



The Evolution of Malay Bride's Traditional Wedding Attire in Peninsular Malaysia

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Abstract

A Malay wedding ceremony is still preserved until now despite several changes that took place in the custom. Publication and comprehensive documentation on the Malay traditional attire is still not widely produced, and less attention in recording this type of clothing. The main objective of this research was to identify the styles of Malay bride's traditional wedding as well as to categorize the styles from the year 1960 until 2016. The present study, which used the qualitative research approach. This research will be beneficial to the upcoming nation for their future references, especially to preserve the Malay traditional wedding culture.

Keywords: attire; evolution; Malay; traditional; wedding.

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1.0 Introduction

Generally, clothing is always associated with the function. The function is mainly to cover the human body to protect from hot or cold weather. Evidence of the first existence of clothing was mostly indirect as the early known humans to make clothing, Neanderthal man, survived from about 200,000 B.C.E. to about 30,000 B.C.E. (Pendergast, 2004). In prehistoric times, humans used simple materials from nature to make their clothes such as grass, weeds, or animal skins until the emergence of threads and weaving processes. Clothing has become an essential aspect of culture in human life (Ismail, 2009). Meanwhile, marriage is a ceremony that takes place and happens typically once in a human lifetime. Therefore, the wedding attire is one of the aspects that highly emphasized by the "Raja Sehari". Wedding attire plays a significant role to symbolize the marriage and the wedding ceremony will not be perfect without wearing the wedding attire. History shows that wedding attires used for many years by all the nations in the world. Nowadays, Malay bride's traditional wedding attire has gone through many changes in terms of the history, development, style, fabrication, influence, and many more. The research is conducted by documenting the evolution of Malay bride's traditional wedding attire in the Peninsular of Malaysia. The Malay bride's traditional attire changes over time, and this includes the changes in style and development. The main objective of this research was to identify the forms of Malay bride's traditional wedding as well as to categorize the styles from the year 1960 until 2016. It is interesting to see how the Malay traditional wedding costume being evolved starting from 1960 until 2016, which had reflected the Malay identity as well.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Malay Wedding

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Generally, marriage is a union between a man and a woman. In Malay society, marriage is relating to something pure and holy as well as involving sacrifices. Also, besides a marriage must be following religious teachings and received the blessing of parents (Kasimin, 2002). Marriage is one of the most essential things in Malay society. Every person goes through the process of marriage towards a perfect and meaningful life (Ismail, 2004). A Malay marriage ceremony is one of the Malay cultural activities that still maintained over the years and practiced until now, although the custom has gone through several changes (Syawal, 1994). Every member of the community, regardless of their social status, celebrates the Malay wedding with joy. (Alias & Nawawi, 2003). Various ceremonies held including the reception ceremony. During this ceremony, the Malay bride wears beautiful attire to impersonate the queen (Ibid). The ceremony is a real thing and is a sign of sincerity, honesty, and true love between man and woman (Noor Aziah Mohd Awal, 2015). The presence of neighbors, friends, and relatives at the wedding ceremony is one of the local Malay customs. In truth, the wedding ceremony is seen as a way to strengthen the relationship between people in the community (Mohd Khairuddin Mohd Sallehuddin and Mohamad Fauzi Sukimi, 2016).

2.2 Malay Traditional Wedding Attire

Bridal attire for the nobility is almost similar to the wedding dress of prince or princess. However, they may change a particular style according to their affordability of the bride and groom. For example, if they do not like wearing *Tengkolok Alang* (normal *tengkolok*), they may wear *Tengkolok Bersering (Destar)* and this similarly practiced by ordinary people. In the 18th century, the wedding dress of commoners in Perak was similar in shape, but the difference was only on fabric quality, and they did not wear too many jewels as compared to the nobility. These differences were existed not because of their status or position but because they could not afford to provide the right clothes and jewelry (Ibid). Initially, a few numbers of royal regalia was reproduced by the nobles and worn as wedding attire. Starting from there, the term bride and groom known as '*Raja Sehari*' (Aziz, 2009).

