

THEMATIC ANIMAL POSTAGE STAMPS OF MALAYSIA: STUDY OF STATE NARRATIVES FROM THE COLONIALISM TO THE POST-COLONIALISM

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Abstract

This research explores the visual representation of animals in postage stamps issued in North Borneo, Sarawak, British Malaya and Malaysia from the 19th to the 20th century. Since postage stamps were an official product of the State, this research exemplifies the postage stamp as a part of the visual culture that facilitates different State narratives and reveals their contribution towards the formation of colonial or national identities. Furthermore, the study explores visual art from a sociocultural perspective, intending to augment its value as a piece of historical evidence. It shows the visual representations of postage stamps as a record of the civilising process by examining the changes in animal representation as it shifts from a kaleidoscope of exotic romanticism towards the righteous pride of animal protection in the postcolonial era. More than hundreds of thematic animal stamps that were issued in Malaysia were examined in order to identify the preferences influencing animal selection in both colonial and postcolonial era. Following that, background studies, theoretical analysis and visual methodologies form the main research approaches. This paper addresses the research gap that State narratives are disputable without any visual cultural element or ideological construct.

Keywords: Malaysia, postage stamps of animals, state narratives, colonial stamps, postcolonial stamps.

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

In this paper, the researcher studies thematic animal stamps from the 19th century to 1991ⁱ to examine the visual narratives envisioned by the State. This research study explores visual art from a sociocultural perspective. Besides, it demonstrates how the colonial or national identities were shaped by the States via the facilitation of visual representations, a series of official and unofficial narratives. The term “State” used in this research refers to the federal or political regimes who governed the lands and issued postage stamps during that era.

In contrast, the “postcolonial era” implies the period that existed after the end of the colonial rule in Malaysia. A postage stamp is a product of Malaysia’s governmental institution until December 31, 1991 (Vellu, 1993). Each piece consists of images that ought to represent the States, their territories or their nations. Despite serving as a pivotal means of delivery, the postage stamp is also a part of the ideological constructs of the State during the colonial to post-colonial eras.

Many scholars employed visual methodologies to study the national identities or State narratives via postage stamps. Kevane (2008) was one of the scholars who analysed the imageries on postage stamps in relation to the national narratives of Sudan and Burkina Faso. He evaluated the topics from different perspectives such as political, multi-ethnic, ideological and civil society aspects. On the other hand, Jack Child (2005) used the semiotic approach to explain the representation of collectively popular art in stamps in relation to the social identity constructs of Latin America. Raento and Brunn (2005) investigated more than thousand images of Finnish stamps issued between 1917 and 2000, in order to study the changes in the state’s focus from war to peace in continental Finland. Although researchers from different countries attributed the postage stamps to the formation of national identities, there is still a lack of analytical studies on the postage stamps for the regions of British Malaya, North Borneo, Sarawak as well as

Malaysia. Hence, this paper extended the topics of colonial and national representations in Malaysia's stamps by capturing the changes in thematic animal stamps that were published from the 19th century to 1991. Furthermore, despite being a favourite philatelic collection, there are very few analytical studies that focused on thematic animal stamps. Therefore, this paper attempts to contribute further understanding of the thematic animal stamps that were favoured by the States across eras.

Apart from that, there are scholars who attributed the stamps' design to the representations of colonial power or imperialism. Jeffery (2006) examined the production of Imperial Penny postage stamps as a working world system for consolidating the British Empire. He further exemplified his statement with the stamps of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Bahamas, and Jamaica. Lin (2017) studied and compared the affinities of definitive coconut stamps among different states of the world such as Zanzibar, Kenya, Cayman Island and Malay states. He discovered similar decorative patterns of definitive postage stamps during the British colonial era. In short, their arguments have mainly exemplified the influence of British imperial powers onto its territorial lands. Being one of the Commonwealth countries, Malaysia inevitably endures certain forms of colonial legacy in both colonial and postcolonial narratives. This paper also presents the postage stamps as a form of visual evidence that were used to propagate implicit colonial narratives.

