

Malay Traditional Institution and The Traditional Dress Policy in Public Spaces

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the dynamics of the implementation of the Malay fashion preservation policy as a strategy for maintaining cultural identity in Riau Province, as well as to evaluate the strategic role of the Riau Malay Traditional Institution (LAM Riau) in regional cultural governance. This research method uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. Data collection was conducted through a documentation study of various cultural policies in Riau Province and in-depth interviews with key informants determined through a purposive sampling technique with 11 respondents with the criteria of inherent authority, cultural actors and key stakeholders in cultural policy in Riau Province. The results of the study indicate that the implementation of the traditional fashion policy has been dominantly internalized in the government bureaucratic system, but its manifestation in the public sphere is still symbolic-administrative and has experienced a reduction in philosophical meaning. LAM Riau plays a central role as a government partner and guardian of values to ensure that modernization does not erode traditional norms. The main challenges faced include the distortion of the younger generation's understanding of dress ethics and the hegemony of popular culture.

INTRODUCTION

Amidst globalization, preserving local identity is a crucial challenge for modern public administration, particularly for regional governments. It is clear that every regional government in Indonesia possesses local wisdom (Arniti et al., 2022). This local wisdom then becomes a unique identity that distinguishes one region from another from the perspective of customs, language, and culture within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic

of Indonesia (NKRI). Law No. 5 of 2017 states that regional cultural diversity constitutes a national wealth and identity needed to advance national culture amidst the dynamics of global development. As a provincial government, the Riau Provincial Government has affirmed its identity as "The Homeland of Malay" with its official government vision for 2025-2045: "Riau is advanced and sustainable within a religious Malay cultural environment." It places Malay culture as the primary foundation of regional development.

Malay culture has long been a part of Riau's life, with a glorious history that is a source of pride for the Riau Malay community (Rehayati, 2013). This cultural heritage is then continuously maintained and developed into an identity, accommodated through the commitment and regional cultural policies of the Riau provincial government. As a concrete manifestation of this commitment, the regional government in Riau province has formally institutionalized the Riau Malay Traditional Institution, a strategic partner of the Riau provincial government in preserving Malay culture, through a regional regulation. Furthermore, to symbolically strengthen and disseminate Malay identity, the policy of wearing Malay attire in government agencies and public spaces is also enforced through policy mechanisms. Individuals and communities are encouraged to learn and appreciate local wisdom based on local culture (Mahrinasari et al., 2024).

Culture is essentially a dynamic and adaptive instrument of well-being that has a significant influence on society (Goldbach et al., 2014). Determining what is or is not included in a country's cultural policy at any given time is not simply a matter of bureaucratic structure but also reflects the limits of public intervention deemed legitimate within that society and can be promoted by state authorities. According to Schuster (2003) government cultural policy can be understood as the summation of all state activities that intersect with three main pillars: the arts, the humanities, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Prioritizing policies that focus on tangible objects, such as Malay clothing, would seem easy to promote and relate to these three main pillars of cultural policy. However, according to Mulcahy (2010), implementing cultural policy often faces its own complexities compared to technical-administrative policies because it deals not only with numbers or procedures but also touches on aspects of community identity, values, and emotions. In the context of Malay clothing, challenges arise not only in compliance but also in understanding the rules or procedures for wearing it in accordance with prevailing customary norms, to prevent the desacralization of Malay cultural values and identity.

Malay clothing is a prominent visual element of cultural symbolism for the people of Riau. Malay clothing is not merely a covering for the body, but a symbol steeped in philosophy, manners, and dignity (Rahmah et al., 2025). In this context, the Riau Provincial Government has implemented a series of efforts to reintroduce Malay clothing to public spaces, a strategic step in preserving Malay cultural values and customs in the region. The use of traditional Malay clothing in government and public spaces serves as a strategy to re-instill a sense of belonging to local wisdom that has begun to erode due to modernity.

The distinctiveness of Malay identity has long been recognized for its politeness, modesty, and ability to adapt to diverse cultures without relinquishing its Malay identity (Rehayati, 2013). This has become a focus of cultural policy in Riau Province, which prioritizes not only formal compliance but also the preservation of cultural values. Riau's strategic position as a crossroads of trade and culture makes this region both strong and vulnerable to the infiltration of foreign values that can erode local wisdom, values, and culture.

