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## Factors which Influenced the Style of Malaysian Printmaking: 1930-2000

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### Abstract

Printmaking can be classified as relief, intaglio, planographic, and digital print. Malaysian printmaking has been developing since the Colonial Era. The objectives of this research are to trace and identify the factors that influence the development of style in Malaysian printmaking. This research will use qualitative methods with an art historical approach based on the primary and secondary data. The works of printmaking are divided into two main categories, the Pre-Independence Era and Post-Independence Era. This study used theories by Shapiro, Panofsky, and Feldman to investigate the findings and possibilities that can identify the factors that have influenced the style.

Keywords: *Style, Printmaking.*

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### 1.0 Introduction

Printmaking is the essence of a visual image produced by a step-by-step procedure and process, enabling it to be multiples called a print. Each piece produced is not a copy but is considered original artwork and called an edition. It requires an image and the surface, from as simple as a potato cut to a more complicated process such as photo etching, photo screen-printing, and currently a digital print (Griffiths A., 1996).

The development of Malaysian modern art was established in the early 20th century when a few Malaysian artists started exploring the Western approach and technique. This factor resulted from the extensive modernization process initiated by the British colonialists (Redza Piyadasa, 2002).

This research will focus on the development of styles in local printmaking in the context of Malaysian modern art. It will be divided into two significant eras, which are Pre-Independence and post-Independence. Printmaking works produced from 1930 to 2000 will be categorized over ten years. The justification of the selection of printmakers' works is based on their contributions to the development of Malaysian modern art.

### 2.0 Literature Review

Producing prints involves a step-by-step process, starting with the block or matrix preparations, printing, and finishing the process. Each process has its discipline and procedure, and block or matrix preparations are fundamental. This will determine the quality of the final

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output. Proofs are taken periodically during the development or preparation of a block or matrix. The next step is the printing process; it depends on how many colours, size of papers, and editions to produce. If the numbers of an edition are significant, it will take a long process and time. The finishing process means signing and detailing of prints to be completed, such as title and editions.

Debating or analyzing printmaking involves both the techniques and process, which differs from other art forms or disciplines. They are synonyms with the mixed medium in their proses, especially in painting. Printmaking has two main methods, which are indirect and direct process, which is translated into an image transferring process. Another terminology referring to printmaking is graphic art.

The Chinese, Japanese, and Egyptian invented a woodcut technique in the East as early as 600 (AD), which only appeared in England in the 15 century. The Chinese invented the screen print during the Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE) and followed by the Japanese, who refined the technique. Samuel Simon from Manchester officially patented this method in 1907 (Biegeleisen and Cohn, 1942). To differentiate the activities between industry and art, the term "serigraphy" was proposed.

In the context of history, the world of printmaking development patterns was seen with an explicit equation to the start of the propaganda activities. Be it religious propaganda or as a tool to achieve independence. At the beginning of its development, which began in China in the seventh century AD, printmaking was the medium to produce religious materials for disseminating Buddhism (Barker, 2005).

The methods of producing prints can be divided into five main categories;

- Relief printing,
- Intaglio printing,
- Planographic printing,
- Screen printing and
- Digital printing.

According to Duane, Sarah, and Patrick (1999), in art, style refers to consistent and characteristic handling of media, elements of form, and principles of design. These will make a work of art identifiable as the product of a particular culture, period, region, group, or person. Style is an essential part of every culture's identity; it comes from the culture and expresses its values. Most cultures of the world have gone through various periods, and these resulted in new art styles. An artistic style may vary over time and give rise to different period styles; it may vary across geographical spaces, leading to diverse regional styles. A group's style is when artists form alliances, exhibit together, and publicize their aims as a group as they develop and promote a distinctive style.

### 3.0 Methodology

This research will use qualitative methods based on primary and secondary data. The data was collected from text and images from books, exhibitions, and art auction publications. The primary data consists of an analysis of printmaking from the selected local prominent gallery publications. The secondary data will include a literature review on style and printmaking.

