

**A Visual Analysis of Packaging and Labeling Design of
Traditional Snack Foods in Context of Malay SME in Malacca**

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to analyze the packaging and labeling design of the traditional snack foods produced by the Malay SME in Malacca. Traditional snack foods are a type of meal, which is popular among Malaysian consumer especially during festive seasons. However, in spite of its reputation, it is found that some of the products are still packed in cheap packaging material hence lacked the sense of value and quality. As a result, many snack food producers have difficulty in terms of positioning their products in major wholesale outlets or exporting to overseas market. Part of the reason is because the packaging and labeling method fail to comply with certain standard set by the government. In this paper, there are three interrelated phases of study. The first phase was a one-to-one interview with several respondents, which include a CEO of the Production Technology Division of the Chief Minister Department of Malacca, a Senior Executive Designer of Sirim Berhad, a Graphic Design practitioner and a number of Malay SME entrepreneurs in Malacca. In the second phase, the researcher conducted a visual analysis by visiting several places including manufacturing premises, food expositions, and retail outlets. Through this process, the researcher observed and analyzed the packaging and labeling of the traditional snack foods in the aspect of visibility, information, emotional appeal and workability. Finally, in the last phase of the study, the researcher conducted a survey of consumer preferences. 200 respondents were selected among the visitors of the "Asean Halal Food Exhibition" which was held at the MITC in September 2004. The respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire concerning their preferences on packaging and labeling of the traditional snack food of Malacca. Their responses were documented and presented in descriptive essay format.

CHAPTER 1

Plan of the Study

1.1 Introduction

Packaging and labeling are essential for all businesses, primarily because they have the ability to strengthen the brand of a product and create loyalties between the consumers and the manufacturers (Milton, 1991). Before a product can catch the attention of a potential consumer, the packaging and labeling design has to be well thought-out, so that it would communicate value and quality. To achieve this, the designers should integrate graphic design elements such as logotype, typography, brand name, symbols, and color in to the packaging structure.

1.2 Problem Statement

In olden times, people used to eat traditional snack foods for special occasions such as wedding ceremony or Hari Raya. Today, traditional snack products have been commercially produced and become one of the major player in the food industries which contribute to Malaysia economy, particularly in terms of employment generation, better income distribution and as a training ground for entrepreneurs before they invest in larger enterprises. However, despite incentives introduced by the government, it is found that many of the Malay SME in Malacca, still produce goods packed in low-quality material with a rather unattractive packaging and labeling style. In addition, they also fail to comply with regulations such as the Food Act 1983 (Akta Makanan 1983), the Trade Description Act 1972 (Akta Perihal Dagangan 1972), the Food Regulation 1985

(Peraturan-Peraturan Makanan 1985) and the Trade Mark Act 1976 (Akta Tanda Niaga 1976). And because of that, the snack product could not be positioned in many major wholesale center or even overseas market.

The basic questions of this research are:

- What are the methods used for creating the packaging and labeling of the snack foods?
- What are the common visual elements found on the packaging and label design of the traditional snack food in Malacca?
- Does the packaging and labeling of the traditional snack foods have strong identity?
- What is the level of awareness of the Malay entrepreneurs with regard to packaging and label design?
- What are consumers' expectations and preferences regarding the packaging and label design of the traditional snack food of Malacca?
- Can beautiful packaging and labeling motivate buyers?

1.3 Statement of Significance

Graphic design is one of the technical aspect in creating effective packaging and labeling. It is also essential for enhancing visual presentation and establishing a brand in the market. However, in the case the traditional snack food in Malacca, the food producers often overlook the importance of graphic design elements. This can be seen through the choice of color, typefaces, logo, materials and shape design applied in the packaging and labeling style. Therefore, it is hoped that the findings of this research will give some

information on how graphic design can help improve the visual aspect of the packaging and labeling.

1.4 Limitations

The real challenge in this research is to distinguish each of the products found in the market. This is because most of them look quite the same from the outside. To eliminate redundancy, a number of traditional snack foods products under a program called “SATU DUN SATU PRODUK” were selected as research specimens. This program is introduced by Malacca State Government to promote entrepreneurship and to improve the economy of the lower income.

