

## Malaysian Heritage and Identity Through *Wayang* (2008): A Film by Hatta Azad Khan

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**Abstract:** - Hatta Azad Khan is an outstanding director in Malaysia, specifically in the film and theatre industries. His remarkable film, *Wayang* (2008), has gathered significant recognition within industry. The narrative circles around a puppeteer who is so devoted to preserving the fading tradition of 'wayang kulit', which is being largely overlooked by modern society. *Wayang* has earned numerous national awards and stands as a cultural emblem that honors and showcases Malay heritage. Its cultural depth has also earned it a place in the in-flight entertainment lineup of several major airlines, including Malaysia Airlines, Emirates, Ijtihad, and Singapore Airlines. While the film has been well-received, research on heritage films in Malaysia is still scarce. Thus, this paper intends to contribute by applying Austin's (2008) heritage film model. This study is guided by the central research question: How is heritage represented in *Wayang* through the lens of Austin's model? To address this, content analysis is employed, extracting from both library research and a close observation of the film. The findings suggested that *Wayang* serves as a critical reflection on heritage and identity amidst a rapidly evolving society. By connecting personal narratives with wider cultural motives, the film both challenges traditional conceptions of artistic expression and affirms the richness of Malay heritage.

**Key-Words:** - *Wayang*, Heritage Film, Cultural, 'wayang kulit', Identity, Malaysian Film

Received: March 26, 2024. Revised: December 19, 2024. Accepted: February 21, 2025. Published: June 18, 2025.

### 1 Introduction

Malaysia is a distinctively diverse nation, built from its rich mosaic of religions and ethnic groups. The ethnic groups consist of Malays, Chinese, Indians and indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak in Borneo and the Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia. The region's development has been shaped by major world religions, including Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity, which have become integral to its civilization and continue to influence the cultural practices of its people.

The Malaysian population is enriched by a multitude of ethnic groups, each with its own heritage, identity and traditions. In Sabah, 32 ethnic

communities are officially acknowledged. The Kadazandusun form the largest group, followed by others such as the Rungus, Bajau, Bajau Laut, Murut, Lundayeh, Orang Sungai, and Iranun – each contributing uniquely to the cultural material of the region. In Sarawak, there are 27 ethnic groups, with the Iban being the majority alongside Bidayuh, Melanau, and Orang Ulu.

Hatta Azad Khan is a distinguished figure in the Malaysian entertainment industry, known for his work as a film director, screenwriter, screenplay, scriptwriter, and stage drama scriptwriter. Among his extensive list of works, *Wayang* (2008) stands out as a critically acclaimed film that has received

industry recognition. In addition, Hatta has directed several other notable productions, including *Mat Som* (1990) and *Kembar Siang* (2011). His storytelling approach is characterized by a focus on societal issues, realism, and cultural heritage, as exemplified by *Wayang* (Anugerah Akademik Negara (AAN), Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi, 2008).

*Wayang* has garnered multiple national awards and is widely recognized as a key cultural work that both showcases and preserves Malay heritage. Among its notable achievements are the Special Jury Award and the Best Supporting Actor Award (awarded to Zul Huzaimy Marzuki) at the 21<sup>st</sup> Malaysian Film Festival (*Festival Filem Malaysia FFM ke 21*) in 2008. Other than that, the film has also received multiple honors at the 2009 Screen Awards (*Anugerah Skrin ASK*), including Best Film, Best Male Director, Best Male Actor, Best Male Supporting Actor and Best Female Supporting Actor. Apart from that, *Wayang* has also been featured in the in-flight entertainment catalogues of several major airlines, including Malaysia Airlines, Emirates, Ijtihad and Singapore Airlines (Admin, 2017; Anugerah Akademik Negara (AAN), Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi, 2008; Asrani, 2020).