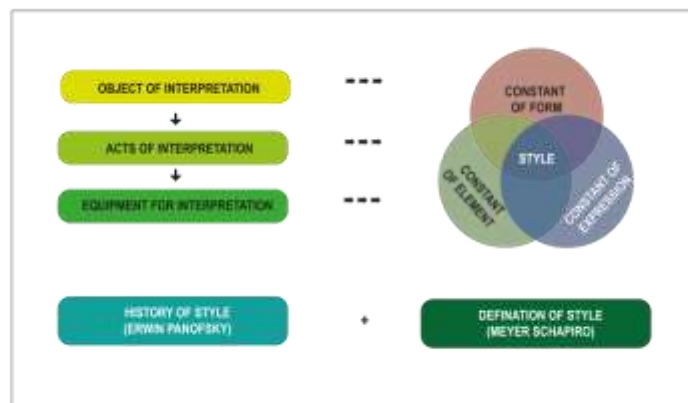


Figure 3.1: Theoretical Framework



Figure 3.2: Adaptation from the History of Style and Theory of Style

The qualitative research is descriptive, and the information was collected in the form of writings, transcripts, photos, historical documents, notations, and interviews relevant to the research. Descriptive research is unique in the number of variables employed. Like other types of research, descriptive research can include multiple variables for analysis, yet unlike other methods, it requires only one variable (Borg & Gall, 1989). One type of qualitative research is historical research, which involves examining past events to draw conclusions and make predictions. The steps in historical research are: formulate an idea, formulate a plan, gather data, analyze data, and analyze the sources of data (www.aect.org).

The concept of style by Shapiro and iconography by Panofsky will be used as the main theoretical framework.

The works of printmaking and the related literature are divided into two main categories: the Pre-Independence (1930-1957) and the Post-Independence (1958-2000). The Pre-Independence era will focus on the British Colonial (1930s), immigrant artists from China (1940s), and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (1950s). Whereas, for the Post-Independence, it will start with the prints, which were produced by groups of artists who graduated from abroad (1960s), graduates from the local higher institutions (1970s and 1980s), and the contemporary artists in the 1990s and 2000.

Eight pieces of print represent each era. Three pieces from the early, two from the middle, and another three from the end. The intricacy of getting print produced during the year, only three pieces for the 1930s, two pieces for the 1940s, and seven pieces for 1950 are collected. The selected artists are among the pioneer, iconic, and contemporary actively producing and participating in exhibitions. Another criteria is the significant of the prints themselves. This will help to trace and find out the pattern of the style of printmaking produced by the local printmakers.

Panofsky's theory (*Object of Interpretation*) will be applied as a guide to describing the research question on the development of style in Malaysian printmaking. The object of interpretation is referring to the printmaking done by the selected artists from the literature review. This secondary data are from the gallery's publications.

The second step (*Act of Interpretation*) will look at the form, technique, and theme of the printmaking. All the data will be used as evidence to explain the research on the development of style in Malaysian printmaking.

Finally (*Equipment for Interpretation*) will be used to measure the major data and all the printmaking from the selected printmakers. These theories will produce the first level, the *Principle of Interpretation* that is covered in the *History of Style*.