Geographical and emotional proximity to Malay-like regions, such as the Riau Islands Province and neighboring Malaysia and Singapore, creates a dynamic cultural corridor yet full of challenges in maintaining the authenticity of local values. Furthermore, advances in information technology are increasingly driving changes in various aspects of life, including customary values, which can threaten the existence of local culture. This condition demands intensive development so that Malay identity is not merely a historical memory but remains alive in the daily practices of the community (Dahlan, 2004). One manifestation of strengthening this identity is the use of traditional clothing in public spaces on certain days and moments, such as the policy of using Malay clothing in government bureaucracy, educational institutions and so on, which has been implemented so far.

Academic discourse on cultural preservation efforts through public policy has been quite extensive, highlighting the challenges of physical preservation (cultural heritage) and regulatory weaknesses. According to Sugianto (2024) study on cultural advancement policies in Indonesia, this policy is implemented through efforts to protect, utilize, develop, and foster culture through the inventory and protection of cultural heritage, including recording, documenting, and designating cultural heritage as cultural heritage. Ritiduian & Megawati (2021) found that the implementation of preservation policies often fails due to economic pressures that convert historic buildings into neglected commercial areas. This is reinforced by Setiawan et al., (2025) who emphasize that the main obstacles to preserving local wisdom are unclear regulatory guidelines and weak sanctions, despite efforts by local governments to establish culture as a source of identity. Furthermore, Apriyanti et al (2024) emphasize the importance of digital technology collaboration in the Society 5.0 era to popularize traditions. Putra et al (2024) specifically examine the preservation of traditional clothing, but their study is limited to the youth segment and formal education environments.

Furthermore, Zainuudin (2018) analyzed the Riau Malay Traditional Institution (LAM Riau) with an emphasis on its role in preserving culture as tourism, not merely as an ethical standard. Similarly, Atmoko (2018) discussed cultural village policies that are more oriented towards art attractions and tourism potential. Other findings highlight local cultural events that can increase tourism visits in the region, such as the results of research by Natasha & Facrureza (2024). In the context of preserving Malay culture in Riau Province, even Afandi et al., (2021) concluded that the formation of the Riau Vision 2025 is currently faced with the reality that Malay culture has weakened significantly in Riau Province with policies that are considered inconsistent and have not implemented effective collaborative governance. Based on the review of several literature, there is still a lack of research that comprehensively dissects the perspective of the policy on the use of traditional clothing in public spaces, which can be one way to strengthen identity and maintain collective memory of local cultural values. Therefore, the formulation of the problem to be answered in this article is: What is the policy on the use of Malay clothing in public spaces in Riau Province? To what extent is the Riau LAM central as a guardian and actor in governance? This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the implementation of traditional clothing policies in public spaces and evaluating the role and dynamics of its use for the Riau LAM.

METHOD

The method uses a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach emphasizes the analysis of phenomena from the perspective of the subject in their natural environment to produce descriptive conclusions (Moleong, 2010). This study explores the dynamics of the implementation of traditional clothing preservation policies in public spaces in depth through the strategic role of the Riau Malay Traditional Institution. The data sources were obtained through a documentary study of cultural policies in Riau Province and complemented by in-depth interviews with 11 key stakeholders. These informants were selected via purposive sampling from government bodies and Riau Malay Traditional Institutions, based on specific criteria inherent institutional authority, active roles as cultural practitioners, and significant influence within the regional cultural policy landscape. Data analysis was carried out interactively referring to the model of Miles et al. (2014), namely data collection in the field, data condensation to sort and strengthen relevant information, data presentation (data display) in the form of logical narratives, and verification and drawing conclusions. In the data collection stage, researchers collected documentation in the form of local policies and reports of the activities of the Malay Traditional Institution relevant to the research focus. These documents were then systematically reviewed and deepened through interviews with relevant parties. Furthermore, the obtained data were triangulated to ensure the consistency and validity of the information to produce valid data. The condensation process involves sorting, simplifying, and strengthening relevant information to better focus on the research objectives. The condensed data is then presented in a structured, logical narrative, making it easier for researchers to see patterns and relationships between findings. The final stage, verification and conclusion drawing, involves reexamining the preliminary findings through triangulation and in-depth analysis, resulting in descriptive conclusions appropriate to the research context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Cultural Policy: The Identity of the Riau Malay Traditional Clothing of the People