Despite its critical acclaim and status as a medium for promoting Malaysian heritage, scholarly research on heritage films in Malaysia remains limited. Consequently, this paper seeks to analyse the heritage content using Austin's heritage film model. The research question guiding this investigation is: To what extent can the portrayal of heritage in *Wayang* be identified and emphasised as a representation of Malaysian film heritage?

## 2 Literature Review

A total of 19 contemporary writings discussing heritage films have been analysed according to five scopes: Heritage Film Tourism and Authenticity, Cultural Identity and a Reflection of National Heritage, Preservation of Cultural Heritage Through Cinema, The Portrayal of Heritage and Societal Value in Visual Media, and Limitations and the Study of Heritage Cinema. The following sections provide a detailed discussion.

### 2.1 Heritage film tourism and authenticity

A significant component of historical films is "film-induced tourism," which refers to how visitors interact with authentic portrayals. Xin Cui and Ziqian Song (2024) investigate how manufactured

and existential authenticity function at Hengdian World Studios, demonstrating how authenticity affects how visitors perceive cultural heritage locations connected to movies.

Su Zhang et al. (2023) investigate the impact of film-induced tourism on heritage conservation intentions, particularly in relation to perceived authenticity and destination image. These findings underscore the importance of authenticity in heritage film studies, especially when analysing films like *Wayang*, which serves as a genuine representation of traditional Malay culture. The emphasis on tourists' perceptions offers valuable insight into how *Wayang*, as part of in-flight entertainment, contributes to shaping global understandings of Malaysian cultural heritage.

In contrast, Naif A Haddad (2023) explores the emerging domains of heritage film tourism and Archéocinema, with a focus on the modern integration of physical and virtual environments to enhance heritage tourism. This study also highlights how audience engagement can be deepened through the fusion of traditional and contemporary narrative techniques – a strategy that holds potential for promoting and preserving Malaysian heritage films such as *Wayang*.

### 2.2 Cultural Identity as a Reflection of National Heritage

Another key issue discussed in this literature is the representation of national identity within heritage films. William van der Heide (2021), in his analysis of Malaysian cinema, explores the nation's complex cultural identity and the influence of external cinematic traditions, particularly from Hong Kong and India. This conflict between ethnic diversity and cultural unity is also reflected in *Wayang*, which represents the traditional art of '*wayang kulit*' within a modern Malaysian context.

Similarly, Serkan Şavk's (2023) study of Turkish cinema underscores the role of film in preserving political and national histories. These studies suggest that heritage films function not only as cultural preservation tools but also as mediums for reinforcing national identity, evidently in *Wayang*'s portrayal of Malay heritage for both local and international audiences.

In relation to political and cultural transformation, Stone, Y (2022) examines British heritage films produced during the Brexit era, highlighting how these films engage with themes of national identity and nostalgia, reflecting broader social anxieties. Similarly, *Wayang* can be interpreted as a cinematic response to cultural

pressures confronting traditional art forms in modernizing Malaysia. By portraying '*wayang kulit*', the film plays a significant role in preserving and celebrating national heritage, while simultaneously reinforcing cultural identity amidst ongoing societal transformation.

### 2.3 Preserving Cultural Heritage through Cinema

The preservation of cultural heritage remains a central concern, particularly in digital archiving and safeguarding of intangible cultural expressions. Muhammad Syahmi Razin Abdul Aziz and Suhaili Din (2021) explore the digital preservation of traditional Malay male attire, *Baju Melayu*, using interactive documentary formats. This method of digital documentation plays a vital role in ensuring cultural knowledge is retained and accessible to future generations.

Similarly, Aliffazraie Jali et al. (2022) address challenges in cinema archiving in Malaysia, noting that heritage films are frequently overshadowed by the prioritization of documentaries and news footage. This tendency poses a serious threat to the preservation of culturally significant works such as *Wayang*, which serves as an important audiovisual record of Malaysia's traditional arts and cultural identity.

