Sundanese Kebaya and the Making of Indonesian National Dress 1970 to 2000

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Received: May 12, 2025; Accepted: August 5, 2025; Published Online: December 15, 2025;

Abstract

This article examines how Sundanese kebaya entered representations of Indonesian national dress during 1970–2000. It asks how changes in the occasions and presentation of kebaya altered the relationship between regional identification and national femininity. Using the historical method, it brings together newspaper reports, a reproduced fashion clipping, government documentation of West Javanese clothing, and scholarship on dress and gender. Stuart Hall's constructionist account of representation guides the distinction between a garment's appearance, its public classification, and its reception. The evidence reveals competing processes. Contemporary commentary associated everyday clothing with practicality, while fashion displays, commemorations, diplomacy, and institutional uniforms gave kebaya renewed public significance. A clipping explicitly headed "Kebaya Sunda" demonstrates that national media could retain regional identification while presenting modified clothing. National visibility therefore did not necessarily entail a uniform design or the disappearance of Sundanese identity. The article argues that the principal transformation concerned the social uses and representational authority of kebaya. Its contribution is a historically qualified account of regional dress within national culture, treating cultural generalisation as a selective process rather than a completed replacement of local meaning.

Keywords: Sundanese kebaya; national dress; New Order Indonesia; women; representation; history of clothing

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Introduction

In November 1974, a fashion clipping in *Kompas* presented three women beneath the heading "Kebaya Sunda". Its caption located the display at the Prambanan Restaurant of Hotel Kartika Chandra and described a lunchtime presentation of Pasundan fashions. The heading identified the display regionally, although the three outfits were visibly different. Here, Sundanese dress appeared as something to be displayed, named, and discussed through a national newspaper. The image poses a historical problem that cannot be resolved by assuming either the preservation of an unchanged costume or the disappearance of regional identity. How did clothing associated with Sundanese women acquire national significance while continuing to be identified as Sundanese?[1]

This article examines that problem within the historical frame of 1970–2000. It asks how the public uses and representations of kebaya changed the relationship between regional identification and Indonesian national dress. The object is both material and social: the blouse and its accompanying cloth, the occasions on which women wore them, and the institutions that gave their appearance public meaning. The central argument is that kebaya acquired greater significance as selected public attire while its association with routine use became contested. Regional identification remained available within that transformation. The evidence supports an account of changing contexts and classifications more securely than a claim that Sundanese characteristics were uniformly eliminated.

The issue matters because the familiar description of kebaya as national dress can conceal differences between regional forms, classes of wearers, and occasions of use. A woman wearing kebaya in a family setting, a fashion model appearing in a hotel, and an airline employee in an institutional uniform do not necessarily make the same social statement. Nor does a garment automatically become less Sundanese when it is photographed for a wider audience. The historical question concerns the relationships through which clothing becomes meaningful. Treating national dress as an accomplished category would obscure the activity involved in making it recognisable and the choices that remained within it.

The longer history of Sundanese clothing also complicates a simple division at 1970. In her study of the Priangan aristocracy, Nina Herlina Lubis described kebaya as both everyday clothing and differentiated attire among women of the menak elite. She also traced the adoption of Western skirts by younger aristocratic women well before the New Order. These observations place later changes within an older history of education, status, and clothing. They make it necessary to distinguish the acceleration or renewed public framing of change from its initial appearance. The period studied here was neither the origin of kebaya nor the first encounter between Sundanese dress and modernity.[2]

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[1] "Berkebaya Sunda," *Kompas*, November 2, 1974, 9, reproduced in Afifah Maula Rahmah, "Pergeseran Adat Kebaya Sunda dari Pakaian Tradisional ke Pakaian Nasional Indonesia (1970–2000)"

[2] Nina Herlina Lubis, *Kehidupan Kaum Ménak Priangan 1800–1942* (Bandung: Pusat Informasi Kebudayaan Sunda, 1998), 228, 234.

