

Exploring the Intersection of Ethnic Wear and Sportswear in Hybrid Fashion: A Contemporary Study of Cultural

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the evolving role of hybrid fashion, focusing on the fusion of ethnic wear and sportswear in contemporary clothing trends. The primary objective is to explore how these two distinct cultural styles of ethnic wear, representing traditional cultural heritage, and sportswear, symbolizing modern athletic and casual aesthetics. These elements are being blended to create a new, hybrid fashion identity. Key findings indicate that hybrid fashion characteristics, through the fusion of ethnic and sportswear elements, is becoming a significant trend driven by globalized cultural exchange and increasing interest in inclusive and multifunctional designs. The study reveals that hybrid fashion not only caters to diverse consumer preferences but also challenges traditional fashion boundaries, promoting cultural appreciation and innovation. Furthermore, it highlights how the blending of performance-oriented and culturally rich attire creates a unique space for self-expression while maintaining comfort and functionality. This research contributes to the understanding of hybrid fashion's role in reshaping fashion norms and offers valuable insights into the design processes and the broader implications for the fashion industry in an era of cross-cultural influence and sustainability. The findings emphasize the significance of cultural fusion in broadening the scope of fashion as a tool for social and cultural dialogue.

Keywords: *Cultural fusion, Contemporary fashion, Ethnic wear, Hybrid fashion, Sportswear*

INTRODUCTION

Fashion has long been a powerful tool for self-expression, cultural identity, and social communication (Wardaya et al., 2024). Over time, the fashion industry has evolved to reflect shifts in global dynamics, blending influences from diverse cultures and subcultures. One of the most intriguing developments in contemporary fashion is the intersection of ethnic wear and sportswear, resulting in a unique hybrid fashion movement (Sood, 2024). Ethnic wear plays a significant role in defining cultural identity and heritage in a certain region, community and country. These garments are being preserved to the past generations to keep the culture alive and reminding (Kaya & Cuciuc Romanescu, 2022). In contrast, sportswear is mainly known for clothing that is designed for sports or active activities. Nowadays, sportswear has become casual wear because of the versatility of the garment suits for everyday apparel. The aesthetic of the design is gradually entered into a high fashion market to make a more fashionable

garment and to have a commercial value (Bielefeldt Bruun & Langkjær, 2016). Today, these two seemingly contrasting styles are merging to create innovative fashion trends that appeal to a globalized and diverse audience.

This study adopts a theoretical framework that maps hybrid through sportive fashion analysis across dual axis models to enable a structured understanding in determining hybrid characteristics. This research addresses the lack of in-depth analysis in the intersection of ethnic wear and sportswear in hybrid fashion. While both styles are widely embraced, their fusion presents a unique opportunity to explore how fashion can serve as a platform for cultural dialogue, creativity, and inclusivity. The objective of this study is to analyze the design elements of ethnic wear and sportswear that contribute to the formation of hybrid fashion styles. Next, to examine the fusion of cultural heritage and functional aesthetics. Finally, to evaluate the intersection of ethnic wear and sportswear in identifying hybrid characteristics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Role of Ethnic Wear and Sportswear in the Fashion Industry

The integration of cultural symbolism into fashion has long influenced the evolution of ethnic wear. The fashion industry has recently seen a revival of interest in traditional motifs and craftsmanship, not only as nostalgic elements but as strategic design features that respond to global consumer demand for authenticity and cultural significance. This trend reflects a broader shift in modern culture, where the blending of costume traditions with contemporary aesthetics promotes innovation between the past and present. Simultaneously, sportswear has evolved beyond its athletic origins to be more practical for everyday wear, health, and social connection. The rise of sports culture has contributed to the development of inclusive and adaptable fashion styles, encouraging designers to explore sportswear in unconventional settings (Zhou et al., 2024). Therefore, the application of sportswear elements holds significant potential for cultural innovation. This fusion not only enhances garment practicality but also facilitates meaningful cultural exchange. The intersection of ethnic wear and sportswear creates new possibilities for redefining fashion narratives.

