

# The Representation of Female Figures Illustrations in Eid Al-Fitr Money Packet in Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the representation of female figures in the illustration of Eid Al-Fitr money packets (duit raya money packets) in Malaysia, with a focus on visual expression, cultural symbolism, and gendered narratives embedded within the designs. While traditionally functioning as festive envelopes for monetary gifting, Eid Al-Fitr money packets also serve as visual artifacts that reflect prevailing social values and ideological shifts. Through a qualitative methodology combining visual content analysis and semiotic analysis, this research examines selected Eid Al-Fitr money packets produced in Malaysia over the past decade. Particular attention is given to the portrayal of femininity through visual cues such as attire, posture, facial expressions and contextual environments. The findings reveal an observable transition from conventional and conservative depictions often characterized by traditional clothing and domestic settings to more diverse, modern, and empowered representations of women. This shift suggests a reconfiguration of gender norms and cultural expectations within the context of contemporary Malaysian society. The study argues that the evolution of Eid Al-Fitr money packets illustrations not only reflect changing aesthetic trends but also functions as a visual commentary on broader societal transformations concerning gender roles. Ultimately, the paper positions Eid Al-Fitr money packets design as a culturally significant medium through which gendered identities are communicated, negotiated and reimagined.*

**Keywords:** Eid Al-Fitr Money Packet, Malaysian Culture, Female Figure, Illustration, Gender Representation

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In Malaysian culture, Eid Al-Fitr is celebrated with vibrant customs, including the tradition of giving "duit raya" (Eid Al-Fitr money) in beautifully designed packets. While much attention has been given to the tradition itself, less scholarly focus has been placed on the artistic and symbolic elements embedded in these packets, particularly the depiction of women. As visual objects distributed across ethnic and age groups, Eid al-Fitr money packets present a unique lens through which cultural attitudes and gender norms can be examined. This paper aims to investigate how female figures are

illustrated in Eid al-Fitr money packets in Malaysia and what these representations reveal about societal perceptions of women.

## 2 MONEY PACKETS

Money packets are a common symbol during Eid al-Fitr for Muslims in Malaysia. Besides celebrating the Eid al-Fitr festive season, “duit raya” is also a token given to children and the elderly. During this festival, many companies, regardless of their business type, will have their own signature Eid al-Fitr money packets as a symbol of appreciation to customers for their support. In Malaysia, empty Eid al-Fitr money packets are usually given when someone purchases a product from any brand.

### 2.1 Illustration Elements and Female Figures in Eid Money Packets

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the popularity of illustrated Eid al-Fitr money packets has increased significantly, with a noticeable shift from traditional ornamental designs to more vibrant, character-based illustrations that appeal particularly to younger audiences. This trend is evident in the growing diversity of designs found in retail outlets and online marketplaces in Malaysia, reflecting broader changes in consumer preferences and festive visual culture (The Star, 2022; Shopee Malaysia, 2023).

A notable feature of these illustrations is the frequent depiction of female figures that emphasize cultural and religious values, particularly modesty. Women are often illustrated wearing traditional attire such as the *Baju Kurung* or *Baju Kebaya*, garments that cover most of the body and are considered appropriate within both Malay cultural norms and Islamic principles (Karim, 1992). Additionally, the inclusion of headscarves or *tudung* in many of these designs aligns with the widespread social expectation of modest dressing among Muslim women in Malaysia (Halim, 2011). The overall artistic style tends to be colourful, playful, and family-friendly, often incorporating cartoon-like aesthetics, with themes that range from traditional Islamic motifs to contemporary festive scenes. These evolving design trends suggest a hybridization of cultural expression, where religious values, national identity, and commercial creativity intersect within the medium of festive packaging.

Female figures depicted on Eid Al-Fitr money packets are often portrayed with warm smiles and engaged in festive activities such as exchanging greetings or giving and receiving money packets, emphasizing themes of joy, familial connection, and celebration commonly associated with Eid al-Fitr. These representations frequently reinforce traditional gender roles by portraying women in nurturing or supportive capacities such as mothers, sisters, or grandmothers which reflects broader cultural narratives that position women primarily within the domestic and familial sphere (Kandiyoti, 1988; Mohd Yusof et al., 2014).

Additionally, such imagery occasionally includes scenes of women cooking or serving food, further reinforcing traditional expectations of women's responsibilities during festive occasions in Malaysia. These visual representations align with portrayals found in other media forms, such as television advertisements, which similarly emphasize women's roles in sustaining familial and cultural traditions (Lazar, 2006). Motion graphic principles such as anticipation, secondary animation, easing, and mass & weight were identified as critical tools in enhancing visual appeal and user engagement in augmented reality applications (Syed Rizakri et al., 2024).