Existing studies provide several approaches to this history. Irma Russanti's research on Bandung in 1910–1980 identifies five design styles and relates changes in construction and appearance to education, textiles, pattern making, and social differentiation. Nita Trismaya approaches kebaya through the multiple identities articulated by urban women, including regional, national, personal, and gendered identification. These studies establish that modification and identity cannot be treated as opposites. Their different chronological and analytical emphases also invite closer attention to the public settings in which particular versions of kebaya were named and presented.[3]

Scholarship on clothing and power supplies a further dimension. The studies collected in Outward Appearances place dress within relationships between state, society, status, and gender. Julia Suryakusuma's account of state ibuism examines the New Order's organisation of womanhood around obligations as wives and mothers. Together, these perspectives make national femininity a historical construction rather than an inherent property of a blouse. Yet an institutional model of appropriate womanhood does not establish how every woman dressed or understood herself. Public representations must be examined as representations, with their social reach left open unless independent evidence demonstrates reception.[4]

The contribution of this article lies in connecting the question of regional identification to specific representational settings. It brings design history into dialogue with accounts of national gender ideology by examining how regional clothing was named and presented to wider audiences. It follows newspaper commentary on practicality, the naming of Sundanese fashion, public ceremonies, and the adaptation of kebaya to institutional attire. The resulting interpretation gives particular weight to the persistence of a regional label within modern display. It also distinguishes the nationalisation of a category from the standardisation of every garment placed within it.

Method

The research follows the historical method of heuristics, external and internal source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Its source search encompassed photographic collections, newspapers, women's magazines, government publications, and relevant historical scholarship. The research documentation identifies ANRI, Perpustakaan Nasional, Dispusipda Jawa Barat, and personal collections among the places of source enquiry. It does not supply a complete dated research log or archival identifiers for every photograph. Accordingly, the analysis distinguishes reproduced material from items known through the research's

[3] Irma Russanti, "Desain Kebaya Sunda Abad Ke-20 Studi Kasus di Bandung Tahun 1910-1980," *ITB Journal of Visual Art and Design* 1, no. 2 (2007): 196–210, https://doi.org/10.5614/itbj.vad.2007.1.2.3; Nita Trismaya, "Kebaya dan Perempuan: Sebuah Narasi tentang Identitas," *Jurnal Senirupa Warna* 6, no. 2 (July 2018): 151–153, https://doi.org/10.36806/.v6i2.95. Accessed March 5, 2025.

[4] Henk Schulte Nordholt, ed., *Outward Appearances: Dressing State and Society in Indonesia* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1997), 8–19,

citations and descriptions. It does not treat a named repository as authentication of every attributed item.

The core analytical distinction is between the garment, its use, and its representation. Visual appearance can establish differences in cut, length, and accompanying clothing when the image is sufficiently clear. A caption can identify the category applied by an editor or photographer. A report can document how a public event was described. None of these, alone, measures how widely women adopted a style. External criticism therefore examines attribution, dating, publication details, and the relationship between an image and its caption. Internal criticism considers purpose, intended audience, selectivity, and the difference between describing clothing and prescribing it.

The historical frame ends in 2000, although earlier material is used to establish antecedents. The surviving examples are concentrated in the 1970s and 1980s, and the terminal year does not imply continuous documentation across every intervening year. Government documentation is read both as information about dress and as evidence of the way regional culture was organised for public knowledge. Newspaper descriptions are likewise read as situated interventions, not transparent records of an entire population's habits. The source base permits comparison among public settings but does not provide a representative household survey or a numerical series of clothing use.

Stuart Hall's constructionist account of representation guides interpretation. It directs attention to how meanings are produced through naming, images, and shared cultural codes. In practical terms, the analysis asks who identifies a garment as Sundanese or national, in what setting, and through which descriptive or visual conventions. The framework is used to interpret documented relationships; it is not independent proof of cultural displacement. Historiography proceeds chronologically within thematic sections so that earlier changes are distinguished from later institutional uses and findings are separated from the wider implications discussed below.[5]

Results

Everyday clothing and earlier differentiation

Before the period under examination, kebaya already occupied more than one position in Sundanese society. Lubis's account of menak women distinguishes everyday kebaya made from particular fabrics from more elaborate attire associated with the wives of regents. The contrast makes social differentiation central to the historical baseline. Kebaya was not a single costume expressing an identical identity across all women. Material, embellishment, and the occasion of wearing could communicate rank as well as regional belonging. Those differences also caution against reconstructing a uniform traditional form from a handful of portraits.[6]

[5] Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 15–17.

