so they wandered around looking for food until they found this village. People in the past liked to plant bananas and other fruits, so when they came, the villagers who had the plants ate them all. But the villagers were not angry because they felt sorry for the elephants. So the elephant was tamed and fed, and the villagers also protected the elephant. They used to use elephants to carry things. After that, the elephants also

went on strike (sulking) until they took themselves wherever. But they also heard that the elephant went to Batu Gajah there (Informant A, Interview 2022).

As demonstrated in the tale of Ratu Roro Kidul, which emphasises the interdependence of people, nature, and the supernatural, this emphasis on nature is not unique to Kampung Gajah; it is a frequent topic in various cultural settings (Damayanti & Taum, 2024). These stories remind the community of its reliance on the environment and its need for preservation for the next generations. Moreover, as evidenced in the ancient beliefs of the Dayak people, these myths sometimes have intellectual and spiritual implications. The foundation of the Dayak community's social and cultural life is their mythology and religious systems, which offer a way of life that directs their contact with the surroundings (Dismas, 2023). Likewise, the beginnings of Kampung Gajah have a spiritual meaning that strengthens the link of the community to the ground and their ancestors beyond mere historical description. This fits the idea of mythology as a narrative framework that ties people to the holy (Damayanti & Taum, 2024). Therefore, the narrative of the migrating elephants acts as a link between the physical and spiritual spheres, offering a better knowledge of the society's position on the earth.

Ultimately, the origin stories of Kampung Gajah—such as the tale of the migrating elephants—are more than just tales; they are cultural activities that

generate and spread meanings, therefore enabling the community to make sense of its past, present, and future. Deeply entwined in the community's cultural fabric, these stories provide means for spiritual direction, knowledge transfer, and cultural expression. From the Kumun Debai community to the Dayak people, folklore and mythology are important in forming cultural identity and strengthening the group's relationship to its natural and spiritual environment, as witnessed in many other cultural settings. Through mythological research and folklore studies, we may better appreciate these myths' relevance in modern society and underline their importance in safeguarding cultural legacy and fostering community membership.

### **Symbolism and Representation in Origin Myths: The Case of "Kampung Pasir Salak"**

Rich in symbolism, the origin stories of "Kampung Pasir Salak" reflect the values, ideas, and close relationship with their natural surroundings of the society. Drawing from the natural aspects of the Salak fruit and the riverine environment, the term "Kampung Pasir Salak" is a tribute to this symbolic representation, therefore reflecting society's pragmatic and humorous perspective. When informant E (Interview 2022) notes; "The name Pasir Salak comes from the Salak fruit found by the river" " it shows how our ancestors used what they saw to name places" (Sujud et al., 2022), In addition, studies examining Malay storytelling and cultural identification have

found that naming locations based on natural features is widespread in Malay cultural landscapes (Hussain et al., 2020; Putri et al., 2024).

The symbolic use of nature is deeply ingrained in Malay culture's traditional way of life, as argued by Sujud et al. (2022), storytelling's moral, social, and philosophical messages are much enhanced by nature. Drawing from the Salak fruit, it represents the community's inventiveness and relationship to their surroundings, in addition to being a natural resource. This is consistent with Hussain et al., (2020). which underlines how the Malay community's values and beliefs are reflected in the construction of the cultural landscape using natural elements.

The name "Kampung Pasir Salak" has symbolic importance beyond its exact meaning. It reflects the cultural ecology of the community, in which environmental sustainability and folklore are closely entwined. As noted by Jabar et al. (2024) folklore sometimes has vital messages about environmental preservation, teaching people how to engage with nature sustainably. Furthermore, the word "Pasir Salak" reminds us of the community's historical and continuous connection with their surroundings, underlining the need to protect natural resources for the next generations. Moreover, the name "Kampung Pasir Salak" is a cultural emblem that enhances the people's connection to their cultural background. As described by Putri et al. (2024), cultural motifs in Malay folklore, such as the Salak fruit, play a significant role in establishing and preserving cultural identity.

These themes inform and entertain society about their background, values, and interactions with their surroundings.

The designation "Kampung Pasir Salak" epitomises the broader symbolic tableau in Malay origin narratives, as articulated by Low (2006), which posits that myths and origin tales serve as manifestations of symbolic imagery rooted in the experiences of a specific populace at a particular time and place, reflecting the historical and cultural occurrences of the community. "Pasir Salak" exemplifies this symbolic landscape. Ultimately, "Kampung Pasir Salak" signifies the values, beliefs, and connection with the environment rather than merely a geographical label. The name's incorporation of natural elements reflects the community's pragmatic and humorous perspective, as well as its strong connection to cultural heritage. From the standpoint of Malay cultural landscapes, folklore, and cultural ecology, "Pasir Salak" serves as a significant reminder of the necessity to save natural resources and cultural identity for future generations.

### **Power and Ideology in Origin Myths: The Role of Elders and Storytelling**

Origin narratives reflect societal power dynamics and are intricately linked to the duties of elders and community leaders who safeguard cultural knowledge. These legends, often transmitted through generations, foster a sense of identity and underpin moral frameworks and social structures. The dissemination of such narratives underscores the necessity of oral history for maintaining cultural continuity

and the influence of individuals who safeguard and share these stories. This scenario denotes power dynamics, the role of elders in transmitting these narratives, and the broader implications for cultural and ideological continuity. Informant D affirms acquiring the village myth from predecessors and thereafter disseminating the information to subsequent generations: "I learnt the story of Kampung Geronggong from my grandparents. I inform my children so they are aware of our heritage".

A crucial component of cultural preservation is how elders pass down stories. Elders are respected in many indigenous cultures as bearers of traditional knowledge, including tales explaining the world's beginnings, the creation of people, and the formation of societal standards. For example the story from informant B:

My grandfather used to tell me when I was little that Kampung Kepala Pulau was an extension of Selat Pulau. There is a connection between the two villages. Kepala Pulau is an abandoned island with an island in the strait of Pulau. When people from outside come and ask what village this is, the villagers don't have a name to call it. So the villagers call it Kampung Kepala Pulau. That's where they built the Dato Sagor bridge. But the area by the cliff is really an area where people want to cross. People who want to go to Teluk Intan also cross over there. There aren't many stories about Kampung Kepala Pulau. Those who know are the people who are old enough to tell stories (Informant B, Interview 2022).

Elders like Temsula Ao and Esther Syiem use storytelling to pass on cultural and spiritual knowledge among the Ao-Naga and Khasi communities of India's Northeast, therefore ensuring the survival of their traditions in the face of modernisation and outside influences (Chakraborty, 2020). Likewise, among the Kanien'skehá:ka (Mohawk) people, elders are essential in passing myths and legends crucial to the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) people's cultural and spiritual life. These legends provide the basis of the community's cultural identity since they are not only amusement but also closely related to historical, ritualistic, and spiritual rituals (Deer, 2016).

Furthermore, sharing origin stories via narrative is an excellent weapon for subverting accepted wisdom and claiming Indigenous sovereignty. Indigenous elders have employed decolonial storytelling in the framework of settler colonialism to challenge imposed colonial conceptions of time, gender, and relationality. Eco-erotic (hi)stories told by Indigenous elders, for instance, stress the intimate and sexual understanding of more-than-human entities like lands, waterways, and spiritual beings, therefore subverting homonormativity and settler colonialism. Shared by seniors like Richard Van Camp and Melissa Nelson, these tales show how storytelling may be a queer and decolonial activity challenging colonial constraints and reasserting Indigenous relationality (Burns, 2024).

Beyond cultural preservation, the significance of elders' storytelling reaches into people's psychological and spiritual well-being. Studies on the life tales of

Anishinaabe people show that keeping traditional Indigenous knowledge helps people to build their narratives, therefore improving their efficacy and personal determination. Rich in existential and spiritual themes, Elders' stories offer a framework for deeply ingrained cultural traditions and meaning-making. Especially in the context of historical trauma and integration efforts, this emphasises the transforming power of narrative in promoting resilience and cultural continuity (Bird, 2014).

Ultimately, the origin mirrors power relations in societies, with elders and community leaders playing a crucial role in passing down tales. Elders also guarantee the survival of customs, preserve social cohesiveness, and question accepted narratives through their stewardship of cultural information. Storytelling also serves as a means of cultural preservation and a strong instrument for claiming indigenous sovereignty and promoting individual and group well-being. Therefore, the responsibility of elders in disseminating these stories is indispensable since it guarantees that their communities' cultural, moral, and spiritual bases remain vivid and relevant for the next generations.

### **Globalisation and Hybridity: The Persistence of Origin Myths as Cultural Resistance**

A robust cultural resistance, the persistence of origin myths amidst globalisation and modernity, enables cultures to maintain their identity and traditions against the

homogenising influences of global change. Frequently transmitted through oral traditions and storytelling, these myths function as a repository of collective memory and cultural values, enabling communities to resist the obliteration of their heritage among external influences (Matthei & Smith, 2008). Informant G states, "Despite contemporary alterations, we continue to narrate these tales. They remind us of our roots and preserve our traditions" (Informant G, 2022). This perspective highlights the dual role of origin narratives in cultural preservation and resistance to globalisation influences.

Strong cultural resistance, persistent origin myths during Globalisation and modernity, allow cultures to maintain their identity and traditions against the influence of homogenous global change. Often transmitted through oral tradition and storytelling, these myths function as a repository of collective memory and cultural values, enabling communities to resist the destruction of their heritage among external influences (Matthei & Smith, 2008). Informant F stated, "Despite contemporary changes, we continue to tell these stories. They remind us of our roots and maintain our traditions" (Informant F, 2022). This perspective highlights the dual role of original narratives in cultural preservation and resistance to the influence of Globalisation.

After Kampung Biak, this is Kampung Bandor Tua, right? I can tell a little bit about Kampung Bandor Tua. Kampung Bandor Tua was once recorded in the history of the Perak War of 1875.

The battle between the British and the Malays at that time resulted in the formation of Bandar Tua. Let's not assume that the old town was like the current town, which is like Bandar Ipoh. The old town and the current town are very different. The town used to be a place where people gathered to trade. Here, people called it the Old Town, and on the other side, people called it the New Town. So in this small district of Kampung Gajah, there are two town villages that don't have a town inside; they just use the term town because they developed with the population. So with stories like this, we feel like we want to take good care of our village because people used to work hard (Informant F, Interview 2022).

For example, the Garifuna people show how origin stories may be used as a weapon for cultural opposition and adaptation. Originating at the junction of European colonisation and indigenous Caribbean traditions, the Garifuna have kept their unique identity through their origin stories, chronicling their history of resistance and resiliency (Matthei & Smith, 2008). These stories give the Garifuna a basis for collective identification and a sense of connection with the past, allowing them to negotiate the difficulties of Globalisation while maintaining their cultural uniqueness. In South Asia, tribal people have kept their oral traditions and folktales despite print culture's predominance and modern invasion (Goel, 2024). These oral archives help communities to preserve their cultural memory and epistemic systems in the face of outside influences, therefore acting as intangible means of knowledge transfer.

The occurrence of Myth stories throughout many civilisations and historical eras emphasises its universality as a literary and cultural phenomenon even more. From postcolonial tales to ancient literature, myths' origins have repeatedly created and strengthened cultural identity (Rocco & Lombardi, 2024). These stories typically acquire fresh relevance in postcolonial settings as they are reinterpreted to question accepted narratives and assert local identities, challenging prevailing narratives. Redefining their cultural memory will help communities assert their alternatives to modernism and fight the influence of outside values. Collective memory and localised narratives are closely related to the building and spreading of origin myths. These narratives, transmitted across generations, become normalised and institutionalised within society (McAuley, 2024). Myth origin is also essential in building social and cultural identities and offering a familiar feeling of belonging and purpose. Emphasising their resilience and adaptation in the face of globalising influences, the Garifuna origin stories, for example, provide a template for their modern identity and record their past experiences (Matthei & Smith, 2008). In South Asia, tribal people employ their oral histories to maintain their epistemic agency, conserving their knowledge systems and subverting the dominance of Western epistemologies (Goel, 2024).

The role of myths and cultural memory in Latin America is evidently oppositional. Writers and storytellers have intentionally altered their cultural

narratives to counteract the oppressive impacts of colonialism and capitalism (Astvaldsson, 2011). By reinterpreting their origins and cultural heritage, these communities have forged their identity and presented alternative concepts of modernity grounded in their traditions. This cultural process of reinvention is not a rejection of change but a selective acceptance of modernity, where communities opt to keep what is most relevant to their identity in their culture. Origin narratives resonate valiantly amidst the fleeting forces of globalisation and the mechanisations of modernity, and thus establish an important strategy of cultural resistance by which groups doggedly and skilfully preserve and reinterpret their cultural heritage in the negotiation of their identity and agency. These narratives — whether manifested in the oral traditions of South Asian rain-forest tribes people, the origin tales of the Garifuna, or literary adaptations by Latin American authors — exist as a potent asset in the fight against homogenising forces of globalisation. Exploring these specific settings provides insight into the dynamic interactions of cultural memory, identity and resistance, no less than the lasting importance of origin stories as a shaping feature of a nation's similarly challenged social and cultural fabric around the world.