Animal stamps are the study focus of this research. The presence of various animal species in postage stamps indicates that the State valued animals as the veritable natural representations across the eras. Moreover, animal metaphors are pervasive in the myths and legends of the local peoples since the early years. The nuances of animals' visual representation in postage stamps (official products) are culturally or socio-politically specific as they may reflect the clues of the civilising process of State Formation, through the ways of seeing or treating animals. Traïni (2016) used the representation of the animal world as the exemplary framework of the civilising process. He pointed out that animality is being denounced as the side contrary to civilized

humanity. As the result, the representation of animals changed from allegorical connotations to a radical dualism between man and animals, eventually linking to feelings of pride yet sympathy towards animal protection. Similarly, in *Why We Look at Animals*, Berger (1980) examines our relationship to animals through an ethical lens as well. He explained that looking at animals in the zoos who were trapped (framed) cage-to-cage, could be similar to contemplating paintings displayed in a gallery. The zoo is the artificial space of “study centre” to observe those “distant and wild” animals closely, separated by a cage barrier indicating the different spaces between human and animals. On the other hand, animal illustrations reproduced in postage stamps are another form of “human construction”, which virtually leads the viewer to see the animals as they ought to be.

Thematic Animal Stamps of Malaysia across the Eras

Since the postal system of Malaysia was brought in by the British governors during the colonial era, stamp designs in the early years were primarily controlled by the British administrators. The stamp production of Malaya, North Borneo, and Sarawak were dominated and supplied by Waterlow and Sons Ltd. as well as De La Rue & Co. Ltd, Blades, East and Blades, all London-based companies (Stanley Gibbons Publications Ltd., 1980). After the formation of Federated Malaya States, the postal institution was renamed to the Postal Services Department of the Federation of Malaya in 1948, and later become *Jabatan Perkhidmatan Pos* that was affiliated to the federal government of Malaysia.

Thematic animal stamps continued to be one of the more famous stamp issues, despite the reformation of a federal institution. Based on information collected in the 30th edition of *Standard Stamp Catalogue Book Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei* (Tan, 2016), there were more than 120 animal stamp designs issued in Malaysia, and approximately 80 species in total were presented and represented until the 1990s. Meanwhile, mammal species had the most significant number of varieties among the thematic animal stamps, where North Borneo (nowadays Sabah) States contributed the majority of the thematic animal stamps

during the colonial era. Moreover, certain animal species such as Felidae (tiger was the most nominated Felidae), primates (orangutan had the most nominations), hornbills (rhinoceros hornbill was the most nominated hornbill), and cows (buffalo had the highest dominations among cows) appeared more frequently as compared to the others. These species groups had at least two issues printed by both colonial and postcolonial States. The researcher suggests that these 80 animal species that were represented in these postage stamps had undergone a selection process out of 10 thousand fauna species in Malaysia. They were selected by the State (government) intentionally based on their potential qualitative meanings. These selected species are significant in some ways to represent the regions or “express” the state narratives across eras.

Animal Thematic Stamps as a part of the Colonial Narratives

Felidae species

Amongst all the animal stamps of Federated Malaya States, stamps featuring the tiger were highly favoured and its popularity as a subject goes back to the 19th century. In Figure 1, Felidae themed stamps are arranged accordingly to the timeline starting from 1891: tigers and clouded leopards were issued or reselected in the colonial era. Apart from its frequent issues, tiger also became critical plate stamps as its duty platesⁱⁱ were printed in different colours accordingly to different Malay Federated States such as Sungai Ujong, Perak, Selangor and Pahang (examples shown in Figure 2).



Figure 1. *Felidae* species from the colonial era



Figure 2. *Tiger* stamps seen in the different Malay States

The tiger's predominant appearance in stamp issues in the British Malaya States might exemplify that the tiger suggested a particular affinity with the lands of Malay Peninsula or more broadly the Malay Archipelago. In most colonial stamps, only the Sultan Highnesses were entitled to be featured in their respective Malay States. The tiger, however, straddled the boundaries of different Malay Sultanate monarchs and became the shared definitive stamps of Federated Malaya States (examples in Figure

2). Although buffalos and elephants appeared in the stamps of Malay Sultanate States, they were more likely to be depicted in a supporting role of men's activities. In the stamps showcased in Figure 3 and 4, elephants are a part of transportation's mean of royal members while the domesticated cows are ploughing the field with the farmer. On the other hand, tigers are endowed the leading role in different stamp issues. They have been showcased in both side views and close-up "portrait" views (Figure 2). On the top of "tiger portrait" stamps of 1895-99, a reverse crescent and star symbolise Islamic art decoration.



