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*Religion, Traditions and Local Wisdom*

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Organised by:

Centre for Knowledge and Understanding of Tropical Architectural and Interior (KUTAI)  
Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak Branch  
Seri Iskandar Campus, Perak, MALAYSIA



**PROCEEDINGS OF THE 16<sup>TH</sup> REGIONAL  
SYMPOSIUM OF THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO  
SIMPORA XVI: 2025**

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Unit Penerbitan UiTM Perak

**Alamat:**

Unit Penerbitan UiTM Perak,  
Pejabat Jaringan Industri, Masyarakat dan Alumni (PJIMA)  
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Perak Branch,  
32610 Seri Iskandar Perak, Malaysia.

05-3742716

uitmperakpress@gmail.com

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# PROCEEDINGS OF THE 16TH REGIONAL SYMPOSIUM OF THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO SIMPORA XVI: 2025

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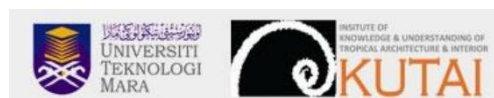
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### **KEYNOTE SPEAKER 2**

PROFESOR DATO' DR. ABDULLAH MOHAMAD SAID  
UNIVERSITY TEKNOLOGI MARA, PERAK BRANCH, MALAYSIA



their form, proportion, and motifs embody modesty, harmony (serasi), and the persistence of local wisdom (Abdullah & Hashim, 2021; Yusof & Ahmad, 2020; Mohd Yusof, 2018; Nor et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, there is scant academic inquiry into royal female attire, such as the Baju Puteri Perak, from the perspective of the built environment. This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to look at how its style, materials, and symbolic meanings have changed from 1950 to 2000. It places the clothing as a culturally produced object that shows design and cultural strength, showing how fashion, like architecture, keeps Malay heritage, identity, and collective memory alive over time.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study adopted a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design to provide a comprehensive and structured synthesis of scholarly and archival evidence concerning the evolution of the Baju Puteri Perak. The SLR method was selected because it enables researchers to collect, evaluate, and integrate previous studies in a transparent and replicable manner, ensuring a balanced representation of findings (Tranfield et al., 2003; Moher et al., 2009). Unlike a traditional narrative review, which is interpretive and selective, an SLR applies a methodological protocol to minimise researcher bias, ensuring that all relevant data are critically examined through an objective framework.

The design of this review follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) model, which provides a step-by-step protocol for identifying, screening, and including relevant sources. PRISMA was originally designed for medical and social sciences but has since been effectively adapted to design and cultural studies, where rigour and traceability of knowledge synthesis are equally crucial (Snyder, 2019). In this study, the PRISMA framework was tailored to examine cultural artefacts textile designs, photographs, and written documentation representing the stylistic evolution, material innovation, and symbolic continuity of the royal attire across five decades (1950 until 2000).

The SLR design integrates both qualitative and interpretive paradigms. While the primary data consist of textual and visual sources, the analytical process involves *content analysis* and *thematic synthesis* to identify recurrent motifs, design principles, and cultural meanings. This hybrid design acknowledges that traditional dress functions as both a material object and a cultural text akin to the built environment, where structures and forms embody intangible philosophies of space, hierarchy, and spirituality.

Consequently, this methodological approach does not merely document the evolution of the Baju Puteri Perak but decodes its deeper significance as a resilient cultural construct one that aligns with the SIMPORA XVI theme of *Traditions and Local Wisdom in the Built Environment*. Through this systematic process, the research interprets fashion as a form of *textile architecture* that mirrors the endurance, adaptability, and symbolic coherence found in Malay architectural heritage.

## Data Sources and Strategy

This study applied a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach following the PRISMA 2020 protocol to ensure methodological transparency, replicability, and comprehensiveness. The SLR framework was designed to synthesise existing scholarly work related to Malay royal costume, Baju Puteri Perak, and cultural resilience within traditional attire, aligning these findings with the broader discourse of built environment and local wisdom.