### **Cultural Studies as Critical Practice: The Role of Myth Origin in Reinforcing Cultural Autonomy and Resistance**

Cultural studies, as a form of critique, emphasises the significance of considering how the subtexts of cultural narratives,

including those addressed in origin stories, serve to fortify cultural isolationism through resources for resisting outside totalising influence. What Barker has to say about cultural studies, especially in the context of external pressures, is that they have performed the active labour of constructing and maintaining social identities rather than reflecting culture. Interestingly, this study demonstrates how myth origin is a strategy for cultural preservation and resistance, and thus references research from other contexts on the functions of storytelling, oral traditions and cultural narratives in indigenous/marginalised communities. For example, oral traditions and folktales have long been intangible means of information transfer in South Asia, retaining cultural legacies despite the invasion of imperialism and modernism (Goel, 2024). Likewise, the active function of storytelling in cultural resilience is shown in the Embera Chamí Navera Drua community of Colombia, where children's stories are purposefully employed to promote cultural identification and maintain the original tongue (Lozano et al., 2024). These instances show how dynamically engaged in the fight for cultural autonomy and resistance, cultural narratives—especially origin stories—are rather than fixed.

After that, there was another story about Kampung Gajah. From Bukit Tunggai, there was the kelembai. The kelembai was not an animal but a supernatural creature of the Kabo people. Anyone who passed by him was cursed by him. He used to live on Bukit Tunggai, but there was also an uncle who

heard him sitting on that hill of Changkat Lada. Wanting to make a story on Bukit Tunggal, there was an elephant sitting there and then he was rebuked by the kelembai. The kelembai also swore that the elephant would turn into stone. So the people of this village called this place Kampung Gajah. So, we used to have to believe what the storyteller told us because they would open a stage every Sunday night, so parents would tell their children and grandchildren to listen to it (Informant A, Interview 2022).

The situation of African indigenous people makes explicit how important the origin is in supporting cultural autonomy. Among the Frafra and Akan peoples, environmental adaptation and climatic resilience are just two of their resilience strategies that revolve primarily around storytelling. These stories are entertaining and profoundly ingrained in their ontologies and epistemologies, offering a cultural framework for comprehending and negotiating the difficulties of a fragile present and unpredictable future (Amo-Agyemang, 2023). In the Sámi community of Sápmi, storytelling about skábma traditions also acts as a decolonising process whereby teachers and children interact with less-known indigenous religious traditions to produce new stories based on them. Protecting cultural information and focussing on the active role storytelling has towards cultural conservation and resistance takes this step further by enabling a sense of responsibility for a sustainable future (Nutti et al., 2024). These examples illustrate how cultural identity and agency are formed through

living and forming activities rather than just historical narratives and myths of origin.

Moreover, one cannot deny the extent to which youth contribute to making cultural autonomy and resistance. Because they want to reach both material "well-being" (having enough goods) and cultural "well-being" (keeping their own identity), young indigenous people in Bolivia are redefining two totally different forms of governance and values. In this mingling of ideals, their pursuit of *bienestar* (material well-being) and *vivir bien* (living well) illustrates their embrace of new knowledge while preserving cultural traditions (Mynen, 2012). The duality is also reflected in children's stories in the Embera community, which combine pedagogical methods aligned with this worldview in parallel with storytelling practices, and help engage children in cultural identity sustenance since childhood (Lozano, et al., 2024). These illustrations emphasise the agency of young people in maintaining cultural autonomy and resistance and, thereby, highlight how, within narrative cultural information is transferred between generations.

Another important factor of cultural narratives' ability to support cultural autonomy and resistance is their decolonising power. Making new stories based on skábma traditions in the Sámi people means decolonising procedures that subvert mainstream narratives and recover Indigenous knowledge systems. Stories, *duodji* (Sámi craft), and children's playtime help link the present to the past while imagining a sustainable future by accomplishing this (Nutti et al., 2024).

In South Asia, the preservation of oral traditions questions Western ideas. It emphasises the importance of decolonising archive activities in the digital age by stating the epistemic agency of indigenous people (Goel, 2024). These initiatives provide alternative ways of being and knowing grounded in Indigenous worldviews, preserving cultural knowledge and challenging dominant narratives.

Finally, cultural studies are a vital activity showing how important origin stories and narratives are in preserving cultural autonomy and resistance. These stories provide means for retaining cultural identity, subverting accepted narratives, and claiming rights for underprivileged groups. Through education and community activities, the stories of intergenerational transmission guarantee their ongoing significance in the face of modernisation and globalisation. The specific themes identified in this study, supported by direct testimony from the local community, are summarised in Table 2.

Emphasising the ongoing relevance of cultural narratives in the struggle for cultural autonomy and resistance, Informant A beautifully states, "These stories are our way of preserving our culture. They remind us of who we are and where we come from" (Informant A, Interview 2022).

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the origin myths of Kampung Gajah, Perak, serve as vital cultural instruments for the preservation of intangible heritage, the construction of communal identity, and the intergenerational transmission of values and beliefs. Narratives such as the migrating elephants' legend, the Kampung Kota fortress, and the Pasir Salak's symbolic naming demonstrate how oral traditions embed historical consciousness and socio-cultural meaning into everyday life. These findings directly address the study's objectives and are situated within the theoretical lens of Cultural Studies,

Table 2  
*Summary of themes, subthemes, and informant quotes*

Main Theme	Subtheme	Informant Quote
Local Cultural Identity	Origins of village names	"Kampung Gajah was named after elephants that came from Bukit Tunggal." (Informant A)
Collective Memory	Inheritance from ancestors	"I got this story from my grandfather and now I pass it on to my children." (Informant D)
Human-Nature Relationship	Natural elements as symbols or markers	"The name Pasir Salak came from the salak fruit that grew near the river." (Informant E)
Preservation of Oral Tradition	Folktales as tools of education	"We still tell these stories even though times have changed." (Informant F)
Community History	Fortresses and traditional social roles	"This fortress was built using river soil, as a shelter for the village chiefs during times of war." (Informant C)

particularly Barker's (2003) emphasis on subjectivity, identity, and meaning making in cultural discourse.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the broader academic field by illustrating how localised myth-making functions as a mode of cultural resilience and symbolic resistance. It offers insight into how marginalised communities preserve their identity through storytelling, even amidst modernising forces. Practically, the study has implications for heritage conservation efforts, community-based tourism initiatives, and the development of culturally responsive educational content. Nonetheless, the study's scope is limited to six informants from selected villages within the Kampung Gajah sub-district and relies primarily on semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Future research could expand by incorporating comparative analyses across regions, applying visual ethnographic methodologies, or exploring digital archiving of oral traditions. These avenues would enrich understanding of myth as a dynamic cultural practice and strengthen efforts to safeguard intangible heritage in Malaysia and beyond.

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## **Representation of Local Cultural Identity in the Entrance Gate Design of Yogyakarta International Airport**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Yogyakarta International Airport in Kulon Progo serves as both a gateway for travellers entering Yogyakarta and showcase of local cultural richness within its premises. This study explores how Javanese and Yogyakarta's cultural traits influence the architectural and decorative aspects of the airport's gates and inner spaces. The research employs qualitative methods, drawing on Relph's Place Identity theory, Stuart Hall's representation theory, Gadamer's hermeneutical theory, and Pierce's semiotic theory for visual studies. Through observations, interviews, and documentation, the study investigates how the integration of local cultural aesthetics preserves identity amidst globalisation's pressures. Findings highlight that the incorporation of Yogyakarta's cultural symbols, such as those from the Jogja palace, fosters a sense of place identity crucial to the airport's location. This integration not only represents the historical and social fabric of Yogyakarta but also aligns with the contemporary Jogja Renaissance movement, ensuring cultural continuity without succumbing to the homogenising forces of modernisation. By maintaining these cultural elements, the airport stands not just as a functional transit hub but as a symbolic link to Yogyakarta's rich cultural heritage. This approach safeguards local wisdom and identity, ensuring they

remain vibrant and relevant in a globalised context. The study underscores the importance of such cultural integration in public spaces, advocating for designs that resonate with local communities while welcoming global visitors, thereby enriching the airport experience with cultural depth and meaning.

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## INTRODUCTION

Airports serve as gateways to various countries, regions, and cities. Airports play an essential role in establishing a feeling of place. They can design one-of-a-kind arrival and departure experiences that successfully connect the airport to the surrounding community's culture and environment. By establishing a *sense of place*, passengers are made to feel welcome in the region as they transit via connecting planes, through the airport, and into it. A strong regional message boosts the local tourism economy and promotes the success of local brands, stores, cafes, and restaurants (Cousins, 2014).

Like the new airport in Kulon Progo, Yogyakarta, known as the Yogyakarta International Airport (YIA), the aesthetic aspects of the building and interior convey a strong regional identity message. Based on the underlying notion of the Memayu Hayuning Bawana philosophy, the *Airport Planner* team transformed it into the Jogja Renaissance concept using Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono X's thoughts. YIA Airport, as a reflection of Yogyakarta, incorporates Javanese and palace culture (Firdaus, 2017). The identity in question is a combination of artistic aspects from Javanese culture and the Yogyakarta Palace, which is located at YIA Kulon Progo Airport. One example is the presence of decorations on the airport's main entrance gate.

Gates were initially known as Gapura in the archipelago's cultural heritage civilisation, which refers to profane

architecture from the Hindu-Buddhist, Islamic, and colonial periods, as well as modern-era gates. According to Izza, the Big Indonesian Dictionary defines a gapura (gate) as a door. Ideal for entering the yard or garden. The gate is a component of the building that can mirror the interior and serve as a boundary that demonstrates the various natures and functions of space (Izza, 2021). According to Bambang Toko, there are 14 gates and 11 relief works that tell the history, culture, and arts of the Javanese people, as well as the story of the five villages impacted by the airport's presence (Al-Hakimi, 2020).

The presence of innovations in the design of entrance gates (Gapura) in architecture and interiors in Indonesia today demonstrates diversity affected by modern architectural forms and tailored to the archipelago's cultural riches. The increasing march of globalisation has a significant impact on Indonesian cultural identity. It can be argued that the presence of a touch of local culture in an aesthetic aspect of the airport's interior design as a public space can offer a *sense of place* that symbolises local cultural identity as well as the airport's location identity.

Previous research on YIA Airport, Pradana, in Local Wisdom. In Yogyakarta, according to his research, airports can become regional icons because they reflect life and cultural values inside society. The Special Region of Yogyakarta, often known as the City of Culture, contains a wealth of local knowledge that may demonstrate cultural identity at an airport.

Based on his study, findings, and debates, he concludes that (1) the airport is one of the media that can demonstrate the values of local wisdom in a region or location, and (2) that local wisdom is generated by societal ideology and historical and cultural values.

According to R.C. Permatasari's research, the airport gate is a key point of entry, and its design should reflect local culture and heritage. The study looks at architectural characteristics, materials, and symbols that represent Yogyakarta's cultural identity. The use of local wisdom improves the airport's cultural image and gives travellers a sense of space. In conclusion, YIA's gate area successfully portrays Yogyakarta's cultural identity, providing travellers with a memorable and authentic experience. The airport is more than just a transportation hub; it also honours the region's artistic and historical past.

Choirul Umom conducted research titled *Application of Metabolic Architectural Concepts in Yogyakarta International Airport Buildings*. YIA airport stated that in its research, it employs the concepts of the metabolic architecture idea, which allows for growth in response to user needs and changes in the space and shape of the structure based on purpose (Choirul Umom, 2022). At the turn of the century, Japan saw a remarkable development in the concept of metabolic architecture. The idea of combining nature and technology while preserving traditional Japanese knowledge (Widagdo et al., 2013). This is also reflected in the YIA airport's architectural concept, which combines nature and technology

while incorporating Yogyakarta's indigenous culture.

The current and prior studies on Yogyakarta International Airport Kulon Progo show a correlation in material objects. It is the same thing but with a different level of study. Using qualitative research methods, this study examines artwork pieces at Yogyakarta International Airport's entrance access gates. Relph's Place identity method approach, Stuart Hall's representation, and Gadamer's hermeneutical theory to understand the interpretation of meaning. Moreover, the results of the analysis use Pierce's semiotic theory approach for visual studies.

This study aims to examine how local historical and cultural factors can influence architectural design and ornamental components at the Yogyakarta International Airport's gates and internal entrance access. Data collecting approaches include observation, interviews, and documentation. One approach was an exclusive interview with the Kulon Progo Airport Branch Head and one of the Yogyakarta International Airport's art planners. It is hoped that the findings of this study will allow Yogyakarta's past cultural identity to undergo a new transformation in the spirit of the Jogja Renaissance concept of present-day cultural form without changing the essence of meaning as an immanent symbol as an attraction for the potential of local culture, preventing it from being lost or eroded by modernisation. As a result, Yogyakarta International Airport, as the subject of this study, is expected to serve as a resource for

ideas for building local cultural identity at other Indonesian airports. On this foundation, this magazine was established to develop improved ways for comprehending the meaning and value of signs that form architectural designs and interior elements at entrance access gates in the Yogyakarta International Airport building layout.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The Kulon Progo population was previously part of the Mataram Kingdom, and the current Kulon Progo district is the result of a combination of two districts. The Kulon Progo and Adikarto districts are part of the Kasultanan Ngayogyakarta hadiningrat and kadipaten Pakualaman (Cahyono et al., 2023).