1.5 Definition of Terms

The terms used in this research are as follow:

1.5.1 SME: Small and Medium Size Enterprise.

1.5.2 Traditional Snack Foods: A light meals, which come in a small package.

It is a popular snack especially during festive seasons in Malaysia.

1.5.3 Packaging: A process essential for the containment and protection of goods. Packaging also makes it easy for consumers, shop owners, and distributors to handle products.

- 1.5.4 Labeling:** An information process, which identifies the product with a distinctive brand identity, color, and graphic design.
- 1.5.5 Graphic Design:** A general term for drawing and other techniques used to reproduce words and pictures. The techniques include block printing, engraving, etching, lithography, silk-screen printing and computer.
- 1.5.6 Typography:** An art of lettering and Typesetting. Typography is one of the components in graphic design, which is also widely used for Desktop Publishing, Printing and advertising.
- 1.5.7 Logo:** A sort of symbols, which represent a company or an institution. Logo carries important message and communicate to audience about corporate philosophy, nature of business and reputation.
- 1.5.8 Brand name:** Brand is a word or words, a name, a design, a picture, a sound, or any other symbol that distinguishes the products of one company from those of another. It usually appears on the product, on its container, or in advertisements for the product.
- 1.5.9 Halal:** Halal basically means any thing or action that comply with Islamic principle and law. Usually, Halal logo is used to indicate that the foods and drinks do not contain pork and liquor. The United Nation has recognized Halal logo as an international standard for quality and assurance.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review of this research centers on the issues of packaging and labeling design. The first writing reviews a speech by the Prime Minister, Dato Seri Abdullah Hj Ahmad Badawi during the “Showcase Usahawan 2003” at PWTC. It discussed the issue of globalization and how it might affect Malaysian entrepreneurs namely the Malay SME in the long run. In the second part, the importance of packaging and labeling were discussed. This section focuses on many aspects of graphic design and visual communications including, how packaging and labeling can affect both consumers and manufacturers; the role of color and packaging identity; the effective use of packaging materials to attract customers' attention; the consumer preferences on the design of packaging and labeling.

2.2 Globalization and its challenges

“Saya sentiasa menyanan kepada usahawan kecil dan sederhana supaya mementingkan mutu keluaran. Perlu diingati bahawa Malaysia tidak akan lepas dari merasai bahang persaingan. Pasaran yang bersifat lebih terbuka ekoran komitmen Malaysia kepada Pertubuhan Perdagangan Sedunia (WTO) dan Kawasan Perdagangan Bebas ASEAN (AFTA) bererti persaingan akan datang dari dalam dan luar negara. Para pengusaha juga perlu memberi perhatian terhadap pembungkusan dan pelabelan produk yang mereka keluarkan. Saya melihat banyak pengusaha IKS, terutamanya industri di kawasan desa, yang menghasilkan barangan yang bermutu tinggi. Namun, keluaran tersebut tidak dibungkus dengan elok atau dilabel dengan jelas. Maka, pelanggan tidak tertarik untuk membelinya atau mempunyai keraguan dari aspek kebersihan dan keselamatan.”

Prime Minister Dato Seri Abdullah Hj Ahmad Badawi,

During an opening speech of the Showcase Usahawan 2003 at PWTC Kuala Lumpur, Prime Minister Dato Seri Abdullah Hj Ahmad Badawi had expressed his concern over the issue of globalization. He urged all Malay SME entrepreneurs to prepare themselves for the upcoming challenges particularly when WTO and AFTA take effect by year 2004 (Majlis Perasmian Showcase Usahawan 2003, 2003). He explained by then, foreign and local products will be competing for shelf space and also for consumer attention. Hence, all Malay SME entrepreneurs should give priority to the aspect of promotion, advertising and packaging. Also in the speech, the Prime Minister criticized the standard of packaging and labeling design of the traditional snack foods. He said, although some of the products were good, still, they could not attract big crowds because the packaging and labeling structures were insufficient. This factor could send wrong message to the consumers, which cause them to have doubts in terms of its cleanliness and safety feature.

According to Anne and Emblem (2002) in *Packaging Prototypes 2: Closure*, insufficient packaging is the biggest factor for consumer to switch to competitive brand. The reason is because such packaging seems to suggest that its content was made of low quality materials. Nevertheless, if a product came in an exclusive packaging and labeling style, consumers will regard it as expensive and high quality goods. In this case, proper packaging and labeling can help persuade consumers and increase sales by the end of the day.

