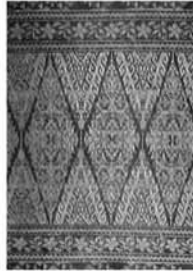


# Costumes and Textiles of Brunei: History and Evolution



*Having long been a stopping point for visitors from diverse cultures in Asia, the Middle East and Europe, it is not surprising that the cultural tradition of Brunei Darussalam comprises various elements from these distant lands. The mode of dress, the arts, crafts, as well as architectural motifs, reflect aspects of Indian, Chinese, European and Islamic influence (which has been the most pervasive). Curator **Bantong bin Antaran** discusses the history of costumes and textiles in the country, and how they have been evolving.*

**B**runei's population consists of seven indigenous groups. They are the Brunei Malays, the Kedayans, the Dusuns, the Tutong, the Belait, the Murut, and the Bisaya. Other ethnic groups living in Brunei that are indigenous to Borneo include the Penans forest nomads and the Ibans, who migrated into Brunei from Sarawak, Malaysia in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The diverse foreign cultures were readily accommodated by the equally diverse mix of indigenous cultural traditions.

## **Early Notes on Brunei Costumes and Textiles**

One interesting approach in documenting Brunei's long history and rich legacy of costumes and textiles would be to trace the development of how Bruneians dressed themselves through the ages. There are few accounts that describe the clothes worn by early Bruneians.

The Chinese reported that during the Liang Dynasty of China (916 AD.), the King of P'oni (Brunei) Pin-ka wore clothes made of embroidered silk, and his subjects wore tunics and pants made of cotton. In 1225, Chau Ju Kua reported that the King in Brunei wore costumes similar to those worn by the Chinese. The wives and daughters of wealthy families were clad in what he described as 'melted-gold colored silk'; materials used in weaving *Kain Tenunan* or *Kain Sungkit*. He further noted that, on formal occasions the King himself dressed in the Chinese fashion, but otherwise followed the Javanese usage of a sarong and gold ornaments. The mentioned *Kain Tenunan* was possibly a material woven by the local people themselves.

During Yong Le's reign (1403-1424) in the Ming dynasty, the Chinese reported that the men of Brunei cut their hair, and bound their heads with a piece of scarlet cloth. The women let their

hair down to their shoulders. They tied scarves around their neck, and wore shirts and skirts but went barefooted.

The first European report on Brunei dress was written by Ludovico Varthema of Bologna in 1505. According to him, the people were pagan and men of good will. Their colour was white. The dress was cotton shirt, though some dressed in ciambelloto (dress made of goat fur); some wore red hats. Sixteen years later, Pigefetta, another European, came to Brunei and he offered more information. He noted that each of them was given brocaded and gold cloth and silk, which were placed upon their left shoulder. The men in the palace were all attired in cloth of gold and silk

that covered their privies and curved diggers with gold hafts adorned with pearls and precious gems, and they had many rings on their hands.

The next account was written by Marryat in 1848. He wrote that at the Sultan's court, they were received at the platform by a numerous party of chiefs, handsomely dressed in silks, satins and gold embroidery. There has been very little systematic documentation of Brunei dress during the early part of 20<sup>th</sup> Century; fortunately, there is a body of photographs and articles from newspapers and magazines available to the researcher. During World War Two, it was thought that many of the traditional garments were destroyed as people were always on the run and hid themselves for safety in remote areas and jungles as their houses were destroyed.