As a result, Kulonprogo's culture is heavily influenced by the Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat Palace. In this way, students become acquainted with Javanese customs and culture. The culture of inhabitants on Java's south coast, particularly in DIY province, differs significantly from that of residents in the north of DIY, on the slopes of Mount Merapi. Dances, village customs, and other traditions are unique. However, for people throughout Java (particularly those who were originally part of the Islamic Mataram empire), reverence for nature and the ground, as expressed in the Javanese adage *Memayu Hayuning Bawono*, remains the foundation of their life.

The Javanese philosophy "*Memayu Hayuning Bawana*" preaches the need for balance and harmony in life. This notion is derived from the Javanese language, which comprises three words: *Memayu*,

*Hayuning*, and *Bawana*. *Memayu* signifies life, *hayuning* means lovely and beautifying, as well as excellent and true, and *Bawana* refers to the globe or universe. Overall, "*Memayu Hayuning Bawana*" can be seen as living in truth and balance to attain peace in this world (Endraswara, 2013). This notion teaches that humans must maintain balance in all parts of their lives, including their relationships with nature, with other humans, and with their creator. This balance is crucial for life to run harmoniously and peacefully.

The concept of an imaginary line connecting the sea, land, and mountains extending from the north to the south has a profound connection to the way of life of Javanese citizens and the YIA airport vicinity inhabitants. A pavilion (as a metaphor) represents the mountain's status as the epicentre of the universe. Lombard (Sumalyo, 2015) asserts that numerous structures divided by tall walls and gates—representing distinct tiers within the cosmological system and serving as fortifications with both physical and spiritual fortitude—bear witness to the Hindu influence. Similarly, the ideologies and narratives of Wayang continue to influence the inhabitants of the DIY region, including those who reside in Temon District, Kulonprogo.

According to Gieryn, he explains several aspects and characteristics related to places, including (1) Geographical location, (2) Physical Parameters, and (3) Identity, which is related to meaning and value (Gieryn, 2000). Meanwhile, according to Canter's theory,

"*Psychology of Place*," place is a product of physical attributes, conceptions, and human activities. The psychology of place. It can be said that identity plays an important role in forming national character and the bonds and characteristics that differentiate Indonesia from other countries.

Place identity theory is a concept that describes how humans interact with certain places.

Moreover, gives meaning and value to these places. Historical, cultural, environmental, and social activity factors can influence place identity, self-image, behaviour, and human well-being (Gieryn, 2000). Shao, in his journal, explains the classification of identity: (1) National Identity, which is used to show the characteristics/identity of the country; (2) Regional Identity/Regional Identity, which is used to show the characteristics/identity which is used to show the characteristics/identity of the city, and (4) Local Identity which is used to show the characteristics/identity of a district or region (Shao et al., 2017). In his book, Relph states that the formation of space is intangible, and explanations of space are always close to sense and the concept of place. Space in the context of place is understood as an area to show existence, so that it differentiates it from other places. If it is related to sense, the place must have an identity, called place identity (Relph, 1976). The context is Yogyakarta International Airport as a *regional identity* in the interior of the airport's public spaces, which is expected to provide an identity with local cultural

characteristics that form a *sense of place* where the airport is located.

According to Stuart Hall, representation characterises the existence and operation of culture within a society. According to him, representation is a crucial practice in producing culture, and culture comprises shared life experiences (Hall, 2007). As a tribute to the Yogyakarta International Airport (YIA) vicinity, the entrance gate is adorned with eleven relief works that recount narratives about the history, culture, and arts of the Javanese people, as well as the experiences of the five villages impacted by the situation.

From the semiotic standpoint of Charles Sanders Peirce, carved story reliefs may be regarded as reference signals. The interpretation of the sign and reference may also elicit particular notions from the interpreter. Furthermore, a correlation exists between the sign and its referent, comprising three distinct properties. The classification of the resulting sign—an icon, index, or symbol—is determined by the nature of this relationship (Hentihu et al., 2018).

Semiotics refers to the process of the representation being connected to the object. The process of interpretation follows the symbolisation procedure for the meaning of symbols. Furthermore, Pierce posits that the development of semiotics can be attributed to the interplay among symbols, objects, and interpreters. According to Cobley et al. (2002), during the postmodern architectural era, the Creator of the Interior Facade Gate of Yogyakarta International Airport encourages the public to comprehend the work using scientific indicators.

By integrating semiotics into a communication system, one would anticipate the emergence of a message that signifies the location's identity. Art: Comprehending significance via the aesthetic experience of a work as communicated through signs. Gadamer argues that the author-created text possesses historical significance, establishing a connection between comprehension, interpretation, and historical elements. The interpreter and the text are currently entangled in a hermeneutical state. His participation establishes a historical mode because humans are inextricably linked to their cultural environment (Poespoprodjo, 2004). The nature of human existence is intricately intertwined with historical actuality (Palmer, 2003). Thus, comprehension can be characterised as a momentous historical occurrence that unifies the interpreter and the text. Understanding is a mediation of language, not a reconstruction of meaning.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research methods are an important component in studying the issue of the potential impact of globalisation on local culture. The research method in the study of interior design and architecture at *Yogyakarta International Airport*, which carries the Javanese cultural philosophy of *Memayu Hayuning Bawana* in the concept of the spirit of the Jogja Renaissance, shows that its existence is to maintain cultural heritage from the potential loss of value due to the rapid influence of cultural globalisation in the era of modernisation, and experiencing

a transformation of cultural forms. Several components developed to determine the research methodology to be used are as follows.

This research paradigm uses a qualitative method with a case study approach regarding the existence of aesthetic elements of the entrance gate to the interior of Yogyakarta International Airport as a visual identity that is structured based on historical and socio-cultural narratives of the people. Qualitative research is an independent multidisciplinary field of inquiry related to cultural studies and has an interpretive nature through broad and in-depth exploration of data (Denzin et al., 2011).

Relph, in his theory, mentions tangible and intangible elements of physical identity. Identity consists of 3 (three) components that cannot be reduced to each other but are interconnected: characteristics that appear with physical appearance (1), observable activities (2), and function and meaning/symbol (3) (Relph, 1976). Through this explanation, cultural heritage in both forms (tangible and intangible) is considered the foundation of "community identity."

Primary data was obtained through field observations and interviews with curator art planner Bambang Toko and the General Manager of *Yogyakarta International Airport*. Mr Ruly Artha. Secondary data was taken from literature studies about the YIA airport, such as books, journals, scientific proceedings, professional seminars, and previous research related to airport theory and data. The results of the analysis are presented using formal and informal

methods, respectively. The results of the formal method are presented in sentence and paragraph form, while the informal method is presented in table form (Creswell et al., 2006).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The YIA Airport is located in Temon District, Kulonprogo Regency. It is located on the coast of the South Java Sea, with sandy soil contours. It was previously an area of rice fields and moorland. The geographical context and regional setting of the airport are visually presented in Figure 2, which provides an aerial view of the YIA site. On this airport's north and west sides are a formation of hills/mountains, namely the Menoreh Mountains to the west and Mount Orange to the north. This geographical location also shapes the livelihoods of its residents, as does the culture surrounding it. The majority of residents of Kulonprogo in Temon District, or to be precise, the 5 villages where the airport is located (Glagah village, Kebonrejo village, Palihan village, Sindutan village, and Jangkaran village), are fishermen and farmers.

Each village or region has a history and background that reflects certain characteristics. Village history is often contained in fairy tales or stories passed down from generation to generation, making it difficult to prove which is sometimes connected to myth. The history of this village is the background for the storytelling narrative at the gate elements, specifically in the departure area of *Yogyakarta International Airport*.

The entry and exit access gates discussed in this research are closely related to the village's history and its people's culture. They are identified based on Figure 1, a floor plan showing the departure zone, and are identified in Table 1. The identification and distribution of the entry and exit access gates across the departure floor plan are detailed in Figure 3 and further analysed in Table 1.

Bambang Toko (Al-Hakimi, 2020) states that the YIA Airport idea integrates Javanese and Yogyakarta traditions within Jogja's contemporary Renaissance art. As defined by the Big Indonesian Dictionary, the Renaissance refers to a time in European history from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century that marked a shift from the medieval to the modern era. This age was characterised by a resurgence of interest in classical literature, the birth of new forms of art and literature, and the rise of modern science. The Jogja Renaissance concept at YIA Airport is a cultural revolution that opposes the Jogja Gumregah movement. It aims to move away from the limitations of mythology and dogmatic confusion by elevating the culture to a higher level through cultural Gumregah.

### YIA Airport Gate Representation of Local Cultural Identity in Design

As a historical artefact, architecture in the form of an *entrance gate* has existed in Indonesia since the Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms. As artefacts, gate structures have taken on temporary, semi-permanent, and permanent forms. A *gate* is a structure that serves as the entrance or boundary to a given location.

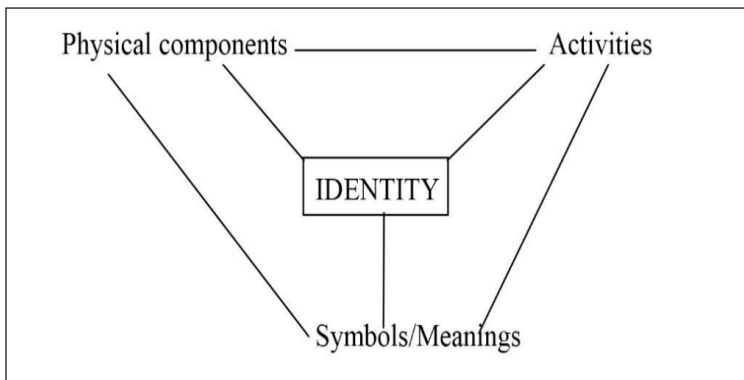


Figure 1. Research model place identity component chart (Relph, 1976)



Figure 2. Above view of the YIA airport location (Baskoro, 2016)

Table 1  
Identification of departure gates in the YIA airport based on Figure 3

Zone	Object	Location
Departure	Lawang Papat	Floor 1 Main Entrance
	Gumuk Pasir	Floor 1 Check in area
	Hastabarata Gate	Floor to SCP2
	Palihan Gate	Floor 2 Domestic Departure
	Sindutan Gate	Floor 2 Domestic Departure
	Jangkaran Gate	Floor 2 Domestic Departure
	Glagah Gate	Floor 2 International Departure
	Kebon Rejo	Floor 2 International Departure



Figure 3. Gate position at Yogyakarta International Airport

Therefore, the gate is frequently interpreted as a representation of a gateway to a region brimming with prosperity and a perpetually fruitful future, ensuring the success of its inhabitants. The gate may also be interpreted as a symbol of honour for visiting visitors. The gate is called *ghafara* in Arabic, which signifies covering or forgiving. The authorities have granted protection and security to individuals who pass through the gate. Philosophical significance is attributed to the gate within the context of Indonesian architecture. Josef Prijotomo posits that the gate has the potential to symbolise the Indonesian nation on the international architectural stage (Prijotomo, 2008).

Upon entering the departure zone, airport patrons will be received by a *plengkung*-shaped gate (*Plengkung Wijilan and Plengkung Gading*), an enduring symbol of Yogyakarta. In addition, *Plengkung* and *Baluwarti* serve as landmarks that direct travellers to *Kedaton*, the epicentre or locus of activity in Yogyakarta, and *Kuthagara*, the capital.

Identification 1 - Visual Text Basic Form of the Main Entrance Gate at YIA Airport Lawang Papat Gate, in Figure 4 and Table 2, shows the relationship between the shape of the mass of the gate and the *Kori Agung* Main Gate. The interpretation shows the connotative meaning of *Kori Agung*, the main gate entering YIA Airport, which is presented with a *kawung* motif whose shape is graded as a symbol of development and unity to achieve a comfortable life. On the section marked *Surya Sengkala* (marker of the Gregorian year), the year Yogyakarta International Airport (YIA) was inaugurated as a reminder of the momentum of the year number, which is considered historic and must be remembered by future generations. The four gates mean that you can enter the city of Yogyakarta through 4 directions, namely *Kulon Progo*, *Gunung Kidul*, *Bantul*, and *Sleman*.

Identification 2 - Visual Text Basic Form of the *Hastabrat Gate* Period *Hastabrata Gate*, in Table 3, is the mass shape of the access gate to the *security check-in point*.

The facade of the relief idea is depicted through the form of relief representation interpreted as a story character about the principles of Javanese leadership, which is full of Javanese philosophy. As illustrated in Figure 5, the representation of the Hastabrata Gate at the security check-in point visually reinforces these principles through symbolic reliefs. The word "Hastabrata" comes from the Hindu Sanskrit book *Manawa Dharma Sastra*, which means that royal leaders act according to the character of the gods they represent.

Into eight natural elements: earth, sun, sky, ocean, fire, wind, moon, and stars. According to Javanese (Hindu) cultural teachings, Astagina's teachings have colour symbolism like the Javanese cosmogony, namely "*Keblat papat Lima Pancer*". The colours are adjusted to the main cardinal directions, namely east, south, west, and north, producing the directions between the main winds: southeast, southwest, northwest, and northeast.

Identification 3.4 - Visual Text Basic Forms of the Gate Period *Palihan Gate*, *Sindutan Gate*, *Jangkaran Gate*, *Glagah Gate*, *Kebon Rejo Gate*. The fifth Gate Story Relief in Table 4 and Table 5 tells a narrative representing the affected village as a form of appreciation for establishing the YIA airport on the village land. Stories represent the visual identity of the three passed down from generation to generation, which indicates information about the culture of the village community. According to Setyawan, in his research, creating a representative visual identity design cannot be separated from

awareness of the importance of conveying information. Relating to the perception of image construction through traditional art based on physical and non-physical elements (Setyawan et al., 2021). As illustrated in Figure 6, the representations of *Palihan*, *Sindutan*, and *Jangkaran Gates* visually reinforce these cultural narratives, complementing the analysis in Table 4.

