

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**TRADITIONAL JEWELLERY
AS AN AESTHETIC AND
CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE TO
MALAY WOMEN'S ATTIRE IN
MALAYSIA**

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ABSTRACT

Traditional jewellery holds aesthetic and cultural significance in Malay women's attire in Malaysia, deeply rooted in the historical and cultural development of Malay society. In Malay culture, traditional jewellery is not merely decoration; it embodies profound symbolic meaning, reflecting status, identity, and commitment to cultural traditions. These accessories are essential to the visual representation of Malay heritage, especially in their association with traditional attire such as the *baju kurung* and *kebaya*. However, there is a knowledge gap regarding traditional Malay jewellery design, stemming from a lack of relevant documentation, particularly the use of motifs in design and pattern. Jewellery styling is still not sufficiently acknowledged as an essential accessory to complement Malay women's clothing. This study investigates the intricate connection between traditional jewellery and women's costume from a historical perspective, analysing how jewellery has significantly contributed to the expression of identity, status, and aesthetics across various periods of Malay history. The objectives of this research are: (1) to identify the types of motifs used in traditional Malay jewellery design; (2) to analyse the design characteristics; and (3) to establish the association of Malay traditional jewellery in Malay women's costumes. The research adopts a qualitative methodology, using a descriptive approach and observation, and is framed within the Malay Aesthetic Principles (MAP) theory by Asliza Aris (2014). Primary data includes photo images and artefact samples of traditional Malay jewellery focusing on upper body accessories, sourced from the antique collector, National Museum, and Textile Museum in Kuala Lumpur. Additional data comprises images of jewellery styling with *baju kurung* and *baju kebaya* from fashion magazines (1970–2022) published by Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, alongside an expert interview. The findings show that the relationship between Malay traditional jewellery and Malay women's attire profoundly reflects the community's cultural identity, heritage, and social values. This research contributes to the understanding of traditional jewellery's role in attire, provides moral and cultural knowledge, and strengthens heritage preservation for future generations, specifically in the context of Malay traditional jewellery.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research topic and guides the researcher through the study process. This research focuses on exploring the traditional jewellery as an aesthetic and cultural significance to Malay women's attire in Malaysia. It delves into the development and history of Malay traditional jewellery, tracing its origins back to the era of the Malaccan Sultanate in the 15th century and examining its evolution to the present day. The study observes various aspects of the jewellery, including its motifs, form, shape, style, craftsmanship, fabrication, and the influences that have shaped its use and design. These observations contribute to defining Malay traditional jewellery as a complement to Malay women's costumes. The research is framed by the Malay Aesthetic Principles (MAP) theory, as proposed by Asliza Aris (2014), which serves as a guideline for exploring the history, characteristics, and function of Malay traditional jewellery, particularly in its role as a complementary accessory in Malay women's attire.

1.1 Research Background

This section provides the general definition and fundamental understanding of traditional jewellery. The study discusses the purposes of Malay traditional jewellery from the perspective of local and expert knowledge. It discusses the analysis of artefact traditional Malay jewellery, the purposes of local knowledge and preservation, and how the actual and tacit knowledge complements Malay women's costumes in today's contemporary cultural environment. The study also explains the issues of selected artefacts to justify the importance of developing cultural understanding.

In Malaysia, the goldsmith has long been established and is believed to date back to prehistoric times. According to Soekmono (1973), the Late Prehistoric Age, or Metal Age, is an era in which the community's social life adopts a culture that uses tools made of metal. Leong Sau Heng (1989) stated that at the beginning of this era, the equipment produced was small objects such as pickaxes, axe points, spear points, and personal adornments such as bracelets (Jusoh, 2008).