

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,

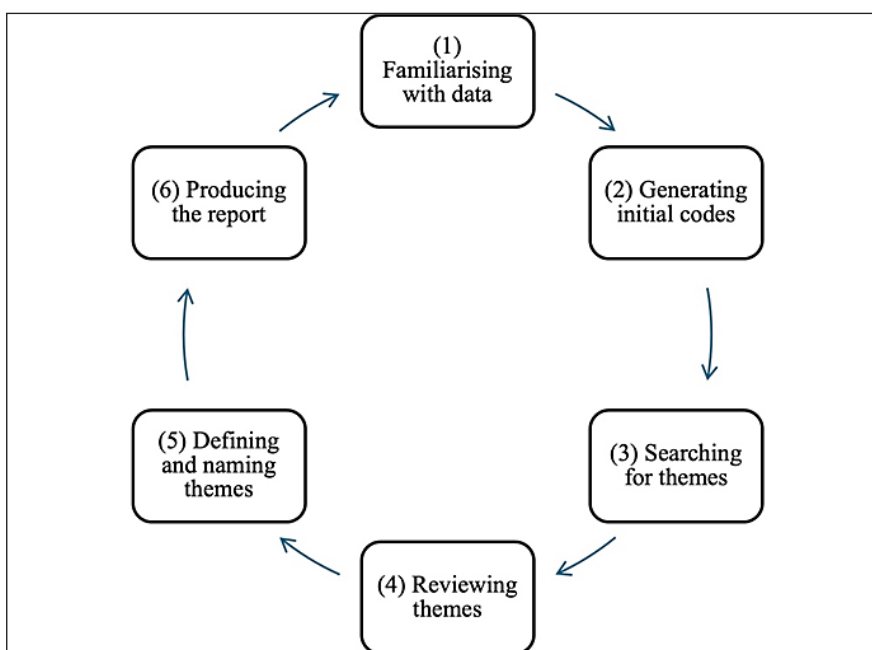


Figure 1. Six phases of the thematic analysis process by Clarke and Braun (2017)

(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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