2.3 Publication and Discussion on Malay Wedding

In Malay wedding, the discussion is more focused on the wedding customs starting from the proposal, engagement, solemnization, and wedding reception. Several publication on the Malay wedding protocol such as *Perkahwinan Melayu* book written by Kasimin (2002), *Pantun & Ungkapan Indah Adat Perkahwinan Melayu* published by Institut Seni Malaysia Melaka (2004), *Adat Istiadat Perkahwinan Traditional Melayu Terengganu* by Ismail (2004), *Istiadat Perkahwinan Melayu; Satu kajian Perbandingan* written by Kassim (1989), *Beberapa Segi Adat Perkahwinan Orang2 Melayu Sarawak Teristimewa Di-Kuching* written by Puteh (1964), *Adat Perkahwinan Orang Melayu Sarawak* written by Puteh (2008), *Kepimpinan Adat Perkahwinan Melayu Melaka* published by Institut Seni Malaysia Melaka (2004). There are some writings about the Malay wedding attire in *Pakaian Melayu Sepanjang Zaman* book written by Alias and Nawawi (2003). In addition, few books discussed about the Malay arts and craft like *Rupa & Jiwa* by Jamal (1992). The major discussions were covered on Malay carvings, aesthetic, colours, Malay jewellery and metals, Malay embroidery, Malay Weaving, Malay clothing, Malay sculpture, puppet shadow, and calligraphy. These books do not discuss the Malay traditional wedding attire. Due to the status of publication, the writing and detail documentation on the evolution of Malay traditional wedding attire in this country is still lacking.

2.4 Issues on Malay Traditional Wedding Attire

According to Tohar and Basri (2007), clothing describes the identity of the wearer. It is important because the character represents race, culture, or any particular group. Identity of Malay traditional wedding attire is important to be researched and studied especially on the evolution as mentioned by Aziz (2009)

"Dengan peredaran zaman yang sentiasa membawa perubahan, sebilangan busana pengantin lama serta gaya pemakaiannya lenyap ditelan zaman. Tempatnya diganti oleh busana yang yang dipinda menjadi lebih ringkas dengan menyerapkannya pula unsur dan pengaruh daripada budaya luar. Namun begitu, sehingga hari ini masih ada beberapa jenis busana lelaki dan wanita yang kekal dipakai, sebilangannya dengan sedikit perubahan, sedangkan yang lain tetap dipertahankan unsur-unsur keasliannya..." (p.229)

"As time changes, the traditional wedding attire and its style have disappeared. The traditional wedding attires were changed to be simpler and were added with the influence of foreign culture. However, there are still some types of wedding attires that remain, with little change, but some elements of authenticity are still being maintained..." (p.229)

In Malay culture, clothes bring a lot of meaning (Ismail, 2009). Clothes are not only about the shape. In the Malay community, clothes fit their lifestyle. Clothes do not only cover the body. They could also show the behavior of society. Ismail (2009) stated that Malay clothes were meaningless if the Malay clothes itself does not reflect the Malay community. In cultural tradition, clothes are associated with ceremony and customs, and Jamal (1992) supported this view. He stated that artwork in Malay culture has its unique characters. It is not only different from the art cultures of the world but also different from any art group near to them. Raja Permaisuri Agung Tunku Azizah Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah in Jami'ah Sokri & Nor Affizar Ibrahim (2019) also suggest that Malay traditional attire should be an official attire or national attire in this country that portrays the identity Malays.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Theory of Sociological Approach by Arnold Hauser (1951)

In this approach, the word 'psychology' brings the meaning that the artist and craft man allowed to create something beyond conventional public thinking and not only limit their expressions to the general expectations. The artists and craft man always do something different because they are creative persons. Also, they did not use the same idea produced by others. The factors of society sociology always

been referred by them to develop their ideas. The combination of psychology and sociology aspects will lead to the last stage in which style aspect. At this stage, stylish artworks produced with their own identity.