In recent years, Eid al-Fitr money packet designs in Malaysia have increasingly embraced more diverse portrayals of women, reflecting evolving societal perceptions of gender and cultural identity. These packets now often depict women in professional and communal roles—such as teachers, business professionals, and festive hosts—moving beyond traditional domestic representations. The illustrations have expanded to include women in various ethnic attire: *baju kurung* and hijab for

Malay women, *cheongsam* for Chinese women, and *saree* for Indian women, demonstrating an intention to represent the nation's multicultural fabric (Wahab, Che Din, & Abu Sujak, 2024; Siek, 2021). This trend mirrors Malaysia's broader design movement aiming to promote social cohesion through inclusive visual symbolism, as festive packaging becomes a medium for reinforcing plural cultural narratives (Ling, 2021; Ismail et al., 2021). Visual materials from online retailers and design platforms corroborate these observations, showcasing colourful, character-driven illustrations that celebrate diversity and evolving gender roles.

Eid al-Fitr money packets frequently serve as innovative branding tools, and as such, the portrayal of female figures is often informed by commercial strategy. Brands such as Bata Malaysia and Shell Malaysia collaborate with artists to create stylized, contemporary illustrations that align with their corporate identity and appeal to target demographics; for example, Bata's Raya packets featured women exchanging greetings amid batik motifs, reinforcing the brand's values of warmth and togetherness (Hasnabi, 2025). Moreover, Shell Malaysia's festive packets depict female figures within lively, traditional townscapes demonstrating how brands leverage cultural storytelling while promoting product association (GrowthOps, 2025). Through this convergence of cultural, religious and commercial elements, Malaysian Eid al-Fitr packet imagery provides a nuanced reflection of the nation's evolving social dynamics and consumer culture.

Despite the growing scholarly interest in Islamic visual culture and gender representation, there remains limited academic attention on the visual portrayal of female figures in everyday festive artifacts such as Eid al-Fitr money packets (commonly known as *sampul duit raya*) in Malaysia. While money packets are widely distributed during festive seasons and serve as significant cultural symbols, their visual content particularly the gendered imagery they project has not been systematically examined.

Previous studies have primarily focused on broader themes such as Islamic art, advertising, and consumer culture in Malaysia. However, the nuanced representation of women in religious and cultural materials remains underexplored, especially in media that are informal yet widely circulated like festive envelopes. The few existing visual or semiotic studies often concentrate on male figures, children, or generic festive motifs, with female representations either underrepresented or depicted through a narrow lens emphasizing modesty, domesticity, or traditional roles.

Moreover, the shift in societal values, gender roles, and visual aesthetics especially in response to modernity, urbanization, and Islamic revivalism raises questions about how female figures are evolving in such visual media. This study addresses this gap by analysing the symbolic, cultural, and gendered dimensions of female figure illustrations in Eid al-Fitr money packets, offering a fresh perspective on how visual culture both reflects and shapes gender norms in contemporary Malaysian society.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

This research aims to analyze the ideological representation of women reflected in Eid money packet designs across different time periods to reveal underlying gender stereotypes and the positioning of females.



A purposive sampling method was used to select a range of *duit raya* (Eid al-Fitr money) packet designs produced in Malaysia during Hari Raya Aidilfitri, sourced from design platforms such as Behance, commercial brand releases and design publications. The selection focused on packets that feature human figures, especially women to enable a detailed analysis of gender representation. Purposive sampling was used designs featuring human figures, with a specific emphasis on female representations to explore how gender is visually constructed in the Malaysian context (Palinkas et al., 2015).


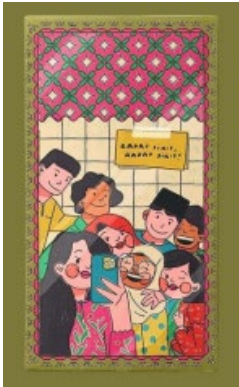
The analysis proceeded in two stages. First, a denotative (literal) description of each packet was conducted. This included documenting visual elements such as:



- **Attire** (e.g., baju kurung, hijab)
- **Posture** (e.g., standing, sitting, active gestures)
- **Facial expressions** (e.g., smiling, demure)

In the second stage, a connotative analysis was conducted to interpret the deeper cultural, social, and ideological meanings embedded within the visual representations of women in the selected Eid al-Fitr money packet designs. This stage moved beyond the literal description of attire, posture, and facial expressions to explore how these elements function as signs that reflect and reinforce dominant gender norms and values in Malaysian society. For instance, a woman wearing a headscarf may symbolize modesty, religiosity, and adherence to traditional Islamic values (Karim, 1992; Othman, 2006), while a smiling or demure facial expression might connote politeness, obedience, or femininity as culturally defined traits (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Conversely, portrayals of women in modern attire or active poses may suggest evolving identities, empowerment, and a shift towards more egalitarian gender roles (Mazlan & Karim, 2018). Guided by a social semiotic framework, this stage aimed to uncover how visual cues are socially constructed and ideologically charged, shaping public perceptions of femininity across time and context (Leeuwen, 2005; Machin, 2013).

