

CULTURAL INTEGRATION IN MALAY TEXTILE: EXAMINING ISLAMIC AND INDIGENOUS DECORATIVE IN MALAY TELEPUK

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Abstract

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Malay textiles decoration, reflecting the Malay Archipelago cultural and historical evolution. This study examines the cooperation between Islamic motifs and original local motifs in Malay textile ornamentation, focusing on telepuk cloth. This research conducting a qualitative methodology by using comparative analysis of selected telepuk cloth collected by Muzium Tekstil Negara to identify the stylistic patterns, cultural influences, and aesthetic principles that define the characteristic and uniqueness of Malay textile (telepuk) decoration. Through the combination of visual analysis and historical contextualization, this study aims to explore how these textiles functioned as both religious and cultural artefacts. The finding of this research can contribute to a deeper understanding of how Islamic artistic conventions merged with pre-Islamic traditions, shaping the visual identity of Malay manuscript art. From the aspect of academic, it can enrich textile studies specifically on how Telepuk reflects a cultural synthesis. Also, can be as interdisciplinary field that bridges art history, anthropology, Islamic studies, and cultural heritage research. Other than that, in term of cultural and heritage contribution it is an act of preservation of heritage and to revive the traditional Malay craft to strengthen cultural Identity. On the other side, it can serve as a design innovation that emphasis cross-cultural dialogue. In term of societal contribution, it is important as an educational resource and cultural diplomacy promoting Telepuk, as a symbol of Malaysian culture in the global arena. this can lead toward community empowerment to supports local artisans economically.

Keywords: Islamic Art, Malay Textiles, Telepuk Textile, Textile Decorations

INTRODUCTION

The heritage of Malay textiles reflects the beauty of a deep cultural, spiritual and aesthetic tradition, shaped by the expression of local culture over the centuries. Among

the most beautiful traditional textiles is Telepuk, a luxurious fabric traditionally decorated with gold-plated motifs, often reserved for royal and ceremonial use. More than just decoration, Telepuk embodies a complex dialogue between the original Malay visual language and the influence of Islamic art, forming a unique cultural synthesis that continues to fascinate scholars and artists.

This study aims to explore how the integration of culture and religion is manifested in the patterns and ornaments of Malay Telepuk textiles. It examines the way Islamic aesthetics are marked by geometric patterns, arabesques and calligraphy. The harmonious combination of these features with indigenous motifs such as flora and fauna that depict the patterns of Malay intellects in the creativity of producing their material culture. Textiles in general and Telepuk in particular not only function as a medium of Malay artistic cultural expression, but also as an cultural archive, reinforcing the Malay identity after the Islamization of the archipelago.

By analysing surviving Telepuk artefacts, visual motifs and production techniques, this research aims to reveal how Islamic and indigenous elements coexist in the design of motifs and fabric decorations. Ultimately, it highlights how Telepuk textiles are more than a visual art form as they are living testament to the Malay cultural heritage and the resilience of its traditional crafts in maintaining relevance and meaning in contemporary culture.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Known by various names throughout the Malay Archipelago and South Asia; such as Indonesian *kain perda*, or *perada terbang*, and Indian *kain serasah*. These types of similar fabrics of *telepuk* also exist in other countries such as in Korean *geumbak*, Japanese *inkin* and Chinese brocade called *xiaojin* (Jailani et al., 2022). Telepuk not only symbolizes elite status but also embodies the expression of Malay material culture (Dasuki et al., 2023). However, despite its rich heritage, scholarly understanding of the decorative elements in Telepuk, especially the extent and nature of Islamic and indigenous motifs, remains limited and underexplored. In the context of Malay history and literature, the beauty and use of Telepuk was often reserved for Malay royalty during ceremonial occasions, royal coronations, dowry exchanges, and even royal gifts or awards, but in term of contextual meaning of the motifs and pattern arrangements are very less interpreted (Harun, 2025).

While its aesthetic richness is acknowledged, there is a lack of comprehensive academic inquiry into how cultural integration, particularly between Islamic artistic principles and Malay world view or life philosophy. The decline in Telepuk production in the 20th century, coupled with the absence of systematic documentation, has led to a significant gap in knowledge of Malay heritage. Telepuk even considered as an extinct art in about a decade before its revival around 2014 (Bernama, 2023). Existing records are limited to museum collections and oral histories, making it difficult to trace the evolution and meaning of its design, motifs and pattern arrangements.