[6] Nina Herlina Lubis, *Kehidupan Kaum Ménak Priangan 1800–1942* (Bandung: Pusat Informasi Kebudayaan Sunda, 1998), 228.

The same historical literature identifies changes among younger aristocratic women before the New Order. Lubis describes the adoption of Western skirts in everyday and school clothing during the early twentieth century, while kebaya continued in official situations. This matters for chronology: an association between kebaya and selected formal occasions did not first emerge after 1970. The evidence concerns a particular social group rather than all Sundanese women, but it establishes that the later transition had precedents. The history must therefore allow different generations and social settings to follow different rhythms of change.[7]

The distinction between ordinary and elaborate clothing also changes how photographs should be read. A carefully arranged group portrait can document what participants wore for that photograph without establishing their ordinary dress throughout the day. Conversely, an image of work does not indicate how the same women dressed ceremonially. The available colonial photographs attributed to KITLV and Tropenmuseum offer useful visual comparisons, but their reproductions do not include complete catalogue records. They cannot independently sustain precise claims about prevalence, the intentions of all sitters, or the moment at which everyday kebaya ceased to be customary.

Regional classification itself contained variation. Russanti's design study distinguishes V-neckline, wide samleh, small samleh, cowak, and triangular bef styles. This typology makes a fixed definition based on a single neckline or one front insert inadequate. An element shared with another regional tradition does not automatically invalidate a Sundanese attribution. Classification depended on combinations of features and on the historical contexts of their use. The subsequent evidence is consequently examined for the labels and settings that made regional identity visible, rather than tested against an imagined immutable original.[8]

Practicality and public discussion in the early 1970s

The early 1970s press placed kebaya within an explicit debate about changing clothing preferences. *Sinar Harapan*'s "Baju Kebaja Kita Terdesak?" discussed the pressure exerted by Western clothing and linked alternative styles to practicality. As described in the research record, the article associated kebaya among middle and upper groups with national celebrations and official receptions. This is evidence that contemporaries articulated a contrast between everyday convenience and formal significance. It does not provide a statistical measure of declining use, and its social categories should not be extended automatically to the entire Sundanese population.[9]

The question in the article's title is itself historically informative. It presents displacement as a matter for public concern, bringing clothing into a discussion of cultural value. A garment considered less convenient could still remain worthy of

[7] Nina Herlina Lubis, *Kehidupan Kaum Ménak Priangan 1800–1942* (Bandung: Pusat Informasi Kebudayaan Sunda, 1998), 234.

[8] Irma Russanti, "Desain Kebaya Sunda Abad Ke-20 Studi Kasus di Bandung Tahun 1910-1980," *ITB Journal of Visual Art and Design* 1, no. 2 (2007): 196, 202–204, 209–210, https://doi.org/10.5614/itbj.vad.2007.1.2.3 Accessed March 5, 2025.

[9] "Baju Kebaja Kita Terdesak?," *Sinar Harapan*, April 19, 1970, 2.

defence, modification, or deliberate selection. Thus the debate did not necessarily oppose cultural loyalty to modern life in an absolute sense. It exposed a problem of compatibility between different expectations of clothing. The concern was how inherited attire might retain a place within changing routines, not simply whether it physically survived.

A further intervention appeared in *Kompas* under the title "Modernisasi Pakaian Nasional". The research record describes an event associated with Ratna Busana, combining beauty demonstrations and the selection of well-dressed women in national attire. National clothing was therefore presented as a category that could be improved and judged. Modernisation did not only involve replacing traditional dress with Western alternatives; it could also be invoked to reshape attire already identified as national. The item's significance lies in that practical conjunction, although the cited publication date varies between the source inventory and the body references.