Figure 3. *Elephant stamp in the different Malay States, 1895-1922.*



Figure 4. *Cow stamp of Kedah States 1912.*

The relationship between the Malay Sultanate and the tiger might begin with reverence towards an anthropomorphic and supernatural shaman's myth, *Pak Belang* or Mr. Stripe (Yong, 1998, p. 22). The myths of were-tiger or *harimau jadian* are rife in Malay and *Orang Asli*'s folklores. Malays would not call *harimau* (tiger) its name in the forest. Instead, they addressed the tiger as *Pak Belang*, *Tuhan utan* (Lord of the Woods) or other similar synonyms (Sabri Zain, 2010). The mythological stories that were passed from generation to generation may conjure faith and belief regarding mythical tigers among the local residents. According to the publication of Sir Richard Olaf Winstedt,ⁱⁱⁱ the were-tigers did exist and disguised themselves as the "Malay magicians" who guard the princess of Ophir Mountain; its name is more commonly addressed as Mountain Ledang by the locals (Winstedt, 1982). In

other words, the tiger was most frequently selected in Peninsula's postage stamps, possibly because of its typical role or "signifier" among the different Malay Sultanate States that recalled and united the collective belief of were-tiger as the Malay guardian. In some senses, these "well-known" and circulated mythologies attributed the tiger with spiritual representations that safeguarded and empowered the States' government.

Apart from being an iconic species in the Malay world, the tiger was one of the representations of more significant Asiatic lands. According to the Descriptive Dictionary of British Malaya in 1894, tiger (*Felis Tigris*) is defined as a "dangerous animal that frequents in the Peninsula and is occasionally found in Singapore, Malacca and Province Wellesley. The tiger of the Malayan nations is the same as that of India" (Dennys, 1894). The first sentence in this definition emphasizes the prominence of the tiger in Malay (Peninsula) lands. It is threatening but undisputedly the most robust species that ought to represent Malay lands on the stamps. Based on the second sentence, it is suggestive that tiger was perhaps, the most magnificent animal species in Malay lands which was once revered as the "Lord of the Woods" by the Malays.

Nevertheless, similar tiger species (regarded as the same species by the Colonial State) were roaming freely in India as well. As the definition of "tiger" in the Dictionary of British Malaya is revisited, it reflects a two-level dualism in its statement about the tiger. Firstly, it pinpoints the dualism between man and nature, where the tiger was the antagonist species that threatened humans but not vice versa. Secondly, it shows the duality on how we (humans) looked at animals. The Malayan tiger is the same as the Indian tiger because each tiger was the Tiger; they were here and there (Berger, 1980). Each tiger is the same dangerous Tiger, as they all belong to the Other's wild lands. In previous paragraphs, we learnt that the tiger was a prominent figure in the Malay culture and its many selections for the stamps is not merely a coincidence. The tiger was selected and reselected. Its presence was likely to have been favoured by the Malay royal or elites; these selections were "approved" by the colonial officers as well since they acted as the sultan's advisors during the colonial era. Therefore, a tiger might be selected due to its proximity to Malay culture and it was

the most influential regional representation. However, from a broader colonial viewpoint, the Malay Peninsula or the Malay Archipelago was regarded as a part of Asia and the tiger is one of the great Asiatic or Oriental representations in the colonial lens.

During the colonial era, the illustrative tiger details in postage stamps reflected particular Oriental narratives, where tiger belongs to the species of Other lands. Further evaluating the depiction of tigers in the colonial stamps (Figure 1 and 2), the researcher identifies similarities in the way of delineations; the tiger is growling fiercely and he pounces out from bushes, indicating the action of a sneak attack. Unlike the lion's posture in the British stamps of the Postal Union (Figure 5), a strong physical appearance with a muscular body to imply solidity as it stands still and roars, as a sign to scares the intruders away from encroaching its family pride as well as warns its pride of the potential danger (National Geographic, 2015). Although both lions and tigers are considered as harmful predators in the Felidae family group, the first animal is imbued with a positive spirit of strong protector. At the same time, the latter is portrayed as a sneak attacker under the colonial lens. During the colonial era, certain official representations have suggested a distinction between East and West, where the East or Orient was stereotyped as wild and inferior lands. Comparing the depictions of the British lion and British Malayan tiger on postage stamps, the researcher observes an explicit dichotomy on the representations of these big felines, to which the tiger's wild, vicious facet was highlighted in official publications while the lion upheld an ideal imperial image.