As in *Palihan Gate*, the artist in the narrative story of the relief is symbolised by two well-built young men holding coconuts, sitting leaning on the beach. Interpretation of the meaning. The connotation of the visual identity tells a message that indicates the determination initiated in the area based on the story passed down from generation to generation about the transition of Prince Diponegoro's troops who turned into ordinary people.

*Sindutan Gate* comes from the general terminology of *Sindu*, which means guarding humanity. However, in Sanskrit, '*Sindu upaka*' means water or river. *Sindutan*'s position is on the main road to other areas. The meaning of this connotation can be interpreted from the word visual identity, which indicates a connection between regions.

*Jangkaran Gate*, an analysis based on the relief facade of the story atmosphere of coastal communities, is narrated by the symbol of a ship's anchor. The interpretation of the visual meaning you want to build communicates that the ship's anchor signifies frequent interaction with guests from the other side. Moreover, usually from an interaction, it will continue to acculturation,

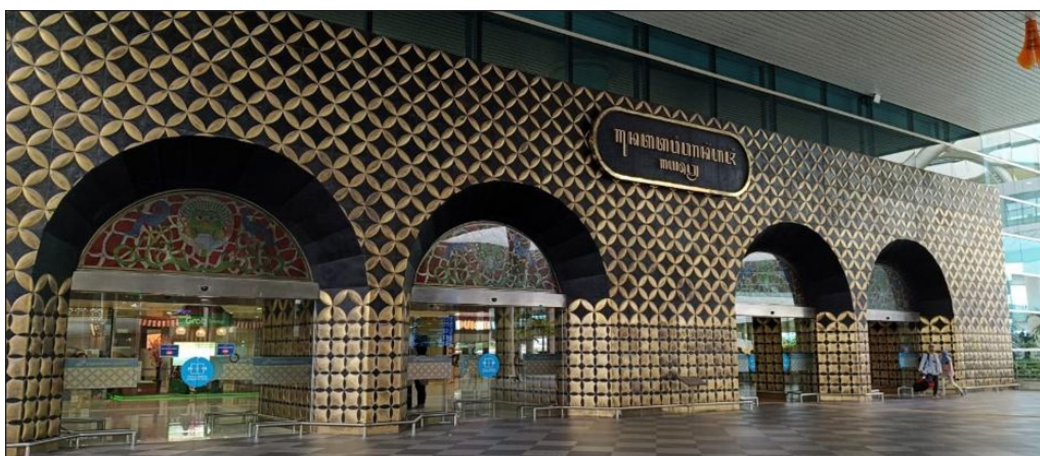


Figure 4. Representation: Lawang Papat (Permatasari et al., 2024)



Figure 5. Representation: Hastabrata gate security check-in point signs (Angkasa Pura Indonesia, unpublished internal report, 2024, used with permission)

Table 2  
Analysis of arrival curb gate signs

Visual Text	Icon	Index	Symbol	Interpretation
Lawang Papat Gate Mass Shape Access Door Gate	Gate	Gate Shape Ideas	Representation of the 4 cardinal symbols with a Kawung motif texture	Cosmological Symbol of 4 entrances to Yogyakarta, namely Kulon Progo, Gunung Kidul, Bantul, & Sleman

Table 3

*Analysis of the Hastabrata gate security check-in point signs based on Figure 5*

Visual Text	Icon	Index	Symbol	Interpretation
Hastabrata Gate Mass Shape Gate Access Gate	Gate Relief andesite	Gate Shape Idea	Symbolic Representation of Javanese Leadership Principles	Manawa Dharma Sastra Symbol: The royal leader acts according to the character of the gods represented by the eight elements of nature (earth, sun, sky, ocean, fire, wind, moon, and stars)

Table 4

*Analysis of domestic departure gate signs, 2nd floor, based on Figure 6*

Visual Text	Icon	Index	Symbol	Interpretation
Palihan Gate Mass Shape Gate Access Door	Gate	Gate Shape Ideas	Representation of symbols of coastal community life	Symbols in Sanskrit, Pali, or Pepali, which means advice or message. It is a sign that there is a determination that was initiated from that area.
Sindutan Gate Mass Shape Gate Access Door	Gate	Gate Shape Ideas	Representation of symbols of life in farming communities	In Sanskrit, there is the term 'Sindu upaka', which means water or river. Sindutan's position is on the main road to other areas. It can be interpreted that the meaning of the word visual identity indicates a link between regions.
Jangkalan Gate Mass Shape Gate Access Door	Gate	Gate Shape Ideas	Representation of symbols of coastal community life	Narrative stories passed down from generation to generation found ship anchors in this area. Markers of interaction with immigrants, cultural acculturation, and trading activities. Scientific and technological civilisation began in this region.

Table 5

*Analysis of the Sign of the Overseas Departure Gate, 2nd floor based on Figure 7*

Visual Text	Icon	Index	Symbol	Interpretation
Glagah Gate Mass Shape of Gate Access Door	Gate	Gate Shape Ideas	Representation of symbols of coastal community life	Analysis based on visual identity depicts sugar cane flowers waving in the wind. The connotative meaning is interpreted as the breeze felt in the Glagah beach area
Kebon Rejo Gate Mass Shape of Gate Access Door	Gate	Gate Shape Ideas	Representation of symbols of life in farming communities	Kebon means garden or field. Meanwhile, Rejo is a Javanese term that means prosperous. Interpretation of the meaning in the description of ijo royo-royo which signifies gemah ripah loh jinawi, the green fertility of plants, and the yellowness of the rice fields in the rice fields. The embodiment of a local food security centre depicted in Kebon Rejo

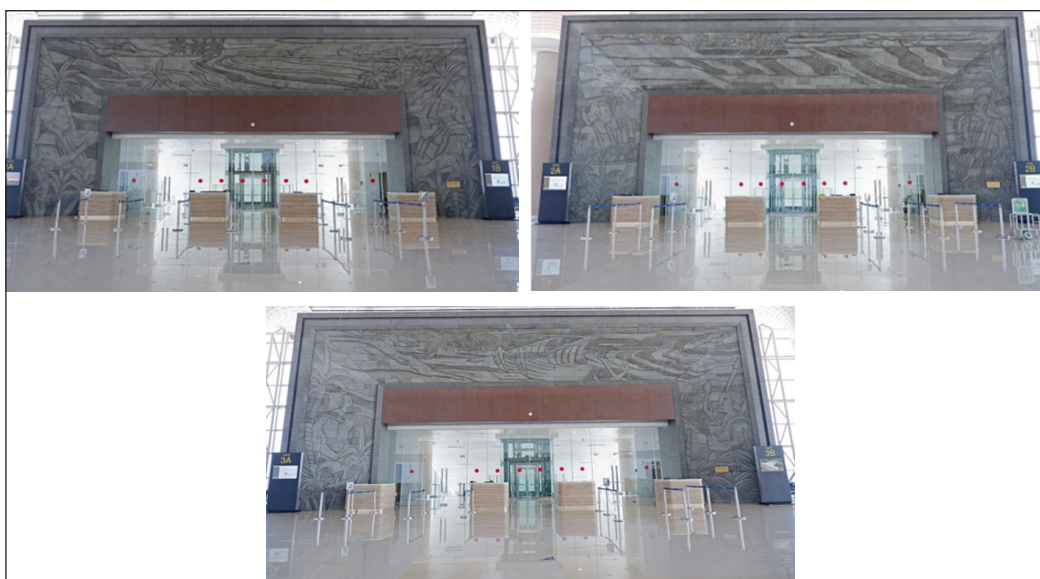


Figure 6. Representation: Palihan, Sindutan, and Jangkaran Gate (Angkasa Pura Indonesia, unpublished internal report, 2024, used with permission)

often done initially by sharing each other's stories, followed by exchanging souvenirs or bartering, and ending in transactional or commercial activities. Likely, some of the knowledge and technology for the region from there started from that place.

As shown in Figure 7, the *Glagah and Kebon Rejo Gates* visually depict the natural and agricultural heritage of the surrounding villages, complementing the symbolic meanings discussed in Table 5. *Glagah Gate*, analysis based on visual identity depicting sugar cane flowers waving in the wind. The connotative meaning is interpreted as the breeze felt in the Glagah beach area. There are also many dunes along the Glagah coast, and it is as if the sand had been blown and shaped by the wind, which formed rows of dunes. Several variants of the Pandan Ri (spiny pandan) plant on the

dunes grow abundantly. In everyday life, Glagah Beach is often used as a tourist destination and a place to have fun with friends and family.

*Kebon Rejo Gate*, Kebon, means garden or field. Meanwhile, Rejo is a Javanese term that means prosperous. Interpretation of the meaning in the description of *ijo royo-royo*, which signifies *gemah ripah loh jinawi*, the green fertility of plants, and yellowness of the rice fields in the rice fields. The embodiment of a local food security centre is depicted in *Kebon Rejo*.

According to Atmadi, the application of local wisdom elements can enrich the value of history and aesthetics and become a supporter of the growth of local cultural values, a creation of human works which is a cultural artefact of the results of human civilisation (Suroso Putro et al., 2019).



Figure 7. Representation: Glagah Gate and Kebon Rejo Gate (Angkasa Pura Indonesia, unpublished internal report, 2024, used with permission)

Based on the results of the analysis, the entrance gate, as a marker of territorial boundaries separating transitions between spaces with different functions in an airport public space, is an aesthetic element that can be used to represent local culture, which is rich in the historical and cultural values of the local people.

The eight gate entrances are elements of physical identity that are in the form of Gate entrances (1). The physical components are in the form of gate entrance facades in visual appearance, which are formed from andesite stone, which has various visual story themes based on the social story background of the regional communities represented. Identity (2). Intangible identity elements are related to the activities of space users. They are closely related to the function of space that differentiates one zone from another in the airport's public area. (3) Intangible identity elements related to the meaning of symbols presented through the appearance of visual objects at gate entrances have different interpretations according to the storytelling narrative of the art planner creator for each gate entrance.

However, overall, the explanation of cultural heritage through the object of study, each visual appearance of the presented gate entrance, both tangible and intangible physical identities, is the foundation for the identity of the community being represented. Symbolically, physical identity experiences development, adjustments and changes, but the meaning of the values of these symbols remains the same. Thus, from the user's activity perspective, from the perspective of space perception researchers, it is felt that the kawung motif presented at the main gate entrance is very strong in forming the identity character of the place where the airport in the Special Region of Yogyakarta is located. Likewise, other gate entrances show similarities in the reliefs found in temples in the area, which are adapted to developments in changes surrounding the socio-cultural history of the people, indicating the identity of the place where the airport is located.

## CONCLUSION

The work of art applied to the Entrance Gate as an aesthetic element with a representative

visual identity cannot be separated from awareness of the importance of conveying information. This is related to the perception of image construction using traditional art, local culture, and history based on physical and non-physical elements.

The Jogja Renaissance concept shows the potential of local culture to successfully arouse the emotions of airport visitors, both prospective passengers at departure and passengers who have just arrived. Thus, each visitor is given a special meaning regarding the identity of the airport's image.

Superior civilisations, in the past, have shown evidence of being able to uphold noble values as the priority of Jogjakarta's identity. Jogja Renaissance is a process of continuous rebirth without destroying *adi lung*, which becomes a vehicle for driving society towards increasing the value dimension, the search for truth values, the economic dimension related to use value, the aesthetic dimension to beauty, the social dimension to trust value, and the political dimension to value. Power, religious dimensions, cultural, and divine values.

As time passes, territorial features from an economic perspective increase. The study of physical and non-physical identity symbols influences the identification of the tendency to commodify cultural heritage elements, which are used as symbols of community identity in collective territories. Physical identity symbols experience development, adaptation, and change, but their meaning and values remain the same.

Through spoken narratives of local history and culture, the aesthetic elements

at the entrance gate at YIA Airport can take on a new transformation in the spirit of the Jogja Renaissance concept for today's cultural form without changing the essence of meaning as an immanent symbol of attraction for local cultural potential so that it is not lost, eroded by modernisation in the era of globalisation. So, Yogyakarta International Airport as a study object is expected to become a reference source for ideas for developing local cultural identity at other airports in Indonesia, where a sense of place can be felt, which has the character of a place identity where the airport is located.

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## **Tiang Seri Shapes: A Reflection of Status in Negeri Sembilan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the construction of the Malay Vernacular architecture, Tiang Seri plays a significant role in both the architectural and cultural aspects of the building. It is present in the design and construction of most Malay traditional houses, palaces, and mosques that were built in the period, including the Malay traditional houses in Negeri Sembilan. Nowadays, with the advances in technology and building materials, Tiang Seri is no longer used and is deemed a forgotten practice in the construction of residential houses. In addition, the existing traditional houses are facing extinction along with the Tiang Seri inside it. A study on an aspect of Tiang Seri is crucial for the conservation effort to document the Tiang Seri. This study aims to document the different shapes of Tiang Seri in traditional houses in Negeri Sembilan, analyse their correlation with the social status of house owners, and evaluate their cultural significance for heritage conservation. Qualitative research is employed with a literature review of related studies, a few case studies, and structured interviews to find the shapes of Tiang Seri in the Negeri Sembilan Malay traditional house. The result shows a variety of shapes of the Tiang Seri, which are Belah 4, Belah 6, Belah 8, and a combination of both Belah 4, and Tiang Bulat. Interestingly, the shapes are directly affected by the status of the owner, proving that it is essential to conduct further studies on Tiang Seri to prevent it from being lost to younger generations.