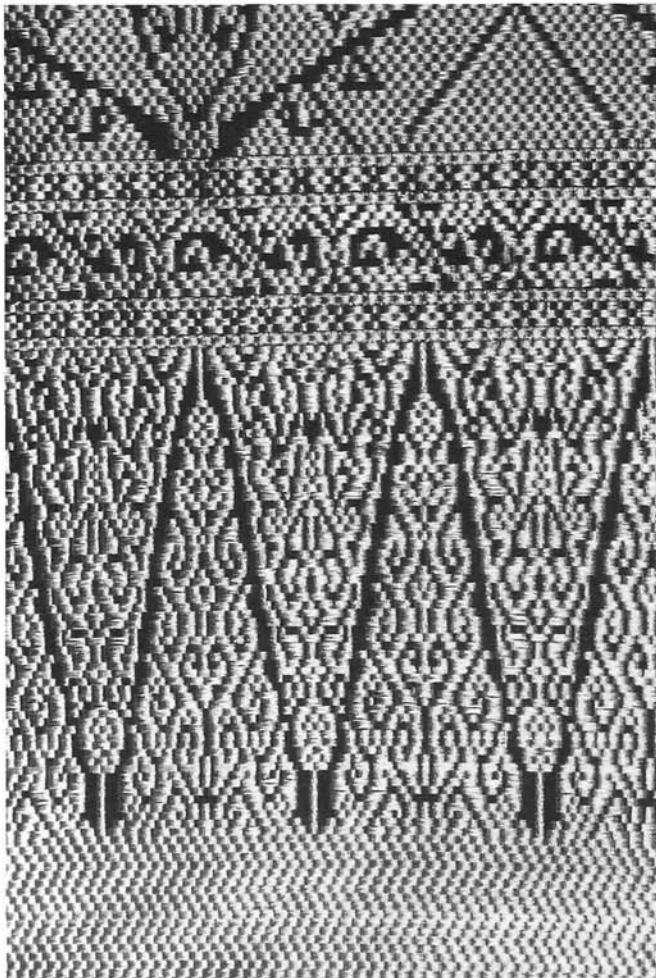
After World War Two, Western clothing, such as shirts, trousers, socks, shoes and hats, was introduced. This new style of clothing was slowly adopted by the locals and eventually became popular among the local 'elite'. Later, it became official government uniform.

In the 1950s, Malay movies became popular in Brunei Darussalam. The films were produced in Singapore and Malaysia, and the story background was normally based on the Malay culture. Apparently, many Bruneians imitated fashions introduced in some of those movies.

There is even less documentation for the development of clothing in the non-Malay indigenous groups. However, the traditional costumes of these indigenous groups appeared to have undergone little change, and some are still worn during special occasions. For example, the Murut wear their traditional bark cloth during cultural stage performances; the Dusun and the Belait don their traditional dark coloured attire during rice ritual ceremonies; and the Kedayan are dressed in their traditional costumes during dance performances.

### Cloth Weaving

One of the most popular handicraft activities in Brunei Darussalam is traditional weaving (locally known as *Kain tenunan*). The craft industry has been handed down for generations, and is



P2 : The bamboo shoot motif

believed to be in existence since the thirteenth Century. In 1225 AD., it was recorded by the Chinese that the people of Brunei were seen to have worn attire made of woven cloth, i.e., the *kain tenunan* which was probably woven by the Bruneians themselves. The role of *kain tenunan* in the historical development of the Brunei traditional costumes is significant, and local *kain tenunan* products are very important ceremonial garments. The woven cloth is a ceremonial costume, and is also worn in social occasions; for example, in a wedding ceremony, the bride and groom may wear the *Baju Pengantin*, made of woven cloth with an intricate pattern of gold and silver threads; the male guests dress themselves up in the *Baju Cara Melayu*, [p4] with a *kain sinjang* or *samping* (piece of cloth tightened around the waist) to complete the attire. This *kain sinjang* or *samping* is normally made of local *Kain Tenunan*. Indeed, it was argued that no Malay wedding would be complete without a traditional *kain Tenunan* that is usually of the *Kain Jong Sarat* type, made of plain cloth with an intricate pattern of gold or silver thread. Similar attire is normally used when attending State functions. The woven fabrics can also be made into the attractive *Baju Kebaya*, which is a type of dress that is rather costly to produce.