Recent revival efforts initiated by heritage institutions such as Perbadanan Adat Melayu dan Warisan Selangor (PADAT), Adiguru Kraf Ukiran Halus Noorhaiza Nordin, and organizations such as the Langkasuka Movement and Yayasan Hasanah, have injecting interest in this art form. However, without scholarly analysis that situates Telepuk within a broader discourse on cultural integration in Malay textile, the depth of its interpretation and cultural relevance risks diminishing. Therefore, this study aims to examine the integration of Islamic concept and principle, and indigenous decorative elements in Telepuk textiles, to understand its aesthetic philosophy and reaffirm its importance as a vehicle for cultural and artistic identity in the Malay world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A book entitled, “*Telepuk: Bunga-Bunga Emas Yang Dilupai*” (Jailani et al., 2022) is one of the latest publications on this heritage textile art. The book documenting the historical, cultural, and technical aspects of telepuk, a textile art closely tied to Malay royalty and ceremonial traditions. It also explores telepuk’s presence in classical Malay literature and its role in events such as royal coronations, weddings, and *Adat Menggelar* ceremonies. By highlighting telepuk’s function in defining social hierarchy and cultural identity, the book serves as a significant scholarly and cultural resource for ongoing studies in material culture and Malay textile heritage.

The enrichment of Malay textile, is a result of the trading history between Melaka, China, Arabia and India. Among valuable merchandises are fabrics decorated with gold, known as *kain telepuk* in Peninsular Malaysia and the Riau Islands. It is known as *kain prade* in Bali, while in Palembang, it is known as *pradan*. In Java it is known as *kain panjang gading beremas* and also by the term *prada* or *prada terbang*. The beauty of the gilding (*menelepuk*) art on the fabric, in a research done by Intan Salina Idrus (Idrus, 2018), type of hand-woven fabric is beautifully revealed in the book “*Warisan Telepuk Alam Melayu*”. The documentation effort uncovers the inspiration and creativity of the previous Malay community to produce dewangga fabrics and decorate Bugis fabrics that are finely woven, dense and crushed.

In 2015, Intan Salina recorded a historical documentation of telepuk is “*Kesenian Telepuk Warisan Melayu Selangor*”. It is stated the origin of telepuk came from Sulawesi, Indonesia, and was brought by the royal descendants of Selangor. The development of telepuk in Selangor proves that the use of this textile in Selangor has existed since the time of Sultan Salehuddin, the first Sultan of Selangor who had Bugis blood from the descendants of Raja Daeng Chelak (Idrus, 2015). Her discovery in Daik Lingga Riau of the intricate carvings of the name of Raja Penuh, the son of Sultan Salehuddin, on the sarang or telepuk stamp has proven that the art and use of telepuk in the Sultanate of Selangor is continuous. Under the support of PADAT, they collecting and compile information about telepuk in Selangor through old Malay texts and various reading materials.

Based on these previous studies, the research were more comprehensive in their documentation, such as "*Telepuk: Bunga-Bunga Emas Yang Dilupai*" (2022) made detailed studies of the history, cultural context, and technical aspects, making it a solid source for historical foundations. Another studies, tend to reveal the history of Telepuk from a regional perspective, a study by Intan Salina Idrus (2018) which broadens the geographical scope, connecting Telepuk with similar textile traditions throughout the Malay Archipelago, namely the Javanese Islands, Bali, and Palembang. From the same author (2015), her study focuses specifically on the locality of Telepuk in Selangor, providing evidence of Bugis roots and its continuity in the Malay royal tradition, supported by archival and artifact discoveries.

From the selection of previous studies, several limitations of the study can be identified, firstly; a historically-centered approach that emphasizes documentation and historical preservation, but lacks attention to contemporary art such as the way Telepuk motifs are integrated into modern design, identity, or fashion. Secondly; which is associated to this paper, is the lack of analytical depth on the symbolism associated to Malay culture and Islamic culture, although this work documents motifs, gilding techniques and uses, it often forgotten of deeper symbolic or aesthetic analysis on the integration of Islamic decorative art principles, for example; geometry, arabesque, and calligraphy, with indigenous Malay local motifs. There are several other limitations of the study that can be addressed, including cultural integration that can compare telepuk produced in other countries. Most research is descriptive or documentary and there is a significant lack of theoretical analysis aspects that use cultural integration, hybridization or aesthetic frameworks that can reveal the deeper meaning of Telepuk beyond historical facts.

