

LOGO & SEMIOTIC

MALAYSIAN INDEPENDENCE DAY LOGO

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ABSTRACT

Logo and semiotic is a relationship that is inspirable. The reason is that if we look at the meaning of semiotic, as mentioned by Crow (2003), it refers to something that is related to symbols and logos. The term semiotic is widely used especially in the art and design field in studying the art of symbols and also the systems involving symbols and logos (Oswald, 2007).

In this paper, Malaysian Independence logo is explained in detail the contents in the aspect of semiotic from year of 1976 to 2012 in term of its meaning and the phenomena that can be associate to the character of particular logo.



FIGURE 1
Independence Day logo.

From the figure 1 above, starting the year of 1976 to 2012 have shown us that each of the logo has a meaning, message and symbol that represent an event that happen during that year during the independence day. If we look at the Independence Day logo for the year 1976 (figure 1) above, five human figures represent the various level of the society working together to achieve one goal, which is the prosperity and safety of the country. The theme "KETAHANAN RAKYAT" (society resilience) was written in a curve represents the strength of the country. The design resembles rebana ubi, a traditional tambourine, which shows that the society is culture rich. The five human figures reflect the five Rukun Negara principles, the foundation for country's goal.

The colours used are from the colours of Malaysian flag (Logo Hari Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994). We can see that the 1976 Independence day logo (figure 1) above has an implicit meaning behind each of the character used, which creates semiotic for the logo.

Nevertheless, from psychological perspective, the 1976 logo (figure 1) above has a different meaning. Basedon Foley & Matlin (2010), the 1976 independence logo above may be viewed as a mere circle with an ambiguous in nature. Based on gestalt theory, it is difficult to see two objects at one time, thus making the shape of tambourine not visible with the five human figures.

The next logo is from the year 1977 (figure 1). The theme for this logo is "20 TAHUN BERSATU MAJU" (20 years united and progressive). It has five points pointing upwards, the symbol of progress. The further up, the points are getting closer, represents the unity of the society. Five pillars represent the five Rukun Negara where the middle pillars (the highest pillar) represent the first pillar, which is the belief in God. Meanwhile, the other pillars resemble the front part of a boat, represent the other four of Rukun Negara, and with the boat like shape represent the national core culture coming from the land of the country.

Circle with the number 20 represents 20 years of independent. Four pillars made of tin indicate that the country is developed in commerce and industrial sector. The highest pillar is made of diamond wood, represents the strength of the Malaysian country. Surrounding it is an ocean blue colour, meaning the country has a rich sea treasure with products from the fishermen as the core since independent. A small bridge across the ocean represents the economic stability of the country. As such, the development of the country covers many sectors, physically (agriculture and industrial sector) and spiritually (Logo Hari Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994).

From the above description, we can see clearly that semiotic plays an important part in the 1977 independence day logo (figure 1), which is something that cannot be denied. From another perspective, the Independence Day logo of 1977 is a bit complex, based on the psychology theory by Lilienfeld, Lynn, Namy & Woolf (2010). It almost wanted us to fill in the blanks, making the viewer guessing what exactly the image is and what does it mean. In addition, it is difficult to know the implied meaning of the logo since many of the shape used is ambiguous and focuses on many things.

Meanwhile, in 1978, the Independence Day logo has taken a different approach from the previous logo. The logo used a yellow crescent and star, taken directly from the country's flag, which represent the country (Malaysia).

Inside the crescent, there is a semi-circle carved with a pattern, reflecting the country's traditional art, followed by the shape of a head and body coming together, representing the unity of the people. The final circle is the red and yellow 'rebana ubi', representing our culture.

At the center, there is the number 'XXI', which means 21 years of independence. This logo portrays Malaysia as a country with multi race and ethnic, inheriting a rich traditional art and culture, at the same time cultivating unity among the people (Logo Hari Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994). The 1978 Independence Day logo still uses the rebana ubi' as the Malaysian traditional cultural symbol. Nevertheless, overall, the logo design for 1978 independence day (figure 1) above still a complex design, which is the norm during that period. According to Cramsie (2010) and Silver (2001), most famous logos nowadays, such as Apple Computers, started with a complex logo design, and later being simply as the time changed.

