



Indonesia's Policy Response to Malaysian Cultural Claims (2007–2019)

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes Indonesian cultural policy from 2007 to 2019, focusing on implementation, public response, and its impact on international relations. Culture is positioned as strategic for identity, heritage awareness, and diplomacy. Using a qualitative descriptive-historical approach with written, visual, online, and interview sources, findings show that cultural claims encouraged reactive and proactive measures. The government accelerated UNESCO registrations of Batik (2009), Angklung (2010), and Wayang (2003) to gain legitimacy. Legal frameworks were strengthened through Law No. 11/2010 on Cultural Heritage and Law No. 5/2017 on Cultural Advancement. Internationally, the Indonesian Cultural House (RBI) program became a soft power instrument, involving the diaspora and enhancing diplomacy. Hence, cultural claims are both challenges and catalysts for sovereignty, regulation, and global cultural strategy.

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Indonesia and Malaysia cannot be separated from the bonds of Malay kinship that form many similarities in language, customs, and arts. This closeness forms the basis for the close cultural ties between the two countries (Maksum & Bustami, 2014). However, these similarities also create vulnerability, especially regarding claims. Things that should be a unifying force often spark debate because they are seen as a form of unilateral recognition of cultural heritage with similar historical roots. This problem is compounded by negative perceptions and a lack of deep understanding of each other's cultures. Instead of strengthening a sense of togetherness, these misunderstandings give rise to suspicion and sour relations. In fact, the concept of a common ancestry should be seen as a bond of kinship that strengthens cooperation, not a source of conflict (Effendi, 2013).

The issue then continued with claims over several traditional Indonesian arts. In 2009, the public was shocked by Malaysia's claim over the Reog Ponorogo art and Pendet dance from Bali. Both arts have deep symbolic value for the Indonesian people, as they serve as entertainment and a medium for preserving cultural values and local wisdom. This case sparked widespread protests in Indonesia, involving civil society, artists, and academics who believed the nation's ancestral heritage was threatened. Unfortunately, the Indonesian government has been deemed slow to respond to these various claims. Its response has been more reactive than preventive. Serious attention to cultural preservation only emerged after cases of cultural claims were widely discussed by the public and received media attention. This situation gives the impression that the state only acts when there is external pressure, rather than because of a well-developed cultural strategy. As a result, the public feels that the protection of Indonesian culture has not been given the priority it deserves (Effendi, 2013; Tanjung & Iskandar, 2020).

The urgency of this issue is not only related to the potential loss of cultural identity, but also concerns the nation's image in the eyes of the world. In the era of globalization, culture is no longer just a local heritage, but also a diplomatic asset that can enhance a country's bargaining position in the international arena. If Indonesian culture is not immediately registered, protected, and promoted officially through international institutions such as UNESCO, Indonesia risks losing recognition of its cultural heritage. Losing this recognition will certainly impact Indonesia's legitimacy in preserving and developing a culture born from its own soil. Recognizing this, the Indonesian government strives to be more responsive by taking strategic steps. These efforts include a comprehensive cultural inventory, copyright, intellectual property rights (IPR) registration, and enhanced cultural diplomacy with Malaysia and other countries. Cultural diplomacy is essential because it can open space for dialogue to build mutual understanding while

reducing the potential for conflict. With a more proactive and comprehensive approach, it is hoped that Indonesian culture will be protected from unilateral claims and become a national identity recognized and respected by the international community (Malihah, [2017](#)).

METHOD

The method used in this research is the Historical research method. In accordance with the rules of historical writing, this study is carried out in several stages, namely data collection activities (heuristics), followed by source criticism (testing), data interpretation, and historiography (Zed, [2013](#)). The first step at this stage is for researchers to start collecting sources and data that support the research. These sources are obtained through direct observation in the field, reading various related books, and reading research reports related to this topic. The sources received will be classified according to the material in the form of written and unwritten sources or oral history. Other source classifications based on the delivery order are primary and secondary sources (Shamad, [2003](#)). Written primary sources that the author uses in this research are documents and archives of cultural and related policies during the Indonesian government period from 2007 to 2019, both in the form of written or photographic archives. Oral sources are obtained from interviews with people directly related to the field of culture. The research also uses secondary sources. The author's sources are books, journals, research reports, and credible and trusted online sites. After the sources are collected, scientific testing is carried out to determine the authenticity and integrity of the historical sources (external criticism).

