

TRANSFORMATION IN MODE OF CLOTHING IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM AND ITS IMPACT ON IDENTITIES

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Abstract

While there has been a growing interest in studies of clothing in Southeast Asia among academics in the recent years, little attention has been paid to Brunei Darussalam. Studies of dress have been largely concerned with social and cultural contexts, including the transformation and the contemporary forces of globalisation. Many of the studies are also frequently using clothing to articulate and project identities. This paper examines the role of clothing in the construction of social and cultural identity of the Malay society in Brunei Darussalam. This paper discusses social, cultural and political organisation, followed by an explication of the different types of dress which are considered 'traditional' among the Malay society and their roles in manifesting ethnic identity. It also looks into how certain modes and types of clothing exhibit gender and religious identity. The role of clothing as a marker of status in relation to social and political hierarchy will also be touched. Finally, the evolution and transformation of mode of clothing will be analysed. This is done in the light of by examining the significance of globalisation and Islamisation and their impacts in evolution and transformation of the mode of clothing in Brunei Darussalam.

Keywords: Malay, clothing, identity, Islamisation, globalisation

Introduction

This paper examines clothing in the Malay society in Brunei Darussalam. Discussion will be focused on the role of clothing in the manifestation of identity. I will begin the paper by presenting the social, cultural and political organisation, followed by an attempt to explore how certain modes and types of clothing exhibit ethnic, gender and religious identity. I will also discuss the role of clothing in revealing social status in relation to social and political hierarchy. Subsequently, factors that contribute to the evolution and transformation of clothing will be analysed. This is done in the light of and through the significance of globalisation and Islamisation and their impacts on the construction of identity.

While there has been a growing interest in studies of clothing in Southeast Asia among academics in the recent years (Howard, 2000), little attention has been paid to Brunei Darussalam. Studies of dress have been largely concerned with

social and cultural contexts, including the transformation and the contemporary forces of globalisation (Howard, 2000). Many of the studies are also frequently using clothing to articulate and project identities (Barnes and Eicher, 1992; Eicher, 1995; Howard, 2000).

There are various ways to trace identity including through language and physical body. "Outward appearance" (Nordholt, 1997) or clothing is also one of the significant markers of identity. Barth (Gunaratne, 1998) acknowledged that actors in a given group use some cultural features, including clothing, as obvious signals or signs that people look for or exhibit identity. It is often reflected in the structure and design of clothing (Maxwell 1990). The shape, structure and decoration of clothing can distinguish certain basic social divisions such as sex, age, and marital as well as social status.

Clothing is one of the most fundamental needs in most societies. According to Islamic teachings, clothing is necessary to fulfil the obligation to cover parts of the body that should not be exposed. Although there is no specification of types of clothing, general guidance of proper modes of clothing is outlined in the Quran according to gender and age, as well as the spatial and temporal context.

Barnes and Eicher (1992) suggest that in the domain of cultural phenomena, dress or clothing has several essential attributes. Dress can be used to define a person's identity geographically and historically as well as the relation of an individual to a specific community. It serves as a sign of the individual's affiliation to a certain group, but also distinguishes the same individuals from all others within the groups. Dress also can indicate general social position of the person in the society in accordance with political and social hierarchy. Social position may be inherited by birth or may also be gained through one's own achievement. Furthermore, dress may also be a symbol of economic position. For instance, types and quality of materials for clothing can acquire great value as expressions of personal or communal well being.

In this paper, I argue that the process of globalisation has been influencing the evolution and transformation of clothing, hence its impact on the signification of identity. The interaction with the outside world has enhanced the diversification and innovation of styles of clothing. On the other hand, it also has instigated homogenization of styles of clothing. It thus generates a dilemma in the articulation of identity. The discussion of this article is not necessarily intended to look at such processes as negative aspects of globalisation on local fashion; rather it aims to provide a balanced debate on how such processes have also promoted and strengthened a sense of national or local identity.