*Keywords:* Conservation, Malay traditional house, Negeri Sembilan, Tiang Seri

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Tiang Seri is an important component of a Malay traditional house. Culturally, the process of constructing the house must begin with the installation of the main pillar or Tiang Seri. In certain cultures, it is necessary to organise a ceremony during this process to make sure the construction

is blessed, and some even believe that the ritual will influence the spiritual harmony of the house. Beyond its ritual and structural significance, the *Tiang Seri* is a prominent decorative element, making it a potent symbol within the vernacular architecture. This intersection of structure, ritual, and decoration suggests it may also function as a marker of social identity. This concept is supported by Oktawati et al. (2024), who demonstrated that for the Mamasa tribe in Indonesia, social status directly influences the function, form, and decoration of their traditional houses. Similarly, in Negeri Sembilan, a shared cultural trait sees social status reflected in their architectural choices.

Negeri Sembilan is a state in West Malaysia that is known for its unique architecture and culture, which is distinct from its counterparts. This is due to the presence of the Minangkabau matrilineal system that stands out not only as a culture that has impressively strived until today but also has been implemented into the architectural designs of the house. As a result, the Negeri Sembilan traditional Malay house is constructed with careful consideration for the owner's body measurements, taking into account the first woman's role in the social system of *Adat Perpatih* (Azman et al., 2022).

In modern days, where technology and building materials evolve and advance, building construction no longer requires the presence of *Tiang Seri* in the building construction of residential houses. According to Professor Dr. Mohd Tajuddin Mohd Rasdi, even if one wanted to construct

a conventional home, it would be difficult to find a trained craftsman at a reasonable price, due to the reduction in the number of such workers, not to mention the sheer price of the materials needed (Tan, 2019). The only way to appreciate and study this historical house component is to visit the remaining structures that still feature it, as these components are no longer utilised in contemporary building practices. Unfortunately, these existing houses are facing the threat of extinction, in terms of being abandoned and decayed or going into major renovations, losing their ingenuity along the way (Rashid, et al., 2018). Thus, making it imperative to document and preserve their unique architectural elements before they are lost forever.

In addition, it needs to be highlighted that there is a lack of research on heritage home components, namely the *Tiang Seri* (Rashidi et al., 2022), which is a substantial loss of information. This discrepancy not only impacts our comprehension of conventional building construction techniques but also leads to the depletion of tangible cultural heritage. The *Tiang Seri* fulfils a vital role as both a fundamental structural component and a kind of artistic representation and social status symbol. It is crucial to rectify this research gap in order to safeguard the technical and cultural aspects of heritage buildings.

### **Aims and Objectives**

This study aims to investigate the role of traditional architectural elements, specifically the *Tiang Seri* shapes, in

reflecting social status within the traditional architecture of Negeri Sembilan. The research focusses on two primary objectives. Firstly, it seeks to document the various shapes of *Tiang Seri* found in traditional Malay houses throughout Negeri Sembilan. Secondly, the study aims to analyse the correlation between the shape of the *Tiang Seri* and the social status of the respective house owners, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of how architectural features reflect cultural hierarchies and identity in the context of Negeri Sembilan's heritage architecture.

## LITERATURE REVIEW / THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Tiang Seri and Culture

Tiang Seri goes by many names, as it was a construction practice not only in Malaysia but also in Indonesia (*Tiang Raja*), Java (*Soko Guru*) (Irnawan & Rahayu, 2020), Thailand (*Sao Prayaa*) (Shimizu et al., 2017) and Brunei (Azman et al., 2021). In Indonesia, *Tunggok Tuo* or *Tiang Tua* is used, while experts with decades of experience in woodworking and the locals stated that the widely used term by the people of Negeri Sembilan is *Tiang Tongah*, and was used as the main supporting pillar. In Malay beliefs, *Tiang Seri* symbolises the strength of the house (Abd Rashid & Amat, 2011). It comes in various shapes, as an example, in *Rumah Kutai*, the shape of *Tiang Seri* is either round, square or octagonal (Khairudin et al., 2018). Although the *Tiang Seri* has traditionally served as

the central structural element of a Malay house, there is a lack of research exploring its direct connection to the social status of the homeowners.

*Tiang Seri* in a Malay traditional house is usually found in the centre of the *Rumah Ibu* with cloth or *Bunga Halang* on the top of the pillar or crown (Abidin et al., 2024). This is said to be a practice to ward off unwanted spirits and protect the occupants. Figure 1 is an example of *Bunga Halang*, a piece of cloth that was put on top of the *Tiang Seri* during the construction of the house. The fabric is adorned with three, five, or seven colours, symbolising the individual's social standing. The variety of colour schemes is associated with different social classes in Malaysia. The common Malays typically have three colours, while the wealthy have five colours, and the royalty has seven colours (Abd Rashid & Amat, 2011).

Figure 1 showcases a remarkable illustration of fabric draped over the *Tiang Seri* or *Kepala Tiang*. In some traditional houses in Negeri Sembilan, a piece of cloth placed at the *Tiang Seri* is usually yellow, white, or red, placed on top of the *Tiang Seri* as a symbolic element.



Figure 1. The remaining piece of cloth found on top of *Tiang Seri*

This practice is believed to function as a spiritual protection and reflects the houseowner's adherence to customary beliefs (Halim, 1985; Mohd Taib, 1989). In the context of Adat Perpatih, such rituals are rooted in ancestral traditions and are considered a way to protect the 'spirit' of the house (Daud, 1991). Typically, the chosen colours for the fabric are yellow or white. On certain occasions, cloth was discovered with Quranic verses inscribed upon it.

The coin in Figure 2 was unearthed during a house demolition and was found buried beneath the Tiang Seri. It was then kept as a memento. The coins or any metal was put at the base of the Tiang Seri as another form of ritual during the erection of the main pillar, while according to a local expert, the reasonings behind the coin are more practical, where it is believed that the date or year inscribed on a coin could be connected to the year of construction of a house. The social status of a family can be inferred from the type and quantity of coins they use. Individuals from privileged backgrounds often opt for more intricate or sizable coins, which serve as a symbol of their affluence and further solidify their position in society.



Figure 2. An old coin that was discovered beneath an unearthed Tian Seri

This aspect connects the ceremonial use of coins to wider cultural beliefs about money and social status. These practices highlight the importance of Tiang Seri in Malay traditional houses as a marker of status.

### **Negeri Sembilan Malay Traditional House: Architecture and Culture**

Malay traditional houses, often referred to as Malay vernacular houses, exhibit distinctive architectural designs that blend aesthetic appeal with historical significance, featuring numerous concealed symbols for new generations to discover and interpret (Hashim et al., 2017). Historically, these house types are constructed in groups, creating a community that exists in a location referred to as a village or kampong – a term utilised in nations like Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Brunei (Samsudin et al., 2020). The houses located in the Malay regions of Malaysia and Indonesia exhibit a remarkable similarity in their diverse styles, often reflecting mutual influences between the two countries.

Negeri Sembilan Malay traditional house, while often being compared to Rumah Gadang, Indonesia, is a perfect assimilation of the culture brought by the people of Minangkabau that migrate to Tanah Melayu and the architectural design of the local buildings. The Malay traditional house in Negeri Sembilan is formed by combining the true Minangkabau matrilineal system with the local matrilineal system, creating a unique complementarity (Azman et al., 2022; Hardono, 2012).

According to research, Tiang Seri serves as a symbol of prestige, power, and social status (Kessler, 1988). Which is why during the Adat ceremony, Ibu Soko or an elder woman who is well-versed in custom will be seated by the Tiang Seri at the center of Rumah Ibu (Maamor et al., 2024). This is why it is crucial to preserve and appreciate the unique architectural elements found in Malay traditional houses in Negeri Sembilan, as they hold significant cultural value. By understanding and passing down these features, we can ensure that the community's cultural identity remains intact and unambiguous (Ismail et al., 2021).

**Theoretical Framework**

This study applies the framework of Oktawati et al. (2024), who established a typology of traditional architecture based on the social stratification of the Mamasai tribe.

Their findings demonstrate four distinct typologies that align with social divisions, differing not only in form, space, meaning, and decorative motifs but also in the quality of materials used. The caste divisions and the traditional house typology of each division are summarised and shown in Figure 3.

Based on the hierarchy, *Tana'bulawan*, or the high nobility, will have more space and access to better quality materials. Not only that, the carvings and decoration diminished as we go down the hierarchy. The buffalo horns found in the commoners' houses are a sign of independence and economic capability. While the *Tana'kua-kua* or the slaves are dependent on their masters for livelihood. The lower the status, the less elaborate the house, with designs adhering to a basic, utilitarian approach. A theoretical framework is developed based on this theory, as shown in Figure 4.

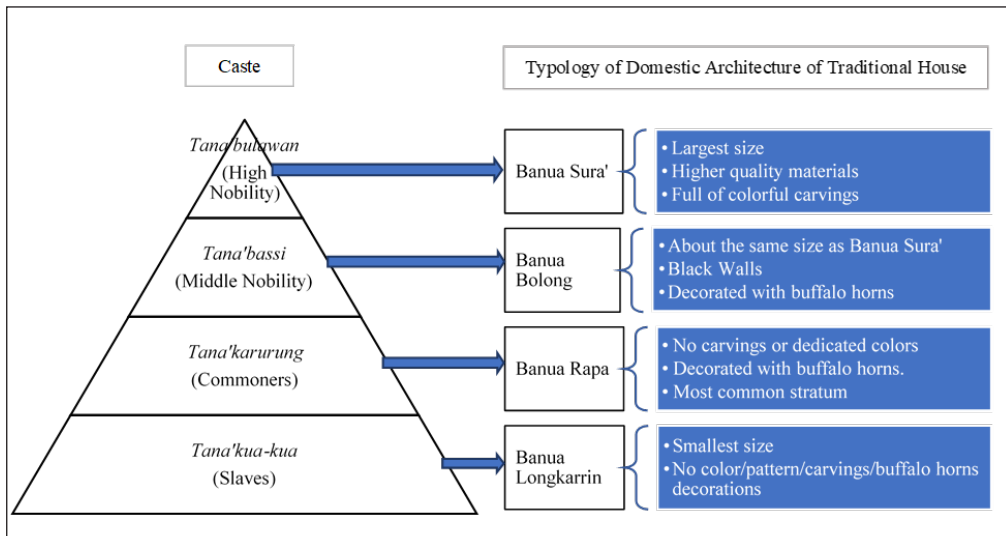


Figure 3. Caste divisions and their typology of domestic architecture of a traditional house

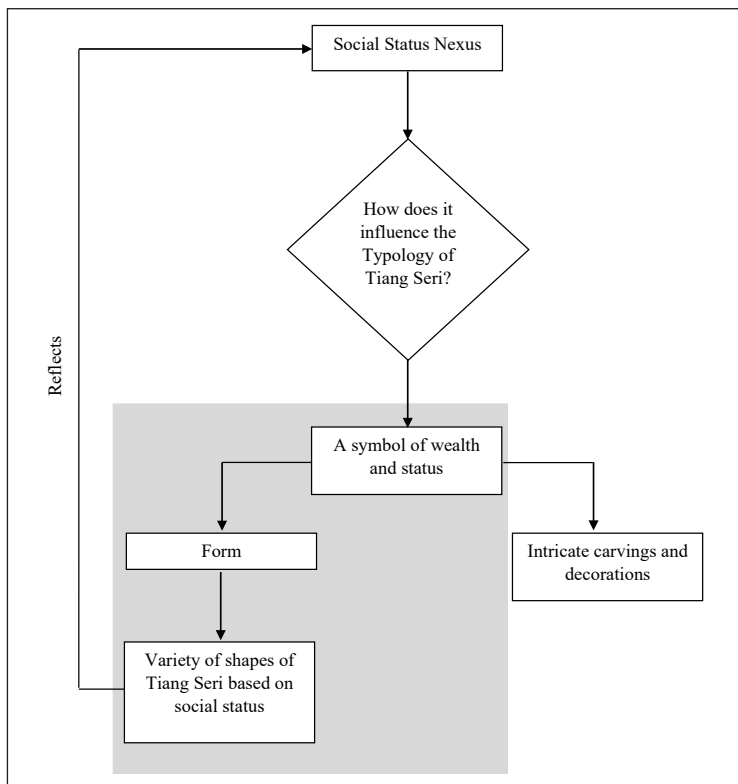


Figure 4. The study's theoretical framework

This study is guided by a theoretical framework based on the model established by Oktawati et al. (2024). Their framework posits that social stratification is the primary driver of traditional architectural variety. This framework is adopted for the present research because it provides a structured lens to analyse Tiang Seri shapes as a marker of social status in Negeri Sembilan.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The study utilised a qualitative method, focusing on a case study approach of 14 Malay traditional houses in Rembau,

Negeri Sembilan. Thus, to gather insights, questionnaires were administered to the 14 owners or representatives, 2 experienced *Tukang Rumah*, and 1 expert respondent who has been involved in traditional house building for many years. Data was also collected through direct observation and photographic documentation.

