

**The Influence of National Cultural Attributes on Locally Produced
Designs: Case Study of Malaysian Design**

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Abstract

This paper examines the influence of national cultural attributes on locally produced designs (i.e. comics, animation, commercial advertisements, printed materials and graphics). Drawing from the inconsistent results of past literature on influences of national cultural attributes on design; it is considered an under-researched area of the important role of cultural values on designs, specifically in the Malaysia context, in which cultural differences among different ethnic groups exist. Because of the paucity of research in this area, this study adopted a quantitative research approach with results derived from the content-analysis of 18 Malaysian designs using a visual preference survey by six experts from the design industry in Malaysia. This study incorporates two stages of sample screenings of a visual preference survey with brief interviews; results show that Malaysian designs need to adhere strictly to requirements and specifications set by the Malaysian authorities; incorporation of Islamic values and code of conduct to reflect the racial harmony and national ideology; and some unique characteristics of the respective ethnic groups in Malaysia were not upheld, thus, they gradually disappeared and/or were blended in the designs. The results and discussion from this study extend the literature on Malaysian design and provide practical implications on how local design industries could produce designs which abide by the boundaries of a Malaysian pluralistic society.

Keywords: national cultural attributes, Malaysian design, multicultural society

Introduction

Malaysia is a multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-cultural society (Haji Ishak, 2010) which consist of various groups of ethnicities such as Malay, Chinese, Indian, Kadazan, Iban, and Baba Nyonya for example. In 2020, it had an estimated population of 32.73 million (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). A moderate Islamic country, 67.4% of the population are “Bumiputera”, known as indigenous group (Malays and aboriginals), 24.6% of them are Chinese, 7.3% of them are Indians and 0.7% of them are of other ethnicities (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). In 1971, the Malaysian government defined the Malaysian culture through the formulation of a National Culture Policy, which has been serving as guidelines for designing, formulating and sustaining a common national identity. The three principles of the national culture are: it must be based on the indigenous culture of this region; suitable elements from other cultures may be accepted as part of the national culture; and Islam is an important component in the formulation of the national culture (National Department for Culture and Arts, 2020).

Culture, a social construct is part of the human development and it contributes to the expansion of identity of individual and a group of people through cultural traits (Mohd Khalis and Mustaffa, 2017). Very few studies have researched this topic within a Malaysian context. Even these studies come to varying results. Thus, one study claims that cultural values do exert an influence on design, as proven by a systematic review of 15 years of research related to culture and website design. This research supported the thesis of a localisation of cultural values and cultural markers on website design. Moura, Singh and Chun (2016) concluded that the role of culture, in particular cultural values of countries, continues to be an important factor reflected on website designs. Tong and Robertson (2008) scrutinised a power distance culture, namely the Malaysian one, analysing language, layout, colour, pattern and images of existing Malaysian websites and found that it is not easy for designers to develop a sophisticated understanding of the culturally sensitive visual interface design for websites. The study concluded that the lack of supporting guidelines and the differences in representation of a multi-cultural society like the Malaysian one has made it more difficult for designers to identify an appropriate model for website design (Tong and Robertson, 2008). On the other hand, one study claimed that there is no evidence of the generalisability of characteristics of product design identity and the agreement and preference of a multi-ethnic society (Zainal Abidin et al. 2015). Another report revealed that visual images and symbols in locally produced designs might give the markets an impression of Malaysia as being increasingly conservative and religious, worrying at least some (Cheong and Fernandez, 2014). Hence, due to the limited studies on the influences of national attributes and cultural values on designs, this is considered an under-researched area, specifically in the Malaysia context.

In addition, Malaysian designers are using innovative processes and creative flair for their designs while working within the constraints of cost, time, and close deadlines. The designers are also facing challenges of creating designs which take into consideration religious sensitivity and abide by policies set by relevant authorities in Malaysia. Due to these constraints faced by Malaysian local designers, it has been a challenging issue for them to create a Malaysia-look design based on characteristics of Malaysia national culture. This study sets out to address this under-researched area by examining the extent of influence of national cultural attributes on locally produced designs (i.e. comics, animation, commercial advertisements, printed materials and graphics). The results of this quantitative content-analysis (18 Malaysian designs, reviewed by six design experts within in Malaysia) will contribute to the literature on Malaysian design,

and provide additional insight and understanding as to how the local design industries could act within the boundaries of a pluralistic society such as Malaysia.

Literature Review

Elements of Design

A design element has a basic symbolic equivalence which carries the designs meanings, this could for example include points, lines and area. For instance, a triangle, visually can be seen as three dots, or three lines joined together, or it could carry the areas (triangle in blue). When the size or shape or colour of a design changes, it carries a different concept and explanation (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Basic Design Means



The classification of design elements can be from nature, such as clouds, lightning, the ocean, flowers, people, and animals; from man-made items, such as a factory, buildings, equipment and transportation vehicles; from the arts, including dance, cartoons, paintings, sculptures, patterns and photographs; or from our daily lives, using all kinds of daily necessities such as electrical appliances, toys, stationery and furniture. The elements of design serve as a strong visual expression and have an inherent impact on the construction or reconstruction of dots, lines or areas and divisions, alongside the arrangement, layout and colour (Landa 2005; White 2011).