Chua (2000) and Howard (2000) noted that the use of clothing for identification has changed due to globalisation. In Singapore, cultural flows have provided relative absorption of global fashion for different groups of people, using ethnic, religious, class and general divisions (Chua, 2000). Howard (2000) observed that the Dutch and Christian missionaries introduced the use of western clothing among the local indigenous people, especially when attending church services, which was seen as an integral part of their conversion efforts, whereas the Indonesian government has sought to promote nation building based on Javanese national culture and inculcating the practice of wearing Javanese-style batik clothing as manifestation of Indonesianness.

Globalisation in Brunei could be traced as early as in the sixth century in which the location of Brunei was well known to all the sailors who travel over the sea trade route from Arabia and India to China and surrounding areas; and was used as a stop-over by the traders, proving that Brunei was an important port of call in ancient times (Mohd Jamil Al-Sufri, 2000). In the ninth century, the country was absorbed into the great Sumatran Empire of Sri Vijaya. However, it recovered its independence in the late tenth century. By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, especially during the reign of the fifth sultan of Brunei, Sultan Bolkiah (1485-1524) and the ninth sultan, Sultan Hassan (1582-1598), Brunei was a dominant power in the region with sovereignty over the whole island of Borneo, extending to the northern part of the Philippines. However, from the end of the sixteenth century, Brunei began to lose its grip on its territory and in the nineteenth century, Brunei Darussalam became the British protectorate for about a century. The technological explosion, such as communication, transportation and logistics (Fraser, 1997) has also played a significant role in accelerating and intensifying the process of globalisation. Indeed, this proves that Brunei has been exposed to diverse influences thus affecting mode of clothing in Brunei.

Brunei regained its independence from the British in 1984 and the Sultan of Brunei declared Malay Islamic Monarchy as the national concept. The ideology stresses the importance of the Malays as the dominant population in the country and adopting the Malay culture, values and identity based on Islam. It also emphasises the monarch as the supreme ruler in the country. Although the philosophy has only been proclaimed formally during the Independence Day, it has been accepted that Brunei has always been a Malay Islamic Sultanate since the reign of the first recorded Sultan of Brunei, Sultan Muhammad Shah (1363-1402). The declaration has been seen as merely re-emphasising the notion as the national ideology and has since been rigorously adopted as the foundation of planning and implementation in all aspects of Brunei life socially, culturally, politically and economically. Furthermore, Islamic standards as well as Malay values of propriety are emphasised upon as filtering measure of globalising influences.

Brunei Darussalam in Brief

Brunei Darussalam is a small state situated on the northwest coast of Borneo. The total area of Brunei is 5,765 square kilometres. Brunei is divided into four administrative districts, namely Brunei Muara, Belait, Tutong and Temburong districts. According to Brunei Darussalam Statistical Yearbook 2007, Brunei had an estimated population of 390,000 (Jabatan Perancangan dan Kemajuan Ekonomi, 2007).

Brunei is an ethnically plural society (King, 2001). The majority of the population of about 67% is Malay, 6% other indigenous groups, 15% Chinese, and the remaining 12% are of other unspecified ethnicity, which may consist of Indians and Europeans. Furthermore, more foreigners are now coming to stay in Brunei. Most of them come from other Southeast Asian regions such as Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines and Malaysia. Most of them come to Brunei for employment, either as skilled or unskilled labour.

According to the 1959 constitution of the State of Brunei, there are seven ethnic groups that are legally recognized as Malay. They are Belait, Bisaya, Brunei, Dusun, Kedayan, Murut and Tutong. Groups that are considered indigenous but not Malays include Iban, Punan and Kelabit. Four of the Malay groups are Muslims: the Brunei, Belait, Kedayan and Tutong. The majority of people in other groups are non-Muslim. However, for the purpose of the discussion in this article, I will only focus my discussion on the Malays, as defined in the Brunei constitution.

Social Organization

Brunei society is highly stratified and can be viewed as a pyramid. In general, the people of Brunei are divided into two major groups: nobles and non-nobles. The Sultan is posited at the top of the hierarchy. The nobles can be divided into two sub-categories i.e. the core nobility and lower nobility. All the present nobles trace their descent from former nobles and are known generally as *Pengiran*. All persons who are relatively close descendents from the Sultan or high noble officials are the core nobility and known locally as *Raja-raja Betaras*. The lower nobility is occasionally referred to as *Pengiran Kebanyakan*, or ordinary/common nobles.