Maisa Moustafa (2022) examines the transformation of film from a commercial product into a form of recognized cultural heritage, highlighting UNESCO's pivotal role in safeguarding cinematic history. The preservation of Malaysian heritage films, such as *Wayang*, aligns with this global initiative to acknowledge cinema as a vital medium for conserving cultural values and traditions.

### 2.4 The Portrayal of Heritage and Societal Values in Visual Media

Numerous studies have examined the ways in which cultural and religious values are conveyed through heritage films. Zulkiple Abd Ghani and Suria Hani A. Rahman (2023) examine how Malaysian films incorporate Islamic beliefs into entertainment, promoting unity and positive portrayals of Islam. Although *Wayang* does not explicitly address Islamic issues, it expresses cultural values by emphasising the need to preserve indigenous art forms such as '*wayang kulit*'. This emphasis on cultural values is critical in the larger framework of heritage cinema studies since films serve as

platforms for promoting unity and cultural continuity.

Jamaluddin Aziz's (2020) analysis of family images in Malaysian films sheds light on cultural value projection. His emphasis on modern Malay masculinity and family narratives complements *Wayang*'s depiction of traditional values, demonstrating how visual culture can reflect and challenge societal norms.

Ahmad Zamil Zakaria et al. (2017) examine the representation of Malay landscape elements in old films, highlighting the importance of visual elements in conserving Malay cultural heritage. In *Wayang*, the traditional Malay art form is portrayed throughout visual storytelling, emphasizing the significance of cultural representation in contemporary cinema.

### 2.5 Limitations and Challenges in the Study of Heritage Cinema

Several gaps in the existing literature underscore the importance of more comprehensive research on heritage films in Malaysia, particularly regarding preservation, promotion and cultural representation. While Xin Cui and Ziqian Song (2024) and Su Zhang et al. (2023) study the relationship between film and heritage tourism, limited attention has been given to how Malaysian films like *Wayang* can stimulate heritage tourism and influence international perceptions of Malaysian culture.

Additionally, although digital preservation efforts such as those discussed by Muhammad Syahmi Razin Abdul Aziz and Suhaili Din (2021) highlight the importance of safeguarding cultural artefacts like traditional attire, the broader issues surrounding film preservation remain insufficiently addressed.

As studied by Aliffazraie Jali et al. (2022), heritage films are often overlooked in favour of documentaries and news media, pointing to an urgent need for focused strategies to protect and promote Malaysia's cinematic heritage.

Furthermore, although numerous studies explore the representation of cultural identity in heritage films, there is a noticeable gap in research specifically addressing how Malaysian films contribute to this discourse. For example, studies like William van der Heide (2021) offer valuable insights into the cultural complexity of Malaysian cinema. However, more focused analysis is needed to study how individual films such as *Wayang* can engage and represent Malay heritage within this broader cinematic cultural framework.

The existing literature on heritage film studies offers a strong foundation for analyzing *Wayang* as a cultural artefact that both preserves and promotes Malaysian heritage. Authenticity, cultural identity, preservation and values are the key themes that frequently emerge in these studies and align closely with the central concerns of *Wayang*, depicting the traditional art of 'wayang kulit' as an essential element of Malaysian cultural identity. However, notable gaps remain in the study of Malaysian heritage films, particularly in areas such as digital preservation, heritage tourism and nuanced cultural representation. Thus, this study seeks to address these gaps by examining how *Wayang* represents Malaysian heritage through the lens of Austin's (2008) heritage film model, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of heritage cinema within the Malaysian context.

### 3 Methodology

This article presents a qualitative research study that employs a library-based approach to collect data from both print and digital sources. Using context analysis as the primary methodological tool, the study focuses on the film *Wayang* (2008) to examine its depiction of Malaysian heritage through narrative, characterization, and visual storytelling.

The analysis is guided by Austin's (2008) heritage film model, which comprises four core components: cultural representation, narrative structure, audience reception and political and social context. However, this study will specifically concentrate on cultural representation, as it is most directly aligned with the research question addressed in this article. Nevertheless, the subtopics that follow will offer a comprehensive discussion of all four components of Austin's heritage film model to provide contextual depth and analytical balance.