The change from a complex logo to simple logo started with the 1979 Independence Day logo (figure 1) as shown above. The logo uses pentagon shape with circle on the outside, which represent unity. Five small circles with blue in colour represent the five Rukun Negara and multi-race society. The red pentagon represents a society that is cooperative, united and disciplined working together developing the country. The goal is represented with blue and red circles at the centre. The yellow circle represents the sovereignty of the King, where the people are loyal to the King. This logo has the meaning of Malaysian society, which is a multi race society, following the Rukun Negara principle, is working together towards achieving prosperous and peaceful country (Logo Hari Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994). From historical perspective, the 1979 Independence Day logo design uses Bauhaus style, which was introduced in 1924. According to Ekilson (2007), Bauhaus design gave the emphasis on balance and static principle.

In 1980, the Independence Day logo (figure 1) design remain using simple shapes. The message remain mostly the same, which is Malaysia is a country with multi race, Rukun Negara as the guiding principle (the pentagon), working together to achieve prosperity. The arcs at the pentagon side represent the multi-race society, loyal to the King and country. The outer most circle enclosing all shapes represent 'bulat manusia kerana muafakat', or unity. The circle also emphasizes the importance of discipline in the society (Logo Hari Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994). Based on the psychological study by Foley & Matlin (2010), the use of simple geometric shape will have more impact towards the mind. As such, the use of geometric shape in the 1980 Independence Day logo (figure 1) shows the maturity, especially in logo design.

Next, the 1981 Independence Day logo (figure 1) as shown above tried to illustrate the success and progress achieved by the country during the 24 years on independent. The three human figures at the bottom part of the logo represent the multi race society, united and working together to achieve success and progress, using the five pillar of the Rukun Negara as the guiding principles. The circles at the top part of the logo represent the success and progress in terms of politic, economy and social (Logo Hari Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994). This logo design, as in the previous logo, uses simple geometric shape with the basic colours combination.

Nevertheless, semiotically, it still has not been able to convey the intended message through the geometric shapes. In logo design such as Independence Day logo, Tero (2012) have suggested the need of the combination of shape, colour and slogan in conveying the implied message in a logo design. In 1982, the Independence Day logo (figure 1) above uses the hibiscus flower shape, which is the National Flower. It represents a long lasting freshness, just like what the flower has proven itself.

The colours used are the same colours as Malaysian flag. The five flower petals can be relate to the five Rukun Negara, the foundation of the perfect country. The blue colour in the number 2 represents the love of the people towards the country, and the convergence of the number 2 and 5 represents unity of the people. The number 25 itself represents the 25 years of independent, and the country has gone through many difficulties and challenges, and at the same time has achieved many success, going into the future (Logo Hari Ke bangsaan Malaysia, 1994). The combination of slogan, shape and the number 25 make the logo more effective and increase the chance for the viewer to remember it. The colours used, especially blue, as suggested by Ditsch (2012), is synonym with nationalism and patriotism.

If we look at the 1983 Independence Day logo (figure 1), it resembles the look of an arrow, giving you the impression that it is moving towards a target, that is the objective to be prosperous. This logo symbolizes the unity and collaboration in the society in various areas. This message can be seen with three squares connected to each other containing circles, which represents various group of people that are entrepreneur, private sector and civil administration. These groups of people involved in developing the country towards prosperity, supported by a triangle, representing government support in the effort to achieve the aspiration of the nation (Logo Hari Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994). Overall, this logo has applied the gestalt method where based on gestalt proximity principle theory, shape or subject arranged in a group is viewed as one object (Lilienfeld, Lynn, Namy & Woolf, 2010). Thus, the squares arrange close together is viewed as one object, which is an arrow. The white circle in the middle of 1984 Independence Day logo (figure 1) represents purity, completeness and perfection, which is the core of trustworthiness.

The blue circle surrounded by yellow and blue pentagon represent collaborative of multi race society in a sovereign country with the government and private sectors working together to bring prosperity in various aspect. Meanwhile, five red arrows like shape represent the results from the previous effort have shown success with the arrow originating from the while circle as the basis of trustworthiness (Logo Hari Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994).

In general, the message behind the Independence Day logo can be seen from the shapes and symbols used in the logo design. Nevertheless, referring to the statement by Tero (2012), it is better if each shape or symbol used directly reflect the intended message. For example, referring to the 1981 Independence Day logo (figure 1) above, unity is represented by the use of human shape.