Sinar Harapan's "Tidak Mudah Memilih Kebaya" adds another strand. The research's account of this June 1974 item describes interest in older lace kebaya and combinations with trousers or a long dress. These examples resist a chronological sequence in which every new fashion necessarily made clothing shorter, plainer, or less traditional. Reuse of an older form and experimentation with its accompanying garments could occur together. The report records an editorial discussion of possibilities available to wearers; it does not establish how often each combination was actually worn.

Taken together, these press items suggest that the transformation of kebaya was discussed through selection as much as through abandonment. Choosing between garments for daily life was one problem; choosing among versions of kebaya for particular occasions was another. Both placed the wearer within a field of alternatives. Such a field could weaken the expectation that kebaya was ordinary clothing while increasing the attention given to it when deliberately selected. The documentary evidence therefore supports changing expectations of use more clearly than a precise date at which traditional everyday clothing ended.

Naming Sundanese fashion in a national newspaper

The reproduced "Kebaya Sunda" clipping provides the most direct visual evidence for the relationship between regional naming and modern display (figure 1). The printed caption describes Pasundan fashions at a hotel restaurant and connects the presentation to a sponsored lunchtime event. This combination of location, sponsorship, and regional identification is important. Sundanese clothing was being presented in a managed social setting where an audience could view and evaluate it. Its appearance in *Kompas* then extended the representation beyond the people attending the event.[10]

[10] "Berkebaya Sunda," *Kompas*, November 2, 1974, 9.



Kompas/P.H.

KEBAYA SUNDA. — Di Prambanan Restaurant Hotel Kartika Chandra Kamis siang lalu telah diadakan santap siang sambil menikmati mode-mode Pasundan yang disponsori oleh Ny. Kastubi. Gambar dari kiri Rina memakai parang rusak Banyumas Ayu Resmi, Sui memakai bludru ungu sulaman dengan bunga kecmasan, dan Indra memakai tenun Purwakarta Citra Resmi.

Figure 1 Fashion display headed "Kebaya Sunda". Source: Kompas, attributed to 2 November 1974, 9;

The image juxtaposes visibly different outfits. Two figures wear blouses with long patterned lower garments, while the third wears a light ensemble with a skirt exposing the lower legs. The first two are also distinguished by colour as described in the caption, ornament, and accessories. Although the reproduction cannot establish every construction detail, it plainly does not present one identical outfit repeated three times. Its regional heading organises variation rather than erasing it. The evidence concerns the editorial presentation of a fashion grouping, not a definitive classification of every component as a canonical Sundanese kebaya.

The caption also describes textiles through particular names and local associations. That descriptive practice matters because the regional label did not stand alone: it appeared alongside information that invited attention to fabrics and combinations. Clothing became an object of informed appreciation. This allowed regional specificity to be communicated through the description surrounding a photograph even when the image could not display all technical details. National circulation of such a representation could therefore operate through differentiation. The newspaper made Pasundan fashion visible to a wider readership by naming and describing it.

The setting further qualifies what modernisation meant in this example. A hotel fashion lunch was neither routine domestic wear nor an official uniform. It joined clothing to hospitality, organised display, and a particular social audience. In that environment, the regional category was available for aesthetic presentation and consumption. This does not prove that commercial display preserved all inherited meanings, but it demonstrates a form of continuing public identification. The

women's bodies, the garments, the venue, and the caption together produced a modern setting for a regionally named fashion.

This example is consequential for the claim that national media necessarily submerged Sundanese distinctiveness. In the clipping, the name remained prominent. It is possible that other representations made regional origins less explicit, but their effects cannot be inferred by reversing the evidence of this item. The strongest finding is narrower and more useful: national publicity and regional identification could coexist. A changed social setting could modify the significance of clothing without removing its regional designation. Evidence of this coexistence must form part of any explanation of cultural generalisation.

The difference between event time and publication time is relevant here. The clipping's caption places the lunch on an earlier Thursday, whereas the bibliographic citation assigns a publication date. These are not interchangeable dates. Without the complete issue, the event should not be assigned an exact calendar day by assuming that the caption and citation have been reconciled. Nor does the photograph identify the date on which an outfit was designed or first worn. The item establishes a documented presentation and a regional description, not the origin of any of the styles shown. Its value comes from this recoverable relationship between image and wording rather than from an unsupported claim of priority.