According to Kamaruddin (2003), globalization does not only affect our way of life but also our daily diet. He said, because of the accessibility to the Internet, more people are now becoming aware of the consequences for eating food which contains high calories, fat, sodium and sugar. Therefore, to avoid the risk of having health problems such as heart disease or diabetes, most consumers would check the amount of calories and sugar in the food. They do this by reading the information on the package label. In conjunction, ex-minister for Health, Dato Chua Jui Meng (Berita Harian, 2003) have recently announced that by May 2004, all food producers must provide nutrition facts to inform consumer regarding the content of the products. He said, this rule must be adhered or otherwise they will be subjected to fine.

In another event, the minister for international trade, Dato Seri Rafidah Aziz (Utusan Malaysia, 2001) urges all food producers to comply with the international law before exporting their product overseas. To maintain reliability of the food products, they

must obtain several standards of quality. MATRADE has listed some of the considerations. They are as follows:

- HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points), which provides full assurance on the premium quality of Malaysian food products.
- GMP (Good Manufacturing Practices)
- SOPs (Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures)
- Halal
- Malaysian marine products also meet CE or EU standards for frozen seafood
- Malaysian manufacturers are moving towards the adoption of ISO 9000 and QAP (Quality Assurance Program.)

2.3 The role of packaging and labeling

What was the first thing about a product that we saw on a shelf? Was it the bright and colorful label that caught our eyes? Or, was it a box that had an unusual shape? Or, did the packaging or the labeling offers any interesting images that made us ponder for a second? Maybe it is all right to say that as consumers, we tend to look at both aspect of packaging and labeling simultaneously. And if the product presentation were convincing, we would pick it off the shelf, examine it in our hands and finally put it in to our shopping cart. This was just to illustrate how a consumer would normally response to packaging and labeling. Certainly, we can agree that packaging and labeling help us in many ways.

Perhaps, one might say that it doesn't matter how beautiful the packaging or the labeling, so long they fulfill the requirements of protecting and describing the content. Actually, it is more than that. Consider clothing as an example in this case. Besides covering the human body, clothes are also useful for describing a character or introducing a person. In short, clothes are like the second skin and any wrong choice of style, fabric and color will certainly affect the person. Similarly this is what packaging and labeling can do to a product. The design structure has to be considerably appealing to all consumers. According to Milton (1991) in *Packaging Design*,

“Packaging design is not about pretty picture and it cannot realistically be tackled by an artistic brand manager and a local printer, however cheap the solution might be. The visual management of a packaging is an expert job.”

Milton stated that packaging design involves more than just beautiful appearance. It's a difficult task in which the designer must reassure the packaging structure performs through its identification and convince through its imagery. According to Elson (2004) packaging design is a creative process that starts with extensive market research and requires continuous monitoring of how a product stacks up against competition.

What is the role of packaging and labeling? How can a business benefit from them? These are some of the questions generally asked by the manufacturers and the consumers. Marsili (1997) in *Technique for Evaluating Packaging Materials*, stated

“Container shape and style, label graphics and colors are all unquestionably important elements in food packaging design. If the appearance and visual appeal are right, packaging can be a potent marketing tool. It tells consumers what the product is and why it's superior to competitor products. It can communicate value, help create brand image, and most importantly, inspire purchase.”

Simply put, packaging is all about communicating value and distinguishing a brand from myriad of choices in the market. Generally, packaging is a container that comes in all shapes and sizes depending on the physical condition of its content. It is used to protect the product from all sorts of hazards such as moisture, fungus, temperature extreme, mechanical shock and vibration. These problems are usually encountered during the process of transporting or storing. In addition, packaging is important to serve consumers in terms of utility such as ease of handling and storing. Among the packaging materials used were sachet pouches, bags, paper wrap, trays, canister, carton boxes, can, bottle and plastic. Regardless what environment conditioned is encountered, these materials are specially designed to protect the content, keeping it in the condition intended for use until the product is delivered to the ultimate consumers. For example, many basic food products like meat, dairy produce and vegetables are packed in a vacuum packaging (where the air inside the package is removed, making the plastic shrink skintight to the contour of the product). This packaging method is effective for concealing the freshness and preventing from food contamination.