The non-nobles also can be divided into two categories. They are the higher non-nobility and the commoners. The higher non-nobles are descendants of holders of high non-noble offices and known as the *awang-awang*. The commoners or *orang kebanyakan* includes other ethnic groups and the non-noble citizens of Brunei. However, among the commoners, the Brunei is the predominant ethnicity and has higher social status.

Political Structure

Brunei Darussalam is an absolute monarchy in which the Head of State is also the head of Government. It practices dual system of government, both traditional and modern based, which Brown (1970) calls a complex system of government. The traditional system is still practised but is more relevant to the royal court. The modern system of government is responsible for the administration of the state as a whole.

The traditional system correlates in large measure with the social stratification. It is parallel to the division of Brunei society into noble and non-noble strata, and differentiated by official orders of the noble and non-noble officials (Brown, 1970). The appointment of officials is based on seniority and birth rank of the bearer. However, merit and other consideration such as audacity, loyalty, prudence and knowledge (Pg Mohd Yusof, 1958) have also partially determined the rank of office (Siti Norkhalbi, 2000).

In 1906, the first British Resident was appointed as the representative of the British government and was responsible for Brunei's affairs and established modern system of administration. The resident had freedom of action in the administration and legal power, and wider fields in which to exercise them. However, the British resident was not to interfere in matters which affected the

Islamic religion. During the proclamation of Independence in 1984, the Sultan of Brunei declared the setting up of a new government which was in the form of ministries, naming himself as the Prime Minister and electing other nobles and non-nobles to hold other ministerial offices. The reformation of system of government has provided avenues for social mobility especially among the non-nobles. More qualified non-nobles, including those of ethnic groups other than Brunei, and naturalised citizens, such as the Chinese, have been appointed to hold high administrative positions in government departments. However, the basic traditional system is still practised especially in the traditional court system. Thus, the appointment of the non-noble officials in the modern system of government also provides access to highly privileged positions in the traditional court system.

Clothing and Identity

Clothing has long played an important role as marker of identity (Barnes and Eicher, 1992; Howard, 2000; Lurie, 1983), and this is true in Brunei. The mode and pattern of dressing have not only been important in reflecting ethnic background but also other categories such, as religion, gender and occupation. The employment of certain accessories and types of clothing has also been significant for determining status in many societies. Only certain people may be allowed to wear certain accessories. The manner and styles of clothing also reflect social status – again, universals that apply to Brunei.

Traditional Attire of Indigenous Male

Historically, among the pagan inhabitants of Brunei, such as the Murut, Belait (the majority of whom have now converted to Islam), Bisaya, Dusun and other indigenous groups such as the Iban and Penan, the form of clothing was very basic. They wore loincloths to cover genitals for everyday wear. For ceremonial wear, the pagans also wore upper body clothing. The materials used to make the clothing may vary among different ethnic groups. For instance, clothing for the Murut was made of bark cloth, whereas other ethnic groups, such as the Belait and Dusun, used cotton.

In the past, most pagan ethnic groups in Brunei, such as the Murut and Belait, were intensely involved in the ritualised warfare of headhunting, locally known as *mengayau*. Capturing the enemy's head was the highest point of achievement, bestowing upon the successful head-hunters higher status in the community. Upon their return, a festival would be held to celebrate their success. During the festival, the warriors were dressed in loincloths, jackets and headdress. The type and colour of the headdress worn were exclusive to them in order to distinguish them from others. For instance, red was exclusively worn by the warrior in the Murut community and for a commoner to wear it could inadvertently mean to invite "spiritual tests" (sorcery might be involved) from higher status people within the ethnic group. The length of the loin cloth was also used to evaluate the status of the wearer. The longer length of the loin cloth indicated not only higher status socially, but also economically. In the older days,

cloths were scarce and they commended high prices which not many people could afford them at the time. Hence, the privilege of having a longer loincloth indicated high economic status.