Commemoration and diplomacy

Other press items associated kebaya with occasions in which women appeared as public participants. The *Kompas* editorial "Wanita dan Kartini" connected the 1973 Kartini commemoration with kain and kebaya and discussed women appearing in that attire during a Perwari congress. The relationship between clothing and commemoration gave kebaya significance beyond an individual wearer's regional background. It situated the garment within a public account of Indonesian womanhood. The report establishes an association articulated at a particular moment, not the uniform meaning of every Kartini celebration.[11]

Commemorative use also helped differentiate an occasion from ordinary time. Clothing selected for a national remembrance could communicate respectability, historical affiliation, and participation in a shared event. This was a different social function from wearing the same garment as routine attire. Yet the distinction should not be exaggerated into a claim that previous wearers never performed identity consciously. Rank-conscious dress and formal appearances predated the period. What changed in the public examples was the setting and the scale of identification available, rather than the invention of symbolism where none had existed before.

The diplomatic setting supplied another form of public significance. A July 1984 *Kompas* report on the wives of foreign ministers described their activities with Tien Soeharto and referred to Istana Bogor. Kebaya, in the research's reading of the report, belonged to the presentation of Indonesian women to international guests. Here, the social position of the wearer and the diplomatic occasion carried much of the representational force. The example concerns national presentation; it does not,

[11] "Tajuk Rencana: Wanita dan Kartini," *Kompas*, April 22, 1973, 4.

without further design evidence, identify every photographed garment as specifically Sundanese.[12]

This distinction prevents a geographical inference from becoming a clothing classification. An event in West Java did not make the garments worn there Sundanese, and a Sundanese wearer could choose another form of kebaya. The evidence of official use is therefore relevant to the national category into which regional clothing could enter, but it should not be treated as direct proof of a particular regional design's adoption. The relationship between regional and national identification must be demonstrated through a label, visible features, or contextual documentation, rather than through location alone.

Institutional attire and the documentation of regional culture

The 1989 report on Garuda Indonesia's new flight-attendant uniforms offers an especially clear instance of institutional classification. *Kompas* described a variant using kebaya and kain through the designation "The Kartini Look". The category linked clothing to a recognised female national figure while placing it within the presentation of a modern airline. This was neither a family inheritance nor an individual fashion choice alone. An institution selected an appearance for employees whose clothing represented it in their work.[13]

The significance of the example does not depend on claiming that the uniform originated in a Sundanese design. It demonstrates how kebaya could be adapted to an organised professional setting and named through a national idiom. The Garuda case also complicates an absolute division between practical Western clothing and impractical kebaya. Institutional attire could combine professional requirements with cultural representation. The report does not document workers' assessments of comfort or mobility, so the functional success of the design remains a separate question from its representational purpose.

Government publication contributed through a different mechanism. *Pakaian Tradisional Daerah Jawa Barat*, published in 1988, documented regional dress within a state-supported inventory. Its introductory material linked cultural knowledge to national unity and acknowledged that the work remained a preliminary record. The publication made local clothing available as an organised body of information. This was a form of cultural selection, but the act of documentation was not itself evidence that officials required all women to adopt one garment or that the forms documented became universal practice.[14]

The publication is also useful for examining the consistency of the chronology. Its discussion of earlier developments describes changes in the fit and

[12] "Mengikuti Istri Para Menlu: Ny. Dhanabalan Langsung Ganti Kelom di Istana Bogor," *Kompas*, July 13, 1984, 3.

[13] "Awak Garuda Berseragam Baru: Jika Tersingkap, Betis Hanya Nampak Sekilas," *Kompas*, January 28, 1989, 5,.