Then, criticize the truth of the source (internal criticism), it will be known which sources are included in the criteria for hard facts (have been tested) or soft facts (still need to be tested) (Hamid, [2011](#)). Furthermore, the author conducts historiography (historical writing). The author presents the research results that have been synthesized and analyzed in the form of writing using the rules of good and correct writing, so that it is easy to understand (Hamid, [2011](#)). The historian's ability to apply theories and methodologies will affect the resulting historiography in this writing process. It can be said that the resulting historiography will show the existence of historians. So, in this case, the author tries to explain the research results so that they can be written and assembled into a scientific work that can be accounted for.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Background of Indonesia's cultural relations with Malaysia

When discussing Indonesia-Malaysia relations, it is impossible to ignore their similarities. The cultural background of Indonesia and Malaysia is very close and is based on the concept of kinship. This similarity is particularly evident in aspects of culture, language, and social systems, which are so closely related that the two nations are often called *serumpun*. This kinship is partly due to internal or inter-Malay migration, which has created similarities in customs, community life, and lineage (Maksum & Bustami, [2014](#)). From a historical perspective, these similarities indicate the existence of strong primordial ties. However, in the contemporary context, this kinship can give rise to new issues related to claims of cultural identity and symbolic sovereignty. Several significant similarities stand out in the early relations between the two nations, particularly regarding ethnicity, language, religion, culture, and livelihoods. In terms of ethnicity, the indigenous peoples of Malay and Indonesia generally originate from the Mongoloid race, which originated in southern China (Yunnan). They are estimated to have migrated to Southeast Asia around 2500 BC (Sunarti, [2013](#)). However, both sides often use this shared history to legitimize their claim to cultural similarities as "shared heritage." If not managed wisely, these historical similarities can become a flashpoint in bilateral relations, as cultural debates concern not only identity but also the symbolic sovereignty of nations.

Language is another crucial factor in shaping cultural affinity. The relationship between Indonesia and Malaysia is marked by a common linguistic root, Malay. European researchers such as Hendrik Kern and Von Heine-Geldern have shown that Malay originated from the migration of Proto-Malay (around 2500 BC) and Deutro-Malay (around 1500 BC). These two groups then developed languages that branched into local varieties such as Javanese, Dayak, Minangkabau, and Batak (Ab Ghani & Paidi, [2010](#)). From a cultural diplomacy perspective, a shared language should be utilized as an instrument of soft power that strengthens the position of both countries on the international stage. However, this linguistic similarity often leads to debates over the ownership of specific literary works or cultural expressions, turning the potential for soft power into a source of tension. The similarities between Indonesia and Malaysia are also evident in terms of religion. Islam is the dominant religion in both countries, unlike most mainland

Southeast Asian societies, which adhere to Buddhism, or the Philippines, which is predominantly Catholic. This similarity should be a strategic strength in building regional solidarity based on the values of Islam Nusantara. However, religious similarities do not automatically result in harmony in bilateral relations. This shows that a shared identity does not always guarantee solidarity but must be cultivated through systematic cultural diplomacy.

In addition, foreign cultural influences also play a role in shaping the cultural identities of both nations. Malay and Indonesian lands have both been significantly influenced by Indian, Chinese, and Arab cultures due to their geographical position on international trade routes. For example, wayang, which has its roots in the Indian epic Mahabharata, and Zapin dance, which is influenced by Arab culture (Ab Ghani & Paidi, [2010](#)). The influx of foreign influences enriches local cultures and raises questions about who has legitimacy over the results of such acculturation. Indonesia and Malaysia often face cultural disputes because both feel entitled to traditions from prolonged historical interactions.