Muslim Malay men, i.e. the Brunei, Belait, Kedayan and Tutong, commonly wore a tunic and a pair of long pants or/and *kain tajung* or a plaid design tubular sarong. Nonetheless, the styles may distinguish the difference of the ethnic groups. For instance, the trousers for the Kedayan ethnic are body fitting and an additional cloth is tied around the waist and adapted as belt. The Brunei man commonly used a pair of looser long pants and wear a short sarong i.e. *sinjang*¹ over them. Styles of clothing may also vary depending on occasions. For instance, a complete set of *baju cara Melayu* (Malay costume for men) which include tunic, trousers and *sinjang* (a short sarong worn by men over the trousers) are commonly worn on ceremonial occasions. *Kain tajung* or plaid design tubular cloth and light round neck shirt or singlet known as *baju sampang* (singlet) may also be commonly worn at home among most of the Muslim Malays.

Plain black textiles are widely used for traditional costumes. However, Brunei ethnic group also prefer to wear plain vibrant colours and Murut keep the natural colour of bark for their costumes. In former times, clothing for men was not usually decorated. This has changed especially after World War II, patterns and decorations have been used to distinguish ethnic background (Siti Norkhalbi, 2007). For instance, the Murut now decorate bark clothes with geometrical patterns across the main body of the jackets and red trimming along the edges of the sleeves and the central openings whereas the Dusun, Bisaya and Belait sometimes affix golden trimmings or stripes to decorate their attire. The Dusun and Bisaya have also used white and red stripes to adorn their clothing. Furthermore, elaborate decoration by employing sequins to make geometrical and floral patterns is also adapted, especially for ceremonial costumes. The Kedayan also adopted stripes, usually of red colour, along the trousers as a decoration. The Brunei remain using plain coloured material for their costumes and wear *sinjang* of plaid, chequered or floral design of traditional woven cloths.

In addition, men also wear a headgear. Black *songkok* (Malay velvet cap) is commonly worn as headdress especially among the Muslim Malay, although other types of headdress are also worn. *Tengkolok* (skullcap) has been popular among men who had performed Hajj. Among other ethnic groups, plain cotton cloth was used and tied around the head. For ceremonial wear, batik or traditional woven cloths may be used. The utilisation of headgear remains popular among men. Now, headgear is no longer restricted to the traditional ones, such as the *songkok* and *tengkolok*, but has varied to include new and modern styles of headgears, such as sport caps. Although the traditional ones are more popularly worn during festive and ceremonial occasions, other kinds of newly design sport caps and hats are commonly worn by males on casual occasions, as well as during leisure time.

Photo 1: The Malay men wearing traditional Malay costume

Source: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah, Fieldwork (2008)

In the Brunei royal court, ceremonial dress denotes the status of the wearer. Certain colours and designs distinguish the status of the wearer in the social and political hierarchy. At royal court functions, dignitaries wear traditional costumes (*baju cara Melayu*), including *sinjang*, *arat* (belt) and *daster*² (specially folded headgear). The *sinjang*, *arat* and *daster* are made of traditional woven cloth and given to them by the royal court upon their appointment to the office. The colour and design of the *sinjang*, *arat* and *daster* differ according to the rank of the wearer in the hierarchy. For example, the noble officers, chief *Cheteria* wears dark purple of *Jong Sarat* designed *sinjang*, *arat* and *daster* whereas *Cheteria* 32 wears bright pink but of similar design. For the higher non-noble officers, the colour of their ceremonial dress is similar to *Cheteria* 16 but of different design.

Traditionally, the way in which the *sinjang* was worn also revealed the wearer's social status, as well as his marital status. The length of the *sinjang* worn indicated the status of the wearer. The general rule was "the shorter the higher." Thus, wearing a shorter length of *sinjang* – about six inches above the knees – indicated the wearer may be from the core nobility. The central design of the *sinjang* is placed at the back for bachelors, but if the centre is positioned slightly towards the right, this indicated that the wearer has already married.

