

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**INTERPRETATION OF
ARCHITECTURAL MEANINGS OF
POST-INDEPENDENCE
MALAYSIAN BUILDINGS
THROUGH SEMIOTIC APPROACH**

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Thesis submitted in fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the results of my own work, unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. This thesis has not been submitted to any other academic institution or non-academic institution for any degree or qualification.

I, hereby, acknowledge that I have been supplied with the Academic Rules and Regulations for Post Graduate, Universiti Teknologi MARA, regulating the conduct of my study and research.

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ABSTRACT

The architectural *identity* of Malaysian is insignificant today. They were highly being misinterpreted and misunderstood. Crucial issues concerning their projections have escalated, particularly in the 1980's onwards. This situation has caused concerns to both Malaysian government and building professionals. Several congresses, seminars and important national policies were introduced to confront these issues. However, the outcomes had not been observable till this day. This study aims to investigate the success level on employment of *signs* and *symbols* in post-independence Malaysian architecture. The objectives are to interpret the characteristics, orientations and cultural emphasis in projecting *identity* and *meaning* through architecture. The semiotic approach was employed in the study. The structure produced through the interpretation helps affirm the consistency of intrinsic *meanings* projected by the selected buildings. Fourteen post-independence public buildings were selected as the subject for case study. They are classified under four categories of architectural genre known as *Malaysian Vernacular Revivalism*, *Interpretive Islamic Symbolism*, *Tropical Architecture and Modernistic Expressionism*, which are used as determinants of design patterns. It is to ensure consistencies in observing the use of signs and symbols within the architecture, built after the early iconic Malaysian architecture during the 1960's. A three-stage process was carried out in the analysis. The first stage investigates the use of shapes and lines (SLA) in architectural compositions. The second examines the visual composition and perception (VCPA) criteria in design. The visual communication technique was employed for the first two steps in interpreting *meaning* on both pre- and post-independence Malaysian architecture, in order to gauge the similarities and differences in their designs. The final stage involves a "*Semiotic Structural Analysis*" (SSA) on Post-Independence Malaysian architecture. The method was based on the technique introduced by San Jose State University, California which was widely used in interpreting *meaning* from design objects. The so-called "first impression counts" visual assessment technique was employed during the observation research process to obtain instant impression and level of expectations on chosen building designs. The finding of the study shows that the *signs* and *symbols* projected by the post-independence architecture was inappropriately used and have not been effectively employed to portray what can be considered as the "national identity". The local culture and characteristics of Malaysia have not been visible as anticipated. This major contribution of the study is the use of semiotics as a potent technique in decoding intrinsic meaning of objects and buildings. Consequently, further research can be done by using the technique in framing a more perceptive and responsive Malaysian architecture.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CONFIRMATION BY PANEL OF EXAMINERS	ii
AUTHOR'S DECLARATION	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xv
LIST OF TERMS	xvi
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Research Background	2
1.3 Problem Statement	4
1.4 Research Questions	7
1.4.1 Research Aim	7
1.4.2 Research Objectives	7
1.5 Research Questions	8
1.5.1 Research Question 1	9
1.5.2 Research Question 2	9
1.5.3 Research Question 3	9
1.6 Research Design	10
1.7 Stages of Research	12
1.8 Potential Benefits of the Research	15
1.9 Wittgenstein's Language Games	16
1.10 Limitation of Study	17
1.11 Organization of Thesis	19