Elements of Ethnic Wear

Ethnic wear is deeply embedded in cultural and regional identity. These garments function as carriers of symbolic meaning, shaped by historical, spiritual, and social contexts and emphasize the integration of specific visual and material components that reflect unique identities (Zhang, 2018). The design elements of ethnic wear ranging from loose, draped forms to tailored, structured garments are not just stylistic preferences but reflections of cultural norms and historical evolution. According to Jia (2024), these embedded characteristics offer valuable design opportunities in contemporary fashion. When interpreted through contemporary design, elements such as intricate patterns, symbolic color palettes, and distinctive silhouettes can inspire innovative design solutions that respect heritage while adhering to modern aesthetics. However, this fusion requires designers to carefully distinguish between cultural appreciation to ensure the traditional elements are contextualized ethically and creatively. Hence, the integration of ethnic design elements into modern fashion is not simply a stylistic trend but a methodological approach that enriches the creative process. It expands the designer's cultural understanding, promotes diversity in design thinking, and encourages the fashion industry to re-evaluate how tradition and modernity can coexist in innovative, respectful, and commercially viable ways.

Elements of Sportswear

In contemporary fashion, sportswear has evolved beyond its original purpose of athletic functionality to become both street style and high fashion. Originally designed to support movement, comfort, and performance. However, modern sportswear integrates technical innovation with lifestyle aesthetics. The rise of sportswear reflects a shift in design priorities where functionality is not sacrificed for style, but instead becomes a defining aesthetic (Bielefeldt Bruun & Langkjær, 2016). Key elements such as breathability, flexibility, and ergonomic fit have been reinterpreted for everyday wear. The use of advanced fabrics, seamless design, and body-conscious tailoring has transformed sportswear into a symbol of urban practicality and dynamic identity. In addition, sportswear design is increasingly influenced by social and environmental factors, with brands embracing sustainable materials and multifunctional features to meet evolving consumer demands (Wang et al, 2023). Therefore, the mainstream acceptance of sportswear reflects a broader cultural shift toward casualization. Consumers seek clothing that aligns with active lifestyles while also conveying individuality and comfort. This transition redefines sportswear by elevating the functionality and aesthetic. Designers integrate these qualities with cultural and symbolic elements where sportswear becomes a potential in constructing identity and challenging the norms in both casual and formal attire.

Fashion in Hybrid Style

The concept of hybrid fashion reflects a broader cultural and creative movement in which designers intentionally merge distinct aesthetics to generate new visual and conceptual expressions. In fashion, hybridity is not merely the blending of elements for novelty, but a strategic process of redefinition, where garments are designed to challenge fixed identities, broaden functionality, and enhance narrative depth (Trisno et al., 2019). Consequently, hybrid fashion involves careful negotiation of design principles, cultural symbolism, and user expectations by combining contrasting pieces. Peplum Hoodie from Adidas by Stella McCartney Collection, which fuses high performance and high fashion, gain significance for blurring the lines between functional and athletic wear, traditional and contemporary. Hence, hybrid fashion becomes a language of resistance and reinvention. It allows for garments to become more adaptable, inclusive, and symbolic, reflecting a changing society where identities are fluid and style is both personal and political (Matthews, 2014). Thus, hybrid fashion connects with sustainability, innovation, and interdisciplinary thinking. The process encourages designers to think beyond traditional and to create clothing that incorporates multifunctional and conceptually rich. These positions of hybrid fashion as more than a stylistic trend, additionally it is a design methodology with implications for education, industry, and cultural discourse.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative experimental design to explore the ethnic and sportswear elements in hybrid fashion. This included the usage of appropriate data collection and analysis that match the research objectives. This contributes to a greater understanding of the elements of ethnic wear and sportswear, hybrid style and characteristics. This study used several types of methods that involved primary and secondary data in achieving the concept.

Total of 3 designs were selected using few fundamentals process in fashion design for purposive sampling. The process includes research and inspiration, concept development, design ideation and technical drawing. The design was divided into different ethnic wear and sportswear: Puteri Perak x

Jogging attire, Qipao x Tennis dress and Bidayuh x Badminton attire. The survey is conducted to identify the knowledge of hybrid fashion from respondents' understanding. A total of 20 respondents participated in the online survey ranging from students, professional and educator as a fashion practice. The items used were mainly multiple-choice questions and 5-point scale to get feedback about their perceptions and views towards elements of ethnic wear and sportswear to obtain hybrid characteristics. This survey was divided into four sections, which includes demographic information, awareness and perception, aesthetic and functional preferences and design contexts. These approaches enhance the reliability and the objective of the findings.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on contemporary models of sportive fashion analysis by An et al. (2021), which examine style categories through gender and activeness. Ethnic wear and sportswear are the fundamental aspects to select specific inspiration for a hybrid design approach.