Photo 2: The noble officials in their ceremonial dress in court

Source: Courtesy from Information Department, Prime Minister's Office, Negara Brunei Darussalam

There are different types of male traditional costumes, such as *Baju cara Melayu teluk belanga* (high collar and fastened with several buttons), *baju cara Melayu cekak Musang* (a flat round neck and slit at the front), *baju cara Melayu butang lima* (open front tunic fastened with five small buttons) and *baju cara Melayu begulambir* (an additional cloth about the size of a handkerchief is attached at front of the collar). Basically they are of similar styles, but can be distinguished through the design of the collar. Traditionally, designs of the traditional costumes may denote the status of the wearer. For instance, the *baju cara Melayu teluk belanga* and *baju cara Melayu cekak musang* were normally worn by the commoners, whereas *baju Cara Melayu begulambir* was designed for people of high status in the royal court (Bantong, 2001). However, such practices are only loosely observed now. Furthermore, not many people are aware of the traditional sartorial rules and symbols. Now, the usage of traditional attire is not restricted to Muslim Malays only. In fact, on many occasions the non-Malay Muslim and other ethnic groups, such as the local Chinese, also wear traditional attire during certain occasions, such as at the royal court. The usage of traditional attire has become a display of collective identity and as a statement of nationalism.

Another style of costumes which have become popular, especially among the Muslim males who have performed the pilgrimage to Mecca is *baju gamis* (a long dress for man), also known as *baju jubah*. It is made of either silk, cotton or polyester, and a pair of long pants is usually worn underneath. The attire originated from the Middle East and was introduced to Brunei in the 1940s

(Bantong, 2001). In the Brunei perspective, people who have performed pilgrimage to Mecca have fulfilled their obligation as a Muslim, thus symbolising completeness (Abdul. Latif, 2003). According to Islamic teaching, a Muslim must complete the five pillars of Islam and the final pillar is performing the Hajj to Mecca for those who can afford it physically, spiritually and economically. And in order to perform Hajj, a person has to be economically stable. Thus, performing the pilgrimage is evidence of having gained higher status socially and economically.

When the British Resident was in power in Brunei, the modern system of governing was implemented. Apart from expatriates who were employed to fulfil certain higher positions, more locals were also recruited both in higher and lower offices. Western clothing had become popular among the office workers, and more formal attire was eventually adopted especially among the local "elite" ((Bantong, 2001:12).

Western-style shirt and trousers are commonly worn for working and everyday attire especially for such people working in the public and private sectors regardless of their ethnic background. However, additional articles of clothing may be used to reflect status or rank of the wearer. For instance, male educators teaching in government and private schools and higher institutions, as well as officers in higher position especially in the administrative level also wear a necktie signifying their position. For formal meetings and functions, a three-piece suit is also adopted, especially among senior officers. However, in the mid 1980's, the process of reMalayanisation has taken over in which the Western shirt was modified to conform the local characteristic by adapting the Malay traditional suit's collar, which replaced the western shirt's collar. For everyday wear, T-shirt, jeans and other forms of modern casual attire has become popular among males.

Female Attire

Females across diverse ethnic backgrounds tend to adopt a similar style of clothing. However, there is a distinctive feature especially among the Muslim and non-Muslim women. Muslim female clothing should conform to the Islamic teaching. The Islamic code of dressing for women requires them to cover the whole body, except the face and hands.

The standard women's costume consisting of sarong or skirt and blouse is worn by the majority of women for all major activities outside their home, from working fields to attending festivals. Cotton is commonly used for everyday clothing, whereas other types of materials, such as silk and velvet are preferred for formal occasions.

For everyday clothing, women in most ethnic groups have adopted a common type of blouse and combined it with a batik sarong, locally known as *kain selendang*³. Women could also wear a batik sarong on its own for covering the body, between the breast and the knees or up to the ankles. This is locally known as *kamban*. However, such a way of dressing was only acceptable when one stayed within the domain of her home. A top or an additional batik sarong was usually put on to cover the upper part of the body when going out of the house.

For festive and ceremonial purposes, clothing was decorated with embroidery, beads, sequins and hollowed silver ornaments filled with small pellets. The design, style and decorations for festive occasions are the most distinctive features that manifest the wearer's ethnic identity. For instance, the Murut female costume consists of a three-quarter-length sleeve loose blouse and a knee length skirt. Beads are elaborately adapted for additional accessories, such as necklace, headgear and belt. Moreover, beads and sequins of multiple vibrant colours, such as red, white, yellow and green, are also elaborately used to decorate the dress. Although beads are commonly used to make belts, silver belt is also utilised.