Graphic design characteristics and its attributes such as colours, photography images, illustration, typography, size and materials may enhance the product recognition and often lead to consumer actions in purchasing a product (Abdul Rahman, Bidin and Lim 2017). Past studies revealed colours, photographic images and technology, illustrations, typography, size and shape, materials, orientation of the design and image, as well as ratios from the principles of art and design are among the design attributes that convey meaning and also drive purchasing behaviour (Silayoi and Speece 2007; Aday and Yener 2010; Clement and Kristensen 2013; Adam and Ali 2014). In particular, visual attributes on any package design act as a visual communication which “produce different meanings to a certain culture, age, gender, special promotions and others” (Abdul Rahman, Bidin and Lim 2017, p. 145).

Design also plays a crucial role in understanding cultural practices. Therefore, it is important that designers should know the technical part of design such as the elements and characteristic in creating comics, animation, commercial advertisements, printed materials or graphics; one of the essential factors is to understand the matter from within the culture of Malaysian society.

Malaysian Culture and Design

Culture is equivalent to a nation’s “soul” or “spirit” and can be displayed in the forms of arts, literature, tradition, belief and lifestyle. Culture is a cultivated behaviour which comprises of distinct spiritual, emotional and intellectual patterns, or it is the way of life that is followed by a certain group of people. According to Idilfitri (2016), culture is intangible and discovered

only when the meaning of culture is practiced by insiders through symbols, pictures, objects, words, or gestures. Scholars have identified five basic characteristics of culture: learned, shared, based on symbols, integrated and dynamic (O'Neil 2007; Bueno 2012). First of all, culture is not genetically inherited but it is learned subconsciously from families, peers, institutions and mass media through the process of enculturation. Secondly, culture is shared between members of a group. Thirdly, culture is based on symbols which have meaning when people in a culture agree on their usage. For example, language is a symbolic component of a culture. Fourthly, all aspects of culture are related to one another because culture is interconnected, hence, culture is integrated. Lastly, culture is not constant and if one component in a culture changes, it is likely that the entire culture will change, therefore, proving its dynamism.

Malaysia is practicing multiculturalism, which is defined as “a system of beliefs and behaviours that recognises and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organisation or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organisation or society” (Rosado 1997, p. 3). As a moderate Islamic society since its independence in 1957; most Malays are Muslims while other ethnic groups such as Chinese and Indians have the freedom to choose their religion and have the right to practice their culture. Due to the preponderance of Malays in the country, Islam is central to and dominant in the Malay culture. To discuss a religion or ethnic group with design, for example, Islam forbids the use of animal imagery in decorations, especially creatures that have been forbidden or proscribed by the Islamic law such as pigs and dogs. The acceptable decorative imageries for Malays are flowers, leaves, geometric patterns, “Quranic” scripture, as well as the crescent moon, which is a traditional symbol of Islam also found on the Malaysia national flag (Siek and Chen 2012). In addition, the symbol of “ketupat” (glutinous rice) is based on a plaited diamond shaped rice dumpling which uses coconut leaves and is also commonly seen in Malay graphic print. Oil lamps, which are known as “pelita” or “panjuti”, are also an example of Malay design in which oil lamps are lit during the days before the “Hari Raya” celebration to attract spirits and angels to descend and bring blessings to Malay homes.

The Chinese and Indians are Malaysia's other two ethnic groups. Chinese are the second largest population in Malaysia, after the Malays. The majority of Chinese people practice Buddhism; other religions such as Confucianism and Taoism are also practiced. They prefer images or shapes that symbolise wealth and good fortune, such as the dragon and phoenix. The dragon symbolises the son of heaven, ultimate abundance, prosperity, and good fortune, and it is also a symbol for the Chinese emperor. The phoenix, on the other hand, symbolises the empress, represents strength and is considered the most important of the winged animals. Another symbol which is relevant to Chinese culture and design is the golden pineapple, which symbolises gambling luck (Giacchino-Baker 1996; Siek and Chen 2013). Lastly, Indians are the third largest ethnic population within Malaysia, and they are known for their fascination with bright hues. They tend to use peacocks, a national animal of India, as well as swans, lotus flowers, mangoes, mango leaves and sun rays as patterns in their drawings, greeting cards, and fabrics.