### i. Database Selection

The data search targeted peer-reviewed and academic databases that contain multidisciplinary research relevant to design, culture, and heritage studies. The selected databases include:

- Scopus: for international journals on design, cultural studies, and heritage.
- Web of Science (WoS): for peer-reviewed cross-disciplinary sources.
- Google Scholar: to identify grey literature, theses, and local cultural research.
- MyJurnal (Malaysia Citation Centre): to access Malaysian journals related to traditional costume and heritage design.
- UiTM Institutional Repository (UiTM IR): for dissertations and internal research on Malay attire and textile heritage.

These databases were chosen to ensure a balanced representation between global scholarship and local cultural narratives, which are essential in studies concerning indigenous heritage and design traditions (Snyder, 2019).

### ii. Search Terms and Boolean Strategy

A comprehensive keyword framework was constructed to capture all relevant literature. The Boolean search strings combined main concepts of attire, culture, and design evolution, as shown below:

("Baju Puteri Perak" OR "Perak royal costume" OR "Malay traditional attire" OR "Malay court dress")  
AND ("cultural resilience" OR "local wisdom" OR "fashion evolution" OR "textile architecture" OR "built environment" OR "traditional design").

The keywords were refined through pilot searches to identify optimal combinations and ensure relevance. Equivalent Malay terms such as *busana diraja Perak*, *pakaian tradisional Melayu*, and *reka bentuk budaya tempatan* were also included to capture bilingual academic output (Yusof & Ahmad, 2020).

### iii. Search Process and PRISMA Model

The SLR process followed the four stages of the PRISMA model (Moher et al., 2009):

1. Identification: All potential studies were retrieved using the defined keywords from the selected databases.
2. Screening: Duplicate records were removed, and titles/abstracts were screened for thematic relevance.

3. Eligibility: Full texts were reviewed based on methodological quality and alignment with the research focus.
4. Inclusion: Final studies were selected for detailed thematic analysis.

A total of 152 records were initially identified across all databases. After removing duplicates and non-academic sources, 64 studies remained for full-text assessment. Following the eligibility review, 36 studies were retained for analysis based on their relevance to traditional Malay attire, royal costume, or cultural resilience frameworks.

#### **iv. Justification of SLR Approach**

The SLR was selected for this study to enable evidence synthesis across fragmented cultural and design studies. Traditional costume research in Malaysia often exists in isolated contexts either focusing on aesthetic form, material technology, or sociocultural identity but seldom integrating these into a cohesive theoretical understanding. The SLR design overcomes this limitation by:

- Consolidating multidisciplinary knowledge from fashion, design, and heritage fields.
- Providing a transparent audit trail of how knowledge about Baju Puteri Perak has evolved.
- Supporting comparative analysis of design evolution and cultural resilience like studies in architecture and built heritage (Tranfield et al., 2003).

Through this approach, the study produces a conceptual synthesis linking the transformation of the Baju Puteri Perak to broader frameworks of tradition, resilience, and local wisdom in the built environment.

## **DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

### **Data Collection**

The data collection process for this study followed the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) protocol as guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework (Moher et al., 2009). The review focused on identifying published literature related to Malay royal costume, Baju Puteri Perak, and styling changes in traditional attire from 1950 to 2000.

Academic data were sourced from five major databases: Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), Google Scholar, MyJurnal (Malaysia Citation Centre), and the UiTM Institutional Repository (UiTM IR). These platforms were chosen for their reliability, peer-reviewed content, and relevance to fashion, culture, and heritage studies.

The search strategy used Boolean keywords to locate relevant materials:

("Baju Puteri Perak" OR "Perak royal costume" OR "Malay traditional attire")  
AND ("styling changes" OR "fashion design" OR "cultural symbolism" OR "royal identity").

A total of 152 documents were initially identified. After removing duplicates and irrelevant records, 64 studies remained for fulltext review. Following a quality screening based on

credibility, contextual relevance, and academic integrity, 36 studies were selected for final analysis.

### Data Organisation

After completing the data collection and screening process, all selected publications were organised manually to ensure a structured and transparent review process. Because this study focused on *styling changes* rather than numerical data, the organisation process relied on descriptive mapping and thematic categorisation rather than statistical analysis.