### 3.1 Sample Analysis

No.	Collection	Attire	Posture	Facial Expressions	Keywords
1.		The female figures are depicted in traditional Malaysian attire, likely representing ethnic clothing styles such as <i>Baju Kurung</i> or <i>Kebaya</i> , complete with headscarves ( <i>tudung</i> ). The choice of attire signifies modesty, cultural identity, and religious values associated with Malaysian Muslim femininity. The use of bold colours and simplified design further emphasizes the attire as a central cultural signifier.	The women are standing upright with symmetrical, composed body language. Their arms are relaxed and close to the body, and there is no exaggerated movement or gesture.	The facial expressions are minimalistic simple, straight-faced, and lacking strong emotion. There are no smiles or expressive features, in line with the stylized and symbolic nature of the illustration.	Modesty, Femininity rooted, Decorum, Stability, Respectability, Emotional restraint
2.		The female figures are dressed in colourful, modernized traditional clothing such as <i>Baju</i>	The women (and girls) are shown in dynamic, interactive postures:	The expressions are overtly joyful and animated. Female figures are smiling,	Empowerment, Confidence, Emotional presence, Humanized, Contemporary,

		<i>Kurung</i> or <i>Baju Kebaya</i> but with looser visual rules than in classical representations. Some are without headscarves, while others may wear them. The clothing appears festive, casual, and playful, with vibrant patterns and colours.	eating, laughing, playing with cats, holding drinks, and socializing with family. The body language is expressive and open, with wide arm movements and joyful gestures.	laughing, and visibly engaged in the festive atmosphere. This is a stark contrast to the formal and neutral expressions seen in the earlier, more traditional packet design.	Liveliness, Togetherness
3.		The female figures are all dressed in matching green traditional attire, including headscarves ( <i>tudung</i> ) and long dresses. Their modest clothing aligns with conventional Malay-Muslim representations of women, particularly in formal or religious contexts	All figures are standing in a static, front-facing pose, grouped closely together to convey family unity. The posture is upright and symmetrical, contributing to a sense of order, formality, and respect.	The female figures are smiling gently, with identical facial features stylized in a cute, cartoon-like manner. Their expressions are warm and welcoming but emotionally restrained.	Formality, Respect, Conventional roles, Collective identity, Cultural respectability, Happiness, Contentment, Familial Warmth
4.		The characters in the illustration are dressed in traditional Southeast Asian clothing, commonly worn during cultural and religious celebrations. The women are depicted wearing garments such as the <i>baju kurung</i> and <i>baju kebaya</i> , which are closely associated with Malay heritage. Some of the female characters also wear the <i>tudung</i> , a headscarf that symbolizes modesty and reflects Islamic cultural values. The bright colours and intricate patterns on their	The posture of the individuals reflects unity and closeness. Everyone leans toward the center to fit into a group selfie, creating a sense of togetherness. Their physical proximity symbolizes strong emotional bonds, highlighting the value of family and social connection. The spontaneous, cheerful arrangement suggests a candid, joyful moment typical of real-life festive	The women in the illustration show cheerful and expressive faces, with bright eyes and wide smiles that reflect happiness and connection. One woman leads the moment by taking a selfie, capturing the joy of the gathering. Their facial expressions highlight warmth, enthusiasm, and their important role in bringing energy and unity to family and festive occasions.	Affection, Closeness, Happiness, Laughter, Warmth, Expressive faces, Cultural representation, Diversity