Migration

The people of Indonesia and Malaysia have a close relationship established through kingdoms that influenced each other over time. Several major kingdoms in the past took turns ruling the same territory. For example, the Kingdom of Aceh once covered parts of Peninsular Malaysia. Similarly, the Kingdom of Riau-Lingga and the Sultanate of Malacca covered parts of Sumatra Island in their heyday. Furthermore, several kingdoms in Peninsular Malaysia were founded by Indonesians. For example, the Kingdom of Negeri Sembilan was established by the Minangkabau people who had migrated to the Peninsula as early as the 16th century. At the same time, the Sultanate of Johor and the Sultanate of Selangor were founded by the Bugis people (Sunarti, [2013](#)). Geographical, cultural, and religious proximity allowed for natural migration between islands, particularly from Sumatra to the Peninsula and Borneo to Sabah and Sarawak. Ethnic groups such as the Minangkabau, Bugis, and Banjar had settled in the Malaysian region long before the formal colonial period (Adryamarthanino, [2022](#)). In Malay history books and Hang Tuah's saga, the term Malay is clearly associated with the region of Sumatra. In Tome Pires' 16th-century book *Suma Oriental*, Tanah Melayu refers to the area around present-day Palembang. Early Chinese sources also mention a Malay country located in present-day Jambi. However, the History of Malay states that "Malay" refers to a river that flows near Bukit Siguntang, a sacred hill in Palembang (Ardanareswari, [2020](#)).

In the early to mid-20th century, a large wave of Indonesian labor migration to Malaysia occurred. This was triggered by the British colonial government's development of plantations and infrastructure in Malaya, which required a lot of labor. People from Java, Sumatra, and Kalimantan became the primary labor force, often through the contract coolie system (Ardanareswari, [2020](#)). The book *Social History of Malaysian Society*, written by Abdul Manaf, explains that the Indonesians who came to Malaysia, or at that time called the Malay land, came from Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi. When compared to the number of immigrants from China and India, immigrants from Indonesia are a small number, but especially in the Sabah and Sarawak areas, we will find more Indonesians because geographically, Sabah and Sarawak are closer to Kalimantan, Celebes, and Sulawesi (Manaf, [2001](#)). Another factor that caused the arrival of Indonesians to Malaysia was the pressure from the Dutch colonials, who were notoriously harsh, to encourage Indonesians to emigrate to other places, including Malaysia. Recorded in 1909, 6170 Javanese people worked in the fields throughout the Malay state of Selangor. Unlike Sabah, here many of the laborers are people from Bugis who are employed as field laborers. In 1921, 11,223 Indonesian laborers were working in the fields of the Sabah region (Manaf, [2001](#)).

After the independence of Indonesia in 1945 and Malaysia in 1957, migration flows continued, now driven by different economic opportunities. Rapidly growing Malaysia created many jobs, and migrants from Indonesia filled the manual labor sectors such as construction, agriculture, and domestic services. Since the 1970s, especially after Malaysia implemented the New Economic Policy, migration has increased due to the demand for labor from neighboring countries. Indonesia is the most significant contributor of foreign migrant workers in Malaysia. Kinship and cultural ties between Malay communities also reinforce this migration flow (Kobokanaeru, [2023](#)). The relationship between Indonesia and Malaysia shows that there has been an irreducible cultural intersection based on the long history of the Malay nation's unification. For example, in the culinary field, Padang cuisine has become widespread among Malaysians. This is due to the influence of the Minangkabau ethnic group living in Negeri Sembilan. Similarly, Javanese food and arts have become part of Malaysian culture, as the Javanese ethnic community is concentrated in

Johor and Selangor. One of the prominent arts is the Barongan dance, which has even become a source of problems in relations between Indonesia and Malaysia.

The condition of Indonesia and Malaysia, which is often described as being under the Malay family, impacts the number of similarities between the two in terms of language, culture, and art. However, this often causes some problems related to cultural claims. Negative perceptions and incorrect information about each country may cause these problems. The concept of allied nations should be seen as a feeling of kinship, not as a source of misunderstanding (Effendi, [2013](#)).