The next logo is the 1985 Independence Day logo (figure 1). The logo uses five blue circles representing Malaysian united multi-race society. The circles are surrounded by red ribbon like shape, which represent the nationalism spirit, the core of the unity. The white circle represents a pure and harmony country. The blue circle at the centre represents a tight inter-race collaboration, creating one Malaysian race. The yellow circle represents an independent and sovereign country.

The red circle represents patriotism, which is the important ingredient in a united society who loyal to their country (Logo Hari Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994). In this design, a repetitive element is used to convey the implied meaning or message. Nevertheless, the elements or characters used are universal in nature, which are geometric shapes where physically it cannot communicate well to its viewer, as emphasized by Gerber (2010) before.

As in the previous logo design, the 1986 Independence Day logo (figure 1) still uses blue geometric shapes, representing determination and firmness of the country in its effort defending independence and its sovereignty internationally. The positive and firm behaviour of the country can only be achieved with the support from every level of the society, which is represented by the red triangle. The yellow colour at the centre represents the sovereignty of the Kings, which is one of the Rukun Negara principles (Logo Hari Kebangsaan Malaysia,(1994).

In general, the 1986 Independence Day logo is trying to convey the message of 'bangsa tegas Negara teguh' or 'a firm society, a stable country', which is the theme for that year. As discussed in the beginning of this topic, a static and geometric design, which is the design identity for Bauhaus, can be found in the 1986 Independence Day logo design. As such, it proves the statement by Cramsie (2010) that the Bauhaus influence is so great that it affected the development of the design field worldwide.

The theme for 1987 and 1988 (figure 1) Independence Day is 'Bersatu', or united. The 1987 logo (figure 1) above uses a square shape rotated 45 degrees, with a semi-circle attached to each side of the square, with a circle inside the square. The square represent the emphasized is given to four economy sectors: housing, agriculture, tourism and industrial. The activities in the four sectors require the support of five fields, represented with five circles. The fields are research, education, services, finance facility and security. The five circles also represent the five Rukun Negara principles. The yellow colour inside the centre circle represents loyalty. The blue colour of the rectangle and semi-circles represent the harmony among the people, while the red colour represents the effort (Logo Hari Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994). For 1988 Independence Day logo, the theme "Bersatu" was represented by three circles in between a 'Y' shape thick line.

The 'Y' shape line looks like one human body, while the circles look like the head (three), which means that the people of Malaysia is a multi-race society needs to be united to maintain the peace and harmony in the country with Malaysian spirit. Five red and white stripes represent the five Rukun Negara principles, the practice of Malaysian people. Three branches represent the concept of clean, efficient and trustworthy, the basic principles in government administration as well as the practice of the people. The yellow colour represents constitutional monarchy system, which unites the people (Logo Hari Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994).

thing to observe and think is, as mentioned by Nee (2011), visual communication is very effective in conveying messages, and in the context of Independence Day, it involve the aspect of educating the society. Thus, the use of logo as a representation is the correct medium in conveying a message. However, the level of effectiveness of the logo depends on the design characters used. For example, in representing stability and strength, the shape of mountain was used by Prudential company as one of the design character as shown in the (figure 2) below.

Going back to the Independence Day logo, based on the view of Nee (2011), it will be more effective if more accurate and familiar is used as compared to the generic geometric shape. The main message for most of the Independence Day logo is unity, thus a new character that can represent the message is needed for the future instead of relying on the generic geometric shapes.



FIGURE 2
Prudential logo

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The blue, white and red circles represent the final planning and control, the noble and virtuous values, in the effort to achieve the Vision 2020 (Logo Hari Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994). As mentioned by Nee (2011) previously, the basic of a design is to convey the intended message. We can see this clearly in the 1991 Independence Day logo, where the number 2020 were used together with an arrow to convey the implied message directly.

The use of the arrow symbol can be seen again in the 1992 Independence Day logo design (figure 1), where the design uses the letter 'W' with arrows. The letter 'W' refers to the word 'Wawasan' or vision, and three arrows inside the letter 'W' pointing upward represent the direction of the Vision, which are the progress in economy, social and spiritual of the country and the people in the future.

The colours red, blue and yellow, which are the Malaysian flag colours, represent the multi-race society living together in harmony, which is the backbone to the economic and social activities moving towards the desired goal. In other words, the message of this logo design is that Malaysia, with a multi-race society living together in harmony, is a stable, peaceful and prosperous country, continuously working to achieve the goal of becoming a developed country in the future (Logo Hari Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994).