The case studies started with choosing Malay traditional houses that fit the criteria of a heritage house. The selection was done based on either their architectural or historical value (Kamal & Wahab, 2014). If the building fulfils either of these requirements, it is eligible as a heritage building.

This is essential to capture the cultural, architectural, and technological heritage of past eras. Such structures offer invaluable insights into historical craftsmanship, design principles, and construction techniques, reflecting the sociocultural contexts of their time. Analyzing these houses aids in understanding the evolution of architectural practices and informs contemporary preservation and restoration efforts. This approach ensures the protection and appreciation of significant historical resources, providing a comprehensive basis for heritage conservation and urban planning policies.

The questionnaire will take place during the case study with the help of homeowners and, for some houses, only the representatives. The questionnaire will be carried out with brief questions regarding the age of the house and the historical status of the original owners. This will help later in determining the relation between the status of the owner and the shape of Tiang Seri. Then, the results of the questionnaires and case studies will be presented to the experienced *Tukang Rumah* and expert respondents. Another series of questionnaires was then administered to them to better understand the outcome of the case studies.

### Case Study Context

The scope of this study is limited to the district of Rembau, which was selected as the case study site due to its suitability in preserving the originality and authenticity of data. According to Abd Rahim et al. (2023),

Rembau is among the earliest districts established in Negeri Sembilan, with historical records suggesting the migration to Rembau began as early as 1388 while others say in 1338 (Omar & Nelmawarni, 2008). However, another researcher concludes that it began even earlier in the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Abas, 1953). In addition to its historical significance, Rembau is also known for retaining traditional Minangkabau cultural practices and housing some of the most authentic examples of Negeri Sembilan's vernacular architecture, making it a highly relevant and valuable site for this research.

Table 1 shows a list of Negeri Sembilan Malay traditional houses that have been categorised according to the status of their previous original owner. The Malay traditional houses exhibit architectural characteristics akin to those found in other traditional Malay structures across the western region of Peninsular Malaysia. However, they present subtle variations, particularly in the roof design, where the influence of Minangkabau architecture is distinctly observable (Awaludin et al., 2021). Although the exteriors may appear alike, the interiors reveal distinct variations influenced by the owner's social or economic status.

Negeri Sembilan is a state full of customs and etiquette; therefore, before the case study was carried out, it was necessary to get permission from the ADUN office. This also aims to aid the process, as the contact information of each MPKK was provided to the researcher by the office. MPKK acts as *ketua Kampung*, which is

Table 1  
*Negeri Sembilan Malay traditional houses categorised according to ownership status*

Status	Commoner	Wealthy	Noble
NSMTH			

*Note.* NSMTH: Negeri Sembilan Malay traditional house

why it was compulsory to communicate with them before reaching out to the owner or heiress themselves. Each homeowner was personally contacted by the MPKK to inform them of the study and whether it is possible to give their permission to enter the premises. Some MPKK have gone above and beyond to lead the researchers to the houses themselves.

Collecting data from houses of more than 100 years old comes with challenges, as not all of them are well taken care of. Some of the houses were in decline as they are no longer inhabited, while some houses are decayed, in ruins, abandoned, and no longer maintained. This leads to the number of case studies being reduced from the originally anticipated.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from the case study on the physical form or shapes of Tiang Seri in traditional houses and the social status of their owners. The data is summarised with the distribution of Tiang Seri shapes observed, followed

by an analysis of their correlation with the owners' social status. Insights gathered from questionnaires administered to homeowners provide a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and practical significance of these architectural elements. The Tiang Seri found during the case study proved to be distinct and unique in their own way. In Table 2, case study details of the heritage houses chosen are listed, including the status of the original owner, Mukim, and the address of each house. Although the list should only contain houses in Rembau, one case in Kuala Pilah was added as it is a rare surviving example of Tiang Seri in Negeri Sembilan that could not be ignored. Although from a different district, it still met the age requirement of being over a 100-year-old house, consistent with the criteria set for this study.

Based on the case study done, the shapes found are square, hexagonal, octagonal, and a combination of cylindrical and square-shaped bases and tops. These terms are then changed to match the settings of the research according to the community involved.

The square-shaped pillar is Belah 4, the hexagonal is Belah 6, and the octagonal is Belah 8, while the combination of the cylindrical and square-shaped pillar is Tiang Bulat and Belah 4. The number in the names represents the sides each pillar has. The cross-section of the pillars is represented in Figure 5.

Presented in Table 2 are the houses chosen for the case study. It includes comprehensive information gathered through careful

observation and questionnaires administered to the owners and representatives of each house. The paper offers valuable insights into the historical context of the original owners and the unique architectural features of each house. It also includes images and descriptions of the position of the Tiang Seri, showcasing their distinct shapes and defining characteristics. From Table 3, it is apparent that despite the typology of the house, the Tiang Seri remains at the centre of Rumah Ibu.

Table 2  
Case study details

House Code	Status of Owner	Mukim	Address
NSMTH-1	Commoner	Gadong	Kampung Gadong
NSMTH-2	Commoner	Gadong	Kampung Seberang Batu Hampar
NSMTH-3	Noble	Gadong	Kampung Seberang Paya, Gadong
NSMTH-4	Wealthy	Chengkau	Kampung Lada, Chengkau
NSMTH-5	Commoner	Bongek	Batu 20, Kampung Bongek, Rembau
NSMTH-6	Wealthy	Seberang Batu Hampar	Kampung Seberang Batu Hampar
NSMTH-7	Wealthy	Penajis	Kampung Ampang, Penajis
NSMTH-8	Wealthy	Selemak	Kampung Selemak
NSMTH-9	Wealthy	Selemak	Kampung Selemak
NSMTH-10	Commoner	Sepri	Kampung Ampang Batu, Sepri
NSMTH-11	Commoner	Nerasau	Kampung Nerasau
NSMTH-12	Wealthy	Nerasau	Kampung Nerasau
NSMTH-13	Wealthy	Kuala Pilah	Kampung Talang Tengah, Tanjung Ipoh
NSMTH-14	Wealthy	Nerasau	Kampung Nerasau

Note. NSMTH : Negeri Sembilan Malay Traditional House

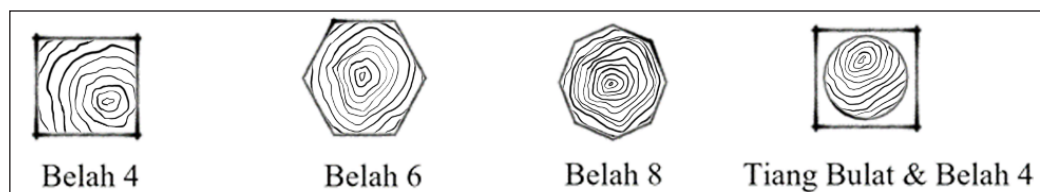


Figure 5. Shapes of Tiang Seri found in the Negeri Sembilan Malay traditional house

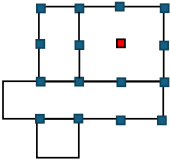



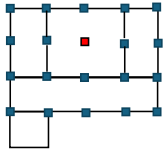



Table 3  
*Tiang Seri details collected during the case study*

House Code	Typology of House	Picture	Close-up Details	Shape of Tiang Seri
NSMTH-1				 Belah 4
NSMTH-2				 Belah 4
NSMTH-3				 Belah 4
NSMTH-4				 Tiang Bulat & Belah 4
NSMTH-5				 Belah 4
NSMTH-6				 Belah 4

Table 3 (continued)

House Code	Typology of House	Picture	Close-up Details	Shape of Tiang Seri
NSMTH-7				 Belah 4
NSMTH-8				 Belah 4
NSMTH-9				 Belah 4
NSMTH-10				 Belah 4
NSMTH-11				 Belah 4
NSMTH-12				 Belah 8

Table 3 (continued)

House Code	Typology of House	Picture	Close-up Details	Shape of Tiang Seri
NSMTH-13				 Belah 6
NSMTH-14				 Belah 4

Note. NSMTH: Negeri Sembilan Malay traditional house

The chart in Figure 6 shows that a majority of the studied Tiang Seri have the Belah 4 shape, which is significantly higher at 78% of the total amount compared to other shapes identified in the case study. This predominance can be attributed to the cost-effectiveness and relative ease of construction associated with the Belah 4 design. Although not part of the formal data collection, additional insights were gathered through casual discussions with several homeowners, which clarifies that the Tiang Seri with the Belah 8 shape is rare, as it is typically affordable only by individuals of high social status. This statement was also supported by experts in related fields. Similarly, the Belah 6 shape and the combination of Tiang Seri Belah Bulat and Belah 4 are also less common and are generally found in houses owned by affluent individuals.

This pattern underscores the correlation between the architectural features of Tiang Seri and the socioeconomic status of the owners, highlighting the role of traditional house components as markers of social distinction.

Figure 7 illustrates that the Tiang Seri Belah 4 is a prevalent shape across all social statuses within the studied Malay traditional houses. This consistency suggests that the Tiang Seri Belah 4 is favoured for its practicality and economic efficiency. However, the study reveals a notable distinction in the variety and complexity of Tiang Seri shapes among wealthier individuals compared to those of lower social statuses.

Wealthier homeowners exhibit a greater diversity of Tiang Seri shapes, including more complex designs such as Belah 6, Belah 8, and combinations like

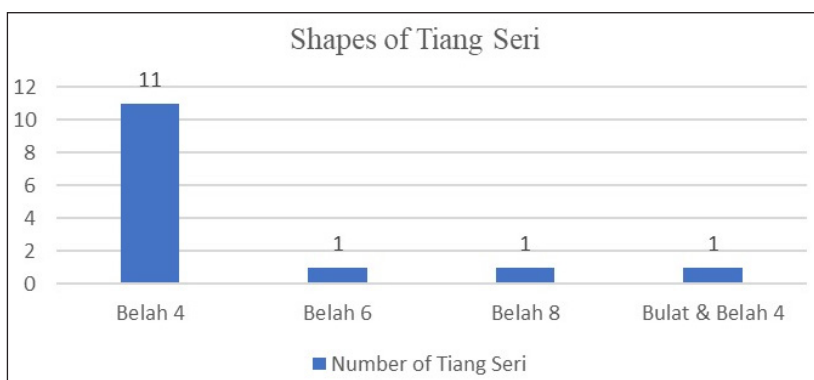


Figure 6. Number of Tiang Seri and their respective shapes

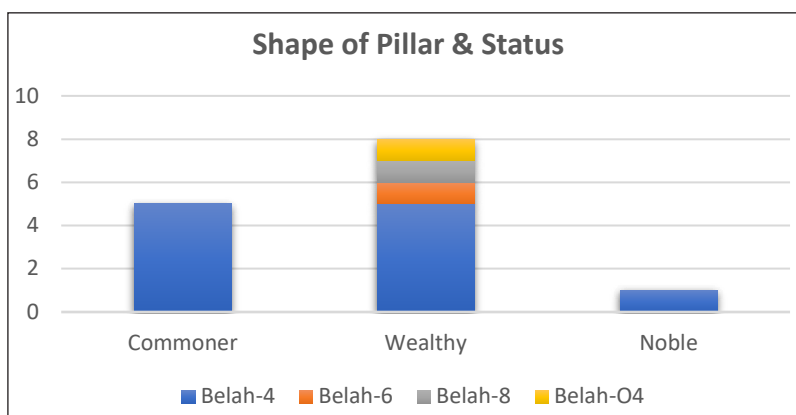


Figure 7. The shape of Tiang Seri and the status of its respective owner

Tiang Seri Belah Bulat and Belah 4. This variety indicates that higher social status is associated with the ability to invest in more elaborate architectural elements, reflecting both economic capability and a desire to display social prestige.

These findings confirm that the Tiang Seri represents the social status of its owner. This provides a concrete architectural case study for Oktawati et al.'s (2024) broader theory of social stratification. Commoners in the case study used only the basic Tiang Belah 4, a shape considered practical and

economical, with minimal to no carvings, which demonstrates their position at the margins of the social status nexus. Although nobles and some wealthy owners in the sample also used the Tiang Belah 4, they distinguished their status through starkly more intricate carvings. This elaboration allowed them to express their status and cultural heritage through architectural detail. While the deeper nuances of the social status are undoubtedly expressed in such motifs, and are a rich topic for future study, the fundamental access to variation in form

itself remains a primary indicator of social status. The restriction of commoners to a single, simple shape visually reinforces their standardised position, whereas the variety of forms is a clear architectural manifestation of their distinct and elevated rank. Figure 8 shows examples of woodcarvings found in a noble house, where each side is unique and beautifully crafted.