National Culture Policies and Design

The National Culture Policy (1971) serves as a guideline in designing, formulating and sustaining the national identity of Malaysia. For example, on 16 September 2010, the “1 Malaysia” campaign had the goal of preserving and enhancing the unity of the nation and highlighted ethnic tolerance with guidelines stating that national culture must be based on the

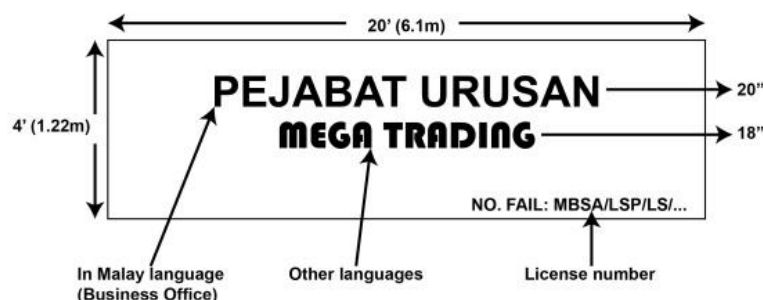
indigenous or Malay culture, although suitable elements from other cultures may be accepted as part of the national culture (Latif et al. 2012). The authors further claimed that Islam is treated as a key component in moulding the national culture of Malaysia (Latif et al. 2012). Given the unique Malaysian aspect of a mixture of religions in an Islamic country, the government promotes Islam above all other religions (Razali and Hands 2017).

The Printing Presses and Publications Act of 1984 (PPPA) is another policy which also has had an influence on Malaysian designs. This Act governs the use of printing presses, as well as printing, importation, production, reproduction, publishing, and distribution of publications in Malaysia (as according to PPPA Act 301 section 3(1): 7). Under the PPPA, the Ministry of Home Affairs Malaysia monitors all publications which include articles, notes, report, writing, statement, sound, music, caricatures, and photographs. The Minister reserves an absolute discretion for him/herself in granting or revoking printing licenses, restricting or outright banning publications that are likely to endanger the national security interest or those which could create social unrest. All content and service providers are responsible for ensuring their content development, production, commercial messages, and news production follow this Act. All printing presses such as printing, importing, selling, circulating and distribution that offer to do any of these things require a license which must be granted and renewed on an annual basis. Failure to apply for a license may result in a jail sentence of up to three years and fines up to MYR20,000 (US\$4,906) (as according to PPPA Act 301, section 5(1): 9).

When the Internet and social media became popular, in 2001 an industrial self-regulatory association known as the Communications and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia (CMCF) was set up to regulate the electronic content in Malaysia, including broadcasting, mobile, and Internet. The association enforces the “content code” to ensure that digital content reflects the national interest. It supports the national policy objectives set out in the Communication and Multimedia Act (1998). If the content breaks the provisions of the “content code”, a fine not exceeding MYR50,000 (US\$12,265) will be imposed, and/or the offending party will be asked to remove the content or cease offering the content (as according to CMA’98, DA’57 Revised’83). A local council in Malaysia, for example, Kuala Lumpur City Hall, known as DBKL, enforces the laws and terms of licenses issued by the Licensing and Petty Traders Development Department for creative activities and business community. The local council by-laws stipulate that the national language, Malay language, must be used for all public signboards but other languages are permitted if they are not as noticeable (Ariffin, Husin and Melaka 2013). Under the by-law 5(1), the display of words and texts on a signboard or banner must be either in the Malay language (national language) by itself, or together with other languages. The letters of the words of a signage in the Malay language must be given priority and have a larger size than other languages (see example of Malaysia signage in Figure 2).

Figure 2

A Sample of Visual Advertising Signage by DBKL



(Adopted from: Guidelines sample from City Hall)

Therefore, the national culture policies such as the National Culture Policy (1971), the Printing Presses and Publications Act of 1984 (PPPA) as well as guidelines from the Communications and Multimedia Content Forum of Malaysia (CMCF) in 2001, the Licensing and Petty Traders Development and the by-law 5(1) by local councils greatly influence local designs. Malaysian designers have begun to explore their indigenous identity and incorporated local culture and tradition into design work as the way forward in creating an identity for Malaysian designs (*The Star Online*, 11, September, 2017). “Integrating these traditional design elements into contemporary design is seen as an approach towards sustaining the nation’s heritage values as *genius loci*” (Shuaib and Enoch 2014: 59).

Identification of Malaysian National Culture Attributes

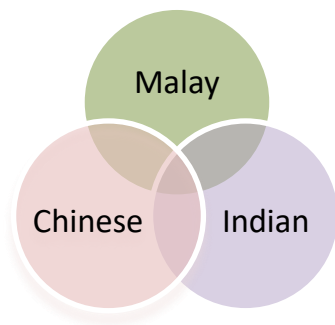
The development of Malaysian national culture comprises three key principles (Suhaili et al. 2019: 408): “archipelago cultures are the core of national culture, while the second principle includes other appropriate and reasonably acceptable cultures through a continuous assimilation and adaptation process. In the third principle, Islam is considered an important element in the national religious culture”. Malaysia is a multi-ethnics nation encourages a multitude of cultures to coexist in the country. “The three ethnic groups in Malaysia – Malay, Chinese and Indian, are ‘treated pluralistically by the government, and each ethnic group has been able to retain its cultural identity through the maintenance of individual languages, religions and traditions” (Tong and Robertson 2008: 1). As shown in Figure 3a, the three congruent circles representing the three ethnic groups, are intersecting each other, characterise the interaction among the Malays, Chinese and Indians. The interaction and integration processes between these multicultural groups in Malaysia have been ongoing since before Malaysia gained its independence in 1957 through both daily interactions and government policies and as a result “the diverse cultures in Malaysian society have been preserved, making Malaysia a nation rich with a variety of cultures” (Suhaili et al. 2019: 408-409).