In addition, visibility feature is also important for positioning and promoting a brand. For example, there are cases where consumers often found that they had purchased a wrong brand. This is probably because many products have similar packaging and labeling styles, which make it difficult for consumers to tell the difference. This is where distinctive label design can help facilitate consumer on making purchase decision and offer relief from the misery of choice (Smith & Taylor, 2002). The labeling must be able to tell the consumer what the product is and why it is superior to any other competitive brand. According to packaging specialist Duvall (2003), food manufactures and retailers

must rely on effective labeling to draw consumer's attention. To achieve this, she recommends the use of graphic elements such as logo, brand name, identity and packaging styles.

Packaging and labeling can also work as an alternative advertising media. Gershman (1980) as quoted in *Packaging: Positioning Tools*, described the role of packaging and labeling as "The Silent Salesman". They can draw attention, communicate price strategy and convince the consumers. According to Semenik (2002), packaging and labeling play significant role in marketing because they help provide product information that is needed by the consumers while at the same time promoting the brand. A senior executive designer at Sirim Berhad, Norhayati (personal communication, March 20), explains that a typical product packaging and labeling must present basic information such as the following:

- Information about the product type
- Quality and specification of the content
- Method of usage
- How to store
- Date of manufacture
- Date of expiry
- Method of application

A good example can be seen in the case of a dairy milk product. To avoid spoilage of the drink by microorganisms, most dairy milk products of today are packed in pre-

sterilized carton box (Sonsino, 1990). Even though the carton boxes are sealed, still there is no guarantee that the milk will stay fresh for a longer period of time. Hence, the date of produce must be printed clearly on the package to ensure the safety of the consumers. Information labeling is extremely useful as it will not only inform but also create loyalties between the brand and the consumer. According to Semenik (2002) many companies have discovered that consumers' dissatisfaction is often related to the lack of information printed on the label. Therefore, food producers must provide accurate information to help consumers decide and also to avoid any confusion.

According to Roeling (2003), packaging and labeling should be adhered not only to its product values, attributes and personality but also to ethical issues as well, for instance, the issue of "Halal" and "Haram". "Halal" is an Arabic word, which means lawful or permitted whereas "Haram" means the opposite. According to Islamic principle and law, Muslims are prohibited from consuming pork and alcohol because they are regarded as "Najis" (unclean) and therefore are considered "Haram". So, in order to gain trust from Muslim consumer, food producers must apply for "Halal" certification from Islamic Department such as Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (see figure 2.3a). They must also display the "Halal" logo on the packaging. This logo features Islamic characteristic, which include the word "Halal" in Arabic characters, an 8 point star shape and green color scheme (see FIGURE 2.3b). Many Non-Muslim countries including China and the United States have recognized "Halal" logo and use it in their food industries.