Within Riau's public administration ecosystem, cultural policy is positioned as a central pillar of governance, not merely a complementary element. This political commitment is strongly legitimized through Riau Provincial Regulation Number 9 of 2015 concerning the Preservation of Riau Malay Culture. This regulation serves as a master plan or foundation, explicitly emphasizing in its considerations that cultural preservation efforts are a strategy to maintain regional identity amidst the rapid flow of globalization and ensure the advancement of dignified civilization.

Attention to cultural advancement is further legitimized through the national policy of Law Number 5 of 2017 concerning Cultural Advancement, which aims to develop the noble values of national culture, enrich cultural diversity, strengthen identity, and strengthen national unity. Furthermore, cultural advancement is also directed at enhancing the nation's intellectual life, enhancing the nation's image in the eyes of the world, creating a civil society, and promoting increased public welfare. These efforts simultaneously serve to preserve the nation's cultural heritage and influence the direction of global civilization's development.

Regional Regulation Number 9 of 2015 mandates the regional government to implement policy interventions to protect symbols of local identity. One of the most concrete manifestations of this mandate is the regulation regarding civil servant dress. This was then technically translated through the issuance of Riau Governor Regulation Number 141 of 2015,

one of the substances of which regulates the use of Malay attire. This was recently replaced by Governor Regulation Number 10 of 2025 concerning Civil Servant Uniforms, which also includes the same provisions.

One specific point of this policy mandates the use of the Baju Kurung Cekak Musang and Teluk Belanga styles on Fridays as the typical regional daily uniform. From a public policy perspective, this step represents a form of local identity that positions the civil servant body as a site of value representation. Governor Regulation Number 46 of 2018 concerning the Implementation of Malay Culture in Public Spaces further strengthens efforts to disseminate Malay identity values. The state not only regulates visual aesthetics but also instills values of authority and identity, as enshrined in the gubernatorial regulation's considerations.

However, the dynamics of implementing this policy encounter complex obstacles, as mentioned in the cultural policy phenomenon (Mulcahy, 2010). Clothing regulations are often trapped in administrative formalities without successfully internalizing the substantive ethical dimension, which is the primary objective of regional regulations on cultural preservation. This creates a risk of traditional clothing being viewed merely as work uniforms to fulfill administrative obligations. Furthermore, there is still minimal public understanding of the meaning of Malay clothing (Zairina & Fakhrihun, 2020). This situation suggests that the role of the Riau Malay Traditional Institution as guardian of values still faces challenges in reaching all levels of society, including the bureaucracy.

The Strategic Role of the Riau Malay Traditional Institution (LAM Riau) in the Cultural Policy Ecosystem

Initially, the traditional institution in Riau was known as the Riau Regional Customary Institution, established in 1970 and based on Islamic law and the Pancasila philosophy. However, with the enactment of Regional Regulation No. 1 of 2012 concerning Malay Customary Institutions, the status of Riau Malay customs was reaffirmed. This regulation emphasizes that Riau Malay customs are a set of values, norms, and customs that have grown and developed over the course of the customary law community. These values have been recognized, internalized, and practiced repeatedly, continuously, and passed down from generation to generation throughout history.

The Riau Malay Traditional Institution aims to explore, foster, maintain, and develop the noble values of Riau Malay customs as a foundation and to strengthen Malay identity. In an effort to carry out its functions, duties and objectives, the Riau Malay Traditional Institution is guided by the Articles of Association and Bylaws which were approved in 2001 and Legal Entity Notarial Deed No. 40 dated 24 June 2005. The main tasks of LAM Riau in accordance with Regional Regulation 1/2012 are:

- a. Collection and Management of Cultural Data; Carrying out efforts to discover, collect and manage materials and data on Malay customs and culture in the Riau area, while remaining in harmony with sharia law and state law.
- b. Dissemination of Malay Traditional Knowledge; Instilling and expanding the knowledge of the Malay community regarding Malay customs and socio-cultural values, in order to form the next generation who have a Malay identity and are useful in elevating Malay luck, honor, honor and dignity in social, national and state life.
- c. Collaboration with the Community and Government; Organize and strive for harmonious and beneficial cooperation with all groups of society and the government.