On another note, the Malaysian national culture has layers and attributes that are identified and categorised into four levels: (1) individual attribution, (2) cultural attribution, (3) social attribution, and (4) national attribution. Figure 3b shows that the basis of the Malaysian national culture lies in the national attribution, followed by social, cultural and lastly individual attribution. In order to achieve national unity, it is crucial for the nation to engage as a united and progressive unit through the policies and initiatives to achieve unity, integrity, and social cohesion among its citizens. The following discussion of the four categories of national culture attributes (see Figure 3b) was adopted from past literature (Nuechterlein 1979; Trowler 1988; Liao 2007).

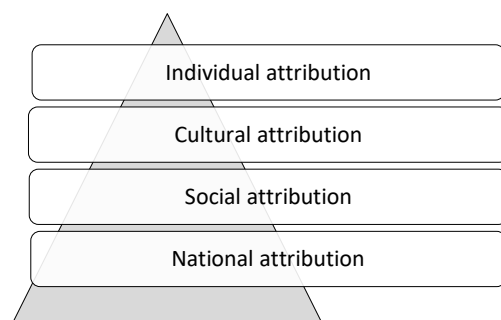
1. Individual attribution – self-esteem and appearance/image.
2. Cultural attribution – language, custom, religions, ethnicity and values.
3. Social attribution – manipulation, hegemony and pluralist.
4. National attribution – defence of interest, moral values, and national order.

Figure 3a

The Structure of the Three Main Ethnic Groups in Malaysia

**Figure 3b**

Attribution Consists of Four levels: Individual, Cultural, Social, and National



1. **Individual attribution:** Individual attribution relates to individual's personal traits. This attribute is defined in two parts: (1) self-esteem: the feeling of having respect for oneself and confidence in one's ability; and (2) appearance: the ability to present oneself freely in public.
2. **Cultural attribution:** Culture is the way of life of a group of people. Language, customs/norms, beliefs, races, and values are all part of culture. Language refers to the preferred text, customs/norms, and religions that bear relevance or similarity between ethnic groups. For example, Malays and Indians use their right hand to eat mixed rice while Hindus and Taoists avoid the consumption of beef. Race refers to the ethnic groups in the country, whereby intermarriage between people of different races groups are considered "mixed" culture. Values refer to one's judgement of what is important in terms of self-significance, family, or good moral values.
3. **Social attribution:** It is based on three theoretical models of media bias, which are the Manipulation model, Hegemonic model and Pluralist model (Trowler 1988). The Manipulation model refers to media as being co-manipulated by capitalists, wealthy, powerful social classes, and the government. The Hegemonic model refers to unintentionally adopted ideology which is being manipulated by social players, and

results in the populace being dominated. The Pluralist model indicates that power is distributed among many groups which allows one to self-determination.

4. National attribution: Based on the study of the classification of Nuechterlein (1979), national interests are classified as survival interest, vital interest, major interest and peripheral interest. Other scholars have further concluded that the classification of Nuechterlein's survival interest is similar to a defensive interest, which comprises of national sovereignty, territorial integrity, national defence, and ethnic status. Vital interest encompasses interests involving the economy and trading, which include national image, foreign trade, industrial raw materials and energy. Major interest and peripheral interest can be seen in the World Order as exchange programmes, financial assistance, investment, sports activities, and cultural activities (Liao 2007).

Research Questions

Drawing on this literature, the two research questions (RQ) guiding this study are:

RQ1: What are the key elements in the design produced by local designers in Malaysia?

RQ2: How do Malaysian national cultural attributes influence locally produced design?

Methodology

Research Approach and Procedure

The purpose of this paper is to examine the influence of Malaysian national cultural attributes on locally produced designs. A quantitative research approach was adopted with data collected through quantitative content analysis of a final 18 sampled designs by six experts who have a range of 5 to 22 years of working experience in the Malaysian design industry. A content analysis was carried out to identify the message characteristics embedded in the design samples that represent Malaysian national culture through sample screening based on a visual preference survey (Lindkvist 1981; Tesch 1990). A total of 120 design samples were randomly collected from magazines, newspapers, social media, product branding advertisements, recruitment advertisements, greeting advertisements, fashion, comics, cartoons, animations, symbols, and business signages, all produced during 2014 (see Appendix 1). These designs were locally produced and varied in different categories of design, in which some are still in use at the time of the writing of this paper. The selected samples are divided into four categories: commercial advertisements; symbol and signage design; textile and fabric design; as well as cartoons, animations and comics.