#### 3.1 Heritage Film Model by Austin (2008)

Austin's heritage film model offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing the representation of cultural heritage within cinematic narratives. The model underscores the role of film as a potent medium for preserving, articulating and transmitting cultural identities, collective memory, and socio-political contexts. By applying this framework, scholars are able to explore the intricate relationship between cinema and the construction of cultural meaning, revealing how heritage films contribute to both national identity and cultural continuity.

#### 3.2 Four Key Components of Austin's Heritage Film Model

1. Cultural Representation: At the core of Austin's model is an analysis of how heritage films represent cultural practices, traditions and values. This component focuses on how such portrayals shape the audience's understanding and appreciation of a community's cultural heritage. By examining cinematic techniques used to depict cultural elements, such as costume, language, rituals and social customs, scholars can evaluate the accuracy, authenticity and significance of these representations in constructing and communicating cultural narratives.

2. Narrative Structure: The narrative structure of heritage films constitutes another key aspect of Austin's model. This aspect involves analysing the storytelling techniques employed by filmmakers to convey cultural meaning and significance. These techniques include the integration of folklore, historical events and personal narratives, which serve as narrative devices to engage audiences and underscore the cultural resonance of the film's subject matter. By examining how these elements are embedded within the film's plot, dialogue and visual composition, scholars can gain deeper insights into how heritage films construct and communicate cultural meaning.

3. Audience Reception: Audience reception is a vital component of Austin's heritage film model, as it explores how viewers interpret, engage with, and respond to heritage films. This dimension considers the impact of such films on cultural identity and awareness at both individual and societal levels. By analysing audience responses, scholars can evaluate the effectiveness of heritage films in promoting cultural preservation, encouraging intercultural dialogue, and shaping collective memory. Furthermore, this component highlights the active role of audiences in negotiating, contesting, or reaffirming the cultural representations depicted in these films.

4. Political and Social Context: The political and social context in which heritage films are produced and received represents a critical component of Austin's model. This element emphasizes the importance of examining the broader socio-political forces that influence a film's creation, distribution, and reception. It involves analysing how issues such as representation, power relations and cultural politics inform both the content and interpretation of heritage films. By situating these films within their specific historical, political and social

contexts, scholars can explore how heritage cinema not only reflects but also shapes cultural discourses, engaging themes of identity, belonging and cultural resistance.

By incorporating these key components into the analysis of heritage films, scholars can develop a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between cinema and cultural heritage. Austin's model offers a valuable framework for exploring how films function as powerful instruments for preserving, articulating and disseminating cultural identities, collective memory and socio-political narratives. However, this article focuses specifically on the component of cultural representation in *Wayang*. A detailed analysis of this aspect will be presented in the following section.

## 4 The Analysis and Discussion

*Wayang* (2008), directed by Hatta Azad Khan, centres on the traditional Malay Kelantanese art form of shadow puppetry, known as '*wayang kulit*'. The narrative follows Awang Lah, a master puppeteer played by Eman Manan, whose performances inspire two orphaned children: Awi, a blind boy with a remarkable memory for '*wayang kulit*' stories, and Melor, a girl with a speech impediment caused by a nasal obstruction. Despite their challenges, both children develop a deep appreciation for the art form. Awi's exceptional recall abilities and Melor's talent in puppet-making and direction contribute meaningfully to their shared artistic journey under Awang Lah's mentorship.

The film critiques traditional conceptions of artistic expression through Awang Lah's struggle to reconcile the evolving interpretations of '*wayang kulit*'. This tension is particularly evident as Awi's innovative approach to storytelling begins to diverge from conventional practices, prompting a critical reflection on the boundaries of tradition. The narrative is further enriched by the budding romantic connection between Awi and Melor, which adds emotional depth to their shared artistic journey. However, their relationship faces external obstacles, particularly from Jusoh, Awang Lah's cousin, whose interference threatens both their personal and creative aspirations.