		clothing indicate a joyful atmosphere, suggesting that the scene represents a family gathering or a festive event such as Eid ( <i>Hari Raya</i> ).	gatherings where people naturally come together to celebrate and capture shared memories.		
5.		<p>The women wear traditional Southeast Asian garments like <i>baju kurung</i> and <i>baju kebaya</i>, reflecting Malay and Indonesian heritage. Many also wear the <i>tudung</i> (headscarves), symbolizing modesty and Islamic identity. Their colorful, patterned attire adds vibrancy and elegance, highlighting their central role in cultural celebrations. The men, in simpler festive wear, complement the women's vivid presence and traditional grace.</p>	<p>The women in the illustration take central roles, leaning in confidently and engaging warmly with others. One woman leads by taking a group selfie, capturing the joyful moment. Their posture reflects openness, unity, and celebration. Surrounded by smiling faces and relaxed stances, their presence highlights the importance of women in creating a lively, connected, and festive atmosphere.</p>	<p>The women's facial expressions radiate joy and warmth, with bright smiles, rosy cheeks, and cheerful eyes. One confidently leads by taking a selfie, capturing the happy moment. Their expressive faces reflect excitement, pride, and emotional connection. Alongside others, their joy enhances the festive mood, highlighting women's vital role in creating a sense of togetherness and celebration.</p>	<p>Multigenerational, Social harmony, Identity and belonging, Interpersonal connection, Community spirit, Social engagement</p>
6.		<p>The character on the envelope is dressed in modest clothing, which is a common practice during Eid. The outfit consists of a long-sleeved top and head covering, reflecting cultural values of modesty and respect during religious celebrations. Though stylized simply, the clothing represents festive yet respectful dress worn during Hari Raya Aidilfitri or Eid al-Fitr, a time</p>	<p>The female character stands calmly, facing forward with a sparkler in hand a symbol of festivity and celebration. Her gentle, confident posture reflects warmth, joy, and hospitality. Surrounded by lanterns and traditional food, she represents the spirit of Eid, highlighting women's role in creating a</p>	<p>The facial expression is simple yet cheerful, with a gentle smile and relaxed features. The character's expression conveys contentment and friendliness, reinforcing the warm greetings associated with "Eid Mubarak." This shows how non-verbal visual elements can effectively communicate</p>	<p>Gendered clothing norms, Ritual dress and identity, Intersection of faith and fashion, Cultural semiotics</p>

		when Muslims wear their best clothes to attend prayers, visit relatives and give out gives out gifts.	welcoming, festive, and culturally rich environment.	emotional warmth and cultural significance in illustrations.	
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## 4 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 4.1 Representation of Women in Design

Scholars have long studied the role of media and art in shaping and reflecting gender roles. Anuar (n.d.) examined Malaysian women illustrators, highlighting their unique challenges and contributions to the local visual arts scene. Hairul Anuar (n.d.) assessed how modernization and tradition intersect in Malaysian festive advertisements, such as those by Petronas, often blending nostalgic cultural imagery with contemporary messages. Studies such as *The Image of Malay Women in the Media* (Zaharom et al., n.d.) and *The Construction of Beauty in Malay Magazine Advertisements* (Noor & Mastura, n.d.) reveal that media representations of women typically align with conventional ideals of beauty and femininity. These representations reinforce stereotypical gender norms while also serving as markers of cultural authenticity. Nasruddin et al. (2024) further explored how traditional motifs are emphasized in festive designs, such as *duit raya* envelopes issued by Malaysian banks. However, the inclusion and portrayal of female figures in *duit raya* packaging remain under-explored and present an opportunity for further gender-based semiotic analysis.

This research employs a purposive sampling strategy to examine the representation of women in Eid al-Fitr money packet designs in Malaysia. The selected samples span different time periods, allowing for an exploration of the relationship between evolving socio-cultural contexts and gendered stereotypes. Eid al-Fitr money packet designs are treated as cultural texts composed of visual and symbolic signs that reflect ideologies or myths. These signs are analysed both individually and collectively to uncover embedded gender norms. Semiotic analysis, particularly informed by social semiotics, is employed to interpret how visual elements on the packets signify broader ideological constructs. This method allows for a nuanced reading of how patriarchal ideologies are visually encoded and perpetuated through everyday objects. As Piliang (2004) argues, meaning in visual media is constructed through ideological sign systems; thus, semiotic analysis inevitably engages with underlying ideological structures.

### 4.2 Semiotic Analysis in Design

Semiotic analysis is a qualitative-interpretative method that focuses on texts as signs and as objects of research, as well as on the role of the researcher in interpreting and understanding the codes embedded in those signs and texts. Textual analysis, closely related, operates on two analytical levels: the examination of individual signs and the analysis of signs as part of a group or in combination (i.e., texts). In simple terms, a text is a combination of signs organized along a paradigmatic axis (selection) and a syntagmatic axis (combination). A fundamental principle in text analysis is polysemy the idea that signs can have multiple meanings. The connotative meaning of a sign is always tied to cultural codes, social meanings, emotions, attitudes, and values. Texts, composed of syntagmatic arrangements of signs, produce specific connotations through socially constructed codes, which can be interpreted differently by readers depending on factors such as social class, gender, race, and age. When a connotation becomes widely accepted within a society, it transforms into denotation a meaning perceived as objective or "correct" by most readers. This denotative meaning often forms part of a cultural myth, which can be understood as an ideological construct. Although originating as a



connotation, the myth becomes naturalized through social acceptance, thus functioning as denotative ideology (Piliang, 2004).