In conclusion, based on the analysis above, the research gap that can be identified that is relevant to the objectives of this study is; the integration gap between Quranic or Islamic culture and Malay culture. Many existing studies document the history and production techniques but do not focus on critical analysis of the inspiration of Islamic art ornaments in general that are integrated with indigenous Malay motifs. This also provides a gap regarding aesthetic and symbolic evaluation in Malay handicrafts that are shaped by the Islamic worldview in general and Malay weltanshauung in particular.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The use of qualitative research methods that combine visual analysis with historical and cultural contextual interpretation to examine Telepuk textiles. The focus is on analyzing motifs and patterns, and interpreting cultural narrative symbolism, particularly the integration of Islamic decorative elements (geometry, arabesque) and indigenous Malay motifs (flora, fauna, cosmological forms). Data were collected from the National Textile Museum, Kuala Lumpur, using visual sampling of selected specimens, namely sarongs and armbands. Two main methods were used, first; artifact analysis, which documents motifs, techniques and symbolism through high-resolution images and physical observations. Second; documented and published research such as examining historical texts, manuscripts, catalogues and previous research journals. This approach allows for

an in-depth exploration of Telepuk as an intangible cultural heritage that encompasses both Islamic and indigenous Malay artistic traditions.

This study categorizes motifs in Malay Telepuk textiles and conducts comparative analysis in relation to historical events and cultural exchanges. Using a dual-framework methodology based on Ismail al-Faruqi's principles of Islamic art appreciation (I. Al-Faruqi & Al-Faruqi, 1986) and the concept of Malay aesthetics by Zakaria Ali (Ali, 2013). The method is shown through the steps of analysis;

1. Data Collection & Selection:

- a. Identify and select samples.
- b. Selection represents a variety of motifs, stylistic features and historical contexts.
- c. Record of origin, approximate period, use (royal, ceremonial) and relevant historical references.

2. Categorization of Motifs & Patterns:

- a. Islamic-derived motifs – geometrical shapes, arabesque, calligraphy.
- b. Malay indigenous motifs – flora, fauna, cosmic, still life, etc.

3. Comparative Visual Analysis:

- a. Compare motifs across categories to detect stylistic similarities and differences.
- b. Examine formal quality (symmetry, repetition, stylization, abstraction).
- c. Relate motifs to specific historical events and cultural exchanges.

4. Theoretical Framework Application (Al-Faruqi & Zakaria Ali)

- a. (Refer Table 1).

5. Intergrative Cultural Analysis:

- a. Synthesize findings from both frameworks to analyze how Islamic artistic conventions are adapted and combined with indigenous Malay traditions.
- b. Identify the creative strategies used by the Malays to integrate religious principles with cultural symbolism in the production of Telepuk.

6. Comparative Contextualization:

- a. Compare with other Islamic art forms (manuscript illumination, mosque decoration) to demonstrate moderate cross-influence.

7. Interpretation & Synthesis:

- a. Draw conclusions about how Telepuk textiles function as both a religious artefact which embodying Islamic aesthetics and a cultural artefact that preserving Malay heritage).
- b. Suggest how this duality reflects the broader process of cultural integration in the Malay Archipelago.

Table 1: Theoretical framework to study and analysis the data collected.

Theoretical Framework	Islamic Aesthetic Expression (based on Tawhid, view of nature, rejection in Islam & beauty concept) by Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi	Malay Aesthetic (based on Malay World View & Malay Intellect) by Zakaria Ali
Description of Artwork	Artist's name, artwork title, year, medium, period/era, and relevant description	
Formalistic Aspects (Analysing the formal elements dan formal subjects)	Abstraction Creativity process & problem solving process; Imitation → Denaturalisation → Stylization → Abstraction	<i>Berhalus</i> (Finesse)
Formalistic Aspects (Analysing the arrangement of composition)	Abstraction, Modular structure, Successive combination Repetition, Dynamism, Intricacy	<i>Bersatu</i> (Unity) <i>Berlawanan</i> (Contrast)
Content Aspect	Art as an Quranic expression	<i>Berfungsi</i> (Functionality) <i>Berlambang</i> (Symbolism)
Context/Contextual Aspects	Aesthetical, Philosophy & Theological 3 levels of Quranic culture; - Quran as definer of Tawhid - Quran as an artistic model - Quran as an artistic iconography	Malay expressive culture Religious belief (Tawhid & Sufism)
Results (Characteristics of Art)	Ilimi design of Arabesque, Geometric and other abstract designs Calligraphy art, vegetal motifs, non-realistic (animal images divorced from nature)	<i>Awan Larat</i> principle in Malay craft (especially in woodcarving)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A research visit was conducted on 28 December 2024 to the *Pesona Telepuk* exhibition, which was held from 28 October to 31 December 2024 at the Saindera Gallery, National Textile Museum, Kuala Lumpur.