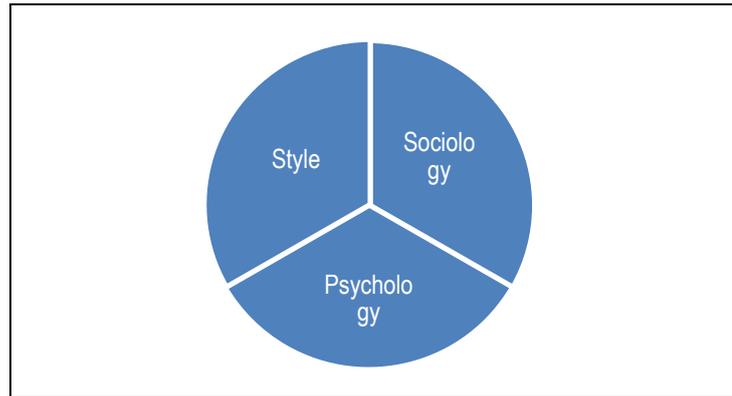


Figure 1: Three stages of the sociological approach by Arnold Hauser (1951).
(Source: *Studies In Iconology; Humanistic Themes In the Art of the Renaissance*, 1972).

3.1.1 Psychology

From the psychology aspect, it is about the designer's experience since their early involvement in the wedding attire. The wedding attire reflects the combination of a designer's creativity and the Malay traditional wedding attire. It is also to bring back and maintains the traditional wedding attire. For those who grew up at the specific period (1960 to 2016) may also reflect their old memories on the attire, which no more applicable today.

3.1.2 Sociology

In the meantime, it also displays the conflict in Malay society. The changes of the Malay traditional wedding attire from time to time can affect the Malay culture itself from the evolution and influence of the modern and contemporary wedding attire to the old traditional one.

3.1.3 Style

The style is about the Malay designer's signature. They play with the cutting, material, ideation, inspirations, influence, and others to produce the Malay traditional wedding attire in their work.

3.2 Theory used to Interpret Material Culture: Iconography by Panofsky (1940)

Through this iconography theory, the researcher will discuss the "form" and "content" of the Malay traditional wedding attire in the Peninsular of Malaysia. All the photos are selected according to the specific year from (1960 to 2016). The study follows the stated theory that consists of three levels of understanding iconography, which are;

a) Pre-iconography description

This is the understanding and interpretation of meaning by familiar such as factual description from the visual surrounding the expressional connotations and what we see from it. Any in-depth knowledge of the works and context does not require, and the ability to recognize what had represented is more practical at this level. It relates to the design of Malay bride's traditional wedding attire in Peninsular of Malaysia from 1960-2016. This level identifies the style, types of material, silhouette, motifs, that worn by the Malay brides during the wedding ceremony. The changes in wedding attire will also be identified. At the end of this stage, the researcher will make formal analysis regarding the Malay traditional wedding attire after discussing the element and principle of design.

b) Iconographical analysis

The more in-depth understanding of facts presented and subject matter are required at this level, which involves a grasp concerning the subject matter. It constitutes the world on allegories, stories, and images. The analysis then requires an evaluation regarding the pre-iconographic material, as can stay derived only out of a discussion on the concept and issues represented. The awareness over such matters be able to stand based totally on exterior sources (such as; textual material) yet may additionally stand in extensive; however, it is usually received after the familiarization with the content. To classify the Malay bride's traditional wedding attire in Peninsular Malaysia, the researcher needs detailed interpretation to group them in chronological order from 1960 to 2016. The categorization made on the list of the attire based on ten years timeline for each according to their year worn by the brides. The researcher had identified Malay traditional wedding attire through the real samples and several publications such as books, newspapers, photographs. He also referred to the potential respondents to obtain accurate facts. There were several processes and procedures in designing the identification. The Researcher had scanned all samples into a JPEG photo format and listed them according to the year starting from 1960 to 2016. Then, the types and styles for all selected samples identified at the second level of iconography. An in-depth analysis is required at this level to see the changes in the Malay bride's traditional wedding attire. At the end of this level, the researcher had identified the story and style of the Malay traditional wedding attire.

c) Iconological interpretation

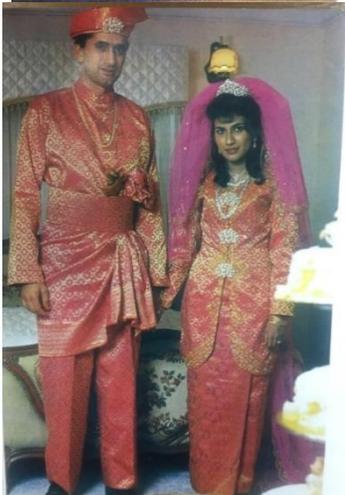
This level involves the understanding of the content or intrinsic meaning of the artwork. It is also through people’s knowledge of the world that linked to the artwork. Panofsky believes that this level is the ultimate goal of iconology. The last level is about the intrinsic meaning that defines the form and its content. At this stage, the researcher made the observations and focused on the interpretation that relates to the objective of research in identifying the evolution of Malay traditional wedding attire in the Peninsular of Malaysia. Then, he managed to find out the meaning of the form and relevant content.

