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The Recalled 600th Anniversary Malaysia – China Relationship Issue

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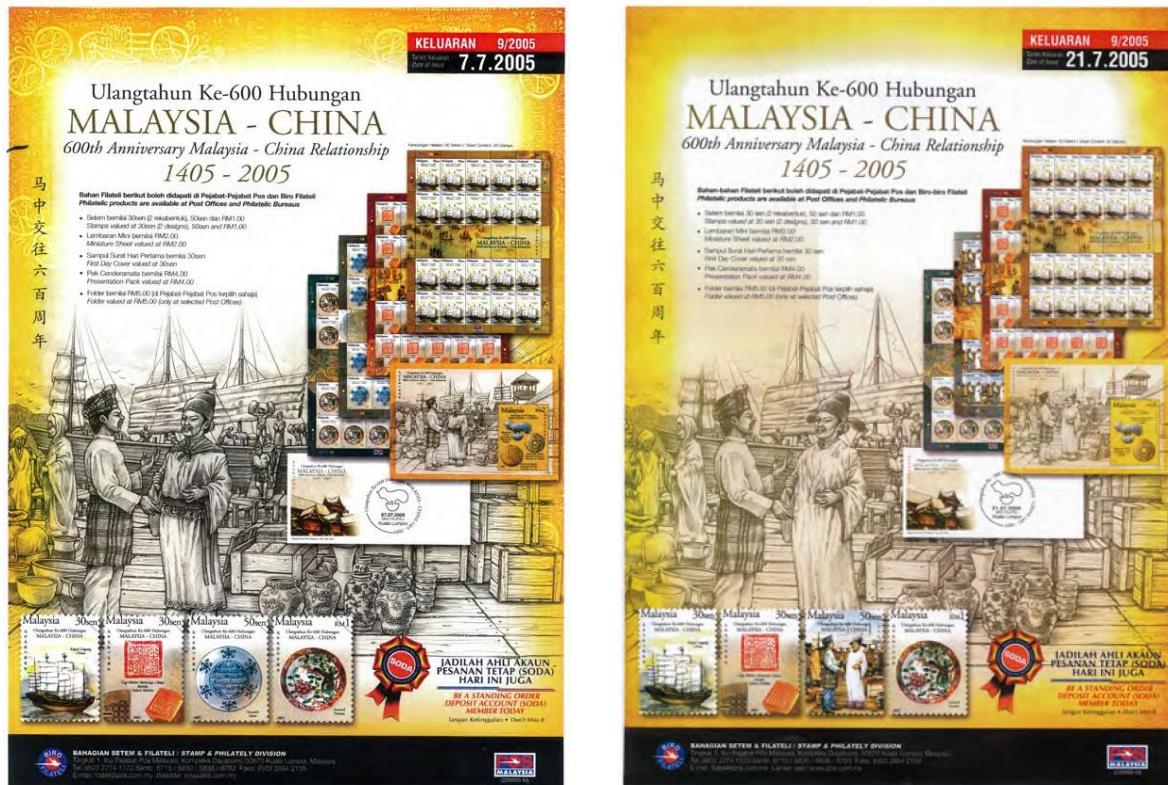


Figure 1. Promotional posters issued by Pos Malaysia for the release “600th Anniversary Malaysia – China Relationship”. On left, the original poster (showing a date of release of 7 July 2005); to the right, the poster for the revised design (date of release moved to 21 July 2005).

Relations between China (including its overseas diaspora) and Malaysia are steeped in antiquity, as evidenced from remains in archaeological sites and other sources, and continue till the modern era. The year 2005, in fact, marked the sixth century of Admiral Zheng He’s (1371–1433 or 1435) first expedition to Malacca (Duyvendak, 1938).

Thus, it was unsurprising that on 21 July 2005, Pos Malaysia issued a series of four stamps and a miniature sheet under the theme “600th Anniversary of Trade between Malaysia and China” (title adopted from Anon, 2017; SG 1276–1279; MS1280). The issue was titled “600th Anniversary Malaysia – China Relationship” by Tan (2018; ISC 1074–1077; ISC MC-334M). The face values of these were denominated in the local currency (100 sen = 1 Ringgit Malaysian, RM)– 30 sen (SG1276–1277, showing a ‘Kapal Dagang’ or merchant ship and the royal seal of the Emperor of China), 50 sen (SG 1278, depicting two interacting merchants– one in Malay, the other in Chinese attire), RM1 (SG 1279, Nyonya ceramic plate), and a miniature sheet of RM 2 (SG MS 1280, that shows tin animal and copper coins). According to information provided in the presentation pack, the design was prepared by Reign Associates Sdn Bhd, and the stamps lithographed by Percetakan Keselamatan Nasional Sdn. Bhd. (the National Security Printers).



Figure 2. Front of envelope cover (first row), front of presentation pack folder (second row) and contents of presentation pack (third row) from the original issue on 7 July 2005, showing the complete set of four stamps, with the recalled 50 sen stamp (third from left).

The “600th Anniversary Malaysia – China Relationship” set was initially issued 12 days earlier (i.e., on 7 July 2005), and featured different designs for the 50 sen stamp and miniature sheet, from those in later release (Figure 1).