Figure 5. *Lion depiction in the British stamps of Postal Union Congress 1929.*

In some sense, these tiger depictions matched the description in Western novels as the tiger is a notorious “stalk and ambush” predator (Boomgard, 2001, p.26). Mary Bradley, who joined the big game hunting, described the tiger, “nothing was ever so beautiful and glorious to me as that tiger walking out of his jungle. He was everything that was wild and savage, lordly and sinister” (Boomgard, 2001, p.1). From the Western point of view, the tiger is constructed to be a game killer, cattle-slayer, and the most threatening man-eater (Boomgard, 2001, p.61).

Regardless of the novel and literature depiction, the colonial administrators in 1880s did publish an annual statistic reporting the numbers of people killed by tigers and leopards in India, Sumatra and Java to showcase the danger of this representative species in the land of Asia (Boomgard, 2001, p.61). Trophies and rewards of around \$100 were awarded for each tiger hunted (*The Straits Times*, 1920). Hence, in combination with the tiger illustrations on stamps and other relative publications, one can observe that the representative animals of the Orient such as tigers were publicly denounced. It provided a rational reason for Western colonialism or intervention to “rescue” and “civilise” the peoples in the East (Said, 1978). Wild animals were directly connected to the repulsive bestiality, that existed in opposition to the perception of “civilised humanity” (Traïni, 2016). In other

words, tigers were being tagged or labelled as dangerous species in the colonial narratives, possibly to rationalise the massive numbers of tiger hunting or execution.

Thematic Animal Stamps of North Borneo

In early cartographic designs, intriguing animal or beast figures were often featured in navigation maps with the purpose of enhancing its attractiveness and marketability (Reinhartz, 2012). Similarly, the introduction of thematic animal stamps during the Western expansion might have served the purpose of attracting the buyers' attention too. Moreover, the postage stamp is a form of official dissemination. Compared to other themes, the State issued more authentic animal thematic stamps in North Borneo. In the following section, the researcher examines the representations of different animals in North Borneo postage stamps as they might implicitly affect the constructed images of Bornean land.

Firstly, the selection of species on North Borneo stamps consisted of mostly giant wildlife species. In the mammal category, the selected species were the more significant mammal representatives such as elephants, Malayan tapir, rhinoceros, cow, orangutan, proboscis, wild boar and clouded leopard (biggest Felidae in Borneo). Besides that, other intriguing big mammals included the sambar deer and bears, as well as the dangerous giant reptile representative, a crocodile, in postage stamps since 1894. Apart from that, more prominent bird species were featured on colonial stamps, such as "cassowary", Great Argus Pheasant, Rhinoceros Hornbill and most likely a Palm cockatoo. These selected animals are not only larger compared to other species in the same family; they were all wild animals as well. In some sense, these dangerous, vicious or species with more significance in size were selected and represented in postage stamps, thus visually constructing the stereotype for North Borneo as a land filled with wildness, where only the labelled gigantic and exotic species were presented in the official dissemination. Moreover, the background depiction in these animal stamps delineated an unexplored natural land with mountains, jungles and rivers in the distant view. The animals' size appeared further enlarged due to the background

setting of the broad wild lands that coincidentally took place in different postage stamps.



Figure 6. *Stamps of North Borneo (elephant) 1909-1931.*



Figure 7. *Stamp of North Borneo (crocodile) 1894-1902.*



Figure 8. *Stamp of North Borneo (rhinoceros) 1909.*



Figure 9. *Stamp of North Borneo (Orangutan / chimpanzee) 1897-1902.*



Figure 10. *Stamp of North Borneo (wild boar) 1909-1922.*



Figure 11. *Stamps of North Borneo (Sambar deer) 1909-1931.*



Figure 12. Stamp of North Borneo (tapir) 1909-1922.



Figure 13. Stamp of North Borneo (bear) 1897-1902.



Figure 14. Stamp of North Borneo (proboscis) 1939.

Apart from the selection of larger animal species, the animal representations in the early colonial postage stamps were exaggerated and deviated from reality. Nevertheless, shading depiction or chiaroscuro has inlaid life-like details in the subject matters and enhanced the value of naturalism in the composition of three-dimensional forms, even though these animal illustrations were distorted from the original species or merely an imagined mixed-breed existence.



Figure 15. Zoom in to Figure 8 (rhinoceros).



Figure 16. Zoom in to Figure 6 (elephant).