4.0 Analysis

This topic focused on the detail of types of Malay bride’s traditional wedding attires. It included the styling, and examples of the attires, the development, and also the evolution as time has been changed. Besides, visual interpretation is also conducted in this analysis. There are selected samples of Malay bride’s wedding attires that were gathered from the year 1960 until 2016. All the samples were collected from the photos from the fashion magazines. The topic also looks into the “form” and “content” which is related to the shape and detail of wedding attire. The analysis identified the styles of Malay wedding attire including, its characteristics, types, and silhouettes. The topic also focused on the evolution of Malay bride’s traditional wedding attire.

Table 1: Types of Malay Bride’s Wedding Attires

Style of Malay bride	Descriptions
	<p>Name: <i>Baju Kurung Teluk Belanga</i> Year: 1960 Features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loose cutting. • Two pieces; top called <i>Baju Kurung</i> and lower waist called skirt. • Top length from the shoulder to the knee. • Lower waist length from the waist to the ankle and some until the heels. • Has <i>pesak</i>. • Has <i>kekek</i>. • Round neckline. • Long sleeves. • Opening at the neck. using <i>kancing</i> • A sash was applied on top.
	<p>Name: <i>Baju Kebaya Labuh</i> Year: 1960 and 1961 Features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loose cutting. • Two pieces; top called <i>baju kebaya</i> and lower waist called skirt. • Top length from the shoulder to knee and might be longer. • Lower waist length from the waist until the ankle and some until the heels. • Has <i>pesak</i>. • Has <i>kekek</i>. • Has <i>lapel</i>. • Long sleeves. • Full opening at the front body using <i>lidah kebaya</i>. • A sash was applied on top.

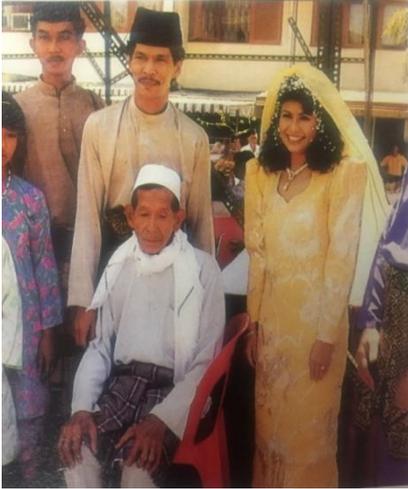


Name: *Baju Kebaya Moden*

Year: 1990, and 1996

Features:

- Slim fit cutting.
- Two pieces; top called as *Baju Kebaya* and lower waist called skirt
- Top length can be from the waist until thigh.
- Lower waist length from the waist to the ankle and some until the heels.
- Long sleeves.
- Puff sleeves design.
- Full opening at front body.
- No lapel, pesak and kekek.
- Sweet heart shaped for the neckline.
- Curve shaped, V-shaped and straight cut at the bottom of bridal *Kebaya Moden*.
- It has evolved from bridal *Baju Kebaya*.