A literature review matrix was developed using Microsoft Excel as a practical tool to record, classify, and compare key information from each selected study. The matrix contained the following columns:

- Author(s) and Year: to trace the chronological development of scholarship on Malay traditional attire.
- Title of Study / Source: to identify the focus and contribution of each work.
- Research Focus or Theme: whether the study discussed form, material, cultural symbolism, or royal identity.
- Methodology: to note whether the study used qualitative, historical, or descriptive approaches.
- Key Findings / Descriptions: summarised notes about styling details such as silhouette, ornamentation, fabric, or craftsmanship.
- Remarks / Relevance to Baju Puteri Perak: brief commentary on how the findings contribute to understanding styling changes or cultural interpretation relevant to this review.

This organisational structure allowed for cross referencing between sources to identify similarities, contradictions, or gaps in the existing literature. For example, certain sources emphasised textile selection and colour symbolism (linked to royal hierarchy), while others discussed pattern, tailoring, and silhouette, reflecting evolving cultural influences.

Each entry in the matrix was read several times to ensure consistency and accuracy of interpretation. Notes were coded manually using colour labels and descriptive tags (such as “form,” “symbolism,” “material,” and “ornament”) to facilitate grouping under emerging themes. This manual coding approach allowed the researcher to remain closely engaged with the textual data, a key advantage in cultural and heritage-based research where meaning is often context dependent (Snyder, 2019).

Through this systematic organisation, the literature was categorised into three overarching clusters:

1. Styling and Form Changes; focusing on modifications in design, silhouette, and structure across different decades.
2. Material and Craftsmanship; highlighting traditional versus modern materials, decorative techniques, and royal artisanship.
3. Cultural and Symbolic Meanings; relating to Islamic values, Perak royal identity, and expressions of Malay femininity and modesty.

This manual and structured organisation method ensured that the data were handled transparently, consistently, and critically, forming a solid foundation for the thematic analysis presented in the next section.

### Validation of Data

To ensure analytical rigour, all extracted data were cross-verified across multiple sources. Triangulation was achieved by comparing textual descriptions with photographic documentation and museum catalogues where available. Analytical reliability was maintained through repeated coding checks and inter-source consistency evaluation.

This systematic approach ensures that the interpretation of styling changes in *Baju Puteri Perak* remains grounded in verifiable evidence and scholarly consensus, fulfilling the methodological transparency expected of a PRISMA based review.

### Analysis

The thematic analysis was conducted following the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) framework outlined in Section 3.0, using the PRISMA 2020 flow to ensure transparency and consistency. A total of 152 studies were identified from the five academic databases (Scopus, WoS, Google Scholar, MyJurnal, UiTM IR). After the screening and eligibility stages, 36 studies were retained for in depth thematic analysis.

Each publication was read and analysed manually using a literature review matrix (as described in Section of Data organisation). The researcher identified patterns, recurring terms, and conceptual alignments related to the styling, materials, and cultural meaning of *Baju Puteri Perak* and related Malay royal costumes.

The analysis resulted in three dominant themes and nine subthemes, which represent the main findings derived from the synthesis of these 36 studies.

Table 1. Summary of Thematic Analysis Based on Final 36 Sources

| Main Theme                         | Subtheme Code               | Findings / Description                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Supporting Sources                             |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Styling and Form Changes</b> | a. Silhouette and Structure | The silhouette of <i>Baju Puteri Perak</i> shifted from loose fitting forms to more tailored shapes, balancing modesty with elegance. The use of structured shoulder seams and waist shaping emerged in the 1970s–1990s. | Yusof & Ahmad (2020); Abdullah & Hashim (2021) |
|                                    | b. Layering and Draping     | Layering of the outer <i>kain selendang</i> (draped shawl) and inner garments                                                                                                                                            | Mohd Yusof (2018)                              |