Through the filtration of samples by the industry experts, two stages of sample screenings were carried out. In the first stage, the 120 design samples were pinned onto six pieces of A2-sized soft form board with each soft form board carrying 20 designs. Through this process, 53 samples were filtered out, based on a visual preference survey, aimed at gauging the opinions of the experts in selecting the designs which contain elements of Malaysian national culture. Each expert was individually asked to rate the sample based on the representation of cultural imagery of Malaysia in the design and only designs that received >50% of the votes were retained. At the end of the first stage, 67 designs were selected to undergo the second stage screening. In the second stage, 49 out of 67 samples were filtered out through a rating selection, using a five-point Likert scale, on the level of representation of Malaysian cultural imagery. Only samples with a mean score of 3.5 and above were retained as the final samples for the

content analysis; therefore, after the second stage of screening, the final sample for the content analysis became 18.

Data Analysis

The quantitative content analysis of these 18 local design samples was carried out with six Malaysian design industry experts in Malaysia together with one of the authors of this paper. These industry experts were: (A) an Art Director in an advertising agency, (B) the Head of Department and Lecturer for the visual communications programme in a private college, (C) a comic artist, (D) a graphic designer, (E) a Programme Leader and Lecturer for the design communications programme in a private university, and (F) a Lecturer for a design communications programme in a private university. The experts were comprised of three Chinese, two Malays and one of mixed parentage (Indian and Chinese). Table 1 reveals the background information of the six industry experts.

Table 1
Backgrounds of Six Industry Experts

Industry Experts	Years of working experience in the Design field	Design Profession and Nationality
A	19	Art Director, in charge of above-the-line advertisements and handling a medium size design studio (Chinese)
B	17	Head of Department for graphic design in a private higher educational institution (Chinese)
C	17	Full time comic and animation artist (Chinese)
D	22	Senior graphic designer in a design studio (mixed parentage of Indian and Chinese)
E	18	Programme Leader for graphic design in a private higher educational institution (Malay)
F	5	Lecturer for graphic design in a private higher education institution (Malay)

Development of Coding Scheme

A coding scheme was developed to identify the four categories of attributions of Malaysian national culture. The aim of the coding scheme was to comb the data for themes, ideas and categories, as well as to mark similar passages of text with code labels for easy retrieval at a later stage for further comparison and analysis. The scale measurements for the coding scheme are mainly grouped under “yes” or “no”. The numerical code “0” was assigned if there were no or inconspicuous attributes of the specific description of the local designs, and “1” was assigned if the answer was “yes”. Coding was applicable to the three categories – individual, social and national attributions. Under the cultural attribution, the customs/norms and religions were coded as yes/no, except language, race and values. For language, the numerical code “0” is assigned if there is no language involved, “1” is Malay; “2” is English; “3” is Chinese; and “4” is mixed languages. For races: “1” is Malay; “2” is Chinese; “3” is Indian; “4” is others; and “5” is mixed races. For values: “0” is assigned if there is no significant value; “1” is presenting good moral values; “2” is having the same value towards family; “3” is having the

same value towards self-significance, and self-worth; and “4” is toward other values. See Table 2 for the coding scheme.

Table 2
Coding Scheme

Category	Categorical variables	Scale Measurement	Description
Individual attribution	self esteem	1 = Yes	Confidence, achievement, respected by others, respects others
		0 = No	Lack of confidence, not respected by others
	appearance	1 = Yes	Able to present oneself freely in appearance
		0 = No	Not able to present oneself freely in appearance
Cultural attribution	languages	1 = Malay	Malay preferred for text
		2 = English	Free to use other languages to present text, prefers English
		3 = Chinese	Free to use other languages to present text, prefers Chinese
		4 = Mix	Free to mix languages
		0 = No	No languages involved
	customs/norms	1=Yes	Present customs that are relevant or similar to other ethnic group
		0 = No	No relevant custom
	religions	1=Yes	Present in relevant or similar religion with other races
		0 = No	Not present with religion
	races	1 = Malay	Particular about whether one is the same ethnicity: Malay
		2 = Chinese	Particular about whether one is the same ethnicity: Chinese
		3 = Indian	Particular about whether one is the same ethnicity: Indian
		4 = Other	Identified and grouped as non-Malay, non-Chinese, or non-Indian
5 = Mixed		Mixed races/parentage	
values	1 = moral value	Present good moral values	
	2= family value	Having the same value towards family	
	3= self-value	Having the same value towards self-significance, self-worth	
	4 = other value	Toward other values	

		0 = No	No significant values
Social attribution	manipulation model	1=Yes	Controlled by wealthy and powerful social class
		0 = No	No significant values
	hegemony model	1=Yes	Unintentionally adopted the ideology or was being manipulated by social players and being dominated.
		0 = No	No significant values
pluralist model	1= Yes	Self determination	
	0 = No	No personal voice, personal opinion not heard by society	
National attribution	defence of nation interest	1=Yes	Defends against potential sub-cultures from foreign institutions
		0 = No	No personal vice or opinion
	moral values	1=Yes	Benefits and protects the Malaysian public
		0 = No	No significant values
	national order	1=Yes	Establishes a peaceful national system, without resorting to conflict
		0 = No	Unrestricted