Cases of cultural claims

The issue of cultural claims between countries, especially between Indonesia and Malaysia, is often debated in public and causes diplomatic tension. Indonesia and Malaysia have similar cultural wealth because both come from the Malay family, cultural elements such as language, dance, music, and customs have many cultural intersections so that there are cultures between these two countries that are agreed to be a shared culture between Indonesia and Malaysia, in this case we can take an example such as the Composing rhymes Culture which is recognized as a culture that belongs together between Indonesia and Malaysia. Mr. Undri directly conveyed this as the Director of Cultural Promotion of the Republic of Indonesia. However, in recent years, Malaysia has attempted to claim some of Indonesia's cultural heritage as part of its culture, which has caused tension both at the national and international levels (Hasanah et al., [2024](#)).

The 20 June 2012 edition of Malaysia Today's news portal reported Malaysia's alleged claim to seven cultural elements from Indonesia. These include Reog Ponorogo, the "Rasa Sayange" song, batik, Pendet dance, angklung, Adan Krayan rice, Tor-tor dance, and Gordang Sambilan musical instruments. This report triggered reactions from various parties in Indonesia, especially from cultural observers and government officials, who considered the action a form of unilateral cultural claim by Malaysia. This allegation is deemed to have the potential to disrupt bilateral relations between the two countries, which have been bound by cultural and historical similarities, in the Pontianak Post Newspaper (see the picture below) where it is stated that Malaysia has repeatedly made cultural claims marked by the affirmation of the word "Again" in the title given to the newspaper (Suhardi, [2012](#)). Negative perceptions and a lack of correct information about each country may cause these problems. The concept of allied nations should be seen as a feeling of kinship, not as a source of misunderstanding (Effendi, [2013](#)).



Figure 1. Malaysia's cultural claims as headline news in the *Pontianak Post*

Based on the findings that the author has collected, the author can assume that the start of cultural claiming activities carried out by the Malaysian Government against Indonesian culture began when Malaysia won the dispute over the Sipadan and Ligitan Island Conflict in the International Court of Justice in 2002 and the Ambalat area dispute in 2005. Since the time of the conflict, the relationship between Indonesia and Malaysia has been marked by a series of disputes due to the conflicts that occurred. In 2007, there was a protest from the Indonesian people regarding the use of the song *Rasa Sayang-Sayange* in Malaysian tourism advertisements, which Malaysia declared to be an Archipelago song. A dispute arose 2009 over the arts of Reog and Pendet Dance (Effendi, [2013](#)).

The table below also presents a table of cultural claim cases that have been carried out by Malaysia from 2007 to 2017:

Table 1. Cases of cultural claims by Malaysia

No.	Culture claim case	Year	Consequences
1	Reog Ponorogo	2007	This sparked widespread protests from the Indonesian public, triggering a campaign to preserve Reog and increasing demands for its registration with UNESCO.
2	Song Rasa Sayange	2007	Fueling anti-Malaysian sentiment, the Indonesian government strengthened copyright protection for regional songs.
3	Batik	2008	Sparking a debate on cultural identity, Indonesia registered Batik with UNESCO, and it was finally recognized as Intangible Cultural Heritage (2009).
4	Wayang	2008	UNESCO recognized Wayang as Indonesia's Intangible Cultural Heritage, raising concerns about losing international recognition.
5	Gamelan	2008	Triggering diplomatic tensions, Indonesia then registered Gamelan, and in 2021, UNESCO recognized Gamelan as world cultural heritage.
6	Rendang	2009	A debate over culinary identity arose, and the Indonesian people launched an international campaign to assert rendang as a Minangkabau specialty.
7	Tari Pendet	2009	Inviting public outrage, the Indonesian government issued a diplomatic protest note and increased its cultural diplomacy efforts.
8	Angklung	2010	This accelerated the registration of Angklung with UNESCO, which was then designated as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Indonesia in 2010.
9	Tari Tor-Tor	2012	The Batak community staged a major protest, triggering a cultural dialogue between Indonesia and Malaysia to discuss claims and joint preservation.
10	Kuda Lumping	2017	This gave rise to a new discourse on the need for cultural regulation, strengthening public awareness of the importance of protecting cultural rights.