The basis of any woven cloth is the crossing of two threads at right angles to each other. The vertical and horizontal threads are called warps and wefts respectively. Warp threads are fixed at each end of the loom, and have to be stronger than the wefts as they take the friction of the continual passing of the shuttle carrying the weft threads. Today's weavers, however, have designed more complicated and delicate techniques of weaving in order to produce a fine and beautifully patterned cloth; for example, they use different colours and types of thread, such as gold and silver. It is, of course, a very time-consuming process.

Motif is a very important factor in making the *kain tenunan* more attractive. The Brunei traditional weavers used no less than fifty different types of patterns, which are given local names. The most common motifs found in *kain tenunan* are the *puckor rebong* (bamboo shoot)

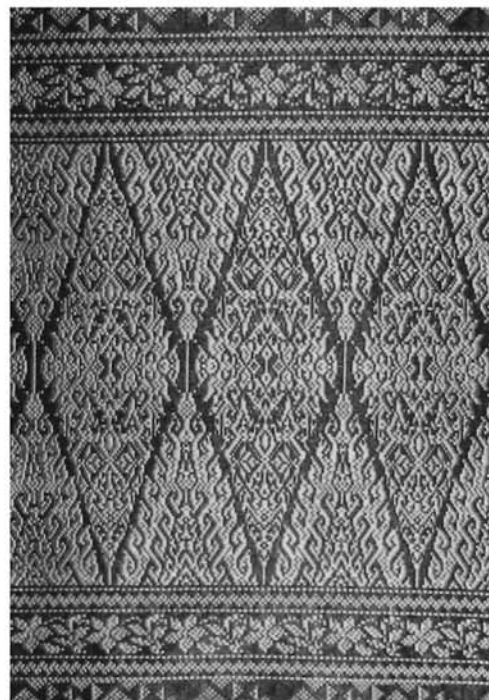
[see P2 opposite page], *biji timun* (cucumber seeds), *arap gegati* (diamond shape motif) and floral motif. [see P3].

The traditional weaving industry was developed in Kampong Ayer (water village) situated next to the capital of Brunei Darussalam. Dynamic and positive steps are now being taken to revive this old skill to meet the demand of the public. The governmental training programme is available at the Brunei Handicraft Centre (established in 1975), Brunei Museums, Ministry of Culture Youth and Sports. There are more than four hundred trained weavers in Brunei Darussalam today, some of whom were taught this skill at the Center or by their elders. Unfortunately, only half of them are still active.

## Costumes

### Baju Cara Melayu

*Baju Cara Melayu* comprises a tunic or loose long sleeved shirt (*baju*), a pair of loose long pants or



P3 : The floral motif

trousers (*seluar*), a *samping* or *sinjang* (a *sarong* worn around the waist over the shirt and pants), and a *kopiah* or *songkok* (headgear). Among the Malays, *Baju Cara Melayu* is worn on various occasions, either social or religious in nature. For State functions, one is obliged to wear a pair (*sepengadak*) of white-coloured *Baju Cara Melayu* for evening receptions, and dark-coloured one during the day.



P4 : *Baju Cara Melayu Teluk Belangah*



P5 : *Baju Melayu Cekak Musang*



P6 : *Baju Cara Melayu Begulambir*

The *Baju Cara Melayu* is normally worn with a black velvet *songkok*. During an ordinary function, *songkok* can be of any colour, e.g. black, maroon, white, blue or green. It was argued that the *Baju Cara Melayu* probably originated in the Arabic or Javanese tradition. The Bruneians adopted the *Baju Cara Melayu* from Malaysia. Over the years various minor alterations had been made on the costumes, which resulted into what we see today.

There are three types of *Baju Cara Melayu*, Brunei's national dress; namely: **Baju Cara Melayu Teluk Belangah** [see P4], **Baju Cara Melayu Cekak Musang** [see P5] and **Baju Cara Melayu Begulambir**. There is only a slight difference among the three; for example, *Baju Cara Melayu Cekak Musang* and *Baju Cara Melayu Begulambir* are both designed with a high round collar, while the *Baju Cara Melayu Teluk Belangah* does not have a collar. The *Baju Cara Melayu Begulambir* [see P6] has a square cloth-cumhandkerchief attached onto the front-neck, which differentiates it from *Baju Cara Melayu Cekak Musang*.

