

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**THE EVOLUTION OF MALAYSIAN
BANKNOTES DESIGN: A STUDY OF
FORM, CONTENT AND CONTEXT**

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the Malaysian banknotes design produced by the Bank Negara Malaysia (National Central Bank) since its first series in 1967 up to the third series in 1996. These banknotes series are Malaysian Banknotes First Series (1967-1981); Malaysian Banknotes Second Series (1981-1996); and Malaysian Banknotes Third Series (1996-2004) respectively. The study explores the forms, style and meanings in the design of the banknotes. As such, three types of analyses were carried out: historical analysis, formal analysis and content analysis. The data from historical analysis shed insight regarding the historical background of the Malaysian currency. Important historical events, which are crucial for the development of banknote design in this country, are identified. These events are found to unfold according to three different phases: the formation of Malaysia (1957-1970); the effects of the national policies (1971-1980); and the vision of Tun Dr. Mahathir (1981-1996). The second analysis focuses on the construction of the Malaysian banknote design through the identification of six aspects: image, text, symbol, pattern, colour and composition. The analysis provides data in relation to the visuals utilised by the Bank Negara Malaysia in the construction of the banknotes. The final analysis investigates the meaning of the visual elements through the employment of semiotic analysis; these meanings were taken associated to Malaysia's history, politics and culture. In relation to design evolution, Bank Negara Malaysia appears to be keeping abreast with the latest trends through the infusion of fresher design and more modern style on the banknotes, as well as the integration of the most advance security features. The images portrayed on the banknotes support national agenda and aspiration of the country, they help in sending messages to the public and impact positively on the national identity. The study concluded that the portrait of the first Yang di-Pertuan Agong, the Bank Negara Malaysia's logo, the use of Malay texts, the use of Ringgit Malaysia as the currency are the key visuals of Malaysian banknote designs, Malaysian banknotes should be considered as a prominent portrayal of national identity.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the study and sets the context for which the study takes place. The study focuses solely on the Malaysian banknotes in the analysis of its design as well as in deriving the visual messages communicated to the audience. The relationships between the country's banknotes and its relevance to the national identity are also analyzed. Hence, the discussions in the following sub-chapters aimed to demonstrate the significance of the study and to illustrate the gap in existing studies concerning the Malaysian banknotes. The research objectives and the research questions which framed the study are also presented. The limitations faced by the researcher and the way these limitations affected the study are detailed. The discussion, then, focuses on the terminologies which are heavily used in this dissertation and representing aspects which defined the study.

1.2 Background of the Study

How familiar are we in recognizing our own banknotes? This is the question that I often asked my audience when I presented my paper at research conferences¹. Strangely I found that majority of them did recognize the images printed on the front page but failed to guess what was exhibited on the other side of the banknote. This in a way informed me about the level of knowledge and awareness of the design of Malaysian banknotes.

In general, banknotes can be regarded as a work of art transacted every second worldwide. We have to realise that the visuals depicted on the surface of the

¹ The same question has been asked in five academic conferences. Those conference are: Seminar Antarabangsa Warisan Nusantara in UMS; The 8th International Malaysian Studies Conference in UKM; Art & Design International Conference (AnDIC 2012) in Concorde Hotel, Shah Alam; Seminar Antarabangsa ke 2 Arkeologi, Sejarah dan Budaya di Alam Melayu (ASBAM 2) in UKM; iCADER 2014 in Bayview Hotel, Penang; Seminar Antarabangsa ke 3 Arkeologi, Sejarah dan Budaya di Alam Melayu (ASBAM 3) in UKM; International Symposium on Language and Arts Education UiTM-UNY-UPI (ISOLA 2015) – UiTM Shah Alam; and Seminar Antarabangsa ke 4 Arkeologi, Sejarah dan Budaya di Alam Melayu (ASBAM 4) in Langkawi.