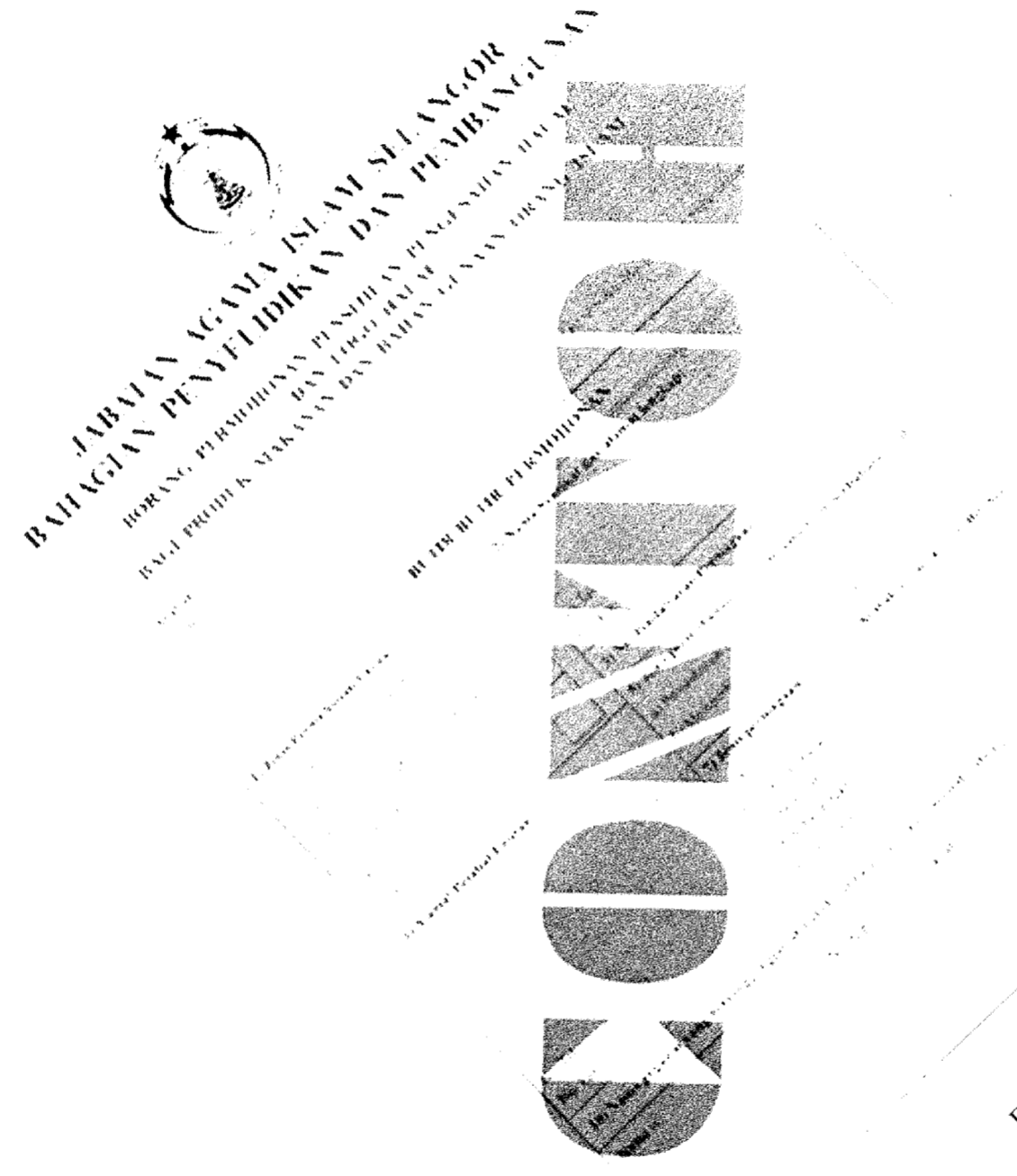


FIGURE 2.3a
 This figure shows an example of an application form for getting Halal food status from Jabatan Agama Islam Selangor.





FIGURE 2.3b

This figure shows a “Halal” Logo issued by JAKIM. According to the Trade Description Act 1972, food producers must obtain official “Halal” logo. Any misuse of the logo is prohibited and subjected to fine.



FIGURE 2.3c

This figure shows a similar kind of “Halal” Logo used in the United States. The Arabic characters and the crescent reinforce the image of Islam giving assurance to Muslim consumers.

CHINESE ISLAMIC ASSOCIATION OF CHINA

الجمعية الإسلامية بجانغو

شهادة المنتجات الحلال

HALAL PRODUCT CERTIFICATE

It is certified that the under mentioned shipment of products has been produced according to Islamic Rites in the presence and under direct supervision of its authorized representative appointed in the area indicated below. Accordingly, these products are Halal and suitable for consumption by Muslims in any parts of the world. Adequate precautions were taken to prevent its contamination with non Halal resource.

هذه الشهادة هي تزكية الى شركة الملاحه. تشهد ان هذا الانتاج تم طبقا لاحكام الشريعة الاسلامية. وتحت اشراف مثلها المختص الموقع ادناه. وهو منتج حلال للمستهلك المسلم في اي مكان في العالم. ويعتبر هذا المنتج غير خاضع لاشرافنا في حالة عدم وجود كلمة "حلال".


生产的制品系根据伊斯兰教教法生产。特此证明。

OFFICIAL HALAL SEAL

Product Names and Producing Company

1. Product Name:
Sorbic Acid
Potassium Sorbate

2. Company Name:
YANCHENG SUPENG CHEMICAL INDUSTRY CO., LTD
NO.32 East Renmin Road, Shenyang, Jiangsu China



DAY	MONTH	YEAR
8	10	2003

Valid since (Date)

Expiry Date		
DAY	MONTH	YEAR
8	10	2004

SIGNATURE

AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE OF

JIANG SU ISLAMIC ASSOCIATION OF CHINA

الجمعية الإسلامية بجانغو

江苏伊斯兰协会

FIGURE 2.3d

This figure shows an example of “Halal” certificate issued by Jiang Su Islamic Association of China.