*Wayang* emphasises the cultural representation of Malay heritage. According to Austin (2008), heritage film subjects are mostly taken from culturally respectable sources such as literature, music and painting. Out of these three arts, painting is crucial because it determines the imagery of the genre. However, *Wayang* describes the cultural elements through the usage of costume, language,

rituals, and social customs in the film. The details of these four cultural elements will be discussed below.

### 4.1 Costume

The analysis of the clothing worn by characters in the film *Wayang* reflects the rich cultural heritage and ethnic identity present in Malaysia. The use of these garments serves not only as a visual element but also as a means to convey the depth of cultural diversity that honours and celebrates unique traditions within the context of the film. As mentioned by Hasma Ahmad and Rosita Mohd Tajuddin (2022), clothing coordination is unified, combined, or matched physically to perform the appearance that develops an identity. The silhouette in Malay traditional clothing is formed while applying and combining garment pieces, which is also a part of the concept of '*persalinan*'. Indirectly, it reflects the culture of Malays through the film.

At the timestamp 00:26:50 to 00:27:38 (see Fig. 1), the presence of the '*Baju Kurung*' is notable, symbolizing the traditions and identity of the Malay community in Malaysia. This traditional attire is worn by both female characters in this scene, showcasing the elegance and beauty inherent in Malay clothing culture. The '*Baju Kurung*' reflects cultural values and illustrates how elements such as clothing can reinforce ethnic identity within the visual context of *Wayang*.



Fig. 1 '*Baju Kurung*' attire worn by female actors in *Wayang*.

From 00:47:54 to 00:51:20, Mak Cik Esah is depicted wearing "*batik sarung*" or "*kain sarung*" (see Fig. 2), highlighting Malay culture's beauty and significance. In addition to representing classic fashion, the "*batik sarung*" is a representation of elegance and cultural identity. Mak Cik Esah's "*batik sarung*" outfit in this scenario can represent

her identity as a Kelantanese Malay woman who uses her dress to uphold cultural values and customs. This enhances the authenticity and visual appeal of *Wayang*, which is rooted in Malay textile tradition, by giving her character and cultural background a deeper dimension.



Fig. 2 “Batik Sarung” worn by Mak Cik Esah, an attire of Kelantanese women.

Between 00:50:07 and 00:53:10, Awang Lah may be observed wearing “*kain pelikat*” and “*semutar*”, a piece of cloth that is wrapped around the Kelantanese man's head (see Fig. 3). His selection of “*kain pelikat*” demonstrates how traditional attire is still significant in Malays' daily lives and displays the diversity of Malay culture and identity. This scene not only adds authenticity to Awang Lah's character but also enriches the cultural visualisation within *Wayang*, providing deeper insights into traditional values and the lifestyle of the Malay community.



Fig. 3 “*Kain Pelikat*” worn by Awang Lah with any top, such as a singlet, is a traditional cloth for males.

The film *Wayang* successfully showcases elements of heritage through traditional clothing. As a heritage film that embodies the identity and culture of the Malay community in Malaysia, clothing serves as a significant aspect of cinematic

representation. This is because traditional attire can serve as a marker for identifying a heritage film. Consequently, *Wayang* effectively highlights the cultural heritage of Kelantan through the costumes worn by its characters.

In this film, the portrayal of traditional Malay attire reflects the aesthetic values associated with cultural identity and reinforces the narrative's authenticity. The costumes enhance the audience's comprehension of the Kelantanese people's cultural heritage by accurately portraying their historical and social background. Since clothing is frequently associated with rank, community connections, and cultural pride, wearing traditional *Wayang* clothes promotes a stronger sense of Malay identity.