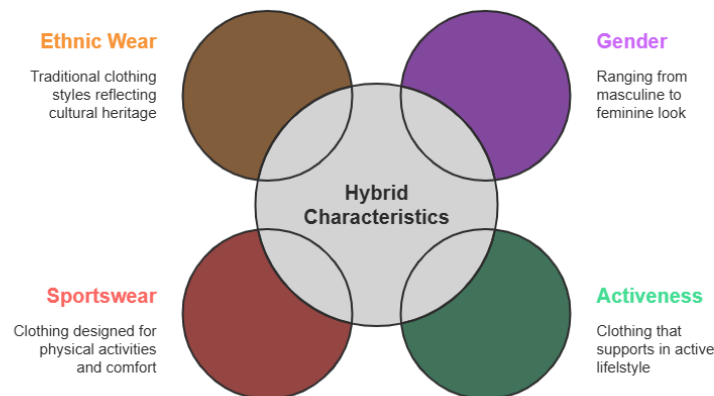


Figure 1. Theoretical framework for ethnic wear and sportswear in hybrid fashion

Gender functions as a stylistic spectrum in hybrid fashion, ranging from masculine to feminine look. This dimension reflects foundational design elements such as silhouette, pattern, color, and surface detailing. Ethnic wear typically leans toward symbolic and ornamental aesthetics, often aligning with either cultural masculinity (e.g., structured ceremonial attire) or femininity (e.g., draped silhouettes with embellishment). Similarly, sportswear may range from performance-driven unisex garments to fashion-forward interpretations with distinctly gendered cuts. The activeness in design encompasses comfort and function to expressive aesthetics.

The intersection of these four dimensions produces garments with hybrid characteristics as well as designs that are culturally rooted and modern functionally. This framework positions hybrid fashion as a response to the evolving needs of contemporary consumers who seek identity expression and multifunctional clothing. This model provides the analytical foundation for evaluating design outputs in this study, allowing the researcher to integrate cultural, functional, gendered, and lifestyle considerations into cohesive hybrid fashion concepts.

FINDINGS

Data from the survey and sample were analyzed. The analysis indicates that the design interprets the hybrid fashion concept by integrating ethnic wear and sportswear. The findings indicate that the key design elements refer to silhouette, material, functionality, gender style and cultural symbolism. From the survey, respondents were male and female, aged between 18-25 and 26-35. These contribute to the current generation who is still in the academic journey and professional within the fashion industry.

Hybrid Design Concept

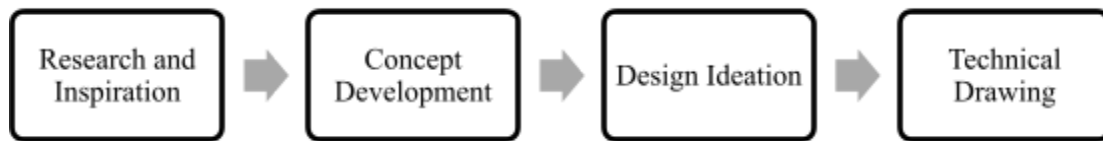


Figure 2. Flowchart of design process

The process involved research and inspiration, concept development, design ideation and technical drawing. Each process was conducted to determine the elements of ethnic wear and sportswear, comparing the outcomes between the two inspirations. The result found that there were more innovative and more thoughtful in the design decisions. There is more understanding in integrating the cultural and functional elements into the design. These findings suggest that the integration of hybrid fashion improved design skills while enhancing creative thinking and cultural sensitivity in the fashion design process.

Design Elements

From design A, B and C, each design comes with different ethnic and sports inspiration. Each design has distinct key elements to be incorporated in the overall design.