Next, in 1993, the shape of Independence Day logo design (figure 1) is almost a circle, which represents unity, teamwork, friendship, harmoni and ambitious towards achieving goal. The red and white colours represent courage, perseverance and strong fighting spirit and determination, purity, honesty, sincerity and passionate in achieving the vision. The blue colour represents the Malaysian aspiration of achieving prosperity, harmony, well being and peacefulness through the desired vision. The yellow colour represents united in purpose and the desired goals. Overall, the shape and colours used in the design represents a high ambition and sincere fighting spirit in achieving the goals of each Malaysian citizen (Logo Hari Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994).

By maintaining the arrow shape used since the 1991 Independence Day logo design, it shows the determination of everyone towards achieving the goals in Vision 2020 consistently. This situation explains the strength of the arrow symbol, which represent progress from semiotic point of view. This, this phenomenon shows that the statement by Green & Loveluck (1992) previously which mentioned that one of the factor that helps the viewer to understand a logo is the properties of a symbol, which also refers to the use of the correct symbol. The use of arrow symbol was continued until the 1994 Independence Day logo (figure 1), which has the heart shape, representing positive values that not only applicable to action and physical only, but also what is inside the heart.

The heart will determine the moral of a person. All actions are also determined by the intention of the heart. The white colour of the heart represents the purity and nobility of the values that are deep inside the heart. The red and blue colour of the main heart represents the multi-race Malaysian society. The yellow of the arrow represents the desires and goals of the people. The people of Malaysia will move forward towards the Vision 2020 with having all these positive values (Logo Hari Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1994).

Starting the year 1995, the Independence Day logo (figure 1) uses the hibiscus shape as the main design concept. The five petals of the flower represent the five Rukun Negara principles. The colours red, white, yellow and blue are the colours of Malaysian flag, which represent the multi-race society with different culture and religion forming their own unique identity. The white colour surrounding the hibiscus represents positive values of the people creating a harmonious environment. The yellow colours represent the sovereignty of the country and the desired vision. The red colour represents the economical and political stability, as well as the courage to face challenges. The blue colour represents the determination of the people a creating a developed, harmonious and peaceful country.

Overall, the logo design represent the multi-race Malaysian with many different culture and religion living in a sovereign country harmoniously and united creating their own identity moving towards the Vision 2020 (76 > 2k 'warna merdeka', 2005). The shift from the use of geometric shape to organic shape can be seen in this logo design, where Henderson & Cote (1998) consider that organic shape is easier to recognize and have a bigger impact to the mind.

The year 1996 presented us with a logo design (figure 1) reflecting the realization of a progressive and innovative country with all of the races living in harmony united creating a dynamic culture. The logo design also highlights the strong determination of the society in pursuit of country's aspiration of becoming a country excel in economy, social and politics. The blue colour represents the people and the government working hand in hand. The red colour represents the courage and passion of the people. The white colour represents the sincerity and the effort of the people towards achieving collective success.

Yellow represents the desired destination, which is inter-race harmony (76 > 2k 'warna merdeka', 2005). Referring to the statement by Joffe (2008) that in creating a logo with a patriotism or political message, it is important to emphasize emotional aspect because it will have an effect to the belief and attitude of the viewer. In simple terms, a logo needs to be interpreted by the viewer. For example, the Independence Day logo for the following year (figure 1) gave various interpretation to the viewer without going into the rational and message behind it.

The logo contains the shape of hands praying (palm facing up) and three layers of hearts, represent the hope of the country so that all of the races in Malaysia will live in harmony, noble moral (spiritual) practicing courtesy and decency for the success of the country. White represents high moral (heart and soul), yellow represent respect and red represent courage striving towards the vision of the nation (76 > 2k 'warna merdeka', 2005). At a glance, the 1997 Independence logo (figure 1) can also be view as the cross section of the earth.

Thus, if the viewer did not read the description of the rational, it could lead to wrong interpretation as stated by Nee (2011) and Joffe (2008) previously. The situation is different compared to the 1990 and 1991 logo where they are easier to understand in interpret. In the year 1998, the Independence Day logo Pada tahun 1998, logo hari kebangsaan (figure 1) portray the aspiration and responsibility of the people building the nation towards excellence in every aspects of life which includes social, economy and politics. Three circles using the colour of Malaysian flag and 14 vertices star represents the Federal Territory and 13 states in Malaysia.