Further highlighting the value of conserving traditional clothing as a crucial component of Malaysia's intangible cultural heritage is the movie's meticulous costume design. In addition to being useful, clothing in Malay culture also represents social status and attractiveness, as has been mentioned in a number of academic studies. *Wayang* teaches its audience the value of traditional attire in preserving cultural identity in a contemporary setting while also providing entertainment by integrating these components into its storyline.

In summary, *Wayang* exemplifies how traditional clothing can be effectively utilized in film to convey cultural narratives and preserve heritage. Through its portrayal of Kelantanese attire, the film contributes to a broader discourse on the importance of maintaining cultural practices and identities in contemporary society.

#### 4.2 Language

The Kelantan dialect is so different from the standard Malay language. The dialect has its own vocabulary and meaning. Thus, *Wayang* portrayed the homogeneity of Kelantanese people who speak the Kelantanese dialect. The speakers born and raised in Kelantan or learners who are familiar with the language are keen to speak the dialect.

The dialogue or conversational language utilized by characters in the film *Wayang* encompasses regional dialects that indirectly preserve the Kelantanese dialect as one of the intangible heritage. The portrayal of this dialect not only enriches the film's authenticity but also highlights its role as a vital component of Malaysian national cinema, as discussed by Shukri (2023). As mentioned by the scholars, the state's dialect serves as the primary language used throughout this film. This dialect is also spoken in varying contexts,



specifically in formal and informal settings. In formal contexts, the dialect employed is clearer, more structured, and adheres to precise grammatical rules. Conversely, in informal situations, the dialect tends to be more concise, simpler, and less grammatically accurate.

The Kelantanese dialect is exclusively spoken by the leading and supporting *Wayang* characters. As a simple example, one of the dialogues is uttered by Awang Lah to his wife, Mak Cik Esah was:

“*Cari nyakit gaponyo...budok Melor tu cukup sehat, tok leh kecek betol jah. Kito kato gapo pun dio pehe.*” (see Table 1 the translation to standard Malay and English). This dialogue was spoken informally without minding the grammar or language.

Kelantanese	Standard Malay	English
Nyakit	Penyakit	Illness
Budok	Budak	Children/Kid
Gapo	Apa	What
Sehat	Sihat	Healthy
Kecek	Cakap	Talk

Table 1 Example of Kelantanese dialect and the translation to standard Malay and English.

### 4.3 Ritual and Social Customs

The prominence of culture and customs in the film *Wayang* profoundly and consistently reflects the identity of the Malay community. The cultural elements and traditions depicted are not merely background features; they form the core of the narrative and character development. This enriches the film's narrative with authentic cultural nuances while promoting Malay cultural heritage to the audience, creating a significant impact and fostering pride in ethnic identity within the context of visual arts.



Fig. 4 Performer or ‘*Tok Dalang*’ used the Kelantanese dialect to showcase the story in ‘*wayang kulit*’.

From 00:29:00 to 00:32:33 (see Fig. 4), we observe how the Kelantanese community continues

to value and cherish ‘*wayang kulit*’ as an integral part of Malay’s cultural heritage. This scene illustrates the importance of “‘*wayang kulit*” in conveying traditional values and morals to society, even in modern times.

The language used in ‘*wayang kulit*’ performances also highlight the richness of culture and the unique identity of the Kelantanese people. Thus, this scene deepens the film's narrative with cultural elements and emphasizes the significance of traditional arts as a medium for preserving and transmitting valuable cultural heritage to current and future generations.

Between 01:20:33 and 01:21:16, we are presented with a scene showcasing ‘*silat*’ (see Fig 5), a traditional Malay martial art. ‘*Silat*’ is not only a cultural heritage but also reflects values such as honesty, bravery, and discipline that are esteemed in Malay society. In this sequence, we witness ‘*silat*’ combat actions demonstrating the skills and techniques inherent in this form of self-defence. The film’s portrayal of ‘*silat*’ adds an action element and promotes the beauty and grandeur of Malay cultural heritage to viewers.



