

CULTURAL PROMOTION THROUGH NUSANTARA TRADITIONAL COSTUME FASHION SHOW AT UTHM MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This community service article describes a cultural promotion activity through a Nusantara traditional costume fashion show under the theme “Wonderful Indonesia” at Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia. The activity responded to the need for more direct, visual, and participatory cultural communication between Indonesian and Malaysian academic communities. It was implemented on 16 April 2026 at the Audio Visual Studio of Tunku Tun Aminah Library, involving Universitas Riau Kepulauan students as performers and organizers, with support from traditional costume studios and salons in Batam. The method used a participatory service design consisting of preparation, partner coordination, costume selection, runway performance, cultural narration, final parade, documentation, and qualitative reflection. The activity presented traditional attire from Minangkabau, Betawi, South Sulawesi, Sunda, Solo, Papua, and Aceh. The results indicate that fashion show performance can function as an accessible cultural diplomacy medium because it combines visual aesthetics, identity narration, and audience engagement. The activity strengthened Indonesian cultural visibility in an international academic setting and produced recommendations for broader audience involvement, stronger digital promotion, and follow-up cultural workshops.

Keywords: *cultural diplomacy; fashion show; Nusantara attire; soft power; Wonderful Indonesia.*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia’s cultural diversity is a strategic social resource that can be developed through education, tourism promotion, and cultural diplomacy. The country’s plural cultural identity is not only represented through language, performing arts, culinary heritage, and rituals, but also through traditional attire that carries regional history, aesthetic values, social status, and symbolic meaning. In international engagement, traditional clothing is effective because it communicates culture visually and immediately, even when the audience does not yet have sufficient linguistic or historical knowledge about the culture being presented.

The need for direct cultural communication becomes stronger in academic environments where students and lecturers from different national backgrounds interact. Universities are not only formal educational institutions but also social spaces where cultural exchange, institutional networking, and public diplomacy can take place. In this context, students are able to act as cultural agents who introduce their national identity through creative and educational activities. A fashion show of Nusantara traditional attire can therefore be positioned as a community service activity because it transfers cultural knowledge to an international audience while developing students’ communication, collaboration, and cultural literacy.

The activity discussed in this article was a “Wonderful Indonesia” themed fashion show held at Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM). It was designed to introduce Indonesian cultural diversity to the UTHM academic community through a runway performance supported by cultural narration. The activity was implemented by Universitas Riau Kepulauan students and involved traditional costume studios and salons from Batam. Eight student models presented attire representing several regions of Indonesia, including Minangkabau, Betawi, South Sulawesi, Sunda, Solo, Papua, and Aceh.

The urgency of this activity lies in the fact that cultural promotion is often conducted through digital campaigns, written materials, or formal presentations, while direct and embodied cultural experiences are less frequently used in campus-based international engagement. Digital campaigns are important, yet they cannot fully replace the affective and visual experience created by live performance. A fashion show allows the audience to observe fabric, color, silhouette, accessories, movement, and cultural explanation at the same time. This combination makes cultural information more concrete and memorable.

The activity also relates to the broader framework of Indonesian tourism branding. The official “Wonderful Indonesia” campaign positions Indonesian tourism through natural beauty, culinary and wellness experiences, arts and heritage, recreation, and adventure. The Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Indonesia states that “Wonderful Indonesia” is a commitment to promote Indonesian destinations for domestic and international tourism and welcomes partnerships to disseminate Indonesia’s cultural and natural richness. This makes the theme suitable for a campus-based cultural promotion activity because it connects traditional attire with Indonesia’s national tourism image.

Based on these considerations, this article aims to describe the implementation, results, and implications of the Nusantara traditional costume fashion show at UTHM Malaysia. The article also analyzes how fashion-based cultural performance can operate as a practical medium for cultural promotion, soft diplomacy, and intercultural learning in a university environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural diplomacy refers to the use of cultural resources, creative expressions, and people-to-people interaction to build understanding, trust, and positive perception across national boundaries. Nye (2008) explains that soft power works through attraction rather than coercion, and culture becomes one of the principal sources of that attraction when it is perceived as meaningful and legitimate by foreign publics. In a similar direction, UNESCO (2022) emphasizes that cultural diplomacy promotes cultural distinctiveness while supporting cooperation and dialogue in an interconnected world.