[14] Cornelia Jane Benny S., Wahyu Wibisana, Sulaeman, and Hamzah, *Pakaian Tradisional Daerah Jawa Barat* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1988), iii–v, https://repositori.kemendikdasmen.go.id/8264/1/PAKAIAN%20TRADISIONAL%20JAWA%20BARAT.pdf. Accessed March 5, 2025.

length of kebaya and in the wrapping of lower garments. These passages concern historical changes before the New Order, not a dated sequence of modifications in the 1970s and 1980s. They cannot support an assertion that body-fitting or shortening first occurred within the article's main period. Reading the document according to the chronology of its sections prevents a general description from being converted into evidence for a later, more specific transformation.[15]

Table 1 summarises the distinct kinds of public evidence. The entries are examples of commentary, display, commemoration, diplomacy, and institutional presentation. They do not constitute successive stages through which every Sundanese garment or wearer passed. Their value lies in showing that kebaya could enter different settings and acquire different forms of public authority. The shared term did not make the settings interchangeable, and national meaning did not require that all visible designs become identical.

Table 1. Selected settings in which kebaya acquired public significance

Period	Source	Setting or issue	Evidential scope
April 1970	*Sinar Harapan*	Everyday practicality	A public discussion of changing preferences; adoption rates unknown
January–February 1973	*Kompas*	Modernising national attire	National clothing presented as open to selection and adjustment
April 1973	*Kompas*	Kartini commemoration	An association with public female participation
November 1974	*Kompas* clipping	Pasundan fashion display	Explicit regional identification alongside varied outfits
July 1984	*Kompas*	Diplomatic presentation	National representation; regional design not established
January 1989	*Kompas*	Garuda uniform	An institutional variant named through a national female figure

Discussion

Nationalisation through changing contexts

The findings suggest that nationalisation should be understood as a change in the range and authority of contexts in which kebaya could represent women. A

[15] Cornelia Jane Benny S., Wahyu Wibisana, Sulaeman, and Hamzah, *Pakaian Tradisional Daerah Jawa Barat* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1988), 14–16, https://repositori.kemendikdasmen.go.id/8264/1/PAKAIAN%20TRADISIONAL%20JAWA%20BARAT.pdf Accessed March 5, 2025.

newspaper fashion heading, a commemorative event, a diplomatic encounter, and an airline uniform each placed clothing before a public in a different way. Some settings highlighted regional difference; others foregrounded national affiliation. The relationship between these settings is more historically specific than a general claim that modernisation caused tradition to disappear. Kebaya's representational value could grow even where contemporaries questioned its suitability for ordinary use.

Hall's framework helps explain that relationship by directing attention to the production of meaning. A garment did not need to change materially in every respect for its significance to change. A new setting or caption could associate it with national womanhood, whereas an explicit regional heading could make local identification legible within the same public culture. The distinction is especially evident in the contrast between "Kebaya Sunda" and "The Kartini Look". These names organised different claims about clothing. The first foregrounded a regionally identified fashion grouping; the second attached institutional attire to a national female reference.[16]

This interpretation also changes the relationship between continuity and change. Continuity need not mean the repetition of an unchanged design, and change need not mean the disappearance of an identity. The clipping's variation demonstrates that a regional category could accommodate modified appearances. What persisted was partly a way of identifying clothing, sustained through public naming. What changed was the social occasion and audience through which that identification operated. This is a demonstrable form of continuity within transformation, although it does not establish the survival of every inherited technique or meaning.

The argument is therefore stronger when it avoids equating nationalisation with a single legislative moment. The period evidence discussed here concerns repeated social and institutional practices, not a reproduced decree that legally converted Sundanese kebaya into national dress. Public recognition could be produced through events, reporting, and organisational choices without a single source containing its entire history. Conversely, the absence of such a decree in this corpus does not prove that no relevant clothing regulation existed. It defines what the available sources can establish about this particular process.

The contrast between practicality and cultural significance also requires care in explaining causation. A report that women preferred convenient clothing documents an explanation offered at the time. It does not isolate the effects of urban employment, household labour, education, or the price of textiles. These factors may have acted together, but their relative influence cannot be calculated from the press items. Equally, the appearance of kebaya in an official setting does not demonstrate that state sponsorship caused its decline in ordinary use. The two developments might reinforce one another, coexist independently in some settings, or affect different groups of women. The historical interpretation therefore follows

[16] Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 15–30.

documented connections without treating temporal overlap as sufficient proof of causation.