Table 1. Design elements of Ethnic Wear and Sportswear

Description	Ethnic wear	Ethnic elements	Sportswear	Sports elements
Design A	Puteri Perak	• Silhouette • Material	Jogging	• Flexibility • Functionality
Design B	Qipao	• Silhouette • Material • Detailing	Tennis	• Ergonomic • Functionality
Design C	Bidayuh	• Color	Badminton	• Breathability • Flexibility

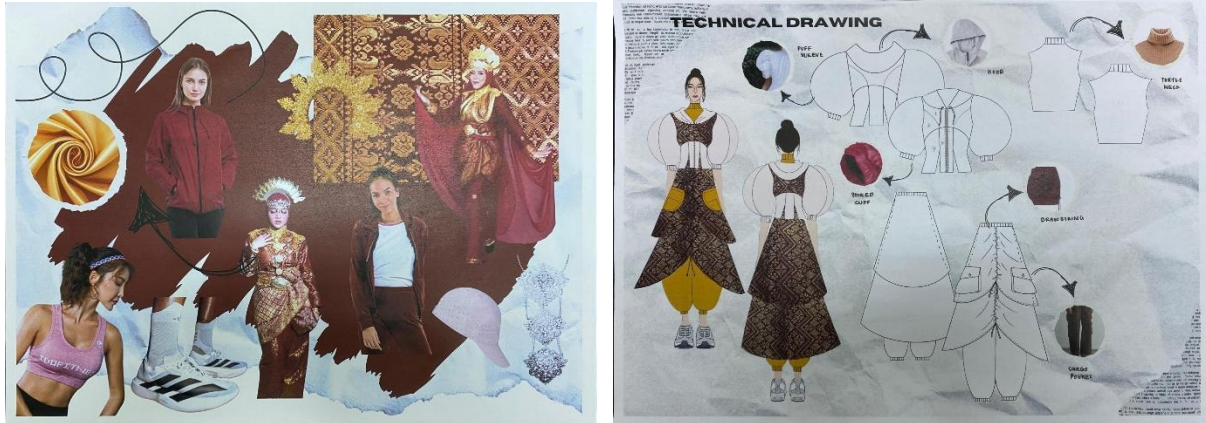


Figure 3. Concept development and design ideation of design A
 (Source: Student Sketchbook, 2025)

The results from Design A shows that the combination of Puteri Perak and Jogging attire emphasized cultural richness through the ceremonial silhouette and traditional fabric, while jogging attire enhanced the functionality and flexibility. This design comes with three pieces of garments consisting of jacket, pants and inner top. This design effectively combines both influences in the mixture of ethnic and sports elements with creativity, in adding design details such as draped songket on the pants to imitate the sampin from the Puteri Perak attire and different types of garments to provide consumers flexibility for different functions. There is a strong ability to balance tradition with contemporary needs resulting in modern garments that maintained cultural significance.



Figure 4. Concept development and design ideation of design B
 (Source: Student Sketchbook, 2025)

Design B examined the hybridization of the traditional Qipao with modern tennis dress to produce culturally infused functional garments. The combinations allowed the elegance heritage of Qipao form fitting silhouette, high mandarin collars and ornamental details while integrating the sporty tennis wear, such as fitted tops paired with pleated skirts. The final design found that the use of form fitted asymmetrical top with qipao chest opening details can maintain the cultural symbolism. The skirt was designed with a layered pleated skirt to enhance the movement and functionality. These hybrid styles were praised for their modern interpretation of femininity and athleticism.



Figure 5. Concept development and design ideation of design C
 (Source: Student Sketchbook, 2025)

Design C challenged to blend hybrid rich culture of Bidayuh costume with the dynamic of badminton attire. The design incorporates the Bidayuh color palette, featuring black, red and gold ornamental embellishments, while badminton attire features lightweight fabrics, to enhance the freedom of movement and breathable garment. This design comes with three pieces of garments consisting of jackets, active tops and legging pants.

Hybrid Characteristics

Table 2. Summary of Hybrid Characteristics

Description	Design A	Design B	Design C
Gender Style	Masculine	Feminine	Masculine
Activeness	Comfort	Aesthetic	Comfort
Hybrid Characteristics	Balanced tradition with contemporary needs Structured garments with symbolic tradition	Reimagined femininity and athleticism Form fitted garments with traditional motifs	Synthesized identity with sports Breathable garments with cultural embellishments

Based on the three designs, the researcher conducted a survey to evaluate the hybrid characteristics for each design. Table 1 shows the summary of hybrid characteristics for Design A – Puteri Perak x Jogging, Design B – Qipao x Tennis dress and Design C – Bidayuh x Badminton. The survey result is to identify gender style and activeness followed by the best hybrid design based on respondent's feedback.