In response to various cultural claims by other countries and a wave of strong reactions from the public, the Indonesian government strengthened its cultural preservation and protection policies through diplomatic, legal, and international recognition channels. Public pressure pushed the government to be more proactive in registering intangible cultural heritage with UNESCO, strengthening the regulation of Intellectual Property Rights (HAKI) on traditional cultural expressions, and promoting regional arts revitalization programs. These steps are realized in a national cultural policy that aims to maintain Indonesia's cultural identity and serves as a form of cultural diplomacy during competing cultural claims in Southeast Asia and internationally. The author sees that those cultural allegations trigger actions and reactions, starting with the cultural claims made by Malaysia. After that, it triggers a response from the Indonesian government, which takes responsive actions and efforts to protect its culture through policies, laws, and cooperation or diplomacy. In this case, the author has poured it through a picture that the author calls the Conflict structure, based on the concept of action and reaction as follows:



Figure 2. Conflict structure of Indonesia and Malaysia

Cultural policy of the Indonesian government

Culture is the identity of a nation that has significant historical, social, and economic value for Indonesian society. In facing the tide of globalization and regional dynamics, including cultural claims by other countries, the Indonesian government is responsible for preserving and protecting its cultural heritage. Protection efforts are in the form of physical preservation and through policies, regulations, and cultural diplomacy activities at the national and international levels. The Indonesian government has taken various steps, such as registering intangible cultural heritage with UNESCO, strengthening cultural intellectual property rights protection, and revitalizing cultural values. Hence, they remain sustainable and can be passed on to future generations. However, these policies should be understood from an administrative perspective and from the perspective of sovereignty and cultural diplomacy. Registering cultural heritage with UNESCO is not only aimed at preserving traditions. Still, it is also a soft power strategy to strengthen Indonesia's cultural identity's international legitimacy while asserting the nation's position amid competing cultural claims in the region.

Before the cultural claim occurs

Before the emergence of cultural claims, the dynamics of Indonesian cultural policy had undergone several critical phases, one of which began with the centralization of culture during the New Order era. This centralization was a process whereby the central government took over the leading role in formulating national cultural policy top-down, reducing the space for diversity in local cultural expression. The view of cultural homogenization that was embraced at the time considered diversity a potential threat to national unity (Kleden, [2000](#)). As a result, only certain cultures deemed compatible with the vision of nationalism and national development received official legitimacy and promotion (Heryanto, [2008](#)). Within this framework, the government established various strategies and large-scale projects, one of which was the establishment of Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (TMII) in 1970, based on an idea by Ibu Tien Soeharto. TMII, built in Cipayung, East Jakarta, aims to present a miniature of the archipelago's cultural wealth in one area, foster national pride, and was inaugurated on 20 April 1975. The project was then handed over to the government as state property through Presidential Decree No. 51 of 1977 (Kita, [1995](#)). In addition to TMII, the New Order also used Cultural Weeks to strengthen national identity. Activities such as cultural parades, craft exhibitions, traditional art performances, and inter-regional competitions were used to instill a controlled spirit of nationalism. However, the cultural expressions displayed had to be in line with the state ideology and free from criticism of the government (Bodden, 2010). In the realm of cultural diplomacy, the government developed the "Titian Muhibah" (1985-1998) and "Senada Seirama" programs, which promoted Malay art as a symbol of ASEAN unity while strengthening relations with Malaysia and Singapore (Adryan, [2023](#)). These efforts were reinforced by establishing a "Twin City" partnership between Bukittinggi and Negeri Sembilan on 18 January 1985, which affirmed the cross-border cultural ties of the Minangkabau people (Redaksi, [2024](#)).