For example, based on the illustrations of the rhinoceros and elephant in the stamps of North Borneo, the way of representation reflects an exaggerated or enlarged species. The illustrated rhino

species in North Borneo stamp 1909 (Figure 8 and Figure 15) has longer legs and protruding facial features especially its front horn than the true species, likewise the white or black rhinoceros in Africa. It was heightened as its two front legs stood at a higher level to make it look more gigantic from this perspective. The portrayal of a subject matter from a low angle can make seem it bigger than it really is. Meanwhile, an adult native standing right next to the elephant in the postage stamp of Figure 6 (zoom in at Figure 16) further juxtaposes their body sizes. The native’s height approached only the elephant’s leg, giving an impression of the massive size of this species. In real life, the Bornean rhinoceros (also known as the Sumatran rhinoceros), Borneo’s pygmy elephant, and the Bornean sun bear are smaller in body size due to the rugged and mountainous terrain geographical feature of Borneo Island. Therefore, different angles of animal depictions may evoke different perceptions among audiences who see or judge these animal species. Hence, these official publication’s depictions were not reflective of the mimesis truth of the other lands. Still, different representations of the subject matter discussed might construct a new meaning or shape particular facets regarding the other land and its species.



Figure 17. *Stamps of North Borneo (Cassowary) 1909-1922.*

Animal thematic postage stamps demonstrate animals as the observed subject as they are envisioned and represented from the colonial lens. Apart from large clouded leopards (Figure 1) and bizarre orangutans (Figure 9), similar exaggerated featuring was also applied to sun bears and “cassowary” birds to evoke the signals of wild and dangerous. Interestingly, the cassowary species presented in the stamps (Figure 17) does not exist in the jungles of Borneo or Malaya; instead, it is native to the tropical forests of New Guinea. Based on the *Stamp & Coin Mart magazine*, “The British North Borneo Company who administered the territory explained that a mix-up occurred with artwork belonging to the natural history set they issued that year...”. They provided the wrong species of cassowary to the Waterlow & Sons printing company. It might be confused with the species of megapode, a smaller species bird (Stamp and Coin Mart Magazine, 2017). As the illustrator or engraver had seen neither cassowary nor megapode before, the so-called cassowary’s head was erroneously matched with the ostrich. The resulting illustration represented an imagined mixed-breed of ostrich (the most prominent bird species) and cassowary (the fiercest bird species). Hence, this observation suggests that the North Borneo Chartered Company or British officers in London preferred wild animals or wildly exaggerated species to be represented in the stamps of 19th to early 20th century. Ironically, the depiction of animals on these official representations was relatively loose in terms of accuracy or precision. These animal illustrations might be naturalistic and have narrative realism in term of depictions, but they are not real. Hence, this indicates that animals in the colonial stamps were considered to be a part of orientalism.

In the stamps, the animals were wild and roamed freely; a crocodile with mouth open awaiting at the wet swamp, rhinoceros, elephants, wild boars and sambar deer at the lowlands while giant bears, clouded leopards, and orangutans swung from the jungle trees. The boar hopping out from a bush in the postage stamps (Figure 10) seemingly delineated the life and vitality of species in the jungles. The Other lands were full of danger and mystery, yet they were proliferated with natural resources that best represented

exotic romanticism (Said, 1978). Postage stamps that had vivid animal depictions had enhanced aesthetic value as well as increased attractiveness.

Moreover, the decorative art was an indispensable element of colonial animal stamps as they created the “picture frame” of scenography designs for Western spectators. Looking at the colonial animal thematic stamps, majority of the eclectic decorative art encompassed similar arch designs at their top. Examples of these designs can be seen in Figure 6 to 14. These arch designs resembled the representation of the proscenium arch in the ancient theatre space, which meant to provide a spectacular visual experience for the West. The proscenium metaphorically acted as the window that channelled Westerners to the distant lands of Oriental scene. Compared to the British royal portrait stamps in the colonial era, oval or other symmetrical cartouches were used instead of proscenium designs. The theatrical display is perhaps the ideal space for narrative of all kinds, in which the stage of European ritual performances or ceremonies of exercising power occurred simultaneously. In the previous examples of animal stamps, most of the central prosceniums were inscribed with the English title “State of North Borneo”, correspondingly leading the audience to link the display subjects to the State of North Borneo. In other words, their presentations expanded viewer horizons and enticed their curiosity to catch a glimpse of life in the distant other lands.