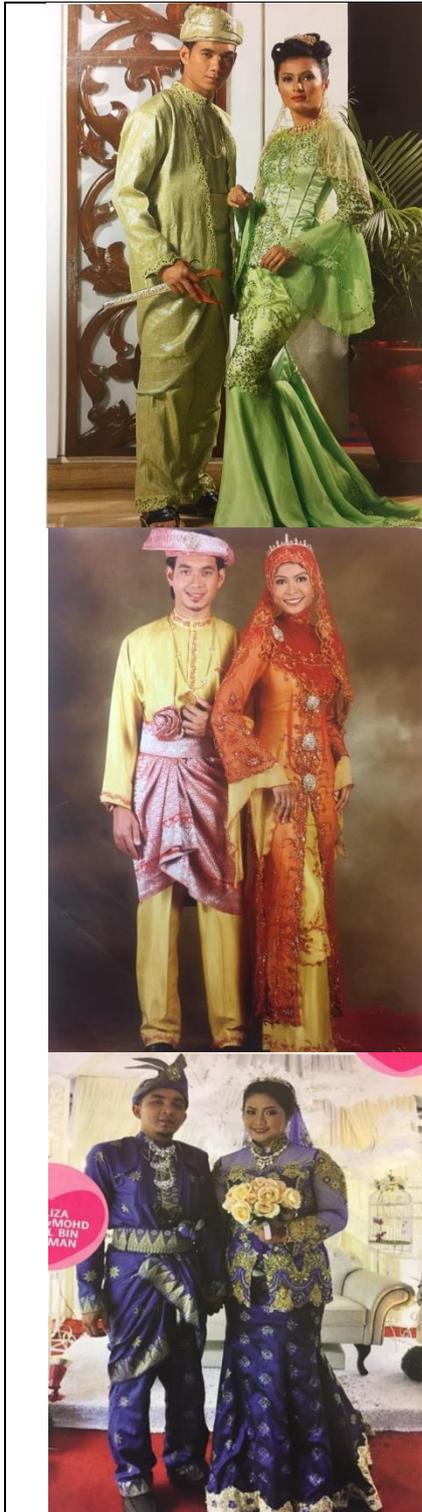
Name: *Baju Kurung Moden*

Year: 1991, 2005 and 2007

Features:

- Slim fit cutting.
- Two pieces; top called *Baju Kurung Moden* and lower waist called skirt.
- Top length can be from shoulder to hip or knee.
- Lower waist length from the waist to the ankle and some until the heels.
- Long sleeves.
- Sometimes the design has modifications like flare sleeves layered and puff sleeves.
- Sweetheart-shaped neckline.
- The opening was at the backside of the body.
- No *pesak* and *kekek*.
- Sometimes a long train skirt was matched.
- It has evolved from bridal *Baju Kurung Teluk Belanga*.





Name: *Baju Kebaya Kontemporari*

Year: 2006 and 2014

Features:

- Slim fit cutting.
- Two pieces; top called *Baju Kebaya* and lower waist called skirt
- Sometimes it can be in three pieces, which were *Baju Kebaya*, corset, and skirt.
- Top length can be from shoulder to waist, thigh, or even until the heels.
- Lower waist length from the waist to the ankle and some until the heels.
- Long sleeves, layered, or flare sleeves.
- Opening at the front and also can be at the back of the body.
- It is also worn with a corset.
- No lapel, *pesak* and *kekek*.
- Design at the bottom of bridal *Baju Kebaya Kontemporari* can be in V-shaped, curve-shaped, or straight-shaped.
- Varieties of skirt design which are layered, mermaid, and flare.
- It has evolved from bridal *Baju Kebaya Moden*.

5.0 Discussion

There are five types of styles that have been worn by Malay brides during wedding ceremonies such as bridal *Baju Kurung Teluk Belanga*, bridal *Baju Kebaya*, bridal *Baju Kebaya Moden*, bridal *Baju Kurung Moden*, and bridal *Baju Kebaya Kontemporari*. In the beginning, there are two types of wedding attire identified, namely bridal *Baju Kurung Teluk Belanga* and bridal *Baju Kebaya*. Malay brides mostly used bridal *baju kurung teluk belanga* and bridal *kebaya* in 1960. The attire mainly designed in two pieces; one piece for the top and one piece for the lower waist. The top part called *Baju Kurung* while the lower waist called a skirt. The bridal *Baju Kurung Teluk Belanga* has few characteristics such as loose in cutting, has *pesak* and *kekek* that joint the front, back, and sleeves. The sleeves length of bridal *Baju Kurung Teluk Belanga* is usually from the shoulder to the wrist. Since bridal *Baju Kurung Teluk Belanga* is a loose

attire, the opening of this garment is at the neck using a *kancing*. Another bride's dress worn by Malay in this era is bridal *Baju kebaya*. It has two pieces; the top called *Baju Kebaya* and the lower waist called a skirt. The top length of this bridal *Baju kebaya* is from shoulder to the knee, and some of it might be below than knee part. Also, it comes in long sleeves, and the length is from shoulder to the wrist same as in sleeves of bridal *Baju Kurung Teluk Belanga*. This bridal *Baju Kebaya* has *pesak* and *kekek*. It also has a lapel feature at the front of the top bridal *Baju kebaya*. The opening of this garment is at the front and attached with *lidah kebaya* as the opening. Besides that, Malay bride also has applied sash with the bridal *Baju Kurung Teluk Belanga*.