A more specific relationship can be identified in organised display. A sponsored fashion lunch provided a setting in which regional clothing could be assembled, modelled, and described for spectators. Publication then made that selection available to readers who had not attended. This sequence is visible in the clipping itself: the caption identifies a presentation, while the printed page preserves the editorial grouping of its images. It establishes a route through which a local designation entered wider public discussion. The route concerns the circulation of a representation rather than a measured transfer of clothing habits. Keeping those two outcomes distinct makes the argument both more concrete and more historically defensible.

Gendered respectability and women's agency

The representational settings were gendered. Commemoration and diplomacy associated kebaya with the public appearance of women, while the airline uniform made women's clothing part of institutional presentation. Suryakusuma's account of state ibuism provides a context for interpreting how official womanhood could be organised around service, respectability, and prescribed social roles. The theory helps explain why dress mattered in the public performance of authority. It does not make every appearance in kebaya an act of submission or every modification an act of resistance.[17]

That caution is necessary because the sources record women appearing in different positions. Models displayed clothing for an audience; participants in a congress wore it in a forum of collective activity; official wives appeared in diplomacy; employees wore institutionally selected uniforms. Their authority to choose, modify, or refuse clothing was unlikely to have been identical, but the sources do not document those negotiations equally. A historical explanation should preserve the differences between these roles rather than dissolve them into a single national female subject. Public resemblance is not evidence of identical experience.

Trismaya's emphasis on multiple identities is useful at this point. It supports an interpretation in which regional and national meanings may coexist with personal and class identification. The "Kebaya Sunda" clipping makes that coexistence historically visible at the level of editorial presentation: a regional label and a modern display belong to the same item. It does not tell us how each model or reader understood the combination. Agency is therefore approached through documented opportunities and constraints rather than inferred from the mere presence of a garment on a woman's body.[18]

The professional example similarly resists a simple association between kebaya and domesticity. Garuda's uniform placed kebaya within women's paid

[17] Julia I. Suryakusuma, *State Ibuism: The Social Construction of Womanhood in the Indonesian New Order* (Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2011), 34–48, 97–115.

[18] Nita Trismaya, "Kebaya dan Perempuan: Sebuah Narasi tentang Identitas," *Jurnal Senirupa Warna* 6, no. 2 (July 2018): 151–153, https://doi.org/10.36806/.v6i2.95, accessed March 5, 2025.

institutional work, even while the national designation could carry conventional ideals of femininity. The two aspects could operate together. This makes the politics of dress a question of how professional visibility was organised, not whether tradition and modern employment were inherently incompatible. The example extends the discussion of national femininity without substituting a claim of liberation for a claim of discipline. Evidence from workers would be required to assess either interpretation at the level of lived experience.

Regional recognition and the limits of standardisation

The relationship between state documentation and media display reveals an ambiguity in the meaning of standardisation. A publication could standardise the way clothing was classified and described without standardising every instance of wearing it. Likewise, an institutional uniform could regulate the appearance of a defined group without determining the clothing of the wider population. These are different processes with different scopes. Combining them under one term risks mistaking the organisation of knowledge for the elimination of material variety. The evidence is clearer when each institution's authority is specified.

Regional recognition could also be selective. National publicity might emphasise a name, a fabric, or a visually striking outfit while leaving everyday knowledge and local distinctions less visible. The hotel clipping shows how a regional designation remained prominent, but it cannot demonstrate the full preservation of the practices from which that designation drew meaning. The possibility of cultural generalisation consequently remains important. Generalisation is a plausible pressure within national representation, yet its extent must be established through comparative evidence about what was included, omitted, or relabelled across different publications and settings.