The blue circle (human like) is the people upholding the country's vision and sovereignty. White represents harmonious society while red reflects the cohesive effort of the government. Yellow represents the sovereignty of the nation (76 > 2k 'warna merdeka', 2005). Meanwhile, the 1999 Independence Day logo used a human like figure, which represent the unity of Malaysian's mind, upholding the intend and noble ambition of the country moving towards the new millennium, which will be more dynamic and challenging.

The cone shape (V) represents moving towards vision 2020. Red represents courage and self-confidence. Blue represents the united society forming the vision of the country. White represents purity of soul and the noble values of the citizen. Yellow represents the determination and togetherness of the people upholding the sovereignty of the nation (76 > 2k 'warna merdeka', 2005). The design of 1999 and 1999 Independence Day logos (figure 1) as shown above maintain the use of the same character and other elements such as shape and colour. The changes can be seen for the year 2000 onwards.

The logo with the theme 'keranamu Malaysia' (for you Malaysia) was used for six years in a row, making it the most used logo design for the Independence Day history (figure 1). This logo portray the gratitude of Malaysian people, which consist of various race, culture, tradition and political ideology of the blessings of peace, prosperity and the country's outstanding achievement.

The blue circle with a yellow crescent and 14 vertices star represent a country with 14 states where Islam is the official religion while other religion are free to be practiced and the people live in a peaceful, prosperous and united. Red, yellow and white forming a human object represent the three main races in Malaysia (Natives, Chinese, Indian) raising their hands together as a symbol of gratitude, the feeling of indebted and proud to experience the progress and prosperity in the blessed land named Malaysia. In addition, the people are determined to continue the excellence achievement in the future, represented by the hand holding forming the "V" shape, which stands for vision (76 > 2k 'warna merdeka', 2005).

Starting from the previous logo, which is the year 2000, the following Independence Day logo, which is the year 2007 (figure 1) have shown maturity in the design. The design of the logo was inspired by Jalur Gemilang (glorious stripe - nickname for Malaysian flag) fluttering, which is the Malaysian flag, the pride of the people. Fluttered Malaysian flag is the symbol of the people's love to the nation. The red and white stripe form the number five while the crescent and star form the number zero, representing the 50th anniversary of the Independence Day. The end of the number five is connected to the hibiscus stigma, the national flower of Malaysia. The stigma contains five dots, representing the five Rukun Negara, the practice of all Malaysian citizens.

The base shape of the logo is 'italic/slanted' to the right side. The shape is dynamic, representing the rapid progress achieved during the 50 years of independence. The circle also means that the people of Malaysia are united in achieving the progress and successes during the 50 years of independent (1Malaysia-Rakyat didahulukan pencapaian diutamakan, n.d.).

Next, just like the year 2007, the Independence Day logo design for the year 2008 (figure 1) is more focused the message is more clear with the theme attached to the logo. The shape of the logo was inspired by three human-like figures connected to each other, representing the solidarity in 'Perpaduan Teras Kejayaan' or 'Unity, Core of Success'.

Three human figures connected tied to each other, shoulder to shoulder, representing the people working together protecting the peace and developing the country. The three shoulder-to-shoulder human figures representing the various races in Malaysia, understanding each other, showing that unity is already achieved. Red is the symbol of courage. White is the symbol of loyalty of the Malaysian people. Blue represent the inter-race solidarity in Malaysia. Meanwhile, yellow represent constitutional monarchy system, lead by Yang di-Pertuan Agong. It also means prosperity /golden colour enjoyed by Malaysian people (1Malaysia-Rakyat didahulukan pencapaian diutamakan, n.d.).

Finally, the 1Malaysia logo was used with different themes each year until 2012. This showed that the 1Malaysia logo has its own strength semiotically, capable of educating the society the implied meaning of the 1Malaysia logo. This is precisely what Crow (2003) and Sebeok (2001) mentioned that logo and semiotic aspect are inter-related and important especially in capturing memories or event that can be recognized and remembered when the logo were presented in future. For example, the Independence Day celebration moment will be remembered by looking at the logos created for the event.

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