Photo 3: The Murut traditional costume



Source: Siti Norkhalbi Haji Wahsalfelah, Fieldwork (2003)

The Belait, Dusun and Bisaya have a similar fashion, especially for ceremonial purposes, but the skirt is longer and batik may alternately be used. Hollowed silver buttons filled with small pellets are commonly attached to the sleeves of the costumes. These buttons are generally termed *kubamban*, thus lending their name to the article of clothing, *baju kubamban*. During festive occasions, such as weddings, the bride and bridesmaid usually wear golden or silver head ornament. Other accessories including gold or silver necklaces, ear rings and bangles are also worn. Furthermore, especially among the Dusun and Bisaya ethnic, old silver coins brooches are commonly adapted for further decoration.

Amongst females, *kebaya* (a female tunic with a front opening) and loose blouse, and batik sarong were also commonly worn. Except among the Brunei, black was the most popular colour used to make blouses, especially for ceremonial

costumes. However, the *kihip* (cotton) and *kasa* (translucent type of material) of floral motif materials were also preferred to make *kebaya* and other types of daily clothing. *Baju kurung* (a long tunic that reaches to the knee as a top, worn with a loose sarong that reached down to the ankle) or loose *kebaya* are commonly worn on social and ceremonial occasions, especially among the Brunei Malays. For ceremonial occasions, such as weddings, the bride and bridesmaid wear clothing of traditional woven clothes of bright colours. They also wear additional accessories, such as golden head ornaments or tiara, necklaces, earrings and bangles.

Photo 4: The bride wearing traditional clothing and accessories



Source: Courtesy from Mohd Hosenal Haji Wahsalfelah (2008)

The head decoration and covering among women is one aspect of dressing that cannot be neglected. The usage of certain types and styles of head decoration and covering may depend on space and time. Such decoration and covering may also reflect the identity of the wearer. For example, the Murut females commonly wear headgear made from bright coloured beads, such as yellow, red and black during festivals, whereas triangular shaped hat for everyday or working wear. The hat might also be decorated with beads of multiple colours. However, there have been some developments and changes in types and styles of head decorations and coverings over the years.

Western style clothing has not only influenced male attire, but also female clothing. In the past, Western and masculines styles of clothing may not have been

accepted for women. However, such perceptions have now long gone. For casual wear, a woman may use T-shirt, trousers and skirts, which are available in the department store. The fashion may vary, but simple and practical themes in clothing are favoured.

The modern administration introduced by the British Government in Brunei not only provided opportunities for males, but also for females to be employed in many departments, including in the army and police forces. Such forces required the officers to wear a specified uniform. At that time, the female's uniform did not conform to Islamic dressing codes in which the uniform exposed the female's upper arms and lower legs. The uniform consisted of a short sleeve top, and a knee length skirt. In addition, the officer is also to wear a specified headgear. Now, many of women uniforms have conformed to the Islamic code of dressing. For types of employment not requiring uniforms, traditional costumes for women i.e. *baju kurung* and *kebaya*, are commonly worn by the female employees especially among those working in the government sector. *Baju kurung* are also prescribed as school uniforms, especially in the public schools.

In former times, *selayah*⁴ was popularly worn for head covering for outings and ceremonial functions. However, a batik sarong may also be employed as head covering. Now, the uses of *selayah* and batik sarong as the head coverings are no longer common. Instead, a large or medium size of square material folded into triangular shape is alternately used as the headscarf, locally known as *tudung*. The material varies, including silk and chiffon, and may be of plain or printed design. For better presentation, a plain headscarf may be designed with floral motif embroidery and decorated with beads.

In the past, *bunga cucuk sanggul* (head ornaments) were also worn, especially on festive and ceremonial occasions amongst women. The *bunga cucuk sanggul* were made of gold or silver and carved mostly with floral motifs. The hair was usually tied in a bun, with the *bunga cucuk sanggul* inserted into the bun. Fresh flowers were also used to decorate the coiffure. According to the traditional custom of the Kedayan, the way of decorating one's hair may express the marital status of a woman. Placing the hair ornaments on the left side of the head signified the woman was single, whereas positing it on the right would indicate that she had married. However, such practice is no longer observed now.