Research examining culturally specific packaging underscores how festive items like Eid al-Fitr money packets serve as ideological texts, communicating gender and cultural norms through visual representation. In Malaysia, the distinctive green *duit raya* packet has evolved from a simple tradition into a nuanced medium for conveying social meaning yet scholarly attention on the portrayal of women in these packets remains limited. Studies in Southeast Asia have highlighted how women on food souvenir packaging and festive goods are often depicted in domestic roles, reinforcing traditional ideals of femininity and family (Rustad et al., 2019; Swanson & Timothy, 2012).

In the Malaysian context, the presence of women whether mothers handing out packets or hosts welcoming guests on Eid al-Fitr designs implicitly ties the visual imagery to values of modesty, hospitality, and nurturing, reflecting broader Islamic and domestic cultural narratives. Furthermore, recent marketing-oriented releases (e.g., AirAsia's 2025 Raya packets) blend corporate branding with thematic representations of community and care, adding layers of commercial ideology to gender imagery (Marketing-Interactive, 2025). Although the act of giving *duit raya* is deeply rooted in tradition and remains largely cash-based despite the rise of e-payments, the visual content of the packets continues to reinforce specific gendered roles. Consequently, Eid al-Fitr money packet illustrations represent a potent intersection of ideology, cultural symbolism, and commercialization a fertile area for semiotic analysis of gender representation.

## 5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In contemporary Malaysia, the design of *duit raya* or festive money packets has evolved into a subtle canvas for cultural storytelling, often embedding visual cues about gender roles. These packets, traditionally exchanged during festive seasons like Hari Raya Aidilfitri, are increasingly adorned with illustrations of women in traditional attire such as *the baju kurung* or *tudung*, often portrayed in demure, domestic, or decorative roles. While these images aim to reflect cultural identity and nostalgia, they also reinforce a stylized and idealized image of femininity rooted in patriarchal values. The use of female imagery as a symbol of warmth, hospitality, and tradition aligns with the marketing of national values but also perpetuates gendered expectations (Mazlan et al., 2021). This practice mirrors how women's representations on souvenir packaging serve not only as aesthetic devices but as ideological tools that subtly reproduce existing social norms about femininity, domesticity, and moral virtue (Liew, 2013). As such, the *duit raya* packets, though seemingly innocuous, participate in a broader cultural mechanism that regulates and projects the ideal female image in Malaysian society.

Prior research on women's issues has primarily focused on their presence and roles as reflections of society's core values. In Malaysia, the portrayal of Malay women remains a subject of scholarly inquiry, particularly within the realm of literary criticism. This is because traditional expectations especially in rural areas have long dictated that Malay women adopt domestic roles such as being subservient wives and stay-at-home mothers (Abdullah, Noor, & Wok, 2008). This traditional outlook persists despite educational advancements and national development. For instance, the Global Gender Gap Index 2018 indicated that Malaysian women, predominantly Malay, have not experienced significant breakthroughs in gender equality, despite enjoying improved access to higher education (World Economic Forum, 2018). This suggests a disconnect between educational attainment and actual socio-economic mobility. Therefore, it is critical to explore how contemporary representations of Malay women such as their depictions on everyday cultural items like festive money packets reflect shifting gender dynamics and challenge or reinforce traditional roles.



Prior research by Muslim et al. (2012) indicates that Malay women's priorities continue to be shaped by traditional cultural norms, which are further reinforced by Islamic values, regardless of their academic or professional achievements. Similarly, the World Economic Forum (2018) ranked Malaysia 101st out of 149 countries in its Global Gender Gap Index, highlighting disparities in economic participation, educational attainment, health, and political empowerment. A more recent study by Puteri Marjan and Hawati (2024), published by the Khazanah Research Institute, suggests that while there have been improvements, progress remains modest, with enduring challenges in shifting gender roles and achieving substantive equality.

In the Malaysian context, the design of money packets, particularly during festive seasons like Hari Raya and Chinese New Year, often reflects prevailing cultural norms and values, including gender representation. Traditionally, women are frequently illustrated in domestic or supportive roles such as mothers, daughters, or caretakers portrayed in graceful attire like the *baju kurung* or *cheongsam*, symbolizing femininity, modesty, and moral virtue (Khalid, 2021). These visual depictions echo broader patriarchal cultural scripts where women's identities are tied to family and tradition (Karim, 1992). Although some contemporary designs attempt to modernize these portrayals by showing women in professional attire or engaging in social activities, such instances remain limited and often sanitized to align with conservative expectations (Ong, 2012). As such, the imagery on money packets serves not only as festive iconography but also as a medium for reinforcing or subtly challenging gender norms in Malaysian society.