Fig. 5 ‘*Silat*’ as one of the cultural heritages portrayed in *Wayang* (2008).

From 01:32:44 to 01:34:01, we are treated to a wedding scene between Awi and Melor (see Fig. 6). This sequence depicts the wedding ceremony itself and provides insight into the Malays’ rich and traditional cultural values. Elements such as customary rituals, beautifully adorned traditional attire, and an atmosphere filled with joy and harmony among guests are evident. The depiction of this wedding serves as a climax in the film's storyline while reflecting the importance of marriage institutions within Malay society. These honouring traditions have been passed down through generations.



Fig. 6 Malay wedding ceremony as part of the cultural heritage in *Wayang* (2008).

The depiction of social conventions and rituals in *Wayang* is extensive. Using aspects like martial arts and marital ceremonies, the director skilfully illustrates the Malay community's many customs and traditional practices. These customs are a reflection of the Malay people's heritage, which is increasingly in danger of being eclipsed by other influences.

*Wayang* therefore effectively explores rituals and social practices to enhance the distinctiveness and identity of Malaysian Malay society. The film functions as both a cultural preservation tool and a source of pleasure by integrating these components into the story. For example, the representation of traditional martial arts emphasises the idea of community values and physical discipline. The depiction of marriage traditions also emphasises the value of societal cohesiveness and familial ties in Malay society.

In addition, the movie discusses worries about how certain traditional customs can be lost as a result of globalisation and cultural uniformity. *Wayang* encourages a discussion about the significance of conserving these traditions for future generations by strengthening its audience's appreciation of Malay history through its meticulous depiction of rites and social practices.

To put it briefly, *Wayang* is a symbol of the depth of Malay cultural history, encapsulating its social norms and rituals while promoting their continuous applicability in modern society.

## 5 Conclusion

The film *Wayang* (2008), directed by Hatta Azad Khan, serves as a profound exploration of heritage and identity through the lens of traditional Malay shadow puppetry, or '*wayang kulit*'. This cinematic work intricately weaves together the lives of its characters, particularly the master puppeteer Awang

Lah, the blind boy Awi, and the speech-impaired Melor, against a backdrop rich in cultural symbolism. Through a detailed analysis of costumes, language, and social customs, *Wayang* preserves and critiques the evolving interpretations of Malay cultural identity.

The examination of costume in *Wayang* reveals how traditional garments like the '*Baju Kurung*', '*batik sarung*', and '*kain pelikat*' serve as visual markers of cultural identity. These garments are not merely aesthetic choices; they embody the values and traditions of the Malay community, reinforcing ethnic identity within the narrative. The film's meticulous attention to clothing highlights its role in preserving cultural heritage while simultaneously reflecting contemporary societal dynamics.

In terms of language, the use of the Kelantanese dialect underscores the regional specificity and homogeneity of the characters' identities (Ashari, 2018). This linguistic choice authenticates the narrative and emphasises the importance of dialect in maintaining cultural continuity amidst modern influences. The film illustrates how language can act as a vessel for cultural expression, enabling characters to communicate their identities and experiences effectively.

The portrayal of rituals and social customs further enriches the narrative by embedding cultural practices within character development. Scenes depicting '*wayang kulit*' performances, traditional martial arts like '*silat*', and wedding ceremonies encapsulate core Malay values such as community, artistry, and familial bonds. These elements serve to reinforce cultural pride and continuity, showcasing how traditional practices remain relevant in contemporary society.

Ultimately, *Wayang* functions as a critical commentary on heritage and identity in a rapidly changing world. By blending personal narratives with cultural themes, the film challenges conventional notions of artistry while celebrating the richness of Malay traditions. The film stands as a testament to the resilience of cultural identity, illustrating how art can transcend generational divides and foster a deeper understanding of one's heritage. *Wayang* preserves and revitalises an essential aspect of Malaysian culture for future generations through its nuanced portrayal of characters and their relationships with tradition.

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