According to an online portal (see Shum 2019), the original 50 sen stamp, showing Islamic ceramic (“Seramik Islam”), was recalled. It would appear that the presentation pack for the same was issued, as were first day covers with cancels (Figures 2–3). The rationale for the recall was not announced, although some contend that Islamic verses from the holy Koran (in Arabic), should not be depicted on such common-day objects as stamps. A translation is provided below (courtesy Haji Mohamad Fairuz bin Ali):

And [He revealed] that the masjids are for Allah, so do not invoke with Allah anyone (18)

And that when the Servant of Allah stood up supplicating Him, they almost became about him a compacted mass." (19)

Say, [O Muhammad], "I only invoke my Lord and do not associate with Him anyone."(20)

The recalled stamp was replaced by one entitled “Commerce in Malacca (“Perdagangan di Melaka”) (Figures 4–5).



Figure 3. First day cover bearing “Biro Filateli Kuala Lumpur” postmark of the original issue of the miniature sheet, dated 7 July 2005 (top) and back of envelope cover (bottom).



Figure 4. Corrected issue, showing four values of stamps from a set (SG 1276–1279; ISC 1074–1077).



Figure 5. First day covers of the corrected version, dated 21 July 2005 for the stamp set, bearing “Biro Filateli Kuching” postmark (top) and of the miniature sheet, bearing “Biro Filateli Kuala Lumpur” postmark (bottom).

The miniature sheet/souvenir sheet with the issue too was revised. The original design (Figure 6) illustrated three antiquities, and as per legend on stamp, were “Matawang Timah Ayam Jantan Abad Ke-14, Melaka” (equivalent to “bushy cock with a curved base”, 13th–14th century Malacca Sultanate tin [76%] and lead [24%] coin), “Matawang Timah Laksamana Zheng He Abad Ke-15, Melaka” (“double cash”, on obverse, ‘Yuan Feng Tong Bao’, a Malacca Sultanate tin [78%] and lead [22%] coin) and “Matawang Zaman Kesultanan Melaka Abad Ke-13–14” (“double cash, shown in reverse, “Nasir Al-Dunia Wa’L-Din”, translated into English, “The helper of the world and of the religion”, the first coin (minted between 1456–59 and 1477), a tin-and-lead coin and issued during the time of King Parameswara (1344

– circa 1414), the last king of Singapura and the founder of Malacca. Sixteenth century Portuguese sources (e.g., Tomé Pires, 1512–1515), mentioned a conversion to Islam by his son, Chaquem Daraxa, ?–1424). The new design deleted the last-mentioned image that was originally depicted at the bottom right (Figure 6). Further technical details, including date of release, are in the accompanying philatelic information sheet (Figure 7). Shum (2019) mentioned a Pos Malaysia claim that the design was derived from an unissued essay that was not released, and speculated that the same may have been a forgery. We have examined four such examples in our collections, including on first day covers, purchased from dealers online or from philatelic product shops in Kuala Lumpur, and suggest that these were printed at the same press as the official issue, and may have somehow ‘leaked’ out of the press. Rationale for this includes the use of the same (phosphorised) paper type, perforation (14) and watermark (“SPM” printed sideways, with the top of the letters to the left, when viewed from back). Tan’s (2018) catalogue listed the stamp for RM 150 (US\$ 35.77) and the miniature sheet at RM 200 (US\$47.69). The catalogue value in Tan (2018) for the official issue of the stamp set was RM 6 (US\$1.43), and of the miniature sheet, RM 5 (equivalent to US\$1.19).



Figure 6. The recalled (left) and corrected (right) versions of the miniature sheets from the series (SG MS1280; ISC MC-334M).

We noted differences in the colour of these two miniature sheets. The original version shows the image of the two interacting merchants to the right, on the selvage area, rendered in Light Brown, while the image in the reprint is reproduced in Deep Brown (Figure 6). Further, the stamps in the reprinted miniature sheet show greater contrast, and the redesigned image (after the removal of a coin image) depicts slightly (20% and 33%) larger coins compared to the earlier design, presumably to fill up space after the removal of the image of the third coin. The clothing of the Chinese merchant too showed differences in attire— in the absence of a waist sash and a different head-gear in the corrected version.

In this note, we discuss a recalled issue from 2005, in the history of modern Malaysian philately. The rationale for the action appears to be religious sensitivities centred round the depiction of religious text. A set of four stamps and a miniature sheet, issued on 7 July 2005 were recalled, after the presentation packs for the former and some miniature sheets were inadvertently released. On 21 July 2005, a replaced 50 sen stamp and a redesigned RM 2 miniature sheet were released.

Abbreviations and Conventions.— Abbreviations include SG (= Stanley Gibbons catalogue numbers; Anon., 2017) and ISC (= International Stamp and Coin catalogue numbers; Tan 2018). Colour notes were made using a Stanley Gibbons Stamp Colour Key 1977. We used a Leuchtturm™ UV-Hand Lamp L80 to confirm the phosphorised nature of paper used. Information on coinage is from Singh (1996) and Nge (2005).

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Figure 7. Information sheetlet accompanying the corrected version, dated 21 July 2005, of the stamp set, showing front cover (top) and inside (bottom).