Although the sample size in this study is relatively small compared to the total number of Malay traditional houses in Negeri Sembilan, it represents a significant starting point and catalyses further heritage research. This initial examination of Malay traditional house components lays out the groundwork for more comprehensive future studies. It could explore the cultural significance of different Tiang Seri shapes and carvings, their historical evolution, and their impact on the social dynamics within traditional communities, which is why efforts must recognise and preserve not just

the elite architecture, but the entire spectrum of building traditions to fully document a community's social history. Additionally, examining the techniques and craftsmanship involved in creating these intricate wood carvings could provide deeper insights into the preservation of traditional architectural skills and knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

The study was able to uncover the shapes of Tiang Seri found in Negeri Sembilan and aimed to contribute to the study of heritage building data conservation. The finding revealed the shape of Tiang Seri in the Negeri Sembilan Malay traditional house to be Belah 4, Belah 6, Belah 8, and a combination of Belah Bulat and Belah 4. Most of the Tiang Seri found are square or Belah 4, while other shapes make up a small portion of the total. The dominance of Tiang Seri Belah 4 suggests that economic and



Figure 8. Unique and elaborate woodcarvings on a Tiang Seri found in a noble house

practical considerations heavily influenced its popularity. The less frequent occurrence of Tiang Seri Belah 8 and other intricate designs indicates that these shapes are symbols of a higher social status. This pattern reinforces the hypothesis that Malay traditional house components like Tiang Seri are markers of social distinction, as Tiang Seri, which is unique, requires higher skills to make. In addition, each Tiang Seri is unique and requires a high degree of skills and a deep understanding of local customs to make. During the case study, it is important to address that certain access restrictions due to safety reasons and a lack of owner permission resulted in the exclusion of some selected heritage houses, which limited the range of data collected for this research. Further research on tangible cultural heritage is always needed and should consider investigating other aspects of Tiang Seri, like its wood carvings and materials, before they also succumb to extinction.

### **Limitations of the Study and Future Research**

This study provides a typological and cultural analysis of Tiang Seri shapes in Negeri Sembilan Malay traditional houses, revealing their role as architectural markers of social status and contributing to the broader understanding of symbolic expression in traditional design. Unfortunately, certain limits must be addressed. The first one is that the study is limited to a certain district in Negeri Sembilan. There are currently more than 500 Negeri Sembilan heritage houses

that have been recorded. However, with time and labour constraints, the focus has been directed to the houses in Rembau, and one special case in Kuala Pilah.

Secondly, the researchers acknowledge that the distribution of case studies was unbalanced as a result of data availability limitations. There are many difficulties in conducting a study with heritage homes that are more than a century old. Because of their age, fragility, or private ownership, these structures frequently have limited access. Because formal authorisation was required to reach some regions, local authority figures were unable to help in multiple cases. Furthermore, some proprietors no longer live on the land, which makes it challenging to get permission or gain access. The extent of direct observation and documentation was further limited by the fact that certain structures were in an unsafe or unstable conditions to be visited. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the chosen case studies were picked with care to offer significant insights into the research issue based on accessibility, relevance, and availability.

Despite the limitations identified in this study, it is highly recommended that subsequent research investigates the underexplored facets of Malay traditional architecture, especially the Tiang Seri and other emblematic structural components. These components, frequently disregarded, carry profound cultural, spiritual, and social significances essential for comprehending the worldview and values of traditional Malay culture. By investigating these neglected or insufficiently documented

pieces, researchers can aid in the preservation of intangible legacy and the perpetuation of information transmitted throughout generations. These initiatives are essential for enhancing scholarly discussion on vernacular architecture and for preserving the cultural identity and knowledge left by our ancestors.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## **The Shadow Plays of Kelantan, Malaysia and Daoqing, Huan County of China: A Comparative Study of Artistic Functions**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Kelantan shadow puppetry represents a quintessential form of Malaysian traditional theatre, while the Daoqing shadow puppetry of Huan County exemplifies China's commitment to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. This study employs an ethnomusicological framework, integrating literature review, case studies, interviews, and participant observation to examine and compare the two traditions in terms of musical structure, puppet design, performance style, narrative content, and accompanying instruments. By exploring their artistic and cultural dimensions, this research highlights both shared features and distinctive characteristics. The findings aim to contribute to global comparative studies of shadow puppetry and foster deeper intercultural dialogue, thereby promoting the preservation and sustainable development of these performing arts.

*Keywords:* Huan county Daoqing shadow play, musical forms, performance forms, wayang kulit Kelantan

### **INTRODUCTION**

Shadow puppetry is an ancient folk tradition that serves both as artistic expression and cultural archive, enriching the spiritual life of communities while preserving historical memory. Through its evolution across centuries, it reflects the distinctive cultural identity and socio-historical structures of the societies in which it thrives.

Primarily an auditory art, shadow puppetry constructs its unique musical identity through rhythm, melody, and performance conventions. Storytelling in shadow theatre incorporates mythology, folklore, and contemporary narratives, delivered through stylised musical

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accompaniment to enhance audience engagement. Simultaneously, it is a visual art, with its puppets' design, colour schemes, and gestures contributing to aesthetic and symbolic depth. The interplay of light and shadow, often enhanced by vibrant puppet designs, produces a mysterious and captivating atmosphere that evokes a profound sensory and emotional response.

At a micro level, Kelantan and Huan County shadow puppetry manifest divergent characteristics shaped by their respective histories, belief systems, and socio-cultural contexts. Their musical and theatrical practices reflect both ritualistic and performative functions. At a macro level, both forms are integral expressions of the intangible heritage of their respective communities, symbolising shared values, beliefs, and artistic visions. Despite their geographic and cultural distinctions, they collectively affirm the human capacity for storytelling, artistic innovation, and cultural continuity.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach, incorporating literature review, fieldwork, organological analysis, and musicological examination. Ethnographic research was conducted in Kelantan and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, as well as in Gansu Province, China.

In Malaysia, participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their expertise and experience. These included shadow play performers, puppet craftsmen,

educators, and government cultural officers: Tok Dalang Pak Cu (a prominent Malaysian performer of Chinese descent), Tok Dalang Pak Nasir (a renowned *dalang* and educator at ASWARA), Tok Dalang Pak Dain (former Deputy Chief Assistant Director of the Kelantan Education Technology Division), Tok Dalang Che Kal (a leading young *dalang*), Tok Dalang Che Ann (a notable puppet maker), and Dr. Fara (a shadow play scholar from Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris).

Chinese respondents included Jing Dengkun (fifth-generation inheritor of the Jing family troupe), Jing Dengqi (a provincial-level inheritor), Wei Zongfu (representing the Wei family troupe), Zhang Zhiwen (a municipal-level inheritor skilled in puppet making), and Xu Mingtang (another municipal-level practitioner of Daoqing shadow puppetry). Fieldwork included participant observation in puppet crafting workshops and local community events. Both primary and secondary data were gathered through interviews, audio and video recordings, photographs, and other observational methods.

Data were analysed inductively using a typological approach. Key themes aligned with the study's objectives—such as musical structure, puppet design, performance form and content, and accompanying instruments—were identified and used to organise the comparative discussion. Each theme was treated as a main heading, with corresponding features of the Kelantan and Daoqing traditions discussed in parallel sub-sections.

## RESULTS

### The Art of Auditory Perception

#### *Forms of Music*

##### ***The Music Form of Wayang Kulit Kelantan.***

The music of Wayang Kulit Kelantan is rooted in the folk traditions of northern Peninsular Malaysia. Although it has incorporated diverse cultural influences over time, it has developed a distinct musical identity. According to Yousof (1998), its musical tradition has evolved into a unique form despite assimilating elements from various cultures. Nasuruddin (1992) notes that it employs pentatonic, hexatonic, heptatonic, and nonatonic scales. Its melodic contours—featuring semitones and microtones—resemble those of Persian-Arabic music, yet it retains a singular Malaysian character.

The musical structure centres around the musical form created by the *tetawak* (gong), which is expanded or halved in binary fashion and repeated in cycles, forming a structure known as *gongan* (Matusky, 1997). The *serunai* (a quadruple reed aerophone) plays melodies that are narrow in range and often repetitive. Music plays a vital role in defining performance structure, cueing puppet movements, delineating characters, and signaling transitions and emotional shifts. For instance, the tune *Hulubalang* accompanies scenes of warriors marching; *Perang* is used for the graceful movement of noble characters, while *Berjalanis* used for the graceful movement of noble characters.

Dalang Pak Dain attributes the formalisation of rhythm and tempo to Tok Dalang Saman and Tok Dalang Yaakub, who composed 30 foundational pieces for

Wayang Kulit Kelantan. These pieces are thematically linked to narrative episodes and remain in use today.

##### ***The Music Form of Huan County Daoqing Shadow Play.***

The musical system of Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry employs traditional Chinese modal frameworks, primarily categorised into two tonal systems: *Huayin* and *Shangyin*. *Huayin* is associated with joyful and lively moods, while *Shangyin* conveys sadness and solemnity. The musical rhythm is organised into *banshi* (metres), including *Huayin adagio*, *Shangyin adagio*, *Huayin allegro*, and *Shangyin allegro* (The Editorial Committee, 2006). During performances, the music shifts fluidly among *banshi* types, depending on character roles and plot developments.

The musical texture includes three components: vocal style, instrumental accompaniment, and *Mahuang* (a call-and-response style derived from traditional labour chants and unique to northern Chinese folk opera traditions) (Zhao, 1997). The vocal style is non-metric and monophonic, characterised by irregular tempo and unmeasured phrasing (Qiang & Zhang, 2019). In contrast, the instrumental accompaniment follows Western-style conventions of pitch, duration, and rhythm and is typically played during preludes, transitions, interludes, and finales. *Mahuang* is the most distinctive element, known for its lyrical melodies, wide intervallic leaps, and standardised rhythmic patterns. It is the only segment where vocals and orchestra are performed simultaneously.

## Accompaniment Instruments

### *Wayang Kulit Kelantan*

The musical ensemble is a fundamental element of Wayang Kulit Kelantan performances. Following the Hornbostel-Sachs classification system, the full ensemble includes:

- Aerophones: *Serunai*
- Membranophones: *Gedumbak*, *Geduk*, *Gendang*
- Idiophones: *Tetawak*, *Canang*, *Kesi*

### Serunai

The *serunai* (Figure. 1) is a quadruple-reed aerophone available in two sizes—48 cm and 35 cm in length. It has a loud, bright, slightly husky tone and is made from conical wooden tubing with reeds fashioned from the *lontar* tree. Its eight finger holes (seven front, one rear) allow pitch modulation. Key performance techniques include circular breathing, vibrato, and glissando.



Figure 1. Serunai

### Gedumbak

This hourglass-shaped single-headed drum (Figure. 2) comes in two sizes: *ibu* (mother) and *anak* (child), with the former being about 45 cm in length. Played horizontally on the lap, it produces various tones depending on whether the open end is covered by the player's palm.



Figure 2. Gedumbak

### Geduk

A barrel-shaped, double-headed drum, the *geduk* (Figure. 3) consists of *ibu* and *anak* drums. Covered with cowhide, it is played vertically using sticks, producing sound through membrane vibration.

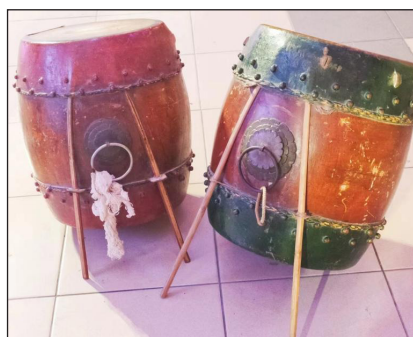


Figure 3. Geduk

### Gendang

This long, asymmetrical double-headed drum (Figure. 4) features a golden-ratio waist and is played horizontally across the lap. It has different-sized heads, allowing for adjustable timbre and tonal variation. It, too, comes in *ibu* and *anak* sizes.



Figure 4. Gendang Ibu (left) and Gendang Anak

### Tetawak

Also known as a hanging gong, the *tetawak* (Figure. 5) comprises two deep bronze or brass gongs (*ibu* and *anak*), typically 40-60 cm in diameter. Sound is produced by striking the raised central knob (*busut*) with a padded mallet.



Figure 5. Tetawak

### Canang

*Canang* (Figure. 6) refers to a pair of small gongs with diameters between 15 and 20 cm. Suspended in a wooden frame; they are played by striking their central bosses with padded mallets.



Figure 6. Canang

### Kesi

*Kesi* (Figure. 7) are small cymbals (approx. 10 cm in diameter) arranged in two pairs. One pair is fixed onto a wooden block, and the other is handheld. The performer strikes them together to produce bright, metallic sounds.



Figure 7. Kesi

### **Huan County Daoqing Shadow Play**

The Daoqing orchestra includes a diverse mix of idiophones, aerophones, chordophones, and membranophones. Key instruments unique to this tradition include:

- Aerophones: *Dizi*, *Suona*, *Dina*
- Membranophones: *Yugu*, *Gangu*, *Dagu*
- Chordophones: *Sixian*, *Erhu*
- Idiophones: *Jianban*, *Shuaibang*, *Xiaoluo*, *Naobo*, *Tamtam*

### **Dizi**

The *dizi* (Figure. 8) is a 65 cm bamboo transverse flute crafted by performers themselves. It has six finger holes spaced evenly, but due to its construction, the fourth and seventh scale degrees deviate slightly in pitch. The instrument is tuned to C major and serves as the tonal reference in the ensemble.



Figure 8. Dizi

### **Sixian**

The *sixian* (Figure. 9) is a handmade bowed string instrument. It includes four silk or gut strings and uses horsehair bows manipulated between the fingers using iron rings. The instrument produces a bright and rich timbre, with techniques including vibrato, glissando, and tremolo. It has a playable range from  $g$  to  $a^1$ .



Figure 9. Sixian

### **Yugu**

Constructed from bamboo or PVC pipe (in modern versions), the *yugu* (Figure. 10) is a single-headed cylindrical drum covered with goatskin or plastic. Placed on the performer's arm, it is lightly tapped with the fingers to produce indefinite pitches.