Now, other forms of head ornamentations are available. Modern styles of hair band, ribbons and assorted clips are also used for head decoration. Furthermore, hats and sport caps are also available for women and are worn according to the occasion. Generally, headscarves are commonly worn, even among the non-Muslim women, especially in formal occasions, such as state functions. Furthermore, the headscarf has also been adopted as part of women uniform especially in public schools and government departments.

The Evolution and Transformation of Clothing

The variety of clothing used in Brunei is now greater than ever. Generally, the structure of clothing among the ethnic groups to some extent has shown a similarity. However, there are some instances differences in styles and additional

items distinguish the members of one ethnic group from another (Howard, 2000), as well as social status within the given group. There is also indication that the phenomenon has undergone some development and changes. Bruneians have been exposed to world fashion in many ways. External influences date back at least to the sixth century in which Brunei was an entrepot especially for traders who came from Arabia and India to travel to China and the surrounding areas. The coming of foreign traders who traded goods including textiles has given Bruneians access to imported goods through exchange with local products. The availability of textiles in the market has directly developed and changed the mode of dressing, with uncomfortable materials of traditional clothing alternated with a comfortable one.

Some traders did not only come solely for the trading purpose, but they were also preaching the Islamic faith to the locals. Islam is believed to have come to Brunei during the tenth century, but it was only widely spread in the fifteenth century when the first Sultan of Brunei converted to Islam. When Islam first came to Brunei, the locals were especially exposed to the Islamic faith rather than the practices and laws. At that time, the people were only exposed to the basic teachings of Islam; especially the basic principles of Islamic faith (*rukun Iman*)⁵ and the five pillars of Islam (*rukun Islam*).⁶ Only once the locals had a stronger faith and belief were the practices and laws of Islam inculcated and implemented as way of life, including code of Islamic dressing. However, even then such code of dressing was only practised loosely. Not until mid 1980's, when Islam was re-emphasised and adopted as the basis for the national ideology, did the Islamic code of dressing begin to be widely observed.

At the same time, not only has the style of dressing in Brunei been influenced by the West, but other regional influences have also contributed to changes, thus enriching the local fashion. The establishment of the British residency in 1906 and the ensuing modern administration and departments, opened the opportunity for foreigners to work and stay in Brunei. The opportunities were not limited to the Europeans, who were employed to hold many positions, but there were also Malay employees from neighbouring states to fill certain positions such as teachers, due to the lack of local expertise. Furthermore, the discovery of oil in 1929 also opened up more opportunities among foreign experts and workers to come and work in Brunei, especially in the newly discovered industry. The coming of these workers has indirectly influenced the development and changes in fashion and style of clothing. In addition, after World War II, the importation of Western styles of clothing increased with the greater availability of varieties of types of dress, such as trousers, blouses, shirts and headgears on market. Eventually such styles of clothing were selectively accepted and worn by the locals.

The exploration of oil has also transformed the economic situation although full development was delayed until after the Second World War. Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin (1950-1967), the 28th Sultan had for the first time utilised the Brunei's oil revenue to finance a Five Year National Development Plan (1953-1958). One of the emphases of the National Development Plan was given to the development of education. Apart from developing education institution in the country, the locals have also been given the opportunities to study overseas, such

as the U.K, Malaysia and Singapore. This not only exposed them to foreign culture, but also gave them social mobility, especially among graduates from the commoners. Upon completion of their study, the graduates were guaranteed with jobs in the government departments to hold high positions, thus conferring them higher social and political status. Such status has evidently manifested through clothing by adapting Western styles of attire, but they have also been honoured with “uniform” of ceremonial dress to wear in the royal court.

The explosion of media technology in which more global information can be transmitted through electronic and printed media, such as television, cinemas, computer and internet facilities, magazines and newspaper, has provided Bruneians with more direct exposure to what happens around the world. Apart from the current issues, Bruneians have also been opened to the designs of up-to-date fashion. Such exposure has generated the interest to possess and imitate selective up-to-date trends, designs and styles of clothing and conform to the standard of local values.