Animal Thematic Stamps as a Part of Postcolonial Narratives

Before the formation of Malaysia, the Malayan Tiger was undoubtedly the first animal to represent the Federation of Malaya. After the establishment of Malaysia, the animal species used in thematic stamps was more diversified with increased variety. The Postal Department proposed different issues of postage stamps before obtaining approval from the relevant Postcolonial State’s authorities (Sundararaj, 2016). In this section, the researcher studies the visual changes in the thematic animal stamps as one of the chosen symbolic products by the Malaya Federation or the Malaysia States. In most cases, the Postcolonial State introduced

thematic animal stamps in a series including special issues entitled “Protected (Wildlife) Series” and “National Series” thematic stamps which intended to group various different or similar species in one issue.

National Animal/ Wildlife Series

There are three stamp series issued with the theme of “National (Animal) Series” until 1991. The first issue is the *National Birds Series* in 1965 (2 years after Malaysia’s formation), followed by the *National Butterflies Series* in 1970 and *National Animals Series* in 1979.

Apart from reflecting the diversity of avifaunal species in Malaysia, the emergence of the *National Birds Series* in 1965 could be attributed to new postcolonial aspirations, namely harmony and inclusiveness regardless of geographical or racial differences. In the *National Birds Series*, the eight bird species shortlisted included Crested Wood Partridge, Blue-Backed Fairy Bluebird, Black-eyed Oriole, Zebra Dove, Great Argus Pheasant, Asiatic Paradise Flycatcher, Blue-tailed Pitta and Rhinoceros Hornbill (all shown in Figure 18). These eight bird species can be spotted in different regions of Malaysia and most of them are shared species between East and West Malaysia.^{iv} Although these eight bird species are categorized in different families, none of them are raptors (birds of prey). Most of them are wild but docile species that feed on fruits or small insects. Besides that, their Malay names were mentioned at the bottom part of the postage stamps, allowing the people of Malaysia to learn these different avifauna species. Since Malaysia was established based on its multiracial populations, the National Birds Series became the first representational national species after Malaysia’s formation as they might reflect certain narratives of togetherness for new nationhood. They were also less provocative than expressions of any regional or ethnical sentiments.



Figure 18. *National Birds Series in 1965.*

Similar with the *National Birds Series*, the researcher suggests that the stamp series of butterflies were entitled *National Butterflies Series* partly due to their sensation of harmony and variety in depiction that contributed a positive connotation to national narratives. Butterflies in the stamp series reflected the richness of biodiversity and the spirit of interdependence between different living species (flora and fauna). The *National Butterflies Series* significantly utilised the provided spaces to delineate the details of different butterfly species and detailed knowledge of lepidopterology. For instance, a caterpillar of the Great Mormons in the stamps of 75 cents (Figure 19) rests on the pomelo tree. In contrast, the caterpillar of Common Nawab crawls on the tree of Red Saga (*Adenanthera pavonina*).^v



Figure 19. *National Butterflies Series in 1970.*

Besides that, the *National Animals Series* introduced eight animals (Figure 20). These are Malayan Tiger (*Panthera Tigris*), cobego (*Cynocephalus variegatus*), mousedeer (*Tragulus javanicus*), pangolin (*Manis javanicus*), Leatherback Turtle (*Dermodochelys Coriaca*), tapir (*Tapirus mdicus*), gaur (*Bos gaurus*), and orangutan (*Pongo Pygmaeus*). The *National Animals Series* featured 5 terrestrial mammals, 2 arboreal mammals and 1 marine reptile to create a picture of biodiversity showcasing the great variety of animal species in Malaysia. The list included predators and preys, big and small terrestrial mammals, as well as large and small arboreal species.



Figure 20. *National Animal Series in 1979.*

To summarize the thematic stamps entitled “National Series”, the researcher suggests two possible national narratives. Firstly, the *National Birds Series* and *National Butterflies Series* that commonly share positive public connotations might imply certain communicative intents, which were to reconcile both intra-national and inter-national harmonies by avoiding any representation of confrontational or provocative subjects during the 1960s to early 1970s. Secondly, the selection of different animal species or subspecies in one issue (especially the *National Animals Series*) reflects the variety of biological diversity in Malaysia. According to Anderson (2003), a nation is an ‘imagined’ constituent that is constructed through a conceptual sense of belongingness to communities. The *National Animals Series* included a variety of animal species into the series instead of imposing solo sovereignty representation. Other than concocting positive connotations on the new nation forging within its peoples, the State was dedicated to presenting a global composure of diversity in the international platform via several channels of official disseminations.