Composite Reliability Test (reliability test among experts' selection for the content analysis)

To identify the relationship between the four categories of local designs, a composite reliability analysis was conducted. The aim of the coding was to comb the data for themes, ideas, and categories; similar passages of text were marked with a code label for easy retrieval at a later stage for further comparison and analysis. One author coded the direction of treatment of the symbolic meaning contained in the visual data of the samples by identifying relationships between the categories (Holsti 1969), exploring the properties and dimensions of categories, and uncovering patterns and testing against all the sample designs (Bradley 1993). In addition to the author, two informants were recruited as independent coders to analyse the 18 sample designs. A total of three coders agreed to independently code the sample and to check the inter-coder agreement following the formula by Holsti (1969) as stated below:

Reliability: $2M / (N1 + N2)$, where M is the number of coding decisions in which two coders agree about.

N1 & N2 are the total number of judgments made by both coders. $Reliability = \frac{2M}{N1 + N2}$

Whereas the Composite Reliability (CR) is: $CR = \frac{N \times (average.reliability)}{1 + [(N - 1) \times average.reliability]}$

The results of composite reliability would show the consistency with which the three coders agreed on the symbolic meaning contained in the visual data of the samples; CR is related to the properties of its components, but is also affected by weighting, and the extent to which the components themselves are correlated with each other. A high composite reliability is indicated by a value of ≥ 0.90 , whereby the data is considered to be relatively reliable due to the lack of errors. However, a low composite reliability that corresponds to values of ≤ 0.50 would indicate that the scheme is not acceptable, and the coding scheme needs to be revised. Wimmer and


Dominick (1983) suggested that if the reliability coefficient of the content analysis reaches 0.9, then it fulfils the minimum requirement. Kassarian (1997) indicated that a value of 0.85 is acceptable. The dependability of the research findings in this paper was established by the transparent coding process, and whenever the percentage of agreement did not reach 0.85, the coding scheme was revised (Schamber 2000).

Results and Analysis




The analysis was based on the 18 samples that were said to be designs representative of Malaysian national culture. These samples were recruitment advertisements in newspapers, commercial advertisements in magazines, urban roadway billboards, business signage in business districts, signage along the motor highways and office buildings, textile and fabric design on costumes, cartoons broadcasted on national television (TV) stations, 2D animation screened in cinemas, as well as comics which had been approved for sale in all primary schools. Table 3 reveals the observed key elements of the 18 samples identified by the six industry experts. These results answered the research questions on the key elements found in the designs produced by local designers in Malaysia as well as addressed the influence of Malaysian national cultural attributes on locally produced designs.

Table 3




Key Elements of Design Sample (18 designs)




Samples			
	Sample 1	Sample 7	Sample 13
Key elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Porcelain store signage. The business is owned and run by ethnic Chinese. ▪ Malay language must be given priority in the display in the signage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Bola Kampung</i> - a Malaysian animated TV series about ‘kampung’ (village) boys who are crazy about football. ▪ Endorsed the national ideology. ▪ Aired on national TV channel, must be in the Malay language. Movie launched with English and Chinese subtitles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cosmetic advertisement with Malay target customers. ▪ Applied a full-face mask (except for the eyes), did not violate the official injunction.
Samples			
	Sample 2	Sample 8	Sample 14
Key elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chinese stationery shop. ▪ Malay words describing the function of the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The most popular comic among Chinese primary students and parents in Malaysia with two main characters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The image design has a longer skirt than the standard female toilet signage. A typical women toilet sign symbol

- business are bigger than the company name in English and Chinese.
- Malay language is used to describe the function of this business entity.
- All five fingers must be drawn, regardless of the proportions of the body, arm, leg, feet, and head of the characters. All cartoon characters must be drawn with the full complement of five fingers, as it might kill the creativity and inspiration of youngsters.
- Teaches the audiences and readers to have positive thinking, good moral values, and live in harmony with different ethnic groups.
- displayed at the public toilet in the expressway’s rest area.
- Implements the Malay women dress code.

Samples			
Key elements	<p style="text-align: center;">Sample 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Business signage for money exchange and remittance services for individuals to send and receive money worldwide through the International Money Express. ▪ Malay words have to be the most visible in the signage. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Sample 9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A very popular comedy superhero cartoon series from 1998 to 2002 on the national, government-owned TV Channel 2. ▪ The series shows violence but gained popularity because of the typical Malay language accent spoken by the main character, a Sikh policeman. ▪ Continuous enforcement of good moral values and national ideology to create generations of people with moral values, good deeds towards personal, 	<p style="text-align: center;">Sample 15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The image of an elevator signage with female passenger in Malay traditional costume. ▪ The elevator signage in a local bank, a passenger elevator signage indicating the location of the elevator. ▪ Implement a common code of conduct.

family, social, and nation.