It has been accepted that Brunei like the rest of the world, inevitably is open to globalisation and its impact socially, politically, culturally and economically. The globalisation theory allows for the possibility of globalisation’s impact upon ethnic identity that is a strengthening of national identity as a reaction or resistance to globalisation(Cibulka, 2000). The national concept, Malay Islamic Monarchy has been adopted as a measure to filter external influences that are considered unsuitable according to the local values. Brunei has made this ideology a national aspiration, inculcating it as a way of life, as well as a national identity. This ideology has thus played a role in the development and change of mode of clothing among local Bruneians of different ethnic background. The acceptance of traditional Malay attire as a national dress, especially worn during certain state and royal court functions, is one way of manifesting national identity through dressing. However, the re-emergence of ethnic traditional clothes has also been encouraged in a way that has allowed them to associate with ethnic identities. It is intended that local cultural expression is orderly manifested and in accordance with the national ideology, Malay Islamic Monarchy.

Conclusion

To recapitulate, it has been shown that mode of clothing in Brunei has been developing and changing. Globalisation has played significant roles in contributing to such processes. The mode of dressing has, to some extent, facilitated identification of the wearer. However, the cultural flow in response to the process of globalisation has exposed Bruneians to diverse influences, thus providing complexity in the questions of identity.

The external influences, such as the foreign traders, Islamic preachers, political authority, as well as the explosion of technology have penetrated deep impacts to many aspects of Bruneians life, including towards the development and change of modes of attire. All of the influences have been selectively assimilated and combined to conform to the local standards of mode of dressing.

The economic development, especially after the revenue from oil industry has been utilised to develop the nation as a whole, provided opportunities to upgrade the social life of the people. The improvement of education system has provided social mobility, especially among the commoners to a higher social, political and economic status, and this was evidently expressed through clothing. The adoption of certain modes of clothing reveals such status. The combination of advancement of technology and economic development has also helped expose Bruneians to the outside world and provides interaction with outsiders that contributing in enriching local fashions. The economic development has provided financial stability among the Bruneians and increased their ability to purchase available clothing on market. Furthermore, more choices of types of clothing have become available for the Bruneians to choose from and as a consequence, questions of identity became more complex (Howard, 2000).

Globalisation has instigated the awareness to strengthen national or local identities. The adoption of national ideology of Malay Islamic Monarchy can be seen as a reaction to globalisation and to maintain and strengthen national and local identities. It is also used as measures to filter external influences. Although both globalisation and the adoption of national ideology lead to similar impact i.e. cultural homogenisation, the national ideology is derived from the local values and directly associated with local identity. Now, as the awareness of “Malay identity” amongst the ethnic groups (especially among the seven ethnic groups that are legitimately recognised as the Malay race in the Brunei Constitution) has increased, ethnic dress has been constantly used to display ethnicity not only during ethnic celebrations, but significantly during events at national or state level, such as the National Day and the Sultan’s birthday celebrations. The traditional dress are worn during these events promotes the sense of belonging and acceptance as part of the Malay culture.

Endnotes

¹In Malaysia, this is known as *samping*.

²In Malaysia, it is known as *tanjak*.

³In other region in the Malay Archipelago, a *selendang* is a long rectangular cloth and commonly used as headscarf or worn like a sash over the women’s shoulder and also use to carry infants. However, in Brunei, *selendang* is a batik tubular cloth and generally used as skirt, which is worn as daily clothing especially among women.

⁴*Selayah* is the term employed in Brunei to label what elsewhere in the archipelago is called a *selendang*.

⁵There are six basic principles of faith in Islam, i.e. to believe in God (Allah), believe in Angels, believe in Prophets and Messengers of God, believe in holy books revealed to Prophet Muhammad (the Koran), Prophet Isa (Jesus – the Bible), Prophet Musa (Moses – the Pentateuch) and Prophet Daud (David – the Psalms), believe in the Day of Judgement and to believe in God’s decree and destiny.

⁶ The five pillars of Islam are to confess that there is no divinity other than God (Allah) and Prophet Muhammad is the messenger of God, perform obligatory prayers five times a day, fasting during the whole month of Ramadhan, to pay *zakat* (tithe due on the wealth of the rich according to Islamic law), and performing pilgrimage to Mecca once in a life time if one can afford physically and financially.

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