The depiction of women on money packets (often used during festive occasions such as Hari Raya Aidilfitri) has evolved as a subtle yet telling form of visual communication. While traditional money packets were largely gender-neutral or featured Islamic motifs and Malay cultural symbols, contemporary designs have increasingly included illustrations of women as part of the aesthetic and cultural narrative. These visual depictions often reflect prevailing gender norms and ideals, where women are frequently portrayed in modest attire, performing traditional roles, or embodying aesthetic ideals of grace and femininity (Hashim & Yusof, 2018). This visual trend aligns with the broader patterns in Malaysian advertising and design, where female representation tends to reinforce social expectations tied to modesty, family roles, and beauty (Hassim & Wahab, 2021). However, the emerging use of women's illustrations on money packets by local brands and designers also opens space for the negotiation of identity and modern femininity. These designs may simultaneously reinforce and subvert traditional roles especially when they depict empowered, independent, or professionally dressed women, thereby subtly challenging stereotypes and engaging in socio-cultural commentary (Ramasamy & Ng, 2020). Thus, money packets in Malaysia are not only cultural artefacts but also mediums that reflect and shape gender representation in visual culture.

*Duit raya* or festive money packets serve not only as a medium of cultural gifting during Eid al-Fitr celebrations but also as visual carriers of sociocultural values and representations. The design of these packets often reflects dominant ideologies and national narratives, including how women are portrayed. Studies have observed that the imagery on money packets tends to idealize traditional gender roles, often depicting women in modest attire engaged in domestic or nurturing roles, such as cooking or serving food, reinforcing normative expectations of femininity (Mohd Salleh & Mohd Yusof, 2017; Yusof, 2021). This visual portrayal plays a role in maintaining gendered cultural scripts, subtly influencing public perceptions of women's roles in Malaysian society. Furthermore, the commercial design strategies adopted by banks and corporations in producing *duit raya* packets may reflect market-driven appropriations of tradition, where representations of women are stylized to align with both cultural expectations and brand identities (Zainal Abidin & Saidon, 2019). These practices underscore the intersection of tradition, commercialization, and gendered representation in everyday visual culture.

The illustration of women on *duit raya* packets (Eid al-Fitr money packets) provides a visual medium through which traditional gender roles are reinforced. These designs often depict women dressed in traditional attire such as the *baju kurung* or *tudung*, engaging in domestic or passive roles serving food, caring for children, or simply smiling demurely in the background. While such imagery celebrates cultural heritage, it simultaneously reinforces the notion that women's primary sphere is the home. This gendered representation aligns with the broader advertising trends in Malaysia, where women are frequently depicted in nurturing or ornamental roles, conforming to societal expectations rather than challenging them (Yusof et al., 2012). The repetition of these visuals in festive material like money packets perpetuates the normative ideals of femininity and continues to marginalize diverse or empowered representations of women in public life (Mohd Sani et al., 2020). By limiting women's portrayal to culturally acceptable archetypes, these visual artifacts contribute to the maintenance of patriarchal norms under the guise of cultural celebration.

In promotional materials, women are often depicted within the constructs of a 'mother', 'wife', and 'women who exudes sexual appeal' (Ariani, 2013). Gender stereotypes have delineated the expected attributes of women which include them to be often than not as slim, attractive, and stylish. Regrettably, Fischer (2010) has also highlighted that women's attributes are further reduced to their conduct within the archetypical homemaker, sexuality or as the object of desire, and negative psychological leanings including being emotional with flawed rationality. The formidable patriarchal authority in many societies has influenced how women are portrayed in media and lead to various gender biased connotations and inherently politicised. Female roles are also deeply intertwined with social regulations and cultural values on gender roles that consistently subjugate women to subordinate positions including restricting their domain within the domestic sphere. The illustrations of such roles on Eid al-Fitr money packets will be discussed in the following section.

## 5.1 The Roles of Women Illustration in Eid Money Packet

Female depictions on Eid al-Fitr money packets as illuminated in Figure 1 are often adorned with traditional outlook regarding their apparel and this is normally in reference to the Malay traditional attire of '*baju kurung*' and '*baju kebaya*' with the headscarf which is reflective of the cultural and religious traditions. The illustrations on the money packets are deeply rooted with the fundamental values of the Islamic religion and Malay customs.



**Figure 1** An Illustration showing female wearing *Baju Kurung* and male wearing *Baju Melayu*. (Source: Google, n.d, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

As demonstrated in Figure 2, women are often typified in roles that emphasize their significance within the domestic and communal contexts, particularly personifying the womenfolk roles while engaging in festive activities in a household such as cooking, exchanging greetings, or the giving and

receiving of '*duit raya*'. The depictions further put emphasis on the roles of women in the conservation and furtherance of familial traditions including within cultural festivities and religious observances.