Samples			
	Sample 4	Sample 10	Sample 16
Key elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The image of harmony among different ethnicities (Malays, Indian, and Chinese). ▪ Various ethnic groups come together in harmony by sharing one language. ▪ Portrays various ethnic groups living together in harmony. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A Hong Kong movie promotional billboard advertisement for <i>The Monkey King: Journey to the West</i>. ▪ The pig was not welcome by the authorities due to Malay cultural sensitivity. ▪ Majority of Malays disputed the image of a pig due to Islamic norms. ▪ Icon of pig was omitted from the advertisement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Malay traditional costume, in accordance with Islamic norms that forbid animal imagery as decoration. ▪ Portrays successful woman dressed with a long, loose two-piece dress which are often colour-coordinated and have nice textures.

Samples			
	Sample 5	Sample 11	Sample 17
Key elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Financial sector talent enrichment programme which prepares graduates to develop their career in the financial service industry, supported by the Association of Banks in Malaysia. ▪ Equal opportunity is given to various races. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Australia-based company Servcorp presented a festival greeting via the company's mascot, a wombat wearing Malay traditional costume, but it was retracted because some Muslims mistook the wombat for a pig. ▪ The advertisement was retracted from the billboard. ▪ The majority of Malays reported the image 'looks like' a pig. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Kebaya – a tight-fitting two-piece dress made from sheer materials, adorned with brocade or floral pattern embroidery. ▪ A traditional costume, worn with batik wrap-around skirt, for Straits-born Chinese, descendants of Chinese immigrants having come to the Malay Archipelago. ▪ Gradually disappeared and merged into the Malay society.

Samples			
	Sample 6	Sample 12	Sample 18

Key elements	▪ Job vacancy advertisement must project all ethnicities to avoid penalty under racial discrimination.	▪ A popular advertisement in Malaysia that was awarded the Best Use of Branded Content in 2014 by the Malaysian Media Specialists Association (Creative Greats, 2014).	▪ Malaysian Cheongsam, worn during formal gatherings. Batik in Malaysia depicting humans or animals are rare because of Islamic norms. Worn during festival occasions.
	▪ Portrays various ethnic groups happily working together.	▪ Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM) portrays features of successful women usually dressed with a headscarf.	▪ More baggy and did not follow the typical symbol of image preferred by the Chinese.

Composite Reliability Analysis

There were 18 design samples with a total of 234 elements (18*13 analysed elements). Based on the data analysis, the reliability test results reached 0.9, which was an acceptable threshold number. Overall, the results of the analysis for reliability test for all variables had a moderate to excellent reliability ($0.70 \leq \text{samples} \leq 0.91$). Reliability coefficients were moderate ranged from 0.50-0.74; good/substantial 0.75-0.9; and excellent/almost perfect >0.90 . The final results presented by all three coders (identified as A, B and C) were >0.91 -0.99, therefore showing an excellent reliability score. For example, the CR for individual attribution had excellent reliability score of self-esteem=0.97 and appearance=0.99. The composite reliability analysis for all four categories and among coders is shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Reliability Test

Category	Information indication	A & B	B & C	A & C	CR
Individual attribution	Self -esteem	0.90	0.90	0.93	0.97
	Appearance	0.97	1.00	0.97	0.99
Cultural attribution	Language	0.9	0.93	0.90	0.97
	Custom/norms	0.83	0.77	0.70	0.91
	Religions	0.90	0.93	0.93	0.97
	Ethnicities	0.80	0.77	0.83	0.92
Social attribution	Values	0.77	0.77	0.87	0.92
	Manipulation model	0.70	0.70	0.93	0.91
	Hegemony model	0.90	0.87	0.93	0.96
National attribution	Pluralist model	0.73	0.70	0.8	0.90
	Defence of interest	0.93	0.87	0.93	0.97
	Moral values	0.93	0.93	0.93	0.98
	National order	0.97	0.97	1.00	0.99

Discussion and Conclusion

From the results, the portrayal of good moral values, national ideology, and national unity is a must for the nation. Although Malaysia is considered a moderate Islamic society, it is very much Islamic-oriented. This can be seen in sample designs 12, 13 and 14, which concur with Razali and Hands (2017), that is, that the Malaysian government promotes Islam above all other religions. Hence, any national order is geared towards defending the nation's interest. In this matter, it is obvious that having good moral values is the key element in establishing a peaceful system to ensure that all the ethnic groups of different religions can live in harmony (Shuaib and Enoch 2014). This element is evident in the sample designs. Through the integration of national ideology, some sample designs reflected the harmonious multi-racial character of the people, without stereotyping a particular racial group or gender; the traditional values and backgrounds of the people are being preserved and upheld (see sample designs 4, 5 and 6).