Figure 10. Yugu

### Jianban

This rhythmic idiophone (Figure. 11) comprises two long bamboo strips (75 cm x 3 cm). Sound is created by pressing and releasing the upper strip against the lower, producing crisp, overtone-free clicks.



Figure 11. Jianban

### Shuaibang

A compound instrument made of a rectangular wooden box (*bangzi*) and a pair of small brass bells (*pengling*) (Figure. 12). The box is struck with a stick to produce a resonant sound, while the bells create high-pitched, delicate tones when clashed together.



Figure 12. Shuaibang

## The Art of Visual Perception

### Types of Puppets

**Wayang Kulit Kelantan.** Dalang Che Ann has created a complete set of over 100 puppets for Wayang Kulit Kelantan, primarily depicting characters from the *Ramayana*, along with supplementary figures such as monsters, animals, palaces, landscapes, and weaponry. Puppet sizes range from 16 cm to over 60 cm in height and are crafted from treated cowhide or goatskin. Once the leather is cleaned, dried, and shaped, the puppets are drawn, carved, painted, and fitted with bamboo sticks for manipulation.

Kelantanese shadow puppets typically have only one jointed movable arm; the

rest of the body is static. However, comic characters are often equipped with both movable arms and mouths. The designs reflect a blend of Indian, Thai, and Malay aesthetics. Characters such as Seri Rama, Laksamana, and Maharaja exhibit Thai influences in their costumes, headgear, and curved fingernails, while distinctive Malay elements are also evident. This cultural hybridity makes the puppets unique artistic objects (Yusof, 1992). During performances, puppets engage in a range of stylised movements such as walking, flying, and fighting, orchestrated by the *dalang*.

***Daoqing Shadow Play.*** According to puppet-maker Zhang Zhiwen, Huan County Daoqing shadow puppets are divided into three categories: human characters, animals, and scenery (Figure. 13). A unique feature of this tradition is the modular construction of puppets—*toushao* (heads) and *zhuangzhuang* (bodies) are crafted separately. *Toushao* are made based on traditional Chinese opera roles: *sheng* (male), *dan* (female), *jing* (painted face), and *chou* (clown). Variations in age, gender, and personality are reflected in the design. The *zhuangzhuang* are gender-specific and produced in sets with varied colours.

Performers can switch *toushao* to change characters quickly during performances. A typical troupe possesses over 500 *toushao* and 100 *zhuangzhuang* to support diverse roles and stories.

The puppets are made from cowhide, which is soaked, cleaned, and repeatedly dried before carving. Natural pigments derived from plants are used for colouring,



Figure 13. God of Wealth Liuhai (one of the Puppets of the Huan County Daoqing)

mixed with hide glue to improve adhesion. The finished puppets are ironed flat for structural integrity. Each puppet consists of 11 articulated parts, allowing for intricate gestures and lifelike movement.

Manipulation techniques form the artistic core of Daoqing puppetry. Bamboo rods are affixed to the puppet's chest and wrists. The puppeteer employs techniques such as:

- Gripping - firmly holding control rods for strong movements
- Pinching - delicate fingertip manipulation for precise control
- Clamping - using multiple fingers to manage several rods simultaneously
- Lifting - rapid vertical motion to simulate jumping or rising

- Twirling - rotating the rods between fingers to animate trembling or suspense
- Swinging - creating rhythmic side-to-side movements
- Shaking - inducing vibrations to convey emotion or tension

These techniques enable the puppets to walk, sit, kneel, kick, tumble, and perform expressive hand and arm movements.

### ***Light And Shadow Art***

***The Light and Shadow Effects of Wayang Kulit Kelantan.*** The art of shadow puppetry is fundamentally grounded in optical principles of projection. In Kelantanese performances, the puppeteer (*dalang*) sits behind a white screen (*kelir*) with a light source—typically a modern electric bulb—placed between them and the screen. Puppets are held between the light and the screen, casting distinct, crisp shadows for the audience on the other side. The white screen maintains the visual integrity of the puppet outlines and colours, ensuring effective image transmission.

The *dalang*'s manipulation of light and motion is central to the aesthetic power of the performance. As the puppets move in synchronisation with musical rhythms, their shadows convey dramatic action, emotional states, and narrative transitions. By adjusting the distance between the puppet and the light source, the *dalang* can alter the scale and intensity of shadows—creating the illusion of depth, motion, or emotional emphasis. For instance, increasing proximity enhances clarity and

enlarges the figure, while distancing creates diffused, softer imagery.

In complex scenes, multiple puppets may be layered to simulate crowds or multi-character interactions. The *dalang* also modulates voice and vocal tone to match each puppet's personality and mood, further enriching the performative dimension.

### ***The Light and Shadow Effects of Huan County Daoqing Shadow Play.***

Before the advent of electricity, Daoqing shadow puppet performances in Huan County were illuminated using traditional oil lamps. These were simple bowls filled with vegetable oil and fitted with five cotton wicks. The lamps were suspended between the puppeteer (*qiantai*) and the screen from a horizontal beam (*liangzi*). As the *qiantai* moved and manipulated puppets, airflow caused the flames to flicker, producing dynamic shadows that added a unique vibrancy to the imagery.

However, this method came with limitations. The weak illumination of oil lamps made it difficult to achieve crisp visual outlines unless the puppet was positioned very close to the *liangzi*. Despite this, skilled puppeteers mastered the manipulation of spatial depth to craft a variety of visual effects, including transitions between sharp and blurry forms, and the illusion of movement or transformation.

In recent decades, oil lamps have been replaced by electric bulbs, offering a more stable and intense light source. While this has improved visual clarity and performance consistency, some traditional atmospheric qualities—such as the rhythmic flickering—have been lost.

## Performance Form and Content

### *The Performance Form and Content of Wayang Kulit Kelantan*

Tok Dalang Pak Dain, a 72-year-old master puppeteer and certified member of the Kelantan Puppeteers Network, has been formally trained in the traditional performance structure of Wayang Kulit Kelantan. During a visit on August 25, 2023, to the Heritage Archives of Shadow Puppetry, the authors met Pak Dain and Dr. Farrah of UPSI, who provided valuable insights into the performance process.

The performance stage may be permanent or temporarily constructed, with the *kelir* (screen) securely fastened at the centre. Banana stems (or foam blocks) are positioned at the base to hold puppets, and the light source is installed directly behind the screen. The *Pohon Beringin* (Tree of Life) (Figure 14) is placed in the centre, flanked by *Maharisi*, *Dewa Panah Perempuan* (Female Spirit of the Arrow), and *Dewa Panah Laki-laki* (Male Spirit of the Arrow). Puppets on the *dalang*'s right represent righteous characters, while those on the left represent antagonists.

The performance typically follows this sequence:

1. Opening Ritual: The *dalang* begins with invocations and prayers to invoke spiritual strength. Rituals are conducted to honour ancestral spirits and cleanse the performance space. Offerings of food are made, and instruments are purified using incense. The segment concludes with the ensemble's performance of *Bertabuh*, a ceremonial musical piece.
2. Musical Prelude: The orchestra performs a medley of traditional and popular tunes to attract audiences and create a festive atmosphere.
3. Prologue (*Dalang Muda*): Traditionally performed by junior or apprentice *dalangs*, this short introductory act serves as training and entertainment. However, due to the decline in apprenticeships, it is now often omitted.
4. Main Performance: The primary narrative unfolds, showcasing the *dalang*'s full range of vocal, musical, and puppeteering skills. The *dalang* is responsible for storytelling, manipulating multiple puppets, voicing characters, and coordinating the musical accompaniment.
5. Closing Ritual: The performance ends with a symbolic return to cosmic



Figure 14. Pohon Beringin

balance. The *Pohon Beringin* descends to the centre of the screen, and the *dalang* casts yellow rice—accompanied by a chant—over the stage, instruments, and themselves, signifying spiritual closure (Matusky, 1997).

### ***The Performance Form and Content of Huan county Daoqing Shadow Play***

The Jingjia Troupe, established in 1903, exemplifies the familial transmission of Daoqing shadow puppetry. Fifth-generation heir Jing Dengkun, now a lecturer at Longdong University, provided detailed information about traditional performance structures. A typical performance consists of:

- Goucheng (Setup): A temporary stage is assembled, typically indoors. The screen (*liangzi*) is hung on tightened ropes fixed to walls. A wooden table is positioned below to support the stage, and ropes define the performance zone, known as the “city.”
- Shixi (Preparation of Puppets): The puppets required for the show—*toushao* and *zhuangzhuang*—are assembled and arranged. Additional puppet heads are stored in albums for quick character changes.

For ceremonial performances, additional rituals are observed:

- Inviting Deities: A Taoist priest (*yin-yang master*) conducts prayers, accompanied by the burning of paper money and fireworks to sanctify the stage.
- Qingtai (Stage Purification): The *qiantai* walks around the stage

carrying burning spirit money and pours vinegar on a hot stone to create purifying steam, while the orchestra plays full percussion to ward off evil spirits.

- Divine Performances: Opening scenes often involve plays like *Heaven Officer Blessing*, which invoke divine presence and blessings.
- Formal Performance: A full-length story is enacted, typically lasting 3-4 hours, though some episodes may extend longer. Under the *qiantai*'s direction, the sequence includes structured cues for dialogue, singing, instrumental interludes, and transitions.

The Daoqing repertoire, passed down orally, comprises around 180 scripts categorised into seven genres: deity and ghost tales, historical dramas, anti-corruption and anti-oppression narratives, frontier defence stories, moral and ethical plays, romantic tales, and contemporary themes (Editorial Committee, 2006).

### **DISCUSSION**

Chinese ethnomusicologist Wang Guangqi, in his foundational work *Music of the Oriental Nations* (1958), classified world musical traditions into three overarching systems: the Chinese, Greek, and Persian-Arabic. The Persian-Arabic system extended southeast into India, Myanmar, Siam, and Java. Within this framework, Wayang Kulit Kelantan aligns with the Persian-

Arabic musical lineage, while Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry is firmly rooted in the Chinese system.

These musical and performative systems are underpinned by broader cultural differences. As Nettle (2005) argues, understanding music within its cultural context is essential: “the relationship between music and other parts of culture is paramount.” Kelantan, one of Malaysia’s oldest cultural regions, forms part of the Malay world, encompassing Indonesia, Malaysia, southern Thailand, the Philippines, and parts of Indochina—a region defined by shared linguistic and cultural heritage (Nasuruddin, 1992).

Historically, Kelantanese culture has been shaped by successive layers of influence: indigenous animistic beliefs, Indian religions (Hinduism and Buddhism), Islam, Chinese exchange, and finally, European colonial contact (Raja Iskandar, 2022). The Malays, rather than passively absorbing these traditions, actively synthesised them into a unique cultural identity. This syncretism is manifest in Wayang Kulit Kelantan’s musical scales, melodic structures, instrumentation, and narrative content.

For instance, the *serunai* shares tonal qualities with Persian-Arabic instruments, though adapted to local styles. The *geduk* (referred to locally as the “Chinese drum”) and the *gendang* trace their origins to Chinese and Indian prototypes, respectively (Lou & Zhong, 2002). The puppet figures blend Thai, Indian, and Malay visual motifs. The narratives, while anchored in the *Ramayana*, also incorporate Islamic prayers

and local folklore. This amalgamation produces a distinctly Malay artform that serves as both spiritual ritual and community entertainment.

In contrast, Huan County lies within the Qin-Long cultural zone—an area at the crossroads of agrarian and nomadic civilisations. Historically dominant within China’s multicultural framework, it has significantly shaped the regional identity of north-western China (Ge, 1998). Daoqing shadow puppetry reflects this heritage. It features modal frameworks rooted in Chinese opera, character archetypes such as *sheng*, *dan*, *jing*, and *chou*, and pentatonic melodic structures typical of the Chinese system. Its instruments—*dizi* (membrane flute), *sixian* (silk strings), and *mahuang* (a distinct vocal-instrumental form)—are deeply embedded in local tradition.

Equally significant are the performance conventions: elaborate lighting using oil lamps, sophisticated puppet manipulation techniques (*tiao qian*), and an extensive oral repertoire. The puppeteer, with “one mouth to tell a thousand-year-old story and two hands to command a million troops,” embodies the memory and creativity of generations.

While the two traditions are structurally and stylistically distinct, they share core functions: both serve as carriers of collective memory, operate within ceremonial and entertainment frameworks, and rely on fixed performance patterns rooted in ritual and social function. These shared roles reflect their identity as socially embedded art forms. As Allan (1967) stated, “all people, in no matter what culture, must be able to

place their music firmly in the context of the totality of their beliefs, experiences, and activities.” John (1973) posed the essential question: “Why do humans have a profound need for music?” Because such art forms, including shadow puppetry, fulfil vital societal roles.

In pre-modern societies, ritual—not entertainment—was the primary function of shadow puppetry. Though entertainment has become more dominant today, the ritual aspect remains essential to its cultural survival. As Nettl (2005) observed, “among various commonalities, surely significant among them must be the association of music with the supernatural.” McAllester (1971) echoed this sentiment. Shadow puppetry thus acts as a “living fossil” of human civilisation, embodying the spiritual, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions of human culture.

Despite their cultural differences, both Wayang Kulit Kelantan and Huan County Daoqing shadow puppetry belong to the “complex whole” that Tylor (1871) described as human culture. As long as these forms continue to resonate with their communities—spiritually, socially, and artistically—they will endure as powerful emblems of cultural identity.

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