- d. Providing Opinions and Suggestions; Providing opinions and suggestions, whether solicited or not, to the regional government to increase the participation of indigenous communities in driving the process and implementation of regional development in Riau and preserving traditional values.
- e. Restoration of Traditional Rights; Striving to restore and restore the traditional and constitutional rights of the Malay indigenous community in accordance with a sense of justice, propriety, and applicable laws.

The existence of the Riau Malay Traditional Institution cannot be reduced to merely an ordinary civil society organization, but rather as an institution with strong cultural and moral legitimacy within the social structure of Riau society. The study revealed that LAM Riau serves a central function as a bridge between state (government) power and the noble values of society. In the context of implementing traditional clothing policies, LAM Riau's strategic role can be comprehensively described in three main dimensions.

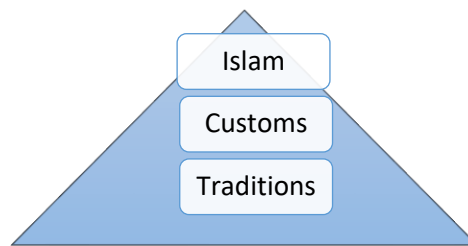
First, as a strategic partner to the government. As a government partner, LAM Riau's function goes beyond simply providing advice. LAM acts as a provider of cultural legitimacy for public policies designed by the government, particularly in the context of cultural preservation. In formulating regulations regarding the use of traditional attire for civil servants, the regional government holds formal legal authority, but the LAM Riau holds substantial authority. Without the involvement of the LAM, the policy on the use of baju kurung risks losing its "spirit" and becoming merely a formality in official uniforms. Input from the LAM ensures that issued regulations do not conflict with customary norms, so that the policy is accepted and complied with by the community, not out of legal coercion, but out of cultural awareness.

Second, as the guardian of the values and philosophical standardization of Malay attire. The Malay Traditional Institution has the responsibility to rectify deviations from customary practices. Amid rapid modernization, disruptions in meaning often occur when traditional attire is worn carelessly without regard for ethics or proper etiquette. This role automatically positions the customary institution as a cultural curator tasked with preserving the purity of tradition. In the context of dress code, this institution actively provides education on the fundamental differences between attire for traditional ceremonies or ceremonial occasions and daily attire, as applied to civil servant uniforms and religious attire. This step is crucial to ensure that the baju kurung does not experience a desacralization of meaning due to inappropriate use. For example, traditional institutions ensure that the wearing of the kain sisi (songket) for men adheres to customary rules, namely that the cloth should be worn above the knee for unmarried men, while the cloth should be worn below the knee for married men. This kind of philosophical detail is a crucial aspect often overlooked in rigid bureaucratic regulatory texts.

The third function carried out is social control to ensure that the currents of modernization do not erode the Malay identity that is integrated with religious values, where established traditions must be in accordance with customs and traditions encoded in Islamic law (Figure 1). In this context, the Riau Malay traditional Institution positions itself as a moral defense for the community. When the policy of wearing traditional clothing is implemented in public spaces and government agencies, this institution provides guidance to ensure that design modifications, often based on reasons of trend or comfort, do not violate the

boundaries of sharia. Aspects of this guidance include ensuring the appropriateness of clothing sizes so that they are not too tight and the use of non-transparent materials. Through applicable customary mechanisms, the institution strives to reprimand and correct all forms of deviation so that Riau's identity as the Malay homeland does not stop at the level of mere physical symbolism but is also implemented concretely in the behavior and politeness of its wearers.

Figure 1



Resource : Rehayati (2013)

To preserve Malay clothing, LAM Riau has not only established formal rules but also developed guidelines that can serve as a reference for the community when wearing traditional attire. These guidelines are not intended to limit creativity, but rather to ensure that everyone who wears Malay clothing maintains its inherent philosophical values and cultural identity. For example, for women, the baju kurung teluk belanga (traditional Malay dress) is recommended to be made from quality materials such as silk or satin, with matching top and bottom colors. Suit styles that combine motifs and colors symbolize harmony, while accessories such as a headscarf or shawl and shoes complete the look with an elegant and modest feel.