Table 2: Categorizing of visual sampling

Category	Ilimi Designs of Arabesque, Geometric & Abstract	Malay Artistic

Islamic
arabesque &
Malay *Awan*
Larat decorated
in telepuk



Iznik tile panel with flowers, 1550-1600.

Source:
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabesque>



Image 4121: Sarung telepuk.

Source: National Textile Museum.
 Photographed: 28 December 2024.

Geometrical
designs



Textile fragment from Spain, 14th century.

Source: <https://www.metmuseum.org>



Image 4143: Kain Setangan telepuk.

Source: National Textile Museum.
 Photographed: 28 December 2024.

Vegetal motif
and abstract
designs



Tile from a mihrab, Ilkhanid period (Iran),
 14th century

Source: <https://www.metmuseum.org>



Image 4213: Kain sarung bergeru.

Source: National Textile Museum.
 Photographed: 28 December 2024.

Calligraphy in
textile



Talismanic shirt with calligraphy, 15th century
 Source: <https://www.metmuseum.org>



Image 4005: Calligraphy as border decoration in kain setangan

Source: National Textile Museum.
 Photographed: 28 December 2024.

Table 3: Comparative analysis to study the integration of Islamic concept and principle into Malay creative process and problem solving process in Telepuk textile.

Category	Islamic Art Characteristics	Application in Malay Telepuk
Visual Form	Geometrical elements. Perfect and symmetrical shape/form and in arabesque embody the principle of Tawhid (unity),	Almost all Malay motifs and pattern also adopt symmetrical and geometric arrangements, influenced by Islamic principles. However, Malay designs often integrate these forms with organic

reflecting divine order and infinity (Wright et al., 1988).

Some design combined with floral motifs symbolizing the spiritual concept of garden of heaven (Ismail et al., 2014).

Pinnacle of Islamic art. Calligraphy as an highest art – the writing of Al-Quran as a representation of the sacred word. Figurative imagery is avoided to emphasize the word of God.

Aniconism subjects – Rejecting the use of figurative elements in Ilimi designs is one of the important rules or canon in Islamic art. No depictions of humans/animals to avoid idolatry.

Gold element could be found in illuminated manuscripts symbolizing light, eternity, and divine beauty.

motifs (e.g., floral patterns), showing cultural adaptation, rather than strict adherence to Islamic abstraction (A. Hasan & Ismail, 2013).

Calligraphy and Arabic or *Jawi* text as motifs exist in *kain setangan*. (In other textiles like *cindai* or *limar*, and *batik* as coffin cover and *kain setangan* also). Calligraphy in Malay textile serves as sacred protection, blessing and as decoration – This reflects Islamic reverence for scripture but also shows how Malays using the word of Allah into everyday and ceremonial textiles (Ismail & Hasan, 2012).

While Islamic aniconism influenced Malay art, local traditions preserved plant and animal motifs such as *pucuk rebung lawi ayam*. These motifs often carried symbolic meanings rooted in Malay cosmology and custom/norms.

Motifs were stamped on polished cloth. *Telepuk* textile features the glittering charm from the gold leaf elevating cloth into symbols of royal prestige, wealth, and exclusivity (S. Z. Ismail, 1997).

Integration between Islamic canon and Malay view, where sacred geometry is localized to suit Malay artistic sensibilities.

Also, the coexistence of Islamic prohibition with indigenous expression shows selective adaptation. Malays localized Islamic principles without erasing pre-Islamic symbolism, creating a unique hybrid aesthetic.

Aesthetical Composition

Intricate arabesque ornamentation by composing motif or pattern in repetition manner. A combination of motifs arranged in complex pattern symbolizing the transcendence of Allah, and monotheistic principles of Tawhid.

Denaturalization and stylization of forms from the plant world.

Malay *Awan Larat* composition is similar to the conjunct and disjunct arabesque pattern. It has intertwine and vine-like continuing in loop. It is similar to the arrangement of arabesque and represent same meaning/symbol.

Due to view of nature principle of Islamic art, Malay artisans tend to observe their environment and influenced with conceptual thought (philosophy or world view) that develops from seeds that sprout, creeping tendrils and develops into a complete pattern.