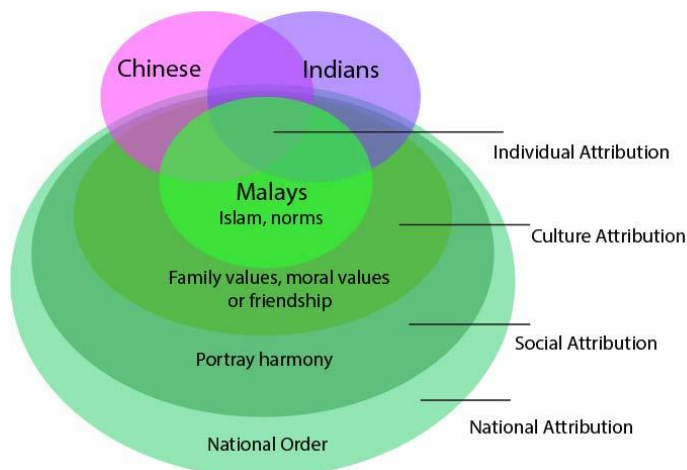
Meanwhile, the social, cultural and individual attributes are key influences on designers. These influences can be seen from design contents that give prominence to the Malay language by the way of allocating more text, brighter colours, larger fonts, outstanding displays, as well as in local commercials and movies, which are recorded in Malay with other languages as complementary text (Latif et al. 2012; Ariffin, Husin and Melaka 2013). The prominence of the national language is apparent in sample designs 1, 2 and 3. In addition, there is also a harmonious blend of norms in the design elements, followed by sensitivity towards cultural habits such as avoiding the usage of forbidden images, and modest dress codes for Malay women in their daily life or for non-Muslim women in official gatherings and events as according to the guidelines provided by the National Culture Policy (1971), PPPA (1984) Act 301, and Communication and Multimedia Act (1998). We can view this national culture attribute embodied in the sample designs 10, 11, 12 and 13.

The unique characteristics and regulations in Malaysia might give viewers the impression that it constrains creativity; yet, the positive side of having such characteristics and regulations help Malaysian designers to be more strategic when expressing their creativity, and to develop ways that accommodate the national cultural attributes as stipulated in the National Culture Policy (1971). The results indicated that design characteristics in Malaysia are strongly influenced by a Malaysian national culture. Although Islam and Malay culture form an important part of the national culture, elements from other cultures (such as Chinese and Indian) may be accepted as part of the national culture. The acceptance of other cultures in design should be aligned with the policies and guidelines set by the Malaysian government and local councils. The integration of national, social, cultural and individual attributes within the Malaysian national culture framework enables Malaysian designers to produce designs which symbolise racial harmony, national ideology, and Islamic norms. In addition, local designers are able to recognise and respect cultural and religious differences for peaceful coexistence between the people in Malaysia, given that Malaysia is recognised as a multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-cultural society.

Figure 4 illustrates the formation of Malaysia's social order in the identification of national cultural attributes. The three congruent circles intersecting each other represent the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia which interact with each other frequently in their own way. The key intersection of the three circles is reflected as individual attribution; while the four tangent circles are placed and grouped with the circle labelled as "Malay" indicated Islam, a religion practiced mainly by the Malays, is an important element in the national religious culture. The

structure of the social order begins at the individual attribution and gradually progresses to the furthest outer circle labelled as “national attribution”. The basis of the Malaysian national culture lies in the national attribution, followed by social, cultural and lastly individual attribution as shown in Figure 3b. Hence, the social order in Figure 4 reflects the influence of the four categories of national culture attributes on local produced designs discussed in the result and analysis section.

Figure 4
The Social Structure of Malaysian National Culture



Drawing on the result analysis, we conclude that: (1) Malaysian designers need to learn and fulfil the requirements and specifications set by the Malaysian authorities in their design to avoid any issues of racial discrimination and conflict, but at the same time produce designs which reflect the harmony of the nation; (2) designers are to incorporate in their design the Islamic values and code of conduct determined by the Malaysian government; (3) designs that symbolise racial harmony, national ideology, and Islamic norms are gradually appearing; (4) different ethnic groups who have lived together for a long period of time have adapted to each other and appreciate each other’s merits due to the indirect influence of the designs; and (5) when unique characteristics of the respective ethnic groups are not upheld, they will gradually disappear or are assimilated.

The present study was an attempt to examine the influence of national cultural attributes on 18 samples of locally produced designs through a visual preference survey of six design industry experts in Malaysia. The framework of national cultural attributes was derived from the review of literature on design and cultural studies in Malaysia as well as with reference to the national culture policies and guidelines of the Malaysian government and local councils. We believe future studies could carry out interviews with government authorities in order to further strengthen and elucidate the validation of Malaysian culture through the formulation of the National Culture Policy in 1971 and its influence on locally produced designs. It is the intention of this study to ultimately contribute to the expansion of literature on Malaysian design, as well as to provide practical insight into how the local design industries can react within the boundaries of a pluralistic society such as the Malaysian one in the process of creating creative designs.

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