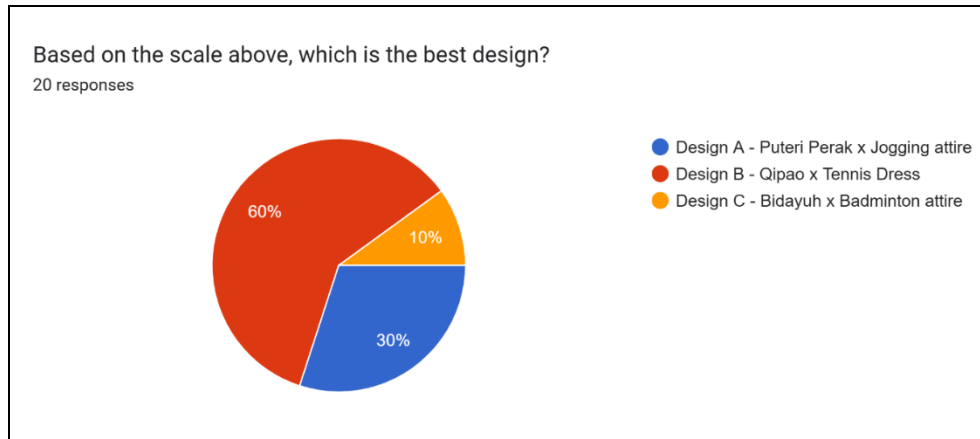


Figure 6. Percentage of the best design

The respondents' results indicate that Design B is the best for hybrid design (Figure 6). Among the 20 responses, 60% agreed that Design B – Qipao x Tennis dress has successfully combined the elegant silhouette of the Qipao with the sporty elements of a tennis dress. This shows that the balance between cultural symbols and modern aesthetic enhances the hybrid characteristics. On the other hand, 30% of the respondents selected Design A – Puteri Perak x Jogging attire as the second-best design. This design may have been appreciated for its bold integration of Malay heritage with activewear. Meanwhile, Design C – Bidayuh x Badminton attire gained 10% of the respondents. The design demonstrated strong cultural grounding, however, the integration of ethnic elements and sports elements is less cohesive in showcasing the cultural identity and modern functionality.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore the intersection of ethnic wear and sportswear in hybrid fashion, emphasizing the integration of these two distinct cultural and functional styles that are merging in contemporary fashion. The findings reveal that the fusion of ethnic and sportswear elements is driven by a growing desire for self-expression, comfort, and cultural identity. Hybrid fashion allows individuals to navigate multiple identities, blending traditional cultural heritage with modern, globalized influences. To achieve research objective one, the elements of silhouette, color, material and detailing can effectively draw from the ethnic wear while sportswear elements of functionality, flexibility, ergonomic and breathability are incorporated into the design showing cultural symbol and embracing contemporary fashion.

In relation to research objective two, the experimental approach highlighted the fusion of ethnic wear and sportswear elements can effectively integrate the design to achieve both expressive and practical. With balancing these two aspects, the outcomes can successfully aesthetic and functional reflecting the value of having ergonomic cuts, breathable materials and active functionality. This fusion allows garments that are not only culturally meaningful but also suitable for daily lifestyle. This trend further highlights the innovation by blending cultural symbols with modern functionality, creating garments that resonate with the consumer. The rise of hybrid fashion challenges traditional boundaries between cultural and functional garments, promoting a more inclusive and adaptable approach to global fashion.

In regards to research objective three, by evaluating the intersection of ethnic wear and sportswear design elements, this research identified four core hybrid characteristics such as cultural symbolism,

comfort, gender fluidity and activeness. These characteristics offer a foundation for future hybrid design methodologies and educational framework that aim to foster inclusive, functional and culturally respectful fashion. It extends existing theories on cultural fusion and identity expression in fashion, offering valuable insights into how hybrid fashion is reshaping consumer behavior, design processes, and the broader fashion industry.

For future research, the study could further expand the understanding of hybrid fashion by exploring its development across different cultural and geographic contexts. Comparative studies involving various ethnic groups and fashion traditions could offer deeper insights into how cultural values and regional aesthetics influence hybrid design outcomes. In addition, the study can focus on the use of sustainable materials and digital tools, including smart textiles, 3D designs, and upcycled components, could enrich the ethical and technological dimensions of hybrid fashion. Additionally, developing hybrid designs into educational frameworks could emphasize the intercultural sensitivity, critical design thinking and material experimentation among emerging designers.

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