Table 3.1:  
List of Selected Artists and Prints

Era	Year	Artist	Title	Technique	Size (cm)
Pre-Independence	1930	Chuah Thean Teng	Portrait	Wood engraving on paper	10 x 9
	1936	Chuah Thean Teng	Break Time	Wood engraving on paper	16.5 x 13.5
	1938	Chuah Thean Teng	Working	Wood engraving on paper	12 x 10
	1940	Chuah Thean Teng	Kampong Life	Linocut on rice paper	23 x 18.5
	1949	Chuah Thean Teng	Two Ladies	Linocut on brown paper	23 x 18.5
	1951	Tay Hooi Keat	King Fisher	Linocut on paper	-
	1952	Tay Hooi Keat	Two Geishas	Linocut on paper	-
	1954	Tan Tee Chie	United	Woodcut on paper	-
	1955	Lim Mu Hue	Yong Toa Fu Seller	Woodcut on paper	15.3 x 20
	1957	Keoh Sia Yong	Illegal Hawker	Woodcut on paper	20.5 x 15.3
Post-Independence	1958	Lim Mu Hue	I am Just a Puppet	Woodcut on paper	20.3 x 12.7
	1959	Lee Joo For	<i>Burung dan Ikan</i>	Woodcut on paper	30 x 30
	1960	Seah Kim Joo	Nyonya - Chinese Women	Monotype on paper	75 x 56
	1961	Tan Tee Chie	Awaiting	Woodcut on paper	38 x 43
	1962	Lim Mu Hue	Love	Woodcut on paper	38 x 43
	1964	Lee Joo For	<i>Batu Tunggal</i>	Etching on paper	83 x 46.5
	1965	Abdul Latiff Mohidin	<i>Bentuk Tumbuh-Tumbuhan</i>	Etching on paper,	34 x 41
	1967	M. Krishnamoorthy	Intruders	Woodcut on paper	40 x 60
	1968	Grace Inpam Selvanayagam	Sun at the Mersing	Serigraphy on fabric	90 x 93
	1969	William K. K. Lau	<i>Kelahiran Tamaddun</i>	Etching on paper	58 x 44.6
	1970	Long Thien Shih	Western Figures in Oriental Clouds and Waves	Serigraphy on paper	73 x 70.8
	1971	Ahmad Khalid Yusuf	<i>Alif Ba Ta</i>	Serigraphy on paper	83 x 65
	1972	Raja Zahabuddin Raja Yaacob	<i>Luar Yang Tidak di Ketahui</i>	Serigraphy on paper	66 x 74
	1974	Chong Chin Seng	After Lunch	Etching on paper	60.5 x 48
	1975	Long Thien Shih	Dead Soul Is Laughing At Us	Etching on paper	75 x 70
	1977	Sulaiman Esa	Waiting for Godot	Photo etching on paper	76 x 62
	1978	Eng Tay	An Interesting Moment V	Etching on paper	76.2 x 35
	1979	Ponirin Amin	<i>Di Pentas Mu Nan Sepi</i>	Etching on paper	60 x 94.5
1980	Abd. Mansoor Ibrahim	3 Sequences	Etching on paper	65.5 x 31	

1981	Ilse Noor	<i>Rindu</i>	Serigraphy on paper	26 x 21
1982	Norma Abbas	Tell Me Something	Lithography on paper	82 x 39
1984	Lee Kian Seng	Of Fashion of Series After Hiroshige	Serigraphy on paper	80 x 65.5
1985	Ibrahim Hussein	Dance of Joy	Offset lithography on paper	71 x 54
1987	Ilse Noor	<i>Bilik Stor di Rumah Panjang, Ensebeng Baru, Sarawak</i>	Etching on paper	46 x 39
1988	Ismail Zain	My Friend Vincent	Digital print (hand coloured) on paper	21 x 30
1989	Bahaman Hashim	Gothic Space	Photo serigraphy on paper	51 x 76
1990	Juhari Said	Garden in the Sky	Mono print on paper	138 x 209
1991	Fauzan Omar	Diversity and Unity Series 1	Lino cut on paper	109.5 x 65.5
1992	Mohd Jamil Mat Isa	Statement Series – Knock'in the Toilet Door	Photo serigraphy on paper	65 x 94
1994	Loo Foh Sang	Greeting Spring	Monotype on paper	49 x 69
1995	Ilse Noor	<i>Perpisahan</i>	Etching on paper	17 x 23
1997	Eng Tay	Safe Haven I	Etching on paper	30 x 30
1998	Ilse Noor	<i>Puteri Bongsu</i>	Etching and aquatint on paper	12 x 9
1999	Lye Yau Fatt	Two Lemons	Aquatint on paper	10 x 12
2000	Juhari Said	Beijing # 2	Woodcut and watercolour on paper	44 x 37
2000	Jack Ting Mui Chi	Space Series – Feather	Etching on paper	11.5 x 19.5
2000	Ilse Noor	Strange Palace	Etching on paper	9.5 x 14.5

## 4.0 Finding

### 4.1 Formal Analysis of the Malaysian Printmaking

#### 4.1.1 The Principles of Art to Create Style

Based on the collected data, the analytical process is on the principles of art (harmony, variety, balance, proportion, dominance, movement, and economy). The tick (√) indicates the print in that particular year referring to the related principle.