Protected Animal/ Wildlife Series

After the *National Animals Series*, the Postal Department of Malaysia started to introduce the *Protected Animals / Wildlife of Malaysia* series in 1985. There were four collections in this series issued from 1985 to 1991. Based on the overview of animal selection, this series shortlists less menacing or smaller species to represent the wildlife of Malaysia. The series of “Protected Wildlife” may reflect the vulnerable facet of wildlife in order to highlight the Nation-State’s obligation to protect them.



Figure 20. *Protected Animals of Malaysia– Series I issued in 1985.*



Figure 21. *Protected Wildlife of Malaysia – Series IV issued in 1988.*

In Series I, three small mammals were introduced, namely the banded linsang (*Prionodon linsang*) and flying squirrel (*Petaurista elegans*), as well as a lower primate, slow loris (*Nycticebus coucang*) in 1985. All of them are nocturnal and arboreal species that were depicted in the setting of natural daylight. Even though the background setting might not reflect the species' environment in a real scene, depiction with natural lighting did unveil these mysterious nocturnal species to the eyes of the public. Over the following years, four subspecies of

pheasant (birds) were featured on the Series II. At the same time, Series III issued four smaller Felidae species, the Clouded Leopard, Leopard Cat, the Flat-Headed Cat, the Marbled Cat and the Golden Cat instead of the Malayan Tiger. It illuminated the different adaptations within the Felidae family as well as introduced them as fragile and endangered species to the point of extinction. Subsequently, Series IV featured four protected passerine birds. Apparently, in the context of new postcolonial identities and global environmental awareness, postage stamps from the *Protected Animal / Wildlife Series* emphasised the act of animal species protection, further rebranding the Nation-State's images by repudiating the association of hunting games which were significantly promoted in the previous colonial era.

Following that, *Protected Animal / Wildlife Series* may have adopted a narrative approach to raise awareness on the conservation of biodiversity. Even though the term “biodiversity” was coined from the concept of biological diversity around the late 1980s, the Malaysian government started to gazette national parks to reserve diversity of species and its habitats since 1965 (National Land Code, 1965). Apart from the Protection of Wildlife Act in 1972 and National Land Code 1965, the government also addressed the problems of the loss of natural habitats and environmental degradation as a result of massive economic development in the Third Malaysia Plan (1976-1980). Besides communicating with the public to raise awareness for endangered animal species, the series of *Protected Animal / Wildlife of Malaysia* and *National Animal Series* might confer an informal declaration of the State's authorial power towards the belongings of its lands. Moreover, displaying the animal species conservation efforts on the stamps revealed the State's overarching vision to construct itself as a new independent identity, who steadfastly opposed the previous colonial hunting games. Hence, the State laced the image of biodiversity to its national narratives.

This series of stamps reflects the narrative to emphasise the natural resources of Malaysia and animals as part of the most exceptional natural heritage and national patrimony. Even though several primary laws included the Protection of Wildlife Act (for Peninsular Malaysia), the Fauna Conservation Ordinance (Sabah),

and the Wildlife Protection Ordinance (Sarawak) enforced to protect the wildlife, laws alone do not guarantee the survival of endangered species. Law enforcement should be engaged with educating the general public regarding the values of nature and the importance of natural conservation efforts.

Marine Life Series

Marine life species were not commonly featured in the colonial postage stamps of the past, especially for British Malaya. This situation might be because the marine life species had comparatively minimal representational value on colonial or imperial narratives. Due to the wide distribution of birds (in the sky) and marine life (in the sea), these species were unlikely to be portrayed in the belongings of other Lands. During the postcolonial era, the newly formed State extended its horizon to marine life through the *Fresh Water Fishes Series 1983* (Figure 26). Other than educating the public regarding marine or fish species, these series recorded the tertiary sector of the economy that was highly promoted by the State during the 1980s.



Figure 22. *Marine Life Series I*: Miniature sheet.



Figure 23. *Marine Life Series I* in 1988.



Figure 24. *Marine Life Series II* issued in 1989.



Figure 25. *Fresh Water Fishes Series* 1983.