A key point in cultural diplomacy is that audiences do not passively receive cultural messages. Clarke (2016) argues that cultural products in diplomacy should be understood through processes of reception and meaning-making. This means that cultural activities cannot be judged only by what organizers intend to deliver, but also by how audiences respond, interpret, and emotionally connect with the cultural products displayed. For campus-based service activities, this perspective is important because the success of cultural promotion depends on clarity of narration, visual appeal, contextual explanation, and the audience’s ability to relate the displayed culture to their own experience.

Traditional clothing has a specific role in cultural communication because dress is visible, embodied, and symbolically dense. Clothing communicates social identity, regional belonging, aesthetic taste, and collective memory. Yin, Waheed, and Ang (2024) identify traditional clothing as a medium of soft power in international forums and argue that dress diplomacy can represent identity, challenge dominant global dress norms, and shape perceptions in international relations. This theoretical view is relevant to the fashion show at UTHM because the activity used traditional attire not merely as costume but as a cultural sign that carries regional identity and Indonesian diversity.

Indonesian textiles and traditional attire have long been used in cultural diplomacy. Steelyana and WawoRuntu (2024) show that Indonesian batik and Balinese Tenun Endek have appeared in diplomatic contexts and international events as cultural heritage instruments. Their study suggests that textile-based cultural representation can strengthen Indonesia’s visibility in global forums. Although the UTHM fashion show was a university-level activity rather than a state diplomatic event, the logic is comparable: traditional dress becomes a cultural medium that communicates national identity in a public international setting.

Tourism branding literature also supports the relevance of the “Wonderful Indonesia” theme. Salamah and Yananda (2020) analyze the media image of “Wonderful Indonesia” across online news sites in sixteen countries and show that tourism branding is closely related to visibility, sentiment, and competitive destination image. The official Indonesia Travel platform describes “Wonderful Indonesia” as a commitment to promote destinations across the archipelago and classifies Indonesian wonders into categories such as nature, culinary and wellness, arts and heritage, recreation, and adventure. Thus, campus-based cultural events can support the broader tourism image by making cultural heritage more visible to foreign audiences. The literature indicates that cultural promotion through fashion requires more than aesthetic presentation. It requires cultural accuracy, clear narration, respectful representation, and audience engagement. The gap addressed by this service activity is the limited use of live fashion performance as a structured academic-community service model for promoting Indonesian cultural diversity abroad. This article

contributes a practical implementation model by documenting preparation, performance, audience response, and improvement plans for similar future activities.

METHOD

This community service activity used a participatory-collaborative design. The activity was conducted through cooperation among Universitas Riau Kepulauan students, the UTHM host institution, and traditional costume studios and salons from Batam. This design was selected because a cultural fashion show requires coordination of cultural materials, venue preparation, technical support, model readiness, audience management, and post-event documentation.

The target audience consisted of students, lecturers, and members of the UTHM academic community who attended the activity. The performers were Universitas Riau Kepulauan students. The selection of student performers was based on their availability, involvement in the international campus activity, and willingness to participate in cultural representation. The activity did not aim to select professional models; rather, it emphasized student participation as a form of cultural agency and experiential learning.

The main materials used in the activity were Nusantara traditional costumes, ethnic accessories, cultural narration scripts, documentation devices, and the technical facilities available at the Audio Visual Studio of Tunku Tun Aminah Library. The costumes represented several Indonesian regions and were obtained through rental from costume providers in Batam. The venue’s lighting and sound system supported the runway performance and allowed the audience to focus on the visual presentation and narration.

Table 1. Design and implementation stages of the service activity

Stage	Main Activity	Expected Output
Preparation	Coordination with UTHM, selection of theme, identification of traditional attire, rental arrangement with costume studios and salons, model preparation, and narration drafting.	Activity concept, costume list, model assignment, technical flow, and cultural narration.
Implementation	Opening, individual runway performance, MC explanation of attire origin and function, audience engagement, final parade, and closing appreciation.	Live cultural performance and direct audience exposure to Nusantara traditional attire.
Evaluation	Observation of audience response, discussion among organizers, identification of technical constraints, and collection of documentation for post-event promotion.	Qualitative reflection, improvement notes, and recommendations for replication.