Russanti's design study nevertheless identifies a specific constraint on regional variation. It reports the non-development of the triangular bef style in the face of the more prominent rectangular Javanese form within its Bandung material. This gives the question of marginalisation a more concrete basis than an inference from national ceremonies alone. Its scope remains the designs examined in Bandung through 1980, however, rather than all Sundanese wearers or all national representations. The finding can coexist with the persistence of a Sundanese label in the newspaper clipping: a regional category could remain visible while some forms within it became less prominent.[19]

The present corpus does not sustain a quantified claim that Javanese kebaya displaced Sundanese designs nationwide. The Kartini designation provides evidence for one influential national reference, while the Sundanese heading provides evidence for continuing regional naming. Their coexistence establishes an uneven field of representation rather than a completed hierarchy measurable across society. A systematic comparison of images, captions, circulation, and audience responses

[19] Irma Russanti, "Desain Kebaya Sunda Abad Ke-20 Studi Kasus di Bandung Tahun 1910-1980," *ITB Journal of Visual Art and Design* 1, no. 2 (2007): 208, https://doi.org/10.5614/itbj.vad.2007.1.2.3, Accessed March 5, 2025.

would be needed to show dominance and its consequences. The appropriate conclusion is that regional identification operated within broader national conventions, with the degree of visual marginalisation still requiring further evidence.

The same distinction applies to collective memory. Public images may contribute to what later audiences recognise as traditional or national, but their presence alone cannot measure remembering or forgetting. Nor can the reduction of everyday use be derived from photographs concentrated on formal occasions: the selection of images may itself favour ceremonial events. The article consequently locates its strongest claims in documented public classifications. These claims explain a historical relationship without presenting an unmeasured social outcome as established fact.

An uneven chronology of transformation

The chronology makes any account of a sudden transition after 1970 untenable. Earlier changes among menak women demonstrate that selected formal use had precedents. The early 1970s press then discussed practicality and experimentation, while the later examples show public and institutional appropriation. These patterns support a history of overlapping developments. They do not establish a single sequence in which all women first abandoned everyday kebaya, then adopted national styles, and finally ceased to recognise regional origins. Different kinds of evidence reveal different processes.

The uneven distribution of sources matters for the final decade. The research frame reaches 2000, but the strongest securely identified items considered here are concentrated before the 1990s. A terminal date is therefore a boundary of enquiry rather than an independently demonstrated turning point. The evidence does not justify identifying 1998 as the moment when a new aesthetic freedom transformed Sundanese kebaya, nor does it establish a completed new settlement by 2000. Those propositions would require dated sources that specifically connect political change to clothing practices.

The historiographical implication is that national dress should be studied through the work of selection and identification. This approach places regional labels, venues, captions, and institutional roles alongside garment construction. It treats the expansion of meaning and the displacement of regional distinctions as separate historical propositions. The most persuasive contribution is the demonstration that regional visibility could persist within national circulation, even as the uses of kebaya became more selective and publicly managed. The unresolved question is how that representational transformation affected ordinary wearers and their knowledge of local forms.

Conclusion

Sundanese kebaya's relationship to Indonesian national dress during 1970–2000 was shaped by changing occasions, public classifications, and institutional uses. The historical baseline already contained differences of status and earlier movement toward selected formal wear. Contemporary commentary subsequently discussed

practicality and modification, while fashion display, commemoration, diplomacy, and institutional uniforms made kebaya available for distinct public purposes. These developments explain the transformation more securely than an undifferentiated account of the replacement of regional clothing by a national costume.

The reproduced "Kebaya Sunda" clipping is decisive for the article's qualified conclusion. It retains an explicit regional designation while presenting varied outfits in a modern social setting. National circulation therefore did not necessarily erase regional naming or require uniform appearance. The contribution of the article is to distinguish the widening of representational meaning from the disappearance of local identity, and the regulation of particular public appearances from the standardisation of all clothing practices. It offers a more precise account of how national culture could incorporate and reframe regional difference.

The evidence remains strongest for public presentation. It does not establish the prevalence of particular designs, the responses of all readers, or the loss of collective memory across Sundanese society. The original historical frame also contains gaps, especially toward its end. Further work on fully identified magazine issues, archival photographic records, and wearers' accounts could test the broader social consequences. Within these limits, the findings support a history of selective national recognition in which regional identification remained possible while the social contexts of kebaya changed.

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