Although the New Order's cultural policies tended to be centralized, there were also large forums such as the Sixth Cultural Congress in Jakarta on October 29-November 3, 1991. This congress was the only one held during the New Order and aimed to formulate a national cultural strategy after a 31-year vacuum, involving academics, cultural figures, and the government (Roy, [2021](#)). At the same time, Law No. 5 of 1992 on Cultural Heritage Objects was enacted, providing the legal foundation for preserving historical objects through protection, development, and sustainable utilization (Indonesia, [1992](#)). During the presidency of Megawati Soekarnoputri, cultural policy shifted its focus toward strengthening national identity. Megawati emphasized that sustainable development must be rooted in the cultural values of the nation, which was realized through the integration of local cultural education into school curricula, cultural preservation campaigns in the national media, and the preparation of regulations for the protection of cultural heritage (Megawati, [2002](#)). This policy became the foundation for enacting Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage in the subsequent era (Wahyuni, [2004](#)). This more systematic and institutional approach marked an essential step toward protecting national cultural wealth, while continuing the legacy of policies from the previous period with a more structured vision.

Cultural activities and policies after the Malaysian claim case

Following the emergence of various cases of cultural claims by Malaysia, the Indonesian government has strengthened its commitment to preserving and promoting national culture. A strategic step taken is to expand cooperation with UNESCO to obtain global recognition for Indonesia's cultural heritage. This effort includes recognizing both intangible and tangible cultural heritage, so that Indonesia's cultural wealth can be officially recorded and protected in

international forums. The results of these efforts can be seen through UNESCO's recognition of several Indonesian cultural elements. Wayang was recognized in 2003, Keris in 2005, Batik in 2009, and Angklung in 2010 (Pantow et al., [2024](#)). Each recognition affirms the uniqueness of local traditions and shows the world that Indonesian culture has universal historical, philosophical, and aesthetic value. This recognition also provides international legitimacy that prevents unilateral claims from other countries, especially in Southeast Asia, which shares many cultural similarities. This international recognition serves as an instrument of soft power for Indonesia. At the global level, culture can be a diplomatic force as vital as politics or economics. By making culture a diplomatic tool, Indonesia can strengthen its cultural sovereignty while enhancing the nation's positive image in the eyes of the world. Thus, every UNESCO recognition fosters national pride and serves as a strategy to assert Indonesia's position amid regional competition fraught with potential cultural claims.

Awareness of the importance of legal instruments in protecting culture has led to new, more comprehensive policies. One such policy is the enactment of Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage, which provides a stronger legal basis for protecting, developing, and utilizing cultural heritage. The presence of this regulation confirms that cultural preservation is not only oriented towards conservation, but also towards strategic efforts to maintain the nation's cultural sovereignty. The law contains provisions that affirm Indonesia's exclusive rights to important sites that have become symbols of national identity. These sites include Borobudur Temple, Sangiran Site, and Old Town Jakarta, which have high historical, spiritual, and civilizational value (Tahiru et al., [2023](#)). With a clear legal basis, the management of cultural heritage can be carried out in a more focused manner, while also strengthening Indonesia's position in facing global challenges, including potential claims from other countries. In addition, the enactment of Government Regulation No. 66 of 2015 concerning Museums further strengthens cultural protection efforts. This regulation not only enhances the management of collections and institutional management, but also makes museums an instrument of cultural diplomacy. Through museums, Indonesia can showcase its history and national identity to the world, thereby becoming a space for representation and a soft power strategy to strengthen Indonesia's image and position on the international stage (Paryana, [2022](#)).