For men, the baju kurung teluk belanga (traditional Malay dress) or cekak musang (traditional Malay dress) is paired with a kain sisi (clothes worn by the Malay people), tanjak (clothes worn by the Malay people), or destar (headscarf), and appropriate shoes. The harmony of materials and colors is not merely a matter of aesthetics but also reflects the values of modesty and honor held dear in Malay tradition. With these standards, LAM Riau strives to raise awareness that wearing traditional clothing is not simply about following trends or styles, but rather a form of respect for cultural heritage and shared identity. More than that, this dress code is a way to revive the sense of pride, togetherness and elegance of Malay culture in people's daily lives.

The Dynamics of Implementing Cultural Policies on the Use of Traditional Clothing and Its Challenges

The dynamics of implementing the policy on the use of traditional attire in Riau cannot be limited solely to the bureaucracy of the state civil service. The philosophical essence of Regional Regulation Number 9 of 2015 concerning the Preservation of Riau Malay Culture mandates a much broader scope, namely the formation of the cultural identity of the Riau community as a whole. Within this policy, the state apparatus functions as a cultural showcase or primary role model. Therefore, dress practices within government circles have a significant psychological impact in shaping public perceptions of proper traditional standards.

The greatest challenge arises when state officials fail to set an example, triggering a negative domino effect on public understanding. When the public witnesses government officials wearing traditional attire that has been excessively modified for aesthetic reasons or in violation of sharia principles, this has the potential to be perceived as a new standard of truth or a normal norm. The distortion of meaning that occurs within the bureaucracy unconsciously legitimizes similar practices within the wider community, resulting in the normalization of violations of dress ethics in public spaces. As a result, there has been a shift in values, where adherence to traditional customs is deemed irrelevant compared to the desire to follow the modification trends demonstrated by state officials.

Furthermore, the sociological challenges facing the general public are increasingly complex with the emergence of the phenomenon of cultural commodification due to the pressures of the global fashion industry. Outside government institutions, Malay clothing is now often produced and worn solely as a fashion commodity without adequate philosophical understanding. This situation indicates that the implementation of cultural policies faces structural challenges in transforming collective consciousness. The role of the Riau Malay Traditional Institution is crucial, not only focusing on government elites but also penetrating education into various levels of the social structure, including the private sector and educational institutions. LAM Riau continues to pursue this goal. This cultural strategy aims to build an understanding that traditional clothing is a communal identity that binds all elements of Riau society.

At this point, it's important to emphasize that the revitalization of Malay fashion depends not only on formal regulations or policies, but also on the active involvement of the community as cultural owners. The participation of local communities, the younger generation, and creative industry players is key to ensuring that Malay values can survive and thrive amidst the tide of modernization. By involving them in dialogue spaces, creative activities, and daily practices, Malay fashion will be more readily accepted as part of a shared identity, rather than simply a ceremonial symbol. This approach, which places the community at the center of cultural preservation, will strengthen a sense of ownership, pride, and social solidarity, allowing the transformation of collective consciousness to occur more naturally and sustainably.

CONCLUSION

In general, the implementation of the policy on the use of traditional attire in Riau Province is based on the cultural policy instrument of Regional Regulation No. 9 of 2015 concerning the Preservation of Malay Culture and its derivative regulations. This is a vital step in fortifying and strengthening local identity. While this policy has successfully institutionalized cultural symbols within bureaucratic structures and public spaces, the reality on the ground demonstrates the challenge of a disparity between administrative compliance and the appreciation of values, where the use of attire is often reduced to mere formality without a comprehensive philosophical understanding. This situation places the Riau Malay Traditional Institution (LAM) in a strategic position as a government partner and guardian of values, rectifying deviations and educating the public amidst the pressures of modern fashion trends and the hegemony of popular culture.

In light of this, the strategic role of the LAM needs to be strengthened through a massive and ongoing socialization process, emphasizing the values and role models of local

figures and leaders, not limited to specific cultural events. The use of Malay attire in the public sector also needs to be encouraged through a mechanism of rewards and sanctions as evidence of the advancement of local culture through traditional attire in Riau Province. This can be initially implemented in public agencies and bureaucracies.

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