The introduction of *Marine Life Series I* to *III* stamp series are mostly pertinent to the accentuation of the “Law of the Sea Convention 1982”, in conjunction with the inauguration of “The Exclusive Economic Act 1984 (EEZ)”. The implementation of EEZ sets out an exclusive economic zone as the area beyond and adjacent to the territorial sea extending to two hundred nautical miles measured from the baselines where Malaysia has sole exploitation rights over all its natural resources within the coverage (Sativale Mathew Arun Advocates & Solicitors, n.d.). In this EEZ area, Malaysia exercises sovereign rights for exploring as well as

conserving and managing the natural resources of the seabed, the subsoil and the superjacent waters (Sativale Mathew Arun Advocates & Solicitors, n.d.).

Malaysia is mainly surrounded by the sea, making it a blessed nation with diverse underwater species within its coastal EEZ. The readers can catch a glimpse of the dynamic underwater world in the miniature sheet issued with the *Marine Life Series I – 1988* (Figure 22). The whole miniature sheet depicted the magnificent platform reefs, pools of fishes, seaweeds and corals, all of which portray the ideal spot for snorkelling or scuba diving. At the same time, the \$1.00 postage stamp captured a Ringed Angelfish (*Pomacanthus annularis*). Apart from proclaiming the State's sovereignty over the coastline, the "Marine Life Series" also highlighted the variety of marine species, building up the image of a tourism-friendly nation.

Conclusion

In this study, the illustrated animals in the colonial animal stamps were scrutinised and several unusual visual representations accordingly identified. For instance, the thematic animal stamps of North Borneo were exaggeratedly depicted and deviated from the real scene. The researcher thus compared these depictions with other colonial visual elements and written literatures or novels and found them to adhere to the stereotype of the wild and oriental lands. This study reveals that visual elements play a crucial role in propagating colonial narratives. Colonial narratives generate a dichotomous view of the world where tropical lands (East) are stereotyped as wild and dangerous.

Conversely, in postcolonial animal stamps, the different preferences of presenting animals in a series revealed the concept of inclusiveness and harmony in the postcolonial or national narratives that are in contrast with previous colonial narratives. The visual representation in postcolonial animal stamps significantly demonstrates the biodiversity of Malaysia, reflects the pride of richness in natural resources and animal species ought to be a part of the national patrimony in terms of cultural lineage.

With this, the National Animals Series and Protected Wildlife species overtly raised the awareness of wildlife protection or conservation. Other than reflecting on the diversity of avifaunal species in Malaysia, the emergence of different bird species in postcolonial stamps might be attributed to their symbolic meanings attached to new postcolonial aspirations, such as harmony and inclusiveness regardless of geographical or racial differences. In short, this research traces the civilising process along with the State narratives by examining the visual representation in thematic animal stamps across the eras.

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¹ After the corporatisation of Pos Malaysia at the end of 1991, the researcher found an increase in the number of animal stamps. There was a paradigm shift in animal selection as a wide range of exotic or domestic animals found in different

countries were featured in stamps in order to cover the philatelic interests of different buyers. However, as a result of very little restriction from the Federal State, certain controversies surrounding animal selection occurred in those years. The cases include the accusation of design plagiarism by a Filipino wildlife photographer and the protests against promoting exotic animals as food and pets by *Sahabat Alam Malaysia*. For more information, please refer to <https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/letters/2019/03/466643/exotic-animal-stamps-will-doom-them> and <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2013/11/07/designers-pos-malaysia-bird-stamps-are-only-drafts>.

ⁱⁱ Key plate and duty plate stamps were made when the printing process splits into two. First, the key plate (or head plate) is used for the bulk of the design. This is followed by a separate duty plate for the name of the colony and the value. Hence, the tiger became the most frequent featuring species on stamps since each Federated Malay State shared similar designs.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sir Richard Olaf Winstedt (1878-1966) was a former British colonial administrator in several Federated Malay States. He used to be the district officer of Kuala Pilah and became the director of education in 1924. His scholarly works included Malay lexicography, folklore as well as history of Malaya. His biography can be retrieved from http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1629_2010-01-30.html.

^{iv} This is based on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species official website. For more information, please refer to <https://www.iucnredlist.org>.

^v The information of butterflies and their host plants are provided by ButterflyCircle. For more information, please read the official ButterflyCircle website at <http://www.butterflycircle.com/content.php?s=b5141f03eae702c6c0e328dd8bdf1cac> and their informative blog page at <http://butterflycircle.blogspot.com/>.