Another example of ethical issue can be seen in Colgate Palmolive brand name called Darlie toothpaste (Roeling, 2001). Originally, this toothpaste was known as “Darkie toothpaste” which featured on the packaging label, a black man wearing a top hat, tuxedo, and bowtie (see FIGURE 2.3d). However, the name Darkie and the graphic imagery of the black man were considered racially offensive. Although the name had little meaning to Asian consumers, it certainly gave a strong connotation of racism to consumers in the United States. To avoid further complications, Colgate Palmolive had changed the brand name by replacing the letter “K” with the letter “L” in “DARKIE” to spell as “DARLIE”. The new packaging also features a presumably white man wearing the same top hat, tuxedo and a bowtie (see FIGURE 2.3e). In other words, naming product can affects the products as well as the company’s reputation. Therefore, it is always advised that a product name should be carefully chosen to avoid any conflicts and disagreement. Typically, good product names are:

- short
- related to the products’ functional purpose
- easy to pronounce and understand
- easy to spell
- memorable
- localizable

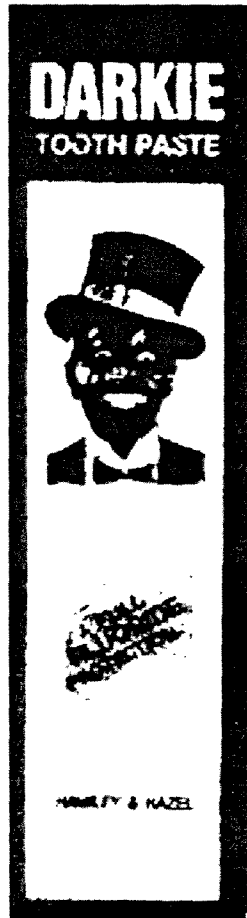


FIGURE 2.3d



FIGURE 2.3e

2.4 Visual Communication

Consumers are usually induced by visuals; they often buy what they see on the packaging and labeling (Duvall, 2002). Therefore, it is important for food producers to have effective visual presentation. She also recommends that the key to good packaging design is creating mood. In the case of snack foods, she finds that festive graphics or bright colors are most appealing and eye catching.

Consider the case of Tan Kim Hock snack product. This company commercializes traditional snack foods ranging from dried snack to frozen. One of the company famous product is “Dodol”, a typical traditional Malay cake made of coconut milk and brown sugar or better known as “Gula Melaka” (see FIGURE 2.4a). The most interesting part is perhaps the packaging and labeling design. Every package is distinctive, unique and eye catching. This can be seen through the details such as the color scheme, typography, image and wrapping methods, which give a sense of personality. For example, the shape of packaging for the “Dodol” is inspired from a gold bar, to suggest wealth and good luck. Green and Yellow are quite dominant in the label design, which suggest nature and fresh. According to the founder, Dr. Tan Kim Hock (personal communication, March 29, 2004), the key success of his company lies on the visual presentation. He said the “clean” and “festive” image reflected in the packaging and labeling motivates consumers to buy the product. The packaging design will not only induce but also signify quality and taste of the product within. To ensure that consumer will continue support his product, he would gradually changed the packaging and labeling style according to the business trend and taste.



FIGURE 2.4a

This picture shows the variety of packaging styles of Tan Kim Hock famous Dodol. The imagery and brand identity clearly suggest value and quality.

In most developed countries, beautiful packaging and labeling design are much appreciated by consumers than anywhere else, said creative director, Li (1992). She added that there are consumers who wouldn't mind paying extra just for the packaging and labeling. For instance, in Japan, many snack products are packed in interesting packaging and labeling styles to convey the sense of preciousness. Most food producers will try to persuade consumer by introducing new and distinctive packaging style with bold graphic imagery and vibrant color scheme. Another fact about Japanese snack foods is that, its packaging and labeling style has strong local taste and identity. This can be clearly seen through the typography and language (see FIGURE 2.4b). Similarly, in western countries, exotic images, materials and textures are often used as decorative elements to promote the sense of wealth and classic.