The implementation was carried out on 16 April 2026. The performance was divided into two principal segments. The first segment was the individual runway, where each model presented a traditional outfit while the master of ceremony explained the attire’s region, identity, and general function. The second segment was the collective parade, where all models appeared together as a symbolic representation of Indonesian cultural diversity. Data for this article were collected through direct observation, organizer reflection, activity documentation, and descriptive notes on technical challenges. The data were analyzed qualitatively by organizing information into preparation, implementation, results, constraints, and follow-up recommendations. The analysis focused on practical outcomes because this article is written as a community service report rather than an experimental study. Cultural representation was treated carefully during the activity. The costumes were presented as introductory cultural symbols rather than complete representations of each region. This limitation was important because one performance cannot represent the full complexity of Indonesian traditional attire. The narration therefore emphasized recognition, appreciation, and initial cultural introduction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of the Nusantara Traditional Costume Fashion Show

The main result of the activity was the successful implementation of the “Wonderful Indonesia” themed fashion show at UTHM Malaysia. The activity introduced Nusantara traditional attire through a structured runway performance involving eight student models. The costumes displayed included Minangkabau attire, Betawi attire, South Sulawesi Baju Bodo, Sundanese attire, Dodotan Solo, Papuan woven textile, and Acehese traditional attire. These selections gave the audience a compact but diverse visual representation of Indonesia’s regional cultural identities.

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The runway format made the cultural message more accessible. Each outfit was not only displayed visually but also accompanied by short narration from the master of ceremony. This narration was necessary because the audience needed contextual information to understand that the garments were not merely decorative but connected to regional identity, ceremonial functions, and cultural heritage. The combination of visual movement and verbal explanation helped transform the performance from entertainment into cultural education.

Table 2. Traditional attire displayed and cultural messages delivered

Traditional Attire	Region/Cultural Identity	Educational Message
Minangkabau attire	West Sumatra	Introduced the strong visual identity of Minangkabau culture, including elegance, regional pride, and ceremonial symbolism.
Betawi attire	Jakarta	Presented urban ethnic heritage and the plural cultural character of Indonesia's capital region.
Baju Bodo	South Sulawesi	Introduced one of the iconic women's traditional garments of Sulawesi with distinctive silhouette and color expression.
Sundanese attire	West Java	Represented refinement, modesty, and aesthetic simplicity associated with Sundanese cultural expression.
Dodotan Solo	Central Java	Displayed Javanese ceremonial elegance and the symbolic richness of royal court-inspired attire.
Papuan woven textile	Papua	Introduced textile diversity from eastern Indonesia and emphasized the geographical breadth of Indonesian culture.
Acehnese attire	Aceh	Presented a strong regional identity influenced by Islamic, Malay, and local cultural elements.

The following documentation shows the implementation of the runway performance and the collective parade of Nusantara traditional attire during the cultural promotion activity at UTHM Malaysia.



Image 1. Documentation of the Nusantara traditional costume fashion show performance at UTHM Malaysia.



Image 2. Collective parade of student models presenting Nusantara traditional attire at UTHM Malaysia.

Audience Response and Cultural Communication Value

The audience response indicated that the activity was able to attract attention and create a positive atmosphere. The report of the activity notes that the audience gave enthusiastic applause and support during the performance. This response is important because cultural promotion requires not only information delivery but also emotional engagement. A silent or passive audience may indicate limited resonance, while visible attention and applause suggest that the performance succeeded in creating curiosity and appreciation.

The activity also demonstrated the practical value of fashion as a cultural communication medium. Traditional attire can simplify complex cultural information into visible symbols. Color, textile, accessories, and silhouette can invite questions before detailed explanation is given. For an international audience that may not yet understand Indonesian regional diversity, this visual entry point is highly useful. It lowers the barrier to cultural learning and encourages audiences to recognize Indonesia as culturally plural rather than culturally homogeneous.

From a cultural diplomacy perspective, the fashion show worked as a small-scale soft power activity. Nye's concept of soft power is relevant because the activity did not persuade the audience through formal argument or institutional authority. Instead, it relied on attraction, beauty, narrative, and personal interaction. The audience was invited to see Indonesia through cultural expression. This aligns with UNESCO's view that cultural diplomacy can promote cultural distinctiveness while supporting dialogue and cooperation.

The use of the "Wonderful Indonesia" theme strengthened the activity's connection with national tourism branding. The theme provided a recognizable frame that linked traditional attire to Indonesia's broader cultural and tourism image. The official tourism campaign emphasizes Indonesia's natural and cultural richness, and the fashion show translated that message into a campus performance. In this sense, the activity did not merely display clothing; it contributed to the circulation of Indonesia's positive cultural image in an international academic environment.