| Main Theme                               | Subtheme Code                   | Findings / Description                                                                                                                                                              | Supporting Sources                      |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <b>2. Material and Craftsmanship</b>     |                                 | symbolised grace and hierarchy, reflecting the multilayered symbolism of royal architecture.                                                                                        |                                         |
|                                          | c. Tailoring and Fit            | Sewing methods became more precise with improved tailoring tools post 1980, marking a shift from purely hand sewn garments to mixed techniques, reflecting adaptation to modernity. |                                         |
|                                          | a. Textile and Fabric Type      | <i>Songket Perak</i> , silk, and brocade were dominant materials. Imported textiles were adapted without losing royal symbolism, signifying material resilience and continuity.     | Ahmad (2019); Yusof & Ahmad (2020)      |
|                                          | b. Decorative Techniques        | Embroidery ( <i>sulam</i> ), gold thread ( <i>benang emas</i> ), and beaded motifs symbolised regality and were preserved even as designs modernised.                               | Mohd Yusof (2018); Nor et al. (2021)    |
| <b>3. Cultural and Symbolic Meanings</b> | c. Colour Palette and Symbolism | Dominant royal colours; yellow, gold, and silver; represented purity, authority, and sacredness. Black was used for ceremonial solemnity, following Malay court etiquette.          | Abdullah & Hashim (2021); Ahmad (2019)  |
|                                          | a. Religious Modesty            | The styling reflects Islamic values of modesty ( <i>aurat</i> ). High necklines and long sleeves signify obedience and dignity, aligning with Malay Muslim ethics.                  | Yusof & Ahmad (2020)                    |
|                                          | b. Royal Hierarchy and Identity | The costume functions as a coded marker of status; only royal women could wear specific colours, patterns, or <i>songket</i> types.                                                 | Nor et al. (2021)                       |
|                                          | c. Local Wisdom and Femininity  | The balanced proportions and delicate detailing embody <i>serasi</i> and <i>sopan</i> , core Malay aesthetic values linking beauty with virtue and spiritual harmony.               | Abdullah & Hashim (2021); Snyder (2019) |

The thematic analysis of the 36 selected articles revealed three dominant themes that describe the nature of styling changes and cultural meanings embedded in the *Baju Puteri Perak*: (1) styling and form changes, (2) material and craftsmanship, and (3) cultural and symbolic meanings. Together, these themes present a coherent picture of how the costume evolved across time while maintaining its royal and cultural identity.

The first theme, *Styling and Form Changes*, highlights the gradual shifts in the silhouette and structure of *Baju Puteri Perak* over the decades from 1950 to 2000. The earlier versions of the attire were characterised by a loose-fitting silhouette with straight hems and simple tailoring, representing modesty and humility, which aligned with the values of the royal household. However, by the late twentieth century, more structured and tailored forms emerged, influenced by modern sewing methods and Western aesthetics. Despite these external influences, the costume continued to express Malay cultural identity through its soft drapery, layered shawls, and elegant modesty. These visual transformations signify the costume's capacity for cultural resilience preserving traditional identity while responding to technological and social changes in the broader fashion context. This balance between innovation and heritage mirrors the adaptive design of Malay palaces (*Istana*), where modern materials are integrated into traditional layouts without compromising symbolic hierarchy (Ahmad, 2019).

The second theme, *Material and Craftsmanship*, emphasises the enduring importance of textile and decorative techniques as markers of royal prestige. The findings indicate that luxurious fabrics such as *songket*, brocade, and silk were consistently used, representing both social rank and aesthetic refinement. Traditional handwoven *songket Perak*, with its metallic thread motifs, remained central to the costume's royal image. Decorative embellishments such as *sulam benang emas* (gold thread embroidery) and beadwork highlighted both technical mastery and feminine delicacy. Colour selection was equally symbolic: gold and yellow tones reflected sovereignty, while silver and white expressed purity and divine grace. The persistence of these materials and techniques demonstrates how craftsmanship functions as a form of cultural continuity. Although sewing methods evolved through exposure to new tools and technologies, artisanship remained rooted in traditional aesthetics and values. This confirms that *Baju Puteri Perak* embodies not only artistic beauty but also cultural endurance and technological adaptability within the Malay heritage ecosystem (Mohd Yusof, 2018; Yusof & Ahmad, 2020).