This culmination was the enactment of Law No. 5 of 2017 on the Promotion of Culture, which became an important milestone in formulating a more systematic and measurable direction for cultural development. This regulation was born in response to the urgent need for cultural policies that not only serve to protect ancestral heritage but are also capable of responding to the challenges of globalization and international competition. This law emphasizes that culture has a strategic position as the foundation of national development and a resource that can support international diplomacy. Thus, Indonesia's cultural policy has transformed from simply preserving the heritage of the past to a proactive strategy in building national strength in the contemporary era. The Cultural Advancement Law also establishes four main pillars: protection, development, utilization, and guidance. These four pillars emphasize that culture must be preserved so that it does not become extinct, developed to remain relevant to the times, utilized as an economic and diplomatic resource, and nurtured to ensure its continuity across generations. In addition, this law details ten objects of cultural advancement, including oral traditions, manuscripts, customs, rituals, traditional knowledge, technology, arts, language, folk games, and sports (Salsabilla, [2024](#)). With such a broad scope, this policy reflects the awareness that culture is a complex ecosystem, involving aspects of identity, knowledge, creativity, and even the nation's social capital.

The implementation of this law was then reinforced by Presidential Regulation No. 65 of 2018, which regulates the procedures for formulating Regional Cultural Principles (PPKD). This regulation emphasizes the importance of active involvement by local governments, communities, and experts in developing cultural policies. Through the PPKD, each region is given the space to document, map, and formulate strategies for preserving and developing its own culture. This is important because Indonesian culture is very diverse, so a uniform approach from the center without regard to local diversity has the potential to ignore the unique richness of each region. Therefore, this Presidential Regulation is essential for realizing the bottom-up principle in national cultural development. The results of the PPKD compiled from various areas then become the basis for formulating the National Cultural Strategy. This strategy accommodates the diverse cultural potentials and issues at the local level and integrates them into the national development framework. This integration was further emphasized through the 2018 Indonesian Cultural Congress (KKI), which produced a National Cultural Strategy with a long-term vision for the next 20 years. This strategic document was then integrated into the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), signaling that culture is no longer viewed as a peripheral sector but as one of the driving forces behind national development.

In addition to national regulations and strategies, cultural diplomacy is also receiving increasing attention. The Indonesian government has developed the Indonesian Cultural House (RBI) program, which is spread across various countries, including Malaysia, as a means of promotion, education, and cultural exchange (Lestari et al., [2025](#)). Through RBI, traditional arts, music, dance, handicrafts, and even the Indonesian language are systematically introduced to the international community. Not only does RBI serve as a cultural showcase, but it also functions as a center of activity for the Indonesian diaspora to maintain their connection with their ancestral identity. This way, cultural diplomacy is outward-looking and strengthens social cohesion among Indonesian citizens abroad. The RBI program demonstrates how Indonesia's cultural policy is not merely reactive to cultural claims from other countries but strategically directed to expand influence through soft power (Dhalyardha, [2023](#)). By making culture an instrument of diplomacy, Indonesia seeks to build an image as a highly civilized nation, rich in tradition, yet modern and open. This strategy also strengthens Indonesia's position in the global arena, where cultural identity has become a field of competition among nations. At this point, it becomes clear that Indonesia's cultural policy is not only related to preserving its past heritage but also closely related to efforts to strengthen Indonesia's sovereignty, national identity, and bargaining power in the eyes of the world.

CONCLUSION

The cultural ties between Indonesia and Malaysia, which have existed since the days of the ancient Malay kingdoms, bring strength and vulnerability, as the similarities in language, art, traditions, and religion are a source of potential cross-border cultural claims. Cases involving allegations over dance, music, clothing, and even cuisine demonstrate the need for cultural strategies that are not only defensive but also proactive through legal protection, cultural diplomacy, and the use of digital technology. This research is essential today because cultural claims concern identity, sovereignty, and national image amid global competition. The lesson to be learned is that culture must be viewed as an instrument of soft power that can strengthen international legitimacy, expand diplomatic influence, and build solidarity among kindred nations. For other countries, this case demonstrates the importance of synergy between national policies, the role of local communities, and international cooperation in preserving cultural heritage. However, this study has limitations because most of the analysis is still based on literature and documented cases, so it has not explored the perspectives of actors in the field, such as local cultural communities, artists, or indigenous peoples. These limitations open opportunities for further research using ethnographic approaches, interviews, or cross-country comparative studies to enrich our understanding.

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