In the year 1990s, Malay brides started to wear bridal *Baju Kebaya Moden*. This attire has two pieces; which top is known as *Baju Kebaya Moden* and lower waist piece known as the skirt. This attire slowly had replaced bridal *Baju Kurung Teluk Belanga* and bridal *Baju Kebaya*. Besides, the bridal *Baju Kebaya Moden* was evolved from the bridal *Baju Kebaya Moden*. The features of this attire were; it has slim fit cutting, the top length from shoulder to the thigh while lower waist length from the waist of Malay bride to the ankle and some was until heels. Also, it has long sleeves as in other Malay bridal *Baju Kebaya* but, the difference was some of the bridal *Baju Kebaya Moden* was designated with puff sleeves. Besides that, the garment has an opening at the front part. It is different from the original bridal *Baju Kebaya* where it does not has lapel, *pesak* and, *kekek* features. Sometime, the bottom part design of bridal *Baju Kebaya Moden* might be not in a V-shaped as in typical bridal *Baju Kebaya* in the 1960s to 1980s, but it can be in a curve-shaped or straight-shaped as well. Furthermore, some of this garment using a sweetheart-shaped neckline design which is different from another typical bridal *Baju Kebaya*.

In the early era of the 1990s, the bridal *Baju Kurung Moden* has been created and was evolved from bridal *Baju Kurung Teluk Belanga*. There were several features of bridal *Baju Kurung Moden*. This bridal attire is slim fit in cutting. Since it was slim fit cutting, this bridal attire does not has *kekek* and *pesak*. It has two pieces; which the top called as *Baju Kurung Moden*, and the lower waist part called a skirt. The top length is from shoulder to the thigh and can be longer to the knee. Meanwhile the skirt length was from a bride's waist to the ankle or heels. It also has long sleeves with the varieties of sleeves design such as flare sleeves, puff sleeves, and layered sleeves. The neckline designs of this attire are round neck or sweetheart neckline design. During the 1990's era, the sweetheart neckline design was popular among the Malay wedding fashion, and the opening of this garment is at the back of the body. Besides, sometimes, a long train skirt was matched to makes this attire looks more beautiful.

During the era 2000s until the year 2016, the Malay brides wore lots of bridal *Baju Kebaya Kontemporari*. This attire was slim fit in cutting. It has two or three pieces, which were *Baju Kebaya Kontemporari*, skirt and sometimes the bride has to wear all together with a corset. The length of bridal *Baju Kebaya Kontemporari* was from shoulder to the waist, thigh, or sometimes until the knee. Meanwhile for the skirt is from the bride's waist to the ankle, knee, or even longer than knee. It has long sleeves with several types of sleeves were used, such as layered or flare sleeves. The opening of this attire can be either of the front or back of the garment. Since it fits the body, this attire does not has *kekek* and *pesak* features. Also, the design at the bottom of bridal *Baju Kebaya Kontemporari* can be in various kinds such as V-shaped, curve-shaped, or straight-shape. Besides that, the top also matched with several types of skirt-like a layered skirt, mermaid skirt, flare skirt, long train skirt, and others. This bridal attire was evolved from the bridal *Baju Kebaya Moden*. Therefore, it is the most fashionable and latest style of Malay bride's fashion.

6.0 Conclusion

This research will be beneficial for the future generation especially designers and those who involved in the fashion industry for them to understand the Malay bride's traditional wedding attire better especially the evolution and development of style from the year 1960 until 2016. From the findings, it will be a guideline about the forms of Malay bride's traditional wedding attire. Besides, the results also will be a reference to the magazine writer to write the correct term, styles, and characters of these attires which, lead the good information exposure among the reader. The in-depth understanding may improve their good perception of the value of Malay traditional wedding as a national heritage as well as giving them guidance in creating new designs.

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