Table 4.1:  
The Principles of Art to Create Style

Era	Year	The Principles						
		Harmony	Variety	Balance	Proportion	Dominance	Movement	Economy
Pre-Independence	1930	√√	√	√√√	√√√	√√√	√√	√√
	1940	√√		√√	√	√√		√√
	1950	√√√√	√√√	√√√√	√√√√√	√√√√√	√√√√	√√√√√
Post-Independence	1960	√√√√√√√√	√√√√	√√√√	√√√	√√√√√√√√	√√√√√	√√√√
	1970	√√√√√√√√	√√√√√	√√√√√√√√	√√√	√√√√√√√√	√√√√	√√√√√√
	1980	√√√√√√√√	√√	√√√√√√√√	√√√	√√√√√√√√	√√	√√√√√
	1990	√√√√√√√√	√√√√√	√√√√√√√√	√	√√√√√√√√	√√	√√√√
	2000	√√√	√√	√√√		√√√	√√	√√

#### 4.1.2 The Pre-Independence Era (1930-1957)

In the earliest era (the 1930s), from three prints, only three principles were dominant. In the following decade (the 1940s), from two prints, almost all principles were considered by the artists. In the 1950s, all principles were applied by artists in their prints.

#### 4.1.3 The Post-Independence Era (1958-2000)

Harmony, balance, and dominance are the most applied principles in this era. In the 1960s, harmony (eight pieces), dominance (eight pieces), and movement are five pieces. In the 1970s and 1980s, the three popular principles (harmony, balance, and dominance) are equal. In the following decade (the 1990s), eight pieces were applied for the three popular principles (harmony, balance, and dominance), and in the same situation detected in the year 2000, all three pieces were used with three principles.

### 4.2. The Elements of Art to Create Style

To complete the process of identifying the form, the analytical process of the elements of art must be considered. This process will guide the researcher in identifying the factors influencing the style.

Table 4.2: The Elements of Art to Create Style

Era	Year	The Elements				
		Line	Shape	Value	Texture	Colour
Pre-Independence	1930	√√√	√		√√√	
	1940	√√	√		√√	√
	1950	√√√√√√	√√√√		√√√√√√	√
Post-Independence	1960	√√√√√√	√√√√√√	√	√√√√√√	√√√√√√
	1970	√√√√√√	√√√√√√	√√√√√√	√√√√√√	√√√√√√
	1980	√√√√√√√√	√√√√√√	√√√√√√√√	√√√√√√√√	√√√√√√
	1990	√√√√√√√√	√√√√√√√√	√√√√√√	√√√√√√√√	√√√√√√√√
	2000	√√√	√√	√	√√√	√√√

4.2.1.1 The Pre-Independence Era (1930-1957)

Local printmaking history began with the traditional techniques and how they used minimum elements of art such as line, shape, and texture. It was printed in black and white, and the monochromatic colours were only applied to linocut print in the 1940s.

Most of the prints produced in 1950 were black and white and very few in color. The combination of line, shape, texture, and colour are the elements featured in the prints in the 1950s.

4.2.1.2 The Post-Independence Era (1958-2000)

In this era, all the elements of art can be identified in the prints produced by the local artists, and they explored and applied all the elements of art in their prints.

4.3 The Techniques Chosen by the Artists to Create Style

Table 4.3: The Techniques Chosen by the Artists to Create Style

Era	Year	The Techniques							
		Wood Cut	Lino Cut	Etching	Serigraphy	Aquatint	Lithography	Monotype/print	Digital
Pre-Independence	1930	√√√							
	1940		√√						
	1950	√√√√√√	√√						
Post-Independence	1960	√√√√		√√√	√			√	
	1970			√√√√	√√√				
	1980			√√√	√√		√√		√
	1990		√	√√√	√	√		√√	
	2000	√		√√					

4.3.1 The Pre-Independence Era (1930-1957)

In this era, the traditional techniques were the only techniques applied by the artists. The knowledge related to other techniques in printmaking has not been exposed to them, and they did explorations in the techniques individually.