Student Learning and Institutional Collaboration

The activity produced learning outcomes for the Universitas Riau Kepulauan students involved. Students learned to coordinate with an international partner campus, manage event flow, prepare cultural performance materials, communicate with costume providers, and perform in front of a foreign academic audience. These skills are not always gained through classroom learning. A cultural service activity therefore becomes a practical learning space where students combine cultural knowledge, teamwork, communication, and public confidence. Institutional collaboration was another important result. The activity required support from UTHM as the host institution and from costume studios and salons in Batam as cultural material providers. This collaboration shows that cultural promotion is more effective when it is not handled by a single actor. Universities, students, creative practitioners,

and cultural communities can jointly produce cultural visibility. The collaboration also opens space for future activities such as cultural workshops, joint exhibitions, student mobility programs, and community-based cultural research. The activity provided direct benefit to the UTHM audience by offering exposure to Indonesian cultural diversity in a concise and attractive format. Instead of learning about Indonesian attire only through written sources or online images, the audience experienced a live performance. This strengthened the educational value of the event because the audience could observe the garments in motion, hear the explanation, and respond collectively within the same cultural moment.

Challenges, Limitations, and Follow-up Plan

The main technical challenge was costume adjustment for student models. Traditional attire often has specific structures, layers, accessories, and fitting requirements. Differences in model body size and costume availability required flexible adjustment by the organizers and costume providers. This challenge did not stop the activity, but it shows that future events should allocate more time for fitting, rehearsal, and backup costume preparation. Another limitation was promotional reach. The activity report indicates that social media promotion was conducted after the event. For a stronger impact, promotion should be conducted in three phases: before, during, and after the event. Pre-event promotion can increase audience attendance, real-time coverage can expand digital reach, and post-event documentation can extend the cultural message beyond the physical venue. This is particularly relevant because cultural diplomacy today increasingly depends on offline-online integration.

The activity was also limited by the number of regions represented. Seven cultural identities cannot represent the full range of Indonesian traditional attire. However, this limitation is acceptable for an introductory fashion show. Future activities can improve representational breadth by involving more provinces, adding short exhibit panels, or arranging a rotating series of cultural showcases. The key issue is not to claim full representation, but to present cultural diversity respectfully and accurately.

Table 3. Evaluation notes and development plan

Evaluation Aspect	Finding	Recommended Development
Cultural content	The displayed attire introduced several regional identities of Indonesia but did not represent all provinces.	Develop rotating themes by region, island group, or textile tradition to avoid overgeneralization.
Technical preparation	Costume fitting was the main operational challenge.	Conduct early fitting, prepare backup accessories, and schedule a full rehearsal before the event.
Audience engagement	The audience showed enthusiasm through attention and applause.	Add short question-and-answer sessions, cultural quizzes, or guided explanation after the runway.
Digital promotion	Promotion was stronger after the event than before the event.	Use pre-event posters, live coverage, short videos, and post-event reels to increase reach.
Sustainability	The activity has potential for replication and follow-up collaboration.	Develop workshops on Indonesian textiles, traditional attire, or cultural storytelling with partner institutions.

The overall findings show that a traditional costume fashion show can become a practical and replicable community service model. Its strength lies in the integration of performance, visual culture, narration, student participation, and international audience engagement. It is relatively feasible for universities because it does not require complex research instruments, yet it can generate visible cultural impact when planned carefully. The article also underlines the need to avoid treating fashion show activities as purely ceremonial events. Without narration and reflection, a fashion show may remain entertainment. With clear objectives, cultural explanation, documentation, and evaluation, it becomes a structured cultural education and service activity. This distinction is important for journal publication because community service articles must show method, implementation, outcomes, and development implications rather than merely describe an event.

CONCLUSION

The Nusantara traditional costume fashion show under the theme “Wonderful Indonesia” at Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia successfully functioned as a cultural promotion activity in an international academic setting. The activity introduced Indonesian regional attire through visual performance and cultural narration, making the

message accessible to students and lecturers from the host institution. Audience enthusiasm indicated that traditional clothing can attract attention and serve as an effective entry point for intercultural understanding. The activity also demonstrated that students can act as cultural agents through campus-based community service. By performing, organizing, and communicating cultural meaning, Universitas Riau Kepulauan students gained practical experience in teamwork, public communication, and cultural representation. The collaboration among UNRIKA, UTHM, and costume providers from Batam strengthened the operational feasibility of the activity and created opportunities for future cultural programs. Future implementation should improve pre-event promotion, expand audience participation, prepare costume fitting earlier, and add more interactive educational components. Recommended follow-up activities include textile workshops, cultural storytelling sessions, rotating regional fashion showcases, and digital documentation campaigns. These improvements can increase the sustainability of the activity and strengthen the role of fashion performance as a medium of cultural diplomacy and community service.

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