Functional & Symbolism.	Integration of art into daily life and cultural norms. To use for Royal and government, as art and religion patronage. Didactic role in conveying values and Islamic identities.	Used in official occasion – formal attire, wedding attire, gifts and wedding dowry, coronation robe (<i>Baju Layang</i>), and <i>persalinan</i> award. Sultan and royalties as artistic patronage. Palace as the center of artistic concentration.
Philosophical & Theological Meaning	<p>Principles of Tawhid – Transcendence of God (Allah), syahadah and the fundamental of Islam.</p> <p>Islamic world view of nature – another principle of Islamic art.</p> <p>Rejection in Islam – life principles according to the teaching of Quran and following the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad.</p> <p>The concept of beauty – reflection of divine beauty (jamal) and majesty (jalal)</p>	<p>Malay clothing philosophy (two examples); The position of the <i>kepala kain</i> in <i>kain sarong</i> or <i>sampin</i> carries a specific meaning. Symbol of Malay identity and cultural continuity.</p> <p>For <i>kain setangan</i>, the fold on the front of the <i>tanjak</i> or <i>tengkolok</i> that slants left or right indicating the wearer's status.</p> <p>The gold embellishment symbolizes grandeur and divine majesty.</p> <p>Repetition of motifs and pattern, linking and intertwine with each other in looping symbolizes eternity which attribute to the oneness of Allah – Tawhidic concept that embedded in Malay motif.</p>

CONCLUSION

This study has critically examined the stylistic patterns and cultural influences in Telepuk textiles, demonstrating how Islamic motifs and indigenous Malay ornamentation were integrated into a unique artistic synthesis. The comparative visual and historical analysis of selected Telepuk cloths from Muzium Tekstil Negara reveals that these textiles embody more than decorative beauty. They also reflecting the religious, cultural, and social evolution of the Malay Archipelago.

Table 3: Levels of Quranic culture in Islamic Art.

Level	Islamic Art & Malay Art (Traditional)
1 Tawhid	<p>As the highest level. Expressing the concept of Tawhid. As for Malay who professes Islam, are also bound to this, thus, the spiritual foundation in both Islamic and Malay arts are reflected in several similar key principles;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Aniconism: following the concept of rejection in Islam, the absence of figurative image is to prevent idolatry, thus the viewer's attention focus on God's invisible presence. Infinity: The infinite nature of God is symbolized through intricate, repeating patterns that suggest endlessness. These can be seen in geometric patterns and arabesques. Sublimation: The ultimate goal of creativity for Muslim artist is to seek purify the material form, transcending its physical qualities to reveal its deeper, Tawhid essence.
2	Second level translating the conceptual teaching of Tawhid into visualisation of artistic

Form (Pattern & Geometry)	form. The obstacles to figurative painting do not hinder the creative process of Islamic artists, thus, developing distinct disciplines of ornamentation;
	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Geometric pattern in repetition, interlaced to create much complex and intricate pattern.2. Biomorphic pattern of arabesque with infinite flowing and curving of vegetal motifs – leaves and flowers that are stylized and abstraction from nature.3. Calligraphy as the highest art and most revered art form. Visually represent the Divine Word of the Quran. In Malay culture, influenced by Arabic literature, <i>Jawi</i> writing system developed and used as written Malay language. These Arabic and <i>Jawi</i> also used as ornamentation in Malay textiles.
3 Material (Media Application)	The use of similar media, namely gold in Islamic art, is largely concentrated in the production of manuscripts in general, including Malay manuscripts, but in Malay textiles, gold (leaf or glitter) is also used on telepuk cloth (another textile that uses gold thread is songket).

Through the dual framework of Islamic artistic principles and Malay aesthetics, the findings affirm that Telepuk functioned simultaneously as religiously inspired artefacts and cultural symbols, shaping a distinct visual identity for Malay textile traditions. Academically, this research bridging the disciplines of art history, anthropology, and cultural heritage studies.

From a cultural perspective, the study underscores the importance of heritage preservation, offering a pathway to revive and safeguard traditional Malay craft as part of national identity. It also opens possibilities for contemporary design innovation that values cross-cultural integration. At the societal level, Telepuk textiles hold potential as educational resources, cultural diplomacy tools, and economic drivers that empower local artisans. Finally, the integration of Islamic and indigenous elements within Telepuk textiles not only illustrates the richness of Malay cultural heritage but also reinforces their enduring relevance as symbols of identity, creativity, and intercultural dialogue in the global arena.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF CO-AUTHORS

The authors acknowledge that there is no personal interest in the publication of this article. The first author conducted the field visit, visual data collection and data analysis. The second author wrote the literature review, discussion and compiled the reference list. The third author made improvements to the literature review and methodology, while the fourth author reviewed the sentence structure, analysis, discussion and reference format.

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