**Figure 2** Roles of women in preparing the Eid celebration.  
(Source: NOKO, 2023, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Malaysia's multi-ethnic society is sometimes reflected in the diversity of female depictions, with illustrations showing women from various ethnic backgrounds, including Malay, Chinese, and Indian, wearing their respective traditional attire. This diversity highlights the inclusivity of Malaysian cultures, where different communities of various ethnic backgrounds come together to celebrate Eid.

The archetypal depiction of women in nurturing or supporting positions are perceptibly delineated in various illustrations as shown in Figure 3, mirroring the cultural and religious emphasis on filial piety, familial reverence, and communal deference particularly in multicultural and multi-ethnic Malaysia.



**Figure 3** Portrait of a family members including the roles of mother, grandmother and daughter. (Source: Animicsgo, 2019, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

The portrayal of female figures in Eid al-Fitr money packets serves as a visual representation of Malaysian cultural values, traditions, and the evolving roles of women in society. While traditional depictions remain common, there has been a gradual shift towards more contemporary illustrations that feature modern and diverse representations of women, reflecting the evolving social norms and greater recognition of women's diverse roles in the Malaysian society. This shift signifies a blend of respecting tradition while acknowledging contemporary changes and modern values.

The transition in visual representation mirrors broader societal changes in Malaysia, where women are increasingly seen in leadership, professional, and diverse roles beyond traditional domestic spheres. As these contemporary depictions become more common, they challenge long-standing

gender stereotypes and giving prominence to the inclusive vision of women's contributions to society. At the same time, the inclusion and the feature of traditional elements, such as modest attire and familial roles, ensures that cultural and religious values remain respected as illustrated in Figure 4. This balance of old and new in the portrayal of women on Eid al-Fitr money packets lay the emphasis how Malaysian culture is adapting to modern influences while not only preserving its heritage but also accentuate its values.



**Figure 4** Modern and traditional women with headscarf and without.  
(Source: SembangSembang, n.d, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Furthermore, the portrayal of wives in illustrations on Eid al-Fitr money packets in Malaysia often reflects traditional roles within the domestic setting, emphasizing their importance in maintaining cultural and familial harmony during festive occasions like Hari Raya Aidilfitri. These illustrations offer insights into how the role of a wife is visually and culturally constructed in Malaysian society. Wives are frequently depicted in nurturing roles, symbolizing their responsibility in caring for the family. They are often exhibited preparing food, serving meals, or engaging in activities that reflect hospitality and care for loved ones, reinforcing the idea of the wife as a central figure in maintaining household harmony during celebrations.

This portrayal reflects cultural expectations of wives embodying modesty, grace, and respect for religious customs. Wives are often illustrated as part of a family unit, alongside husbands and children, reflecting their role as a supportive partner. This reinforces the cultural narrative that places the wife at the 'heart' of a family life, contributing to the celebration by fostering togetherness and unity during Hari Raya. In many illustrations as shown in Figure 5, wives are portrayed engaging in traditional practices, such as organizing or giving out *duit raya* (money packets) to children or younger family members. This visual representation emphasizes their role in preserving cultural customs and ensuring that traditions are passed down for generations to come.

In more recent and contemporary illustrations, the role of the wife may be portrayed with a modern twist and variation, reflecting changes in gender roles in progressive Malaysian society. While traditional depictions still prevail, there is a growing representation of wives balancing domestic roles with more progressive images that reflect their broader contributions outside the household, such as participating in social or professional activities. The role of the wife in Eid al-Fitr money packet illustrations embodies both traditional and evolving representations of women in Malaysian culture, reflecting her importance in family life, cultural continuity, and the celebration of religious and social values during Hari Raya Aidilfitri. Recent research highlights how motion illustration techniques: such as diverse visual styles, narrative strategies, and the integration of

cultural elements with contemporary animation can enhance audience engagement and preserve traditional storytelling through digital media (Kamaruddin et al., 2024).



**Figure 5** Roles of wives, mothers, daughters, siblings, cousins.  
(Source: SembangSembang,n.d, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

Meanwhile, the portrayal of modern women without headscarves on Eid al-Fitr money packets in Malaysia can be seen as a reflection of the nation's increasingly diverse representations of femininity. These illustrations, while still aligned with the festive spirit of Hari Raya Aidilfitri, suggest a broader interpretation of modern womanhood that encompasses various lifestyles and roles. Women depicted without headscarves are often illustrated in contemporary settings such as in professional attire or engaged in leisure or public life which may be intended to symbolize modernity, individual choice, or urban identity. Importantly, this representation should not be interpreted as implying that women who wear the *tudung* are less empowered, professional, or socially engaged. On the contrary, many Malaysian women who wear the *tudung* occupy prominent positions in public life, including in politics, business, and academia. Rather than presenting a dichotomy, the presence of both headscarved and non-headscarved figures in cultural artefacts like money packets may reflect Malaysia's evolving social fabric and the coexistence of multiple expressions of femininity within its multicultural society (Karim, 1992; Othman, 2006).

The evolving visual portrayal of women in Eid al-Fitr money packet illustrations in Malaysia reflects broader societal shifts in gender representation and cultural pluralism. These depictions increasingly acknowledge the diversity of Malaysian women, particularly by representing figures who do not conform to traditional dress norms, such as the wearing of the headscarf. The absence of the hijab in some of these illustrations may be interpreted as a visual acknowledgment of Malaysia's pluralistic society, wherein women from varied ethnic, religious, and sociocultural backgrounds actively participate in national identity and celebration (Hashim et al., 2020; Musa & Ahmad, 2019). Despite deviating from conservative visual codes, these illustrations maintain respect for the cultural and festive spirit of Hari Raya Aidilfitri. They often merge traditional values such as familial unity and community participation with contemporary notions of female autonomy and self-expression. This intersection of modernity and tradition in visual representation underscores the dynamic negotiation of gender and culture in Malaysian visual media (Khan, 2021; Karim, 2017).

The portrayal of women without headscarves on Eid al-Fitr money packets challenges conventional representations of femininity within the context of Islamic festivals, subtly pushing the boundaries of cultural and religious norms. These illustrations suggest that women can still participate in religious and cultural celebrations without adhering to specific dress codes, reflecting a more inclusive and progressive view of gender roles. The depiction of modern women without headscarves on Eid al-Fitr money packets represents a growing recognition of diversity and individuality in Malaysian society. These illustrations highlight women's evolving roles, emphasizing their

independence, modernity, and active participation in both family and public life, while still respecting the cultural essence of Hari Raya Aidilfitri.



**Figure 6** Modern female character in Eid money packet design.  
(Source: Nvdhrvhvmrvn, 2022, Copyright Consent: Permissible to Publish)

## 6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The portrayal of female figures on Eid al-Fitr in Malaysia reflects a blend of cultural, religious, and societal values. These illustrations serve as visual representations of Malaysian norms, particularly regarding modesty, family roles, and community values. By examining these portrayals, we can better understand how traditional gender roles and cultural expectations are reinforced through visual art in public and commercial spaces like Eid al-Fitr celebrations. While maintaining respect for cultural traditions, money packet designs could strike a balance between tradition and modernity. For instance, traditional attire and modesty can be preserved, but women can be shown in more diverse roles beyond the domestic sphere, reflecting modern aspirations and progress.

While many designs on the Eid al-Fitr money packets emphasize traditional attire and individual roles particularly the female functions, there has been a gradual shift toward a more diverse and modern depictions, reflecting changing societal attitudes toward women's roles in the Malaysian society. Nevertheless, traditional gender expectations often remain central in these visual narratives, symbolizing women's importance in family and festive traditions. Designers and companies should aim to diversify the portrayal of women in Eid al-Fitr money packets, reflecting the modern, evolving roles of women in Malaysian society. This can include depictions of women in professional roles, leadership, and various cultural backgrounds, mirroring the broader societal shift towards gender equality. Given Malaysia's multicultural society, Eid al-Fitr money packet designs could also showcase women from different ethnic backgrounds in their respective traditional clothing since Malaysia is made up of a multicultural society. This approach would celebrate Malaysia's diverse cultural fabric while highlighting the shared values of the festive season.

Eid al-Fitr money packets, as a form of culturally embedded visual media, offer a compelling platform for raising awareness about gender equality and women's empowerment. Through subtle and positive design messaging, outdated gender stereotypes can be challenged while maintaining cultural authenticity and social relevance. Rather than perpetuating homogenized or traditionalist portrayals of femininity, inclusive visual strategies allow for greater representational diversity, aligning with broader efforts to foster equity in cultural production (Hashim et al., 2020). Promoting the involvement of female artists and designers in the creation of these packets can further enhance the



authenticity of representation. Their lived experiences and subjective perspectives offer critical insights into how women in contemporary Malaysian society wish to be seen and understood, contributing to more nuanced and relatable depictions (Musa & Ahmad, 2019).

Moreover, aligning the design of Eid al-Fitr money packets with global sustainability trends such as those outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) can add new dimensions of relevance and impact. The use of environmentally responsible materials and messaging that appeals to socially conscious younger audiences presents an opportunity to merge tradition with modern values. In doing so, the visual and material culture surrounding Hari Raya Aidilfitri evolves in step with contemporary concerns, including gender equity, sustainability, and cultural pluralism. Ultimately, such approaches not only enrich the symbolic and aesthetic dimensions of Eid al-Fitr money packets but also contribute meaningfully to broader societal discourses on gender roles and representation in Malaysia. (Khan, 2021; Karim, 2017).

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The author declares no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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