4.3.2 The Post-Independence Era (1958-2000)

The artists applied more techniques in this era. They have more choices to use rather than the traditional techniques. In the 1970s, etching and silkscreen were still the chosen techniques. Lithograph and digital were relatively new techniques explored by our artists in the 1980s. Digital print was explored in the late 1980s; even though it is just a basic digital printing process, the impact on the Malaysian art scene was huge.

In the 1990s, aquatint was another new technique explored the others. The woodcut and etching techniques were still practiced in 2000.

4.4 The Theme Chosen by the Artists to Create Style

The theme is another factor to analyze and study, as proposed by Erwin Panofsky (Theory of Style).

Table 4.4: The Theme Chosen by the Artists to Create Style

Era	Year	Theme			
		Figurative	Environmental	Still life	Cultural
Pre-Independence	1930	√√√			
	1940	√√			
	1950	√√√√√√			
Post-Independence	1960	√√√√	√√√√		
	1970	√√√√√√	√	√	√
	1980	√√√√√√	√√	√	
	1990	√√	√√√√	√√	
	2000	√√			√

#### 4.4.1 The Pre-Independence Era (1930-1957)

The artists chose figurative as a theme in their creative process in the 1930s and the following ten years. The collected prints show how the workers are the main issues highlighted by the artists and their relation to the current situation. Social and culture were the issues that had been discussed. Tan Tee Chie's *United* (1954) and Keoh Sia Yong's *Illegal Hawker* (1957) are discussed on the social aspect. Lim Mu Hue's *Yong Tau Fu Seller* (1955) is about the economy.

#### 4.4.2 The Post-Independence Era (1958-2000)

Tan Tee Chie's *A Waiting* (1961) and *Intruders* (1967) by M. Krisnamoorthy used the social comment as to their issues and figurative still a chosen such as Lim Mu Hue's *I am Just a Puppet* (1958) and Seah Kim Joo's *Nyonya-Chinese Women* (1960) are discussed on the culture.

In the 1970s, figurative appeared in five prints as *Western Figures in Oriental Clouds and Waves* (1970), *Dead Soul is Laughing at Us* (1975), *Waiting for Godot*, (1977), *An Interesting Moment V* (1978), and *Di Pentas Mu Nan Sepi* (1979). The environmental theme is *Luar Yang Tidak di Ketahui* (1972); still, life (*After Lunch*, 1974), and cultural is *Alif Ba Ta* (1971) was chosen.

In the 1980s, another five prints were discussed on the figurative theme, two on environmental (*3 Sequences*, 1980 and *Rindu*, 1981), and one on still life (*Off Fashion of Series After Hiroshige*, 1984).

In the 1990s, the environment was so dominant, with four prints from a total of eight. Another four are figurative and still life (two prints each). Figurative and cultural themes were chosen in the year 2000.

## 5.0 Conclusion

### *The Common Style of the Malaysian Printmaking*

Based on the above analysis, it can be proven that the most common choices of printmakers made based on each era are as below:

Table 5.1: Common Style of the Malaysian Printmaking

Era	Pre-Independence			Post-Independence				
Year	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Form	Minimal	Minimal	Complex	Complex	Complex	Complex	Complex	Complex
Technique	Wood cut	Lino cut	Wood cut	Wood cut	Etching	Etching	Etching	Etching
Theme	Figurative	Figurative	Figurative	Figurative Environmental	Figurative Environmental Still life Cultural	Figurative Environmental Still life	Figurative Environmental Still life	Figurative Cultural

As artworks, all selected prints have a form. In the Pre-Independence (1930 and 1940), most prints were in minimal form, which was changed to a complex form in the Post-Independence (1960 to 2000). In the context of the technique, all prints are in the category of traditional prints. The woodcut and linocut print became the chosen technique from the 1930s to the 1960s. Etching was very popular from the 1970s until 2000. The most famous theme selected by the local artists was figurative from the 1930s until 2000. The environment was the dominant theme in the 1960s and in the next three decades. Still life and culture appeared in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000 to break the dominance of figurative as a theme.

All artists have been applying the elements and principles of art in producing their prints. To determine the style, the technique is one of the characteristics of works of art, and in this study, etching techniques (15) and woodcut (13) are the popular choices made by the local artists. From 1930 to 2000, figurative was used as the favorite theme in their works.

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