The third theme, *Cultural and Symbolic Meanings*, situates the costume as a medium of moral and spiritual expression rather than mere adornment. The enclosed silhouette, long sleeves, and high neckline of the *Baju Puteri Perak* signify the values of modesty and piety (*aurat*), consistent with Islamic principles embedded within Malay royal ethics (Yusof & Ahmad, 2020). The design also conveys hierarchical meaning specific motifs, colours, and accessories were reserved exclusively for royal women, reinforcing social stratification and ceremonial protocol (Nor et al., 2021). At the same time, the costume embodies *serasi* and *sopan*, two key concepts in Malay aesthetics that express harmony, balance, and grace. These visual and moral codes parallel the symmetry and proportional balance observed in Malay architecture, where every element conveys spiritual order and cultural hierarchy (Abdullah & Hashim,

2021). Therefore, the *Baju Puteri Perak* can be interpreted as a form of “textile architecture,” where design elements in clothing reflect the same philosophical principles of space, dignity, and spirituality found in the built environment.

Integrating these three themes reveals that the *Baju Puteri Perak* represents a living manifestation of cultural resilience. The stylistic changes express adaptability to new influences without erasing traditional essence; the material continuity reflects an enduring respect for royal craftsmanship; and the symbolic meaning reaffirms the intersection between faith, culture, and beauty. Collectively, these findings align with the SIMPORA XVI 2025 theme, particularly under the areas of “Cultural Tradition Resilient” and “Design and Built Resilient.” The attire, therefore, stands as a tangible expression of how fashion can function as a cultural archive, preserving memory, belief, and identity through material form.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to decode the royal elegance of the *Baju Puteri Perak* through a systematic review of scholarly sources focusing on its styling, materials, and symbolic meaning from 1950 to 2000. Guided by the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method under the PRISMA framework, thirty-six studies were identified, analysed, and synthesised thematically. The findings demonstrate that although the *Baju Puteri Perak* has experienced notable changes in silhouette, tailoring, and material choice across five decades, these adjustments reflect cultural adaptation rather than transformation. The costume continues to embody the essence of Perak’s royal dignity its emphasis on modesty, refinement, and spiritual grace—anchored firmly within Malay cultural and religious traditions. Three key insights were drawn from this review. First, the changes in styling and form highlight how traditional royal attire maintains visual continuity while responding to the evolution of social taste and modern craftsmanship. Second, the use of materials and embellishments demonstrates the persistence of artisanal knowledge, particularly the integration of handwoven songket, silk brocade, and sulam benang emas, each symbolising noble lineage and cultural continuity. Third, the cultural and symbolic meanings embedded in the *Baju Puteri Perak* reflect Islamic modesty and Malay aesthetic philosophy; *serasi*, *sopan*, and *halus*, where beauty and morality coexist as inseparable design values. Collectively, these findings reinforce the notion that traditional attire operates as a form of textile architecture, mirroring the hierarchical and spiritual design principles found in the built environment of Malay palaces. In essence, the *Baju Puteri Perak* stands as a living artefact of cultural tradition resilience, connecting past and present through the language of dress. It serves as both a historical record and an active expression of identity, encapsulating Perak’s royal grace and spiritual sophistication. The parallels between the *Baju Puteri Perak* and architectural features of the Malay palace underscore the interconnectedness of fashion, faith, and spatial order within the Malay worldview.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

While this study has provided a systematic understanding of the Baju Puteri Perak within Perak's royal and cultural context, further research could expand its comparative scope within the Malay Archipelago. Future studies are encouraged to explore the stylistic and philosophical similarities between Perak's traditional royal costume and the Acehese women's attire, particularly in relation to form, modesty, and ornamental codes. Both cultures share deep Islamic influences and a history of royal governance that shaped gendered fashion identities and ceremonial aesthetics. Comparative research between Perak and Aceh could therefore reveal cross cultural continuities in textile symbolism, tailoring philosophy, and moral embodiment within the broader framework of the Malay world (Alam Melayu). Additionally, future researchers may examine the interrelationship between costume, architecture, and ritual practices, analysing how royal women's attire interacts with spatial settings during court ceremonies, coronations, or religious events. Digital reconstruction or visual ethnographic approaches could also be employed to document these garments for heritage preservation and education purposes. In conclusion, the Baju Puteri Perak represents more than a royal garment; it is a visual narrative of resilience, refinement, and reverence. Its enduring legacy reflects how fashion functions as a vessel of memory, transmitting local wisdom across generations and geographies. Through comparative and interdisciplinary research, scholars can continue to uncover the threads that connect Perak's royal elegance with the broader cultural fabric of the Malay and Acehese worlds.

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