The *Baju Cara Melayu Teluk Belangah* originated in Johor, West Malaysia, and was popularized in Brunei during the 1950s. In Malaysia, it is also called *Baju Kurong Teluk Belangah*, and it is

believed to have come into existence around 1800, at Telok Belanga in Singapore, then the administrative seat of the Johor Sultanate. The *Baju Cara Melayu Cekak Musang* originated in Malaysia, and became popular in the 1930s. It also introduced to Brunei during the 1950s. Both the *Baju Cara Melayu Cekak Musang* and *Baju Cara Melayu Teluk Belangah* are common dress in Brunei

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P7 : *Baju Butang Lima*

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Darussalam, while *Baju Cara Melayu Begulambir* was designed for people of high status in the Royal Court.

### **Baju Butang Lima**

During the 1930s, another garment, the *Baju Butang Lima* [see P7], was the most common dress worn by men when attending specific functions. This was a long-sleeved, hip-length blouse with an open front tunic fastened with five small buttons and worn with a pair of loose trousers and a *sinjang*.

### **Baju Kurong**

The national dress for women is called *Baju Kurong* and *Baju Kebaya*. The *Baju Kurong* [see P8] is an official dress in government offices, and is also worn as a uniform in schools. It comprises of a long sleeved and knee-length blouse and an ankle-length skirt, commonly called *sarong*. In Brunei Darussalam, *Baju Kurong* is now commonly worn with a *tudong* (headcover), a triangular scarf normally of matching colour, in almost all social and religious occasions. The blouse and the *sarong* are normally made from the same materials (*seperampun*). Some *tudong* are also made from the same material as that of the *Baju Kurong* and its *sarong*. However, this need not always be the case. For example, it is common for women to wear *batek sarong* daily. At present, the *Baju Kurong* and its *sarong* are generally made of silk (Korean, Chinese or Italian silk), reflecting the recent affluence that Bruneians enjoy.



P8 : Baju Kurong

The blouse is embroidered with intricate designs, sewn with multi-coloured threads and beads, especially along the hemline of the blouse, the neckline and the bottom-edge of the blouse. During a state reception,

the women are required to wear a dark-coloured *Baju Kurong* and a dark-coloured *tudong* (head cover or a scarf) during the day, and the white-coloured *Baju Kurong* during the night. For an

ordinary function, *Baju Kurong* and *tudong* worn can be of any colour, pattern or design.

The *Baju Kurong* introduced here was from Malaysia in the 1900s. It is now commonly worn in Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore and parts of Indonesia, as it has been suggested that the *Baju Kurong* went to Indonesia via Muslims traders from western India.

### **Baju Kebaya**

It is believed that the word 'Kebaya' was derived from the Arabic word 'habaya', meaning a long tunic with a front opening. It was adopted from the Portuguese in Malacca during the sixteenth or seventeenth Century, and popularized by the Chinese Peranakan. The *Baju Kebaya* is a long-sleeved blouse that is worn over an ankle-length skirt called *Kain Lapas* or a *Kain Sarong*. There are four types of *Kebaya* worn by Brunei women, locally known as *Kebaya Panjang*, *Kebaya Labuh*, *Kebaya Buntak/Pendek* and *Kebaya Bandung*.

**Kebaya Panjang** (Long *Kebaya*). The *Kebaya Panjang* [see P9] is a knee-length, long-sleeved blouse, worn over a *kian lapas* or a *kain sarong*. This blouse is often elaborately embroidered with floral designs on the cuffs and the front lapel, with a neckline that is usually 'V'-shaped. The *Kain lapas* is an ankle length skirt made either from cotton or silk, interwoven with metallic or gold



P9 : Kebaya Panjang



P10 : Kebaya Labuh

threads, or of *batek* cloth. Most of the *kain lapas* is imported either from Malaysia, Indonesia or Singapore. One of the most popular *kain* worn by the locals in the 1950s was called *Kain Bugis*, and was first introduced to Brunei in the 1930s. A *kain sarong* on the other hand is an ankle-length tubular skirt of tubular shape (formed by wrapping the cloth around the hips). It is either made from plain- coloured or cotton, silk, interwoven with metallic or gold threads or of patterned-*batek*.

**Kebaya Labuh** (Loose *Kebaya*). Another variety of the *Kebaya Panjang* is known as the *Kebaya Labuh* [see P10]. This *Kebaya* is a loose-



P11 : *Kebaya Buntak*

fitting long blouse, worn with the *Baju Pontong* as an undergarment. The blouse is designed with some small buttons as fasteners. *Kebaya panjang* does not accentuate the shape of the body of the wearer as compared to the other *Kebaya*, and although it is normally worn by older women, recent trends show that this dress is becoming more popular.

**Kebaya Buntak/Pendek** (Short *Kebaya*). In contrast with the *Kebaya Panjang* is the *Kebaya Buntak/Pendek* (short *Kebaya*). *Kebaya Buntak* [see P11] has been popular in Malaysia since

1920, and is also known as *Kebaya Nyonya*, *Baju Bandung* or *Baju Kota Baru*. It was introduced in Brunei during the 1950s, and was popular during the 1960s and 1970s. Popular among the young women, *Kebaya Buntak* consists of a figure-hugging blouse, and is made to emphasize the shape of the body.

**Kebaya Bandung** (the *Bandung Kebaya*). The *Kebaya Bandung* originated from Bandung, Indonesia, from which its name was derived. It was introduced in Brunei during the early 1950s. A similar version of this *Kebaya* was also found in Kupang, West Timur, Indonesia, where it is usually worn by the bridegroom. The *Kebaya Bandung* [see P12] consists of a long-sleeve blouse that is hip-length, usually made of cotton material, and worn over an ankle-length *kain lapas* or *sarong* or patterned *batek*. The most peculiar feature about the *Kebaya Bandung* is that the edge of its bottom front blouse is cut into a 'V' shape, and this differentiates it from the *Kebaya Buntak*.

### Wedding Attire

It goes without saying that no Malay wedding would be complete without *Kain Jongsarat*, a traditional cloth made of cotton threads interwoven with an intricate pattern of gold or silver threads



P12 : *Kebaya Bandung*



P13 : *Pakaian Pengantin Bersanding*

to produce strikingly beautiful patterns. For the bride, the cloth is made into *Kebaya Panjang* or *Baju Kurong*, embroidered with floral patterns. It is usually worn over a beautiful *sarong* with intricate edgings, and comes with a matching *salendang* (a long scarf). The bride also wears a glittering veil with a tiara on top of her head. This cloth is also used for making the wedding suit of the bridegroom, consisting of a shirt, trousers, a fourinch wide waistband, a *samping*, (a knee-length *sarong* wrapped round the waist) and a *dastar* (headgear).

Another type of wedding attire for men is a knee-length jacket called *Baju Jubah*, introduced to Brunei Darussalam in the 1940s, and was popu-

lar for only a very short period until after the Japanese occupation in 1948. The jacket is worn over a long-sleeved shirt and a pair of trousers or a *Baju Cara Melayu*. On some occasions, a long blouse (knee-length) called *Baju Gamis* was also worn as an alternative. This costume, complete with a *tengkolok* (head cloth made of voile *kain kasa*), was worn by the groom on the third day of the wedding ceremony, called 'Muleh Tiga Hari' (literally means the day when the bride and groom return to the groom's family after a three-day stay with the bride's family). The *Baju Jubah* was made of silk and cotton or purely cotton, and for some ritual reasons bright colours were preferable; while the *Gamis* was either made of poly-

ter or silk and normally white in colour. The origin of the *Baju Jubah* is thought to be Arabic. Another dress option for the bride is *Baju Bermasuk Butang Lima* (literally a blouse with five buttons) worn over a *kain jong sarat*, a traditional *sarong*, woven elaborately with intricate floral designs. It was secured at the waist with an ornate gilded silver belt or sometimes a gold one (for the wealthy). The *Baju Bermasuk Butang Lima* is a long sleeved collarless blouse of hip-length tunic either made of satin, cotton, polyester or silk. Similar to the groom's attire, the bride's attire was also bright in colour; preferably purple, red, or green.



P14 : *Baju Jubah Berlapis Gamis*

P15 : *Baju Pontong*

P16 : *Baju Kedayan*

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During a Malay wedding ceremony, the Malay male guests normally wear the *Baju Cara Melayu* with a *songkok* (a *kopiah* for the *Haji*) while the Malay female guests wear *Baju Kurong* or *Kebaya* complete with a scarf (*tudong*). It can be of any colour. The female *Baju Kurong* is usually made of silk fabric embroidered with floral motifs.

Today, women of all ethnic groups in Brunei



P17 : *Baju Kedayan*

normally wear *Baju Kurong* or *Baju Kebaya* to go to school, offices and markets.

### Other Indigenous Ethnic Attire

Ethnic costumes are very traditional and rigid in form. They are usually made of indigenous or low quality materials, and consequently are not very marketable and have come to be replaced by factory-made clothing. There are now mainly used during a few special occasions like festivals, weddings and staged cultural performances.



P18 : *Baju Dusun*

#### Baju Kedayan

The Kedayan are one of Brunei's indigenous ethnic groups, and the *Baju Kedayan* [see P16] is a long-sleeved blouse made from plain black cotton for its women. This blouse, also known as *Baju Bekubamban Butang Enam*, has sleeves that are adorned with hollowed silver buttons filled with small pellets that jingle when the arms are moved, and is worn over a black cotton *Kain* or *sarong* and worn with a *tudong* (a scarf). The male version of *Baju Kedayan* [see P17] comprises a long-sleeved and collarless cotton shirt, usually black in colour, and worn with a black tight-fitting cotton pair of trousers which extended past the knees but above the ankles, and complete with a *daster* as a headgear. Today, this attire is rarely seen or worn except during ceremonial functions.

#### Baju Dusun

The *Baju Dusun* [see P18] is named after the ethnic group that wears it (the Dusun), and consists of a long-sleeved, hip-length blouse and an ankle-length *kain* or knee-length skirt. It is made of black plain velvet or sometimes embroidered with flowery patterns. This attire was

originally be a common dress for Dusun women but now is rarely worn except by the Dusun priestess (*Balian*) during a ritual rite called *Tamarok*, or by Dusun ladies in cultural stage performances.

### Conclusion

There is a greater variety of clothing in Brunei now than ever before. Besides the traditional forms, many Bruneians have been exposed to other styles of dressing while they are studying or travelling abroad. For those who stay at home, movies, television, magazines, and newspapers introduce and reinforce the latest fashion trends from overseas. Compared to earlier times, Bruneians also now have a more disposable income available to increase both the variety and quality of their wardrobes. Moreover, the prevalence of air-conditioning in the home and the workplace means that Bruneians can choose to wear fabrics which would otherwise be more suited for cooler climates.

It would appear that the foreign influences on clothing styles has had a greater impact in the clothes worn for everyday activities. Younger Bruneians prefer casual shirts and T-shirts with Jeans (and a *tudong* in the case of Muslim women) because such informal clothes are convenient and practical. Today, convenience seems to be essential. Nevertheless, clothes worn for special cultural and religious occasions have changed very little. Bruneians continue to be quite traditional when it comes to their cultural and religious activities, as evidenced by the Malay